

## Resources for Further Exploration

### Library of Congress and National Archives

- [Inventing Entertainment: The Motion Picture and Sound Recordings of the Edison Company](#)—Library of Congress (LoC): *American Memory* online collection of early sound recordings and short film showcasing emerging technologies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Includes films of New York city street life.
- [Alien and Sedition Acts \(1798\)](#)—National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): *100 Milestone Documents in American History* contains scans and transcripts of the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798), and also of [Senate Resolution 301: Censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy \(1954\)](#), who worked to safeguard the United States by putting penalties on unpopular political speech.

### Historical Sources

- Seneca Falls [Declaration of Sentiments](#) (1848);  
Frederick Douglass, [“The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro”](#) (1852);  
Franklin D. Roosevelt, [“Four Freedoms” Speech](#) (1941)

### Law

- [United States Constitution](#) (1787): Second Amendment (1791),  
Fifteenth Amendment (1870), Nineteenth Amendment (1920)  
[Voting Rights Act](#) (1965)

### Supreme Court

- [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) (1896)  
[Brown v. Board of Education](#) (1954)

### General Fiction and Non-Fiction

- Innovation*: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)  
Alain Locke, [“Enter the New Negro”](#) (1925)  
*Equality*: Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (1911)  
James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)  
*Freedom of Speech*: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892)  
Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” (1849)

- Poetry**: Langston Hughes “Dream Deferred” (1951)

### Children’s Literature

- Debbie Taylor, *Sweet Music in Harlem* (2004)

### Young Adult Literature

- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

### Web Resources

- [The Trial of John Peter Zenger](#)—The Historical Society of the Courts of New York: History, text, and documents of the court case that laid the foundation for the principle of the freedom of the press.
- [Eli Whitney’s Patent for the Cotton Gin](#)—National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): *Teaching with Documents* exhibit about the invention that fueled the antebellum American economy and solidified the institution of slavery.

## Mass Moments

Mass Moments is an online compendium of stories from Massachusetts history, including the following ones that touch on the topic of *This We Believe*.

[Tupperware Inventor Born: July 28, 1907](#), saw the birth of Earl Tupper. Raised in central Massachusetts, birthplace of the plastics industry, he went on to lead one of the most successful companies in US history.

[Norman Rockwell Wins Medal of Freedom: On January 10, 1977](#), the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, was bestowed on 83-year-old Norman Rockwell, painter of *The Four Freedoms*.

[Massachusetts Executes Sacco and Vanzetti: On August 23, 1927](#), Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were put to death in the state prison in Charlestown, convicted them of murder and robbery. Many argued that they were persecuted for their political beliefs.

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## Picturing America

### VI. THIS WE BELIEVE



Clockwise from top:

- Pottery and Baskets: c. 1100 to c. 1960 ([1-A](#))
- Hiram Powers, *Benjamin Franklin*, 1862 ([4-B](#))
- George Caleb Bingham, *The County Election*, 1852 ([7-B](#))
- Quilts: 19<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries ([10-B](#))
- Mary Cassat, *The Boating Party* 1893/1894 ([14-A](#))
- Charles Sheeler, *American Landscape*, 1930 ([15-A](#))
- Norman Rockwell, *Freedom of Speech, The Saturday Evening Post*, 1943 ([19-A](#))
- Martin Puryear, *Ladder for Booker T. Washington*, 1996 ([20-B](#))

Picturing America, a program of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Library Association, brings high quality reproductions of masterpieces of American art into classrooms and libraries nationwide. This brochure was produced by

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## VI. THIS WE BELIEVE

It can be very challenging to identify beliefs that a majority of Americans—diverse as this nation is—can agree upon, and even more so to distill them into a coherent whole or work of art. And then there is the work of reconfiguring “established” beliefs in the face of new experiences, eras, needs and realizations. This set of images suggests ways to look at art as reflecting and shaping American beliefs and posing questions about three concepts often seen as central to an American belief system: *ingenuity and innovation*, *equality*, and *freedom of speech*.

### Taking Inventory

How does one express an idea with art? Consider these pairs:

**Pottery and Baskets** and *Brooklyn Bridge*

*The Boating Party* and *Freedom of Speech*

*Ladder for Booker T. Washington* and *The County Election*

Which pair would you connect with the themes ingenuity and innovation, equality, or freedom of speech? How do they address these ideas?

**Ingenuity and Innovation:** In what proportion do Americans value innovation vs. tradition? How does the answer to this question change based on who is answering it or when it is asked? How does art speak to any of these questions?

- Explore each of the items in *Pottery and Baskets* and *Quilts*. Catalog differences and similarities between and among the items—evidence of both ingenuity and tradition. Consider the materials used, patterns and decoration, or shape and vessel. Also, look for distinctive features in each one (you might compare Cesar Johnson’s *Gullah Rice Fanmer Basket* and the *Sikyatiki Bowl*). Look at the dates on each piece. What is consistent over time? What has changed?
- Consider this claim: “*American Landscape* suggests potential problems with innovation.” Which of the painting’s details support this statement? Catalog elements of innovation: railroad, smokestacks, and machinery. How has Sheeler visually related these to parts of the natural landscape, such as clouds and the river?

**Equality:** How easy is it to enact a belief in equality? Is equality of opportunity, “equality”? How do artists attempt to represent equality or lack of it?

- Bingham’s *The County Election* depicts American democracy in progress in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Look more closely at the men gathered to vote. Who is who and what are their roles in this event? Are they shown as equals? How are they—and how are they not? The man under the blue banner with a blue coat is one of the candidates for office. How does his clothing compare to the rest of the crowd?
- At the far left edge of the painting, notice the African American man. Consider the link between the location of this figure in the painting and the position of African Americans in 1850s America. How might *Ladder for Booker T. Washington* “speak to” or challenge *The County Election*?

**Freedom of Speech:** How does art help us recognize and question the limits of our belief in freedom of speech? Are there settings in which speaking one’s mind is problematic or dangerous?

- Pay attention to the look on the central figure’s face in *Freedom of Speech*. How confident and comfortable does he appear to be in voicing his mind? How supportive are the onlookers? What techniques and details does Rockwell use to shape our “reading” of this man’s actions?
- Compare the woman’s role and position in Mary Cassat’s *The Boating Party* to Rockwell’s man. What is the woman doing? How would you describe her feelings about the situation? Is she enjoying this “party”? Compared to the central figure in *Freedom of Speech*, how confident is this woman in expressing her views? What details and techniques helped you come to your conclusions?

### A Closer Look

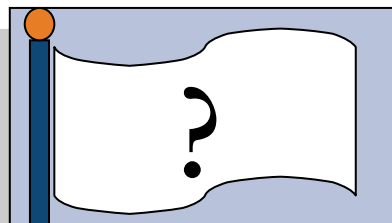
As you look at these images, what additional American beliefs do they address? Are there “American” beliefs not represented here? Or beliefs of which we can infer the existence by the absence of items or figures? Start with *The County Election* and *Freedom of Speech*.

### Children’s Activity

**Step 1:** On a separate sheet of paper, draw an American flag.

How many stars does it have? How many stripes? What do they represent? (If you do not know, you can look up the answers in a book or online.)

Is the flag something Americans can be said to “believe” in?



**Step 2:** Now draw a flag for your family, school, or town.

Make sure that you design it to reflect or represent something that the people in your family/school/town believe.