



# 7th Grade: JANUARY

## *Winter Landscape with Skaters*

### Hendrick Avercamp

© 2013 Debra J. Herman, M.F.A., All Rights Reserved  
Funded by the John and Frances Beck Foundation, Chicago, Illinois  
Edited by Constance Kamrath, M.A.

#### 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.

#### Hendrick Avercamp

Hendrick Avercamp, named after his paternal grandfather, was the first child born to Barent Avercamp and Beatrix Peters in Amsterdam, Netherlands. His actual birthdate is unknown but records indicate he was baptized on January 27, 1585.

Avercamp's family moved to the small town of Kampen soon after his first birthday, where his father served as apothecary for ten years. Beatrix gave birth to another six children in Kampen, two of whom died. It was at this time that Avercamp's inability to speak became apparent and he eventually became known as the "Mute of Kampen." Some believe he was also deaf. Despite this limitation, his sight and ability to observe became his strength. The Avercamp family was well-educated and wealthy so one can assume the young Avercamp had every opportunity to learn to lip-read, read text and write.

The family moved back to Amsterdam but soon returned to Kampen upon the urging of the town council as many citizens were suffering with the plague. Not only was Avercamp's father the apothecary, he soon assumed the role of town doctor, yet in 1602, became a victim of the plague epidemic. The untimely death of Avercamp's father did not place a financial strain on the Avercamp family; nonetheless, his mother felt a strong need to carry on the work of her husband. She received permission from the town council to assume the work of her husband and trained her growing sons in the apothecary practice.

It is thought Avercamp's early connection to art began with lessons by the town painter who served also as a surveyor and may have dabbled in landscape painting. Another clue reveals that at a 1607 estate sale of Flemish landscape painter Gillis van Coninxloo in Amsterdam, a single buyer purchased many of the paintings. Records show the buyer was identified as the twenty-two year old "Mute of Kampen. At the time, Avercamp was living in the house of Danish portrait painter Pieter Isacqs while receiving instruction in painting. Oddly enough, Avercamp's style of painting has no resemblance to that of his assumed teacher but rather was more in the style of Gillis van Coninxloo and Flemish painter David Vinckboons, especially in the genre of winter landscapes, giving indication that Avercamp probably

studied under these two masters rather than Isacqs. Avercamp was young and impressionable and, like his mentors, wanted to devote his life to landscape painting.

Avercamp was thought to have left Amsterdam and returned to Kampen around 1613 and stayed there for the remainder of his life, proven by four documents: an inscription on the back of a drawing, a bill of sales for two horses, a petition made by Avercamp's mother to receive extra financial support for him following her death, and Avercamp's funeral record. It is believed he lived in his mother's house until the time of his death on May 15, 1634, at the approximate age of forty-nine.

Avercamp's subject matter was scenes of life on the ice. During his life span, he experienced countless severe winters known as the Little Ice Age in the Netherlands, which impacted everyday life. Frozen waterways prevented delivery of supplies. Growing seasons were shortened so less produce was grown and what little produce was grown was depleted far before winter's end. Deep freezes, with temperatures at -15F for two months, challenged everyone; many froze to death.

It was after one of the most severe winters (1607-1608) that Avercamp painted the ice scene, *Winter Landscape with Skaters* (1608), of people outside enjoying winter activities including ice games and merriment. It appears that everyone spilled outdoors to enjoy the fun. Perhaps it was a few days break from the extreme cold.

Avercamp signed his art but he rarely dated his paintings or his drawings, thus presenting a challenge when trying to put his work in chronological order. Experts look carefully at clothing trends captured in the painting as clues for time periods. Shifting trends in landscape painting styles also left clues. For example, in his early work, Avercamp broke the horizon line by placing a castle or other large building in the middle of the horizon, such as in *Winter Landscape with Skaters* (c. 1608). Later, he shifted the placement of a building off to the side, eliminating the bare trees and lowered the horizon line to reveal a large, uninterrupted horizon. He established a greater sense of visual depth such as in *Winter Landscape on the River Ijsel Near Kampen* (c. 1615). Notice ice colf was a recreational sport, "colf" meaning club or stick.



## 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

Literature that relates to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Gallery Ghost: Find the Ghost who Paints the Most!* by Anna Nilsen
- *Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Paintings* by Ivan Gaskell

## REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hephaestus Books. *Dutch Golden Age Painters, including: Ambrosius Bosschaert, Aelbert Cuyp, Hendrick Avercamp, Jan Van Goyen, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals, Paulus Flinck, Carel Fabritius, Pieter De Hooch*. Hephaestus Books. 2011
- Roelofs, Pieter, *Hendrick Avercamp: Master of the Ice Scene*. RIJKS Museum. Amsterdam. 2009
- Van Suchtelen, Ariane. *Holland Frozen in Time. The Dutch Winter Landscape in the Golden Age*. Waanders Uitgevers. 2001

Avercamp's art was known for the subject matter which captured the harshness of life during the Little Ice Age as well as providing a glimpse of the social scene, among both the peasant and the wealthy class. Amsterdam's international trade encouraged a wide variety of clothing and merchants who eventually supported minor clothing industries in Kampen. Whether the aristocracy was from Amsterdam or visiting their leased farms in Kampen, they were captured in fashion-detail in Avercamp's drawings and painting. The ice scenes were socially inclusive of all groups, from rich to poor. However, in the midst of the harsh winters, was Avercamp's impression of life on the ice reality or fiction?

## About the Art

*Winter Landscape with Skaters* was executed, oil on panel in 1608 by the Dutch painter Hendrick Avercamp. It is one of the rare paintings that Avercamp actually dated upon its completion. The painting measures 34.4 x 52 inches and is in the collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. It features a bird's eye view of a village whose residents, of all ages, are enjoying winter activities. One can imagine listening to the sounds and noises of the activities. In its likeness to the contemporary "Where is Waldo" scene, the eyes spin around to take in the action. No one focal point, no object or person or action steals the scene and demands our attention. Avercamp's style is consistent with the work of an earlier Flemish painter, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who was among the first to paint winter scenes, as early as 1565. As does Bruegel, Avercamp gives a panoramic view of the village. The high horizon gives the artist ample space to create the activity within the town. They both included in their scenes a bird trap made with a discarded wood door.

## Directed Observation

Show students an image of *Winter Landscape with Skaters*. Tell them it was painted, oil on panel, in 1608, by the artist Hendrick Avercamp. Offer students biographical information about Avercamp. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following are suggested questions to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. Take time to closely examine *Winter Landscape with Skaters*. Identify and share the activities of the people.
2. Based on this painting, what can you determine about the lives of these people?
3. How could they have survived during the harsh winter?
4. Compare their lives to your life. Could

you survive a 16th or 17th century winter? Research the living conditions of that time period in the Netherlands.

5. Compositionally, Avercamp's paintings are packed with images to view. Discuss how this is engaging for the viewer.
6. Avercamp's style shifted throughout his career. Research other artists to see how their artistic work also shifted. Why do you think this happens? Is it a good thing? How does your artwork change over the years?
7. Given the harsh winters and Avercamp's positive and happy scenes, did he express reality? Research Norman Rockwell and compare his images of everyday life in America to Avercamp's work.
8. Avercamp had physical challenges and was able to find his strength in observation. What are your artistic challenges? How can you turn them into your artistic strengths?

## Things to Do

1. Biographical information on individuals who lived long ago in the 16th century is hard to come by. Researchers must rely on bits and pieces of information to reconstruct someone's life. Research the jobs of curators and biographers.
2. Compare and contrast the winter scenes of Avercamp and Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Which do you prefer?
3. Since Avercamp rarely dated his work, it was difficult to trace it chronologically. Prepare images of scenes in various decades and see if others can put them in order based on fashion trends.
4. Create quick sketches of a class of students playing on the playground and capture their various activities. Once back in the classroom, further develop your drawings. Create small paintings from the drawings or collaborate with others to create a larger scene.
5. Create several landscape drawings and pay attention to the horizon line, placing some high on the page and others low. Also examine "breaking" the horizon line with a building or tree.
6. Examine how Avercamp captured the reflective quality of ice. Try creating a scene on ice with your choice of materials. Make sure the ice reflects the images.
7. Avercamp was inspired by life on the ice. Image yourself as a visual artist. What type of work will you create? What will it look like? What will your inspiration be? Where will you live and work? Write an imaginary biography of your life as an artist. Be sure to include images of your art. If you can dream it, it might happen!