



By Art Teacher Pat Holte

American Gothic: Playing with parody

Volume 147 | Gr. 6–12

Time Frame: 2–3 weeks
(50-minute classes)



National Core Art Standards

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Presenting

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Objectives

Students will ...

- Learn about Grant Wood and his contributions to American art.
- Understand the concept of parody and how it applies to artwork.
- Analyze *American Gothic* and discuss why it has been widely parodied.
- Plan and create their own parody of *American Gothic* using paint.
- Develop realistic figures and a setting that aligns with their chosen parody concept.
- Reflect on the meaning and impact of their parody through guided discussion and written reflection.

Teacher Prep:

- Prepare a slideshow or printed images of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and notable parodies.

Meet Grant Wood

Grant Wood was an artist from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He grew up on a farm, so he understood the life of rural families. When he was 10, his family sold the farm and moved into town. After high school, he studied art and even taught high school art.

On a trip to Europe, Grant saw Northern Renaissance paintings, which feature dramatic lighting, dark backgrounds, and serious-looking faces. The expressions reminded him of people back home in Iowa, and that inspired his own painting style.

In 1930, he painted his most famous work: *American Gothic*. The people in the painting aren't really a farmer and his daughter — they're actually his dentist and his sister, posing in front of a house with a gothic-style window that caught Grant's eye. He wanted to show what a typical Midwestern farmer and daughter might look like.

After *American Gothic*, Grant kept painting scenes and people from the Iowa farm community. He passed away from cancer just one day before his 51st birthday.

Directions:

Introduction to *American Gothic* & parodies

1. Introduce Grant Wood as an influential Regionalist artist from Iowa. Explain how he was inspired by Northern Renaissance paintings, which featured dramatic lighting and serious expressions.
2. Discuss *American Gothic* (1930), including its subjects, Wood's dentist (62 years old) and sister (30 years old), and the famous Gothic-style farmhouse in the background.
3. Then, introduce the concept of "parody." Parody is a form of expression that imitates the style or content of a particular work, artist, genre, or subject in an exaggerated or humorous way. It is often meant to criticize, comment on, or entertain. Parodies typically mimic distinctive features, such as tone, wording, or visuals, while twisting them for comic effect or satire.
4. A great example of parody is when artists or advertisers recreate Grant Wood's *American Gothic* but change the characters, setting, or mood for humorous effect.

For example, in a parody of the painting, the farmer and daughter might be replaced with:

- **Pop culture characters** like the Simpsons, standing in the same pose with exaggerated expressions.
- **Modern workers** like a barista and a tech support rep, holding a coffee cup and a laptop instead of a pitchforks
- **Pets or mascots**, mimicking the same solemn posture in costume.

These parodies imitate the visual style of the original while exaggerating or twisting it to make a joke or cultural comment, often highlighting the contrast between traditional rural life and modern life.

5. Show examples of *American Gothic* parodies and ask: Why do people parody this painting so often?



"The Wonder Pets"
by Teacher Pat Holte



"Fiona and Shrek"
by Ariana Martinez Koltermann

Planning & sketching the parody

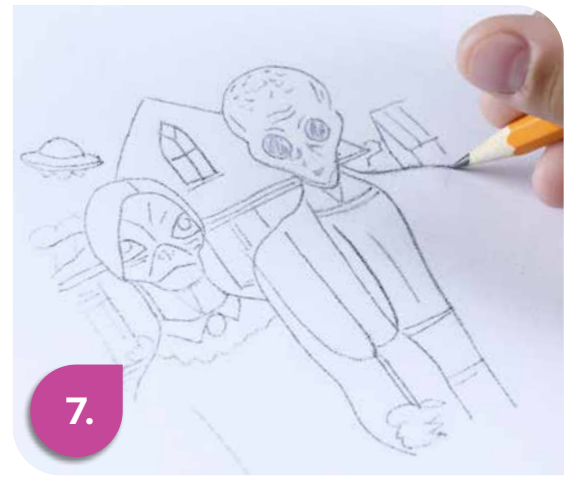
6. Have students brainstorm ideas for their parodies. They should consider:
 - a. **Who** will replace the original figures? (Celebrities, fictional characters, animals, self-portraits, etc.)
 - b. **How** will the background change? Should it stay traditional or be modernized?
 - c. **What** mood do they want to convey: humorous, dramatic, satirical?
 - d. **What** medium will they use — tempera, acrylic, or watercolor paint — and how will that affect the final mood of the painting?
7. Have students sketch several thumbnail sketches and then choose the one they want to pursue. Remind them that if they choose to use a picture of real people they know, they should ask permission before they add them to their rendition of the painting.
8. Then, have them draw their draft on their painting paper or board, paying attention to proportion, symmetry, and composition.
9. Encourage them to consider facial expressions and body language to match their chosen theme.

Painting the parody

10. Have students begin painting the background first, using *American Gothic* as a reference. Students may modify the colors and details to fit the mood and style of the scene they chose (for example, if they chose to depict vampires, they may want to make their background look stormy or menacing).
11. Then, have them move on to the figures, ensuring they pay close attention to details, realistic proportions, and shading. They should focus on details that connect their parody to the original painting, such as similar poses or facial expressions.
12. Once dry, have them add final touches like texture, shading, and highlights to enhance realism.

Reflection & discussion

13. Display finished paintings and have students do a gallery walk where they observe and comment on each other's work.
14. Have students answer the following reflection questions in writing or discussion:
 - Do modern-day Midwesterners look like the people in Grant Wood's original painting? Why not? What would be a typical modern background instead of a Gothic farmhouse? What else would you change to make it more up-to-date?
 - Why do you think *American Gothic* is one of the most parodied paintings in history?
 - Is it legal to use famous people in art if it's not for sale?
 - Is it legal to use famous people in art if it is for sale?
 - Is your parody meant for comic effect or critique? Why?
 - What inspired your subject choices and background?
 - How does your version compare to the original? Does it reflect modern culture?
 - Does your parody still honor Grant Wood's artistic legacy?





Materials list

- 12" x 18" (or larger) watercolor paper ([9718846](#)) or mixed media paper ([9728258](#))
- Tempera ([NE20175](#)), watercolor ([9723011](#) or [NE20752](#)), or acrylic paint ([9736645](#))
- Paint brushes ([9741048](#) or [9725240](#))
- Pencils and erasers ([NE20211](#) or [9742802](#))
- Reference images for inspiration
- Examples of *American Gothic* parodies

