

ATHENAEUM



Allan Rohan Crite: *Art Lessons*

Allan Rohan Crite (1910-2007) was an artist, mentor, and educator. His work documents his time in Boston and his relationships with the city and with the artists who continue to be inspired by the knowledge he shared. Crite's work can be appreciated by learners of any age and at any skill level—novice, beginner, intermediate, and advanced. When assigning projects, consider how your students interpret and respond to narrative images, and allow them to choose a Crite painting to study. There is a list of suggested works at the end of these lessons but more can be found at the [Boston Athenaeum](#).

Novice | **Storybook Page: What is Happening Now?**

Art Project

- Select one of the images in the Crite catalog.
- Write or tell a story about your chosen image.
- Create a piece of artwork inspired by your story.

Art Techniques/Tips

Emphasize color, shadow, and figures to enhance your artwork's impact. Experiment with various materials like markers for bold colors, watercolors, and colored pencils for line work. Pay attention to shapes and lines, using geometric forms for structure and organic lines for movement, to create a more expressive artistic style.

Prompt Questions

- What is happening in this image?
- Put yourself in the image, how do you feel?
- What do you hear? smell? see?

National Art Standards

VA:Cr1.2.2a | *Make art or design with various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.*

VA:Re.7.2.1a | *Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.*

Beginner | Comics as a Narrative Tool: What Happens Next?

Art Project

- Select one of the images in the Crite catalog.
- Draw 3-5 panels after your chosen image to form a complete story.
- Use the historical background of the image and include that information in your comic strip.
- Make sure your comic is clear and creative.

Art Techniques/Tips

Focus on the background, middleground, and foreground in paintings. Students should explore mixed media techniques, incorporating materials such as watercolor, ink, and oil pastel and crayon. Additionally, layering colored pencils over watercolor.

Prompt Questions

- What is happening in this image?
- What happens before this image?
- What happened after this image?
- What is in the background, middleground, and foreground?

National Art Standards

VA:Cr1.1.1a | *Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.*

VA:Re.7.2.7a | *Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.*

Intermediate | Flip Book: What Happened a Second Before and After?

Art Project

- Choose one image from the Crite catalog.
- Pick one figure or a small section of that image to focus on.
- Decide on the moment you will show: the frame just before and the frame just after your chosen image.
- Use 5–15 sheets of the same size paper. Stack them in order.
- On the first sheet, draw the first frame (the starting pose).
- Place the next sheet on top and trace the drawing, changing it slightly to show the next moment.
- Repeat tracing and making small changes on each new sheet until you reach the final frame.
- Test the movement by flipping the pages quickly.
- If it works, bind the pages together (staple, clip, or glue) to finish your flipbook.

Art Techniques/Tips

Act out the movement first to see how the figure changes. Use thin paper for easier tracing. Keep changes small between pages so the motion is smooth.

Prompt Questions

- What happens before this image?
- What happened after this image?

National Art Standards

VA:Cr1.2.8a | *Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.*

VA:Re.7.2.7a | *Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.*

Advanced | Narrative Paintings: What Happened Before?

Art Project

- Select one of the images in the Crite catalog.
- Investigate the historical context of the chosen image.

- Students can stretch out what they imagine happened the moment before Crite's image. Find a new moment or perspective to tell a unique narrative inspired by history.
- Once students have designed the new moment, draw on watercolor paper.
- Use watercolor to create your painting, match Crite's color palette.

Art Techniques/Tips

Explore the concept of a monoscenic, where a single scene is depicted. Have students dive deep into the historical context to create an image that tells a visual narrative by breaking a story into its beginning, middle, climax, and end, and using techniques like sketching and adding details to convey characters' emotions, setting, and action.

Prompt Questions

- What is happening in this painting?
- What's the beginning of this story?
- What's the end of this story?

National Art Standards

VA:Cr3.1.1a | *Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.*

VA:Re.7.2.6a | *Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions.*

Suggested Crite Works with Historical Context

Consultation in the drafting room.

A group of men and women crowd around a drafting table where a draftsman sits holding a large sheet of blue paper. This is the drafting room of the U. S. Navy at the Boston Naval Shipyard in Charlestown, Mass., where Crite worked as a technical illustrator from 1941 to 1974.

Have your pass ready.

A man collects passes from a crowd in military and civilian dress. An inscription on the verso identifies the location: "Gate 1 / Boston Navy Yard / Charlestown." From 1941 to 1974, Crite worked as a technical illustrator for the U. S. Navy at the Boston Naval Shipyard in Charlestown, Mass.

Burning and digging: South End housing project.

The demolition of housing in Boston's South End for a new housing project. A steam shovel and a crane are at work in a pit, and a fire is burning in the background.

33B in action.

A city scene depicts snow falling while a steam shovel works in a pit, likely symbolizing the demolition of old housing in Boston's South End for public housing. In 1940, the Lenox Street housing project marked the first major public housing development in the area as part of a broader initiative. This development initiated a trend in the South End, where early public housing projects were segregated and predominantly housed Black residents.

Girls playing on my street.

Girls playing ball outdoors. In 1940s Boston, girls played a mix of indoor and outdoor games, including classic street games, board games, and more gender-specific play that centered on dolls and mimicking household activities. The decade, marked by World War II, also saw the rise of women's professional sports, which likely influenced girls' athletic ambitions.

I love a parade.

A street parade with a girl carrying a baton in the lead and three percussionists in the front row. The 1940s brought many parades to the city of Boston. The Black community shifted to Roxbury, and celebrations and parades were an important part of its cultural life, though documentation from that time is scarce.

7:45 a.m.

Commuters crowded onto trains and streetcars. Wartime gas rationing led to a significant increase in ridership. As a result, public transportation services were experiencing a boom.

Loading the truck with clay.

A steam shovel is shown lifting dirt from a pit, with city buildings in the background and signage reading "C J Maney Co. Inc." identifying it as a Somerville construction firm. The ink inscription notes the view as looking toward Kendall St. between Shawmut Ave. and Tremont St. This scene reflects early public housing projects in the South End of Boston during the 1940s, such as the Lenox Street development, initiated in response to federal urban renewal legislation.

A course in music appreciation.

A group of young people sits on a park bench in Madison Park, listening to a phonograph, amid a demographic shift in the area. Snow falls as a steam shovel works nearby, likely representing the demolition of old housing in Boston's South End for public housing. During the 1940s, Boston's Black music scene thrived in venues like the Hi-Hat Club and the Pioneer Jazz Club, with the Sabby Lewis Orchestra playing a key role and Dean Dixon becoming the first African American conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra