



# 1st Grade: DECEMBER

## *Winter Landscape*

### Pieter Brueghel

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#### **About the Artist**

*The following information is provided to give classroom teachers a comprehensive understanding of the artist and artwork. Use your judgment on what to share with your students based on their level of curiosity, observation/inquiry skills, comprehension and age-appropriateness.*

#### **Pieter Brueghel the Elder**

Pieter Brueghel the Elder was born between 1525-1530 in or near Breda in the Netherlands, although the exact year and birth date are unknown. The term, “the Elder” is to distinguish him from one of his sons, Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Brueghel dropped the “h” from his name in 1559. His sons, however retained the use of “h” in their names.

Brueghel spent most of his life in Antwerp and Brussels. He began his painting career as a copyist by imitating the work of other artists, primarily that of Hieronymous Bosch. He apprenticed to Pieter Coecke van Aelst, a leading artist whose talent was quite broad. Brueghel was well-educated and as an artist, he was able to surpass the work he copied. He joined the Antwerp Guild as a master painter in 1551 and spent time studying art in France and Italy where he was exposed to formal Italian artworks. Despite exposure to the works of such artists as Michelangelo and others in the Vatican, Brueghel turned his interests to capturing life and nature. He was inspired by local farmers and townspeople and captured them in both religious and secular activities within the community, such as weddings, daily routines, agricultural activities, and festivals. He captured life in 16th century Netherlands by visually documenting details of fashion, tools, and foods, thus telling stories of these people and communities. Because of this, Brueghel won the admiration and respect of a broad spectrum of the local population—the local scholars as well as the local peasants. He even took on the nickname of “Peasant” Brueghel.

Pieter Brueghel’s paintings include religious work as well as secular scenes. In general, his paintings are filled with people going about their daily activities. It is often difficult to know where to begin when viewing the work. Similar to a “Where is Waldo” scenario, Brueghel’s subject matter is usually hidden among crowds of people or activity. Viewers have to wade through the distractions to find the subject. In addition, Brueghel places his figures on a landscape which is presented in foreground, mid-ground, and background. As a general rule, Brueghel places the viewer slightly above ground level or looking down on the scene. Brueghel’s paintings may appear cluttered or over crowded with people and objects randomly placed. However, their placement was well-planned. Brueghel was brilliant at creating vignettes of activity while moving the viewers’ eyes

around his work. This sophisticated approach was appreciated by a group of patrons made up of scholars and businessmen.

Pieter Brueghel married Mayken, daughter of his mentor Pieter Coecke van Aelst. He lived a short life by today’s standards. He died September of 1569 in Brussels around the age of forty leaving two sons, Pieter the Younger and Jan. Both sons were successful 17th century painters who, unfortunately, were too young to receive training from their father before his death. However, some believe Brueghel’s sons received artistic training from their grandmother. Pieter Brueghel the Elder was considered the first Western painter who painted landscapes outside a religious context. Many considered him the greatest Flemish painter of the 16th century for his ability to document the everyday lives of humble people.

#### **About the Art**

*Winter Landscape with Bird Trap* was painted in 1565, oil on a wood panel. It is 15 x 22 inches size.

A typical Pieter Brueghel scene, *Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap* shows an outdoor landscape during the winter months. Brueghel placed the viewer as though he were on a hill top, allowing him to look down on the scene. This gives a vantage point that takes the viewer to the distant fields and hills as well as giving a panoramic view from left to right. Also typical for Brueghel is the distinctive use of space as he creates an illusion of depth by placing objects in the foreground, mid-ground and background. For example, buildings and trees on the right are larger because they are closer to the viewer while the other houses and trees are smaller as they are placed farther away. The same is true with the size of the individuals on the ice. Brueghel placed ice on the river and snow on the sloped rooftops in this Flemish town. Adults and children, dressed in winter gear, are absorbed in playful activity on the ice. Some may be ice fishing while others are engaged in games. People are surrounded by their simple homes. Almost in the center of the painting is the local church which was typically built in the center of town. The grouping of buildings, people, trees and hills keeps the viewers’ eyes in motion, moving constantly around the painting. The viewers’ eyes can even travel up to the sky to catch two birds in flight.

There was no electricity, plumbing, or other modern convenience in the 1500s. People worked hard to keep up with daily work, especially with finding and preparing food. Perhaps that is where the bird trap comes into play. These were not wealthy people who had servants to do chores. These were poor people who worked very hard for everything they had. Brueghel was able to capture them in daily routines—working, playing, and finding food.

## Discipline-Based Art Education

The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience.

### Art Aesthetics

Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

### Art Production

Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

### Art History

Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

### Art Criticism

Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

## ELEMENTS OF ART

- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area enclosed by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light.
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

## PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

## COMPOSITION

- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

## ARTISTIC STYLES

- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

## ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE BOOKS

Children's literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Kipper's Snowy Day* by Mick Inkpen
- *The Log Cabin Quilt* by Ellen Howard
- *The Mitten* by Jan Brett
- *Red Fox Running* by Eve Bunting
- *Time For Sleep* by Denise Fleming
- *Where's Waldo? The Fantastic Journey* by Martin Handford
- *Winter Poems* selected by Barbara Rogasky
- *1001 Things to Spot in the Town* by Anna Milbourne

## REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Janson, H.W. *History of Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1999
- Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History, Volume Two*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1995
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter\\_Brueghel\\_the\\_Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_Brueghel_the_Elder)

Brueghel arranged the composition in such a way as to put the townspeople in perspective with the world they live in—nature. There is always an element of danger in nature. The ice may give way or the winter may be too harsh. Similarly, the crows, while free and playful, may encounter the trap. This idea of tension or living on the edge of danger adds interest to the painting.

## Directed Observation

Consider reading one of the *Where's Waldo?* books. Talk about the challenge of locating Waldo amid the activity. Discuss how the illustrations tell a story about Waldo and the various locations Waldo experienced. The Waldo illustrations also tell about the people based on their activities. Transition to the lesson by showing students an image of *Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap*. Tell them it was painted in 1565 by Pieter Brueghel the Elder and explain the term, "the elder." Mention the work was painted with oil on a wood panel instead of a cloth canvas. Invite students to quietly study the work. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. Why is this painting called a landscape?
2. When you look at this painting, where are you? On the ice? On the land? In the trees?
3. What advantage is there to being up high when you look at the town? Where do you think Brueghel sat when he painted this work?
4. Students will be able to pick up on the obvious features included in this painting. They should be aware of the frozen river, the homes, and the hills. Perhaps some students can share their personal experience of playing on frozen surfaces.
5. How do people get from one side of the river to the other side of the river without walking on the icy surface?
6. In addition to the frozen river, what else tells you that it is a very cold day? How does the artist use color to tell you it's cold? Describe how the painting would look if the artist put a bright sun in the sky.
7. What time of day do you think it is? What tells you that?
8. Find the birds. Where are they and what are they doing? Can you find the bird trap? How does it work? Why is there a bird trap in the town?
9. How did the artist use lines and shapes in the painting? What kind of lines and shapes do you see?
10. How does the artist move your eyes

around the painting? How far back into the painting does he take you? How does he do this?

11. What building is the most important building in town? How do you know?
12. Brueghel liked to group things. Find groups of things.
13. What do you wonder about when you look at this painting? What would you like to know about the artist?
14. Compare this community to one of Norman Rockwell's.
15. If you were painting this scene, what would you add or do differently?
16. Would you like to live in this community? What would your life be like if you lived in this town?
17. Describe how the town might look in the summer. What would be different?
18. Do you think Pieter Brueghel was a good artist? Why/Why not?
19. What do you like about this painting?

## Things to Do

1. Estimate the number of people in the painting and then count them.
2. Pretend you are Pieter Brueghel and make a sketch of this same town. Draw it as if you were seeing the town from another location such as from the land or from the bridge or from the church.
3. If you walked into this painting, where would you go? Where would you live? What would be the most fun to do?
4. The absence of electric and phone lines in this painting reminds us life was lived differently. What would you do in the morning, afternoon and evening without electricity, plumbing and other conveniences?
5. Just for fun, observe your school or local community from various locations. Select the best vantage point to capture the people and places and create a drawing.
6. Work with others to create a colorful mural of your town on a large piece of paper. Consider which season to portray.
7. Create a postcard advertising your town. Write a message on the back and mail it to distant relatives and friends.
8. Use postcards collected from various locations or collect old holiday cards which feature landscapes. Use these to inspire landscape paintings of your own.
9. Imagine your perfect town and share your thoughts with others. Is it by a lake, the beach, the mountains, the city, the desert or in the country? Make several sketches of your ideal landscape. Choose your favorite sketch and develop it into a painting. Place objects in the front, middle and back to create depth.