


Norman Finds His Own Way



Written by Gina Capaldi & Q.L. Pearce

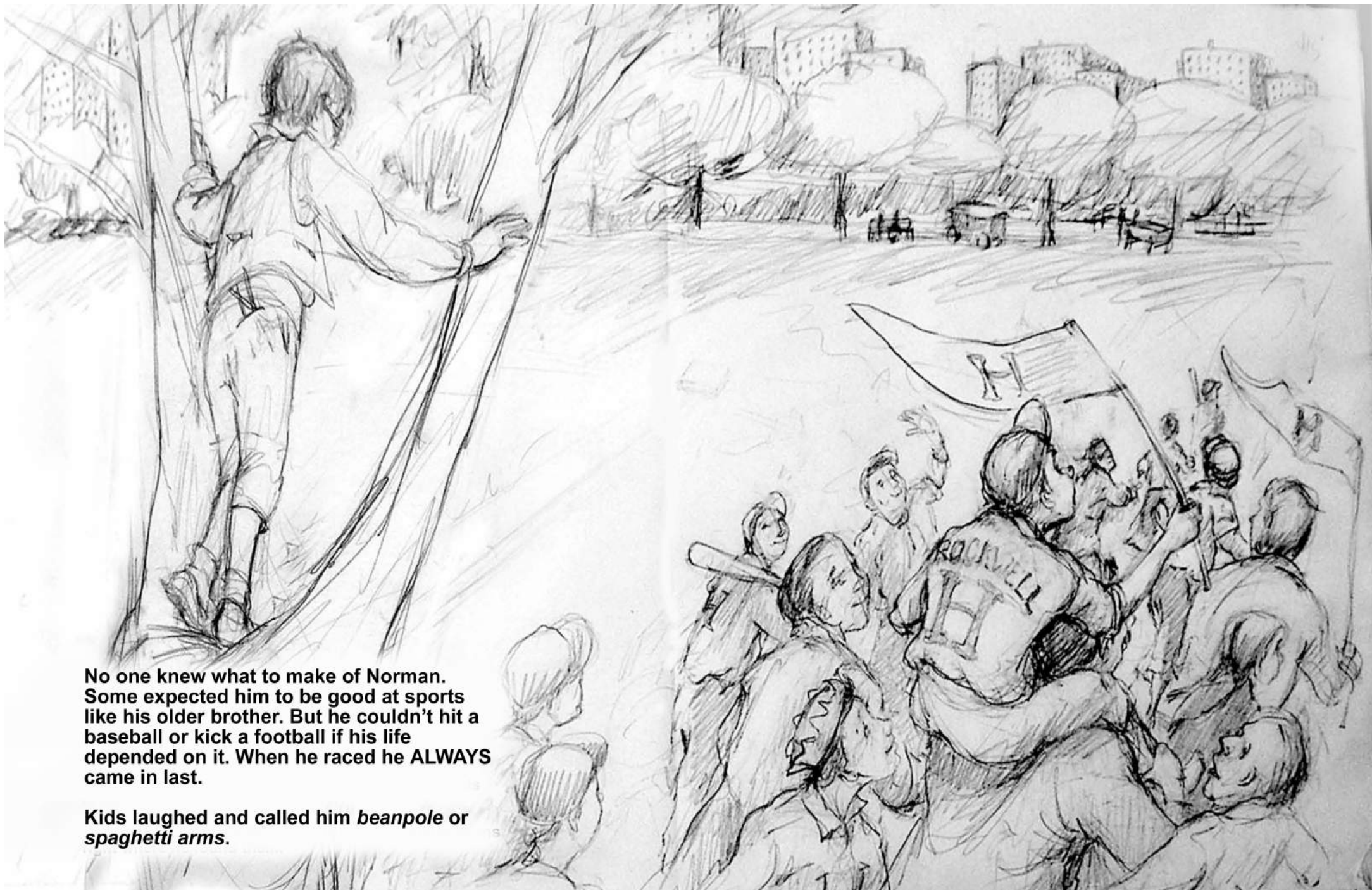


Norman Percival Rockwell had his own way of looking at things.

**When the summer sky was dark and gloomy, most people warned, "A storm is coming!"
Norman exclaimed, "Look at the shapes in the clouds!"**

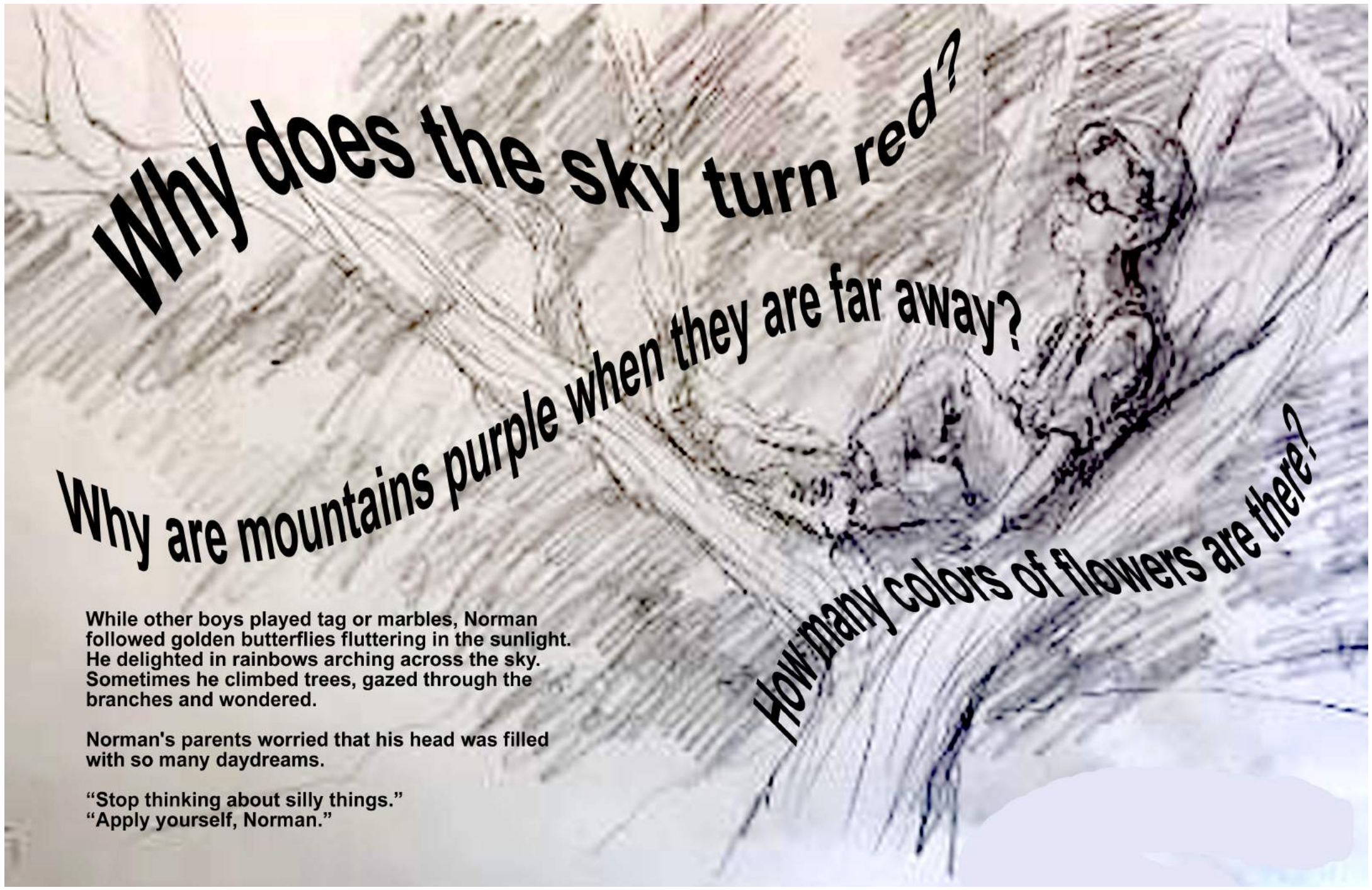
When Autumn brought a chill to the air, most people complained, "So many leaves to rake." Norman whispered, "The colors are beautiful."

**When snowflakes fell in winter, most people worried, "The roads will be slushy."
Norman celebrated, "Everything sparkles."**



No one knew what to make of Norman. Some expected him to be good at sports like his older brother. But he couldn't hit a baseball or kick a football if his life depended on it. When he raced he **ALWAYS** came in last.

Kids laughed and called him *beanpole* or *spaghetti arms*.



Why does the sky turn red?

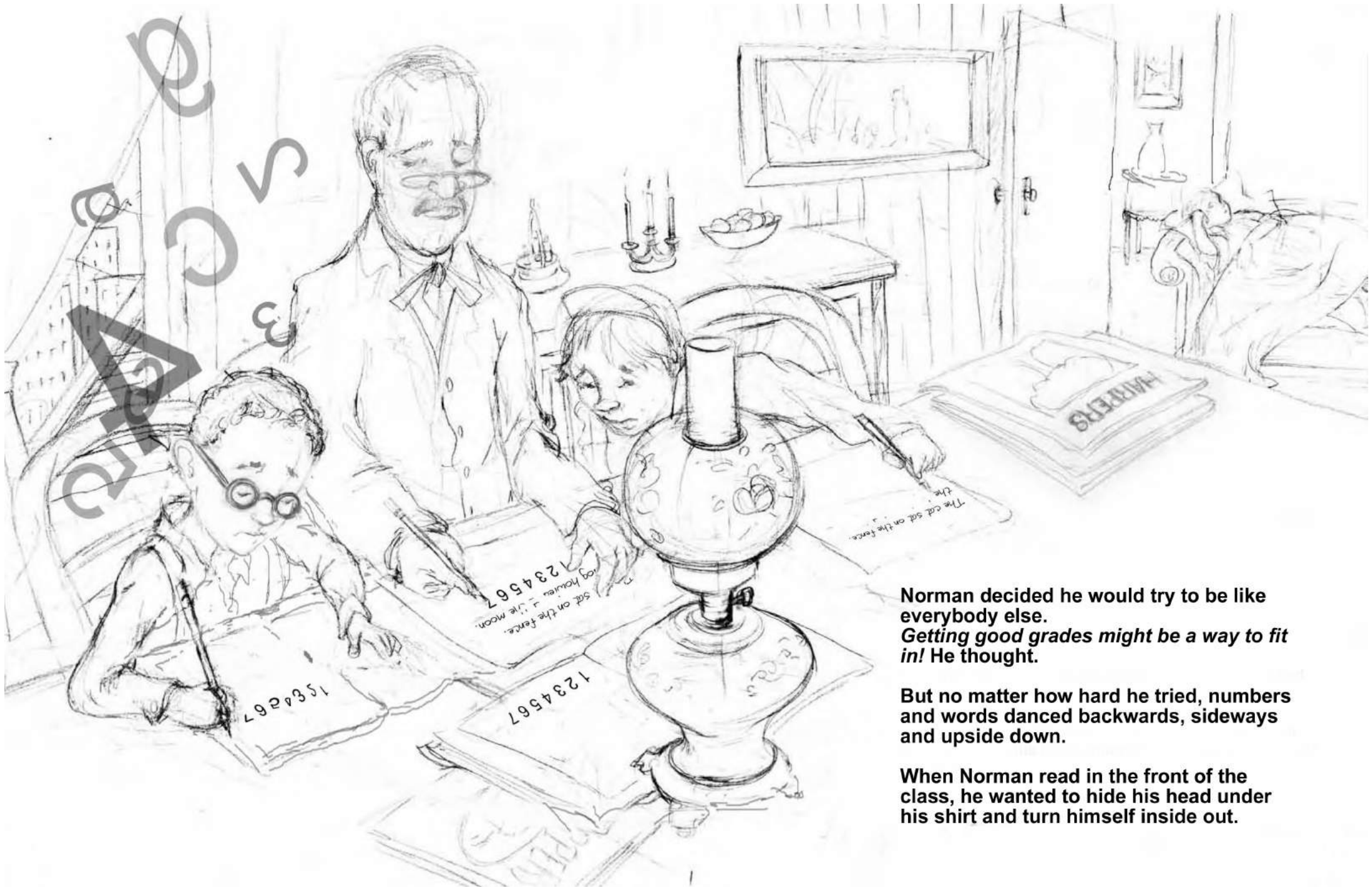
Why are mountains purple when they are far away?

How many colors of flowers are there?

While other boys played tag or marbles, Norman followed golden butterflies fluttering in the sunlight. He delighted in rainbows arching across the sky. Sometimes he climbed trees, gazed through the branches and wondered.

Norman's parents worried that his head was filled with so many daydreams.

"Stop thinking about silly things."
"Apply yourself, Norman."



Norman decided he would try to be like everybody else. Getting good grades might be a way to fit in! He thought.

But no matter how hard he tried, numbers and words danced backwards, sideways and upside down.

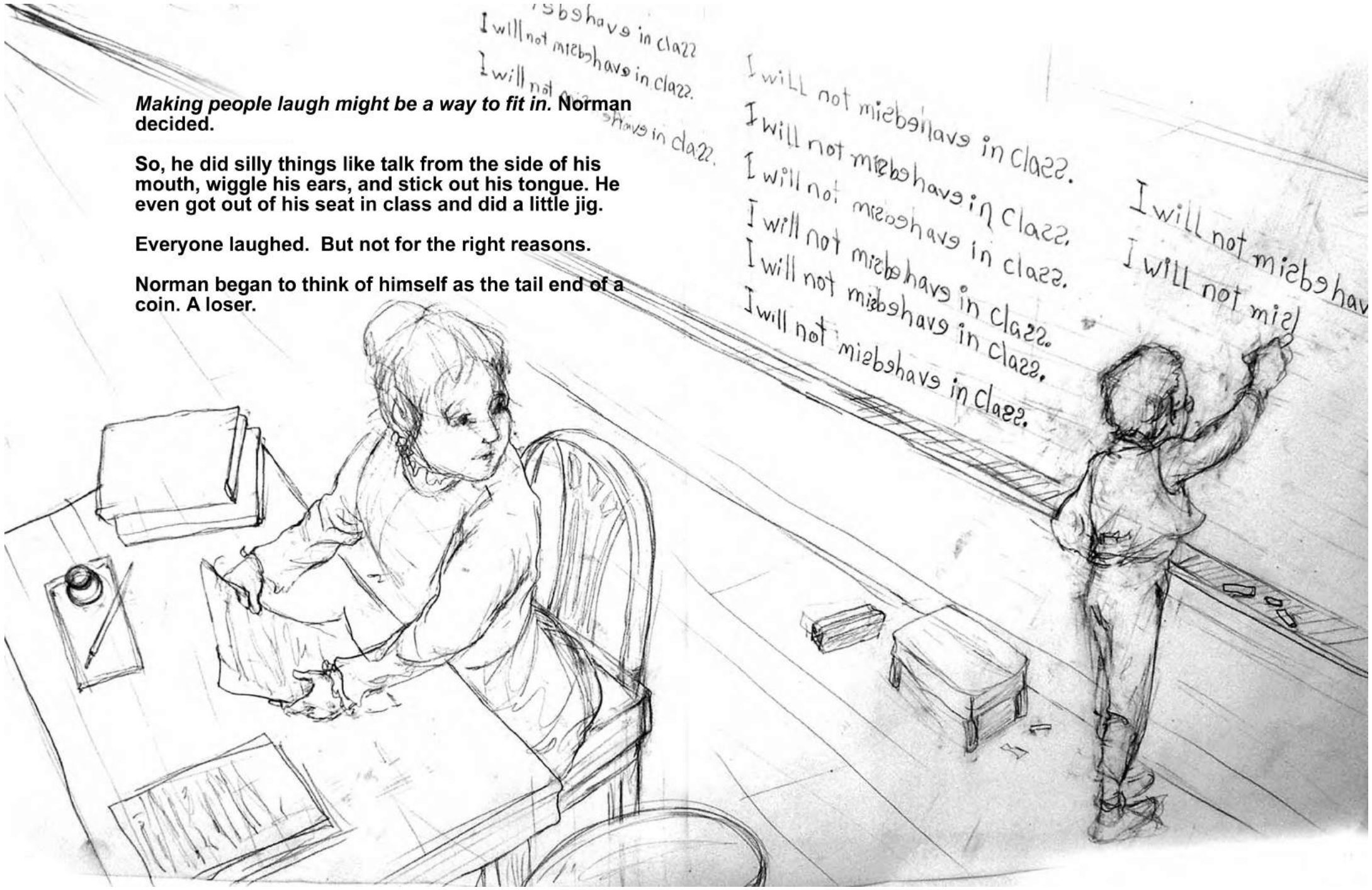
When Norman read in the front of the class, he wanted to hide his head under his shirt and turn himself inside out.

Making people laugh might be a way to fit in. Norman decided.

So, he did silly things like talk from the side of his mouth, wiggle his ears, and stick out his tongue. He even got out of his seat in class and did a little jig.

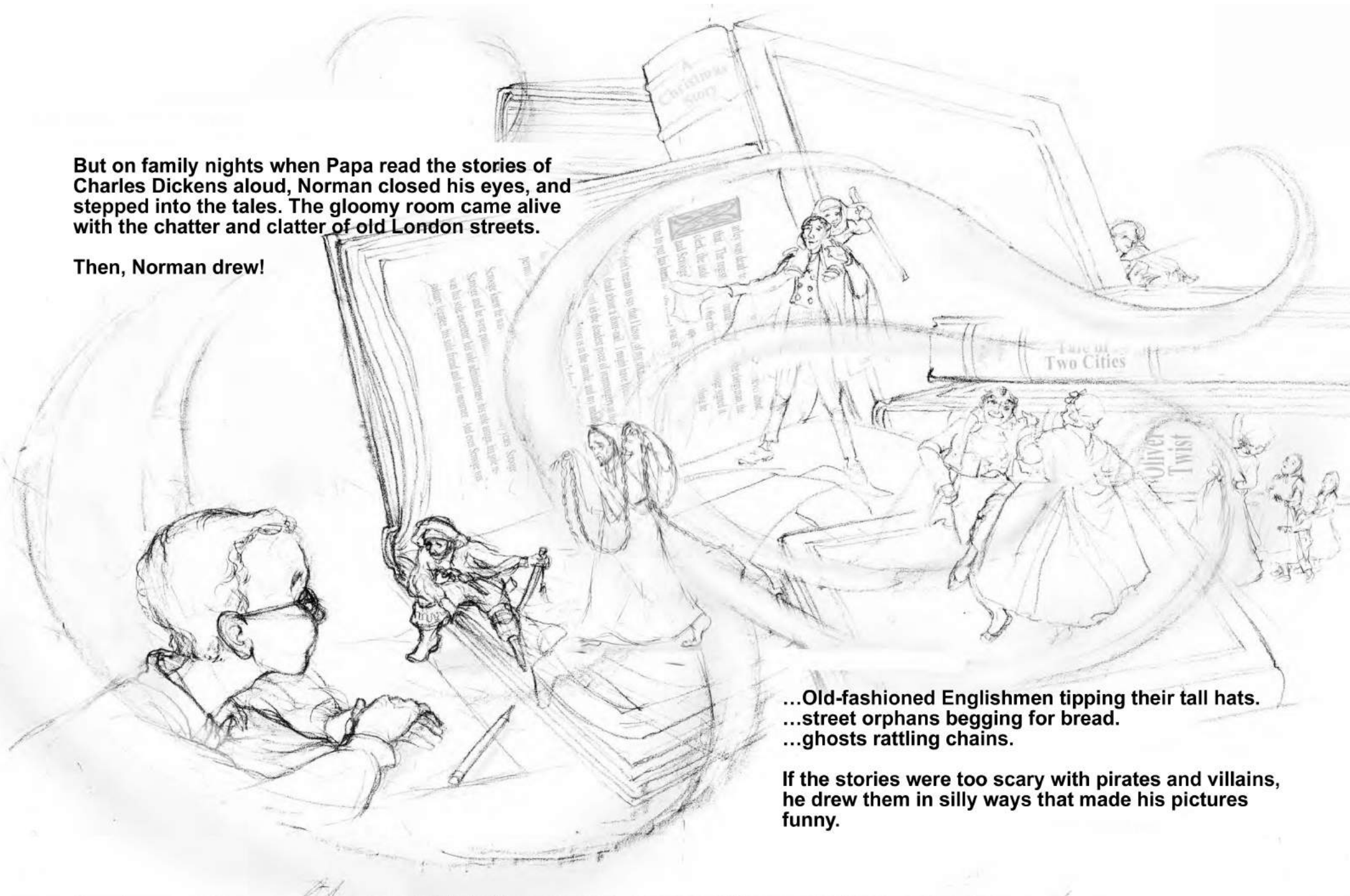
Everyone laughed. But not for the right reasons.

Norman began to think of himself as the tail end of a coin. A loser.



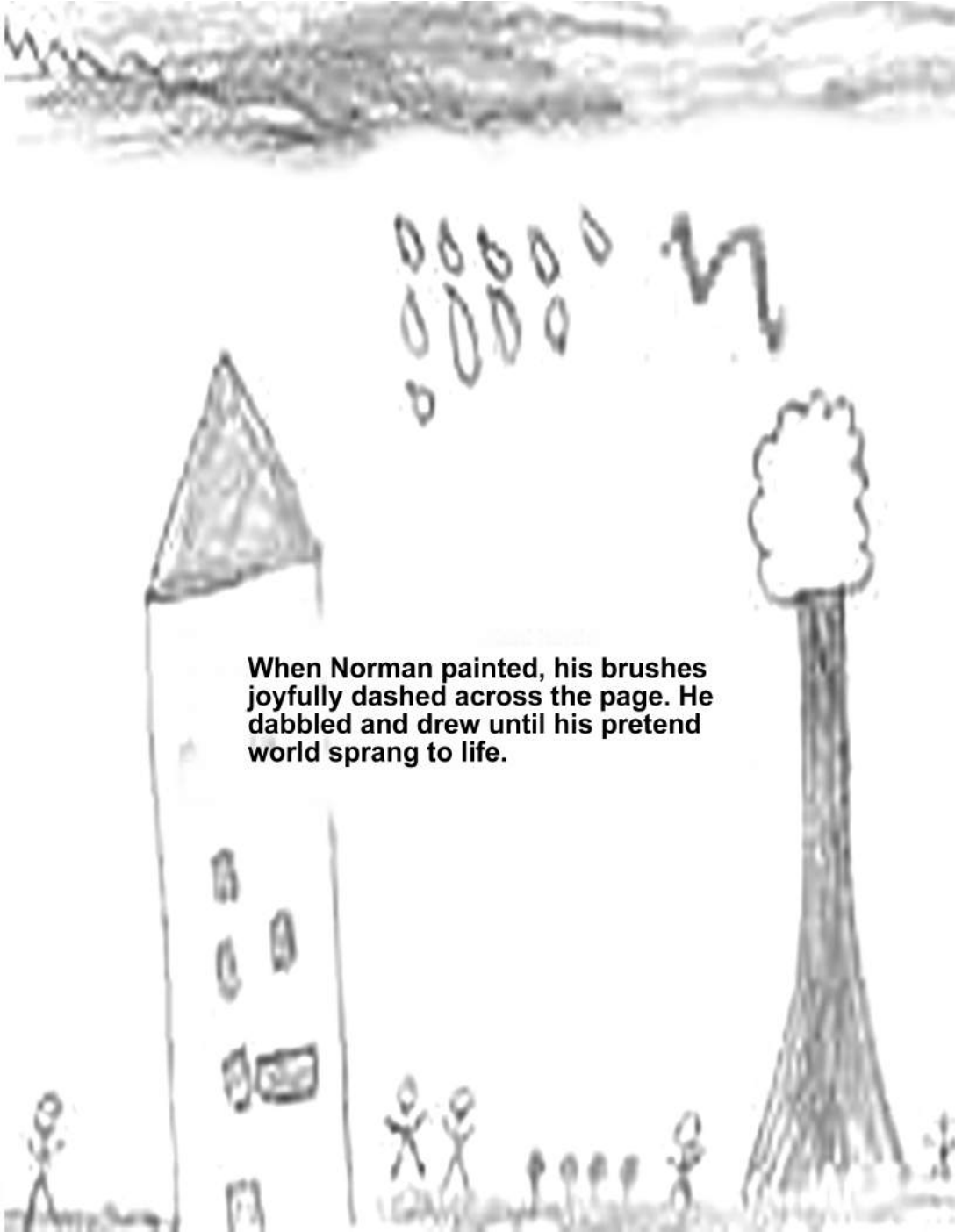
But on family nights when Papa read the stories of Charles Dickens aloud, Norman closed his eyes, and stepped into the tales. The gloomy room came alive with the chatter and clatter of old London streets.

Then, Norman drew!



**...Old-fashioned Englishmen tipping their tall hats.
...street orphans begging for bread.
...ghosts rattling chains.**

**If the stories were too scary with pirates and villains,
he drew them in silly ways that made his pictures
funny.**



When Norman painted, his brushes joyfully dashed across the page. He dabbled and drew until his pretend world sprang to life.



Before long, Norman spent every spare minute drawing. In class, while other kids paid attention to the lessons, Norman daydreamed, then drew. His doodles squirmed around the columns of his schoolbooks. Drawings burst from his workbooks.

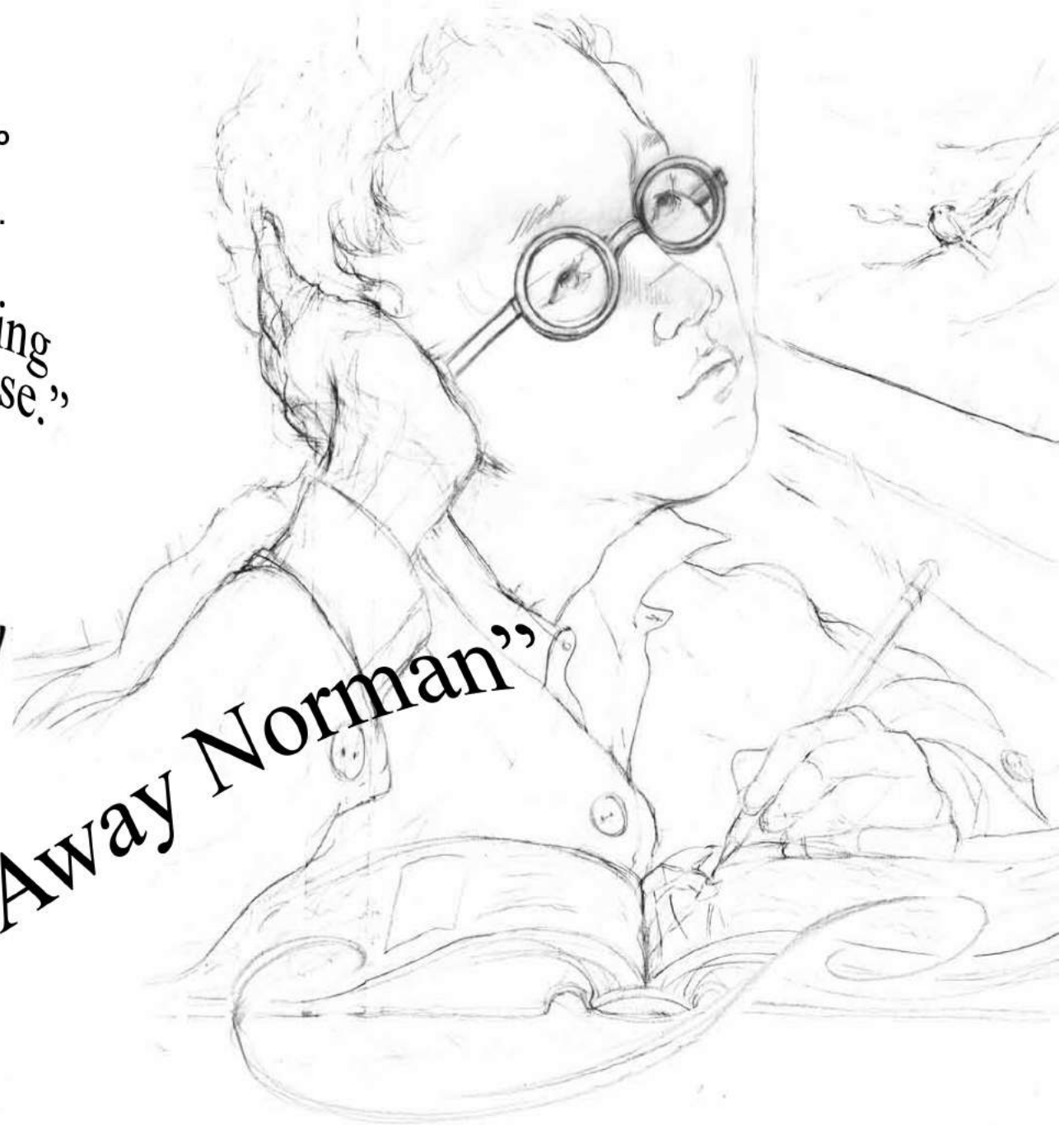
His teachers were not pleased.

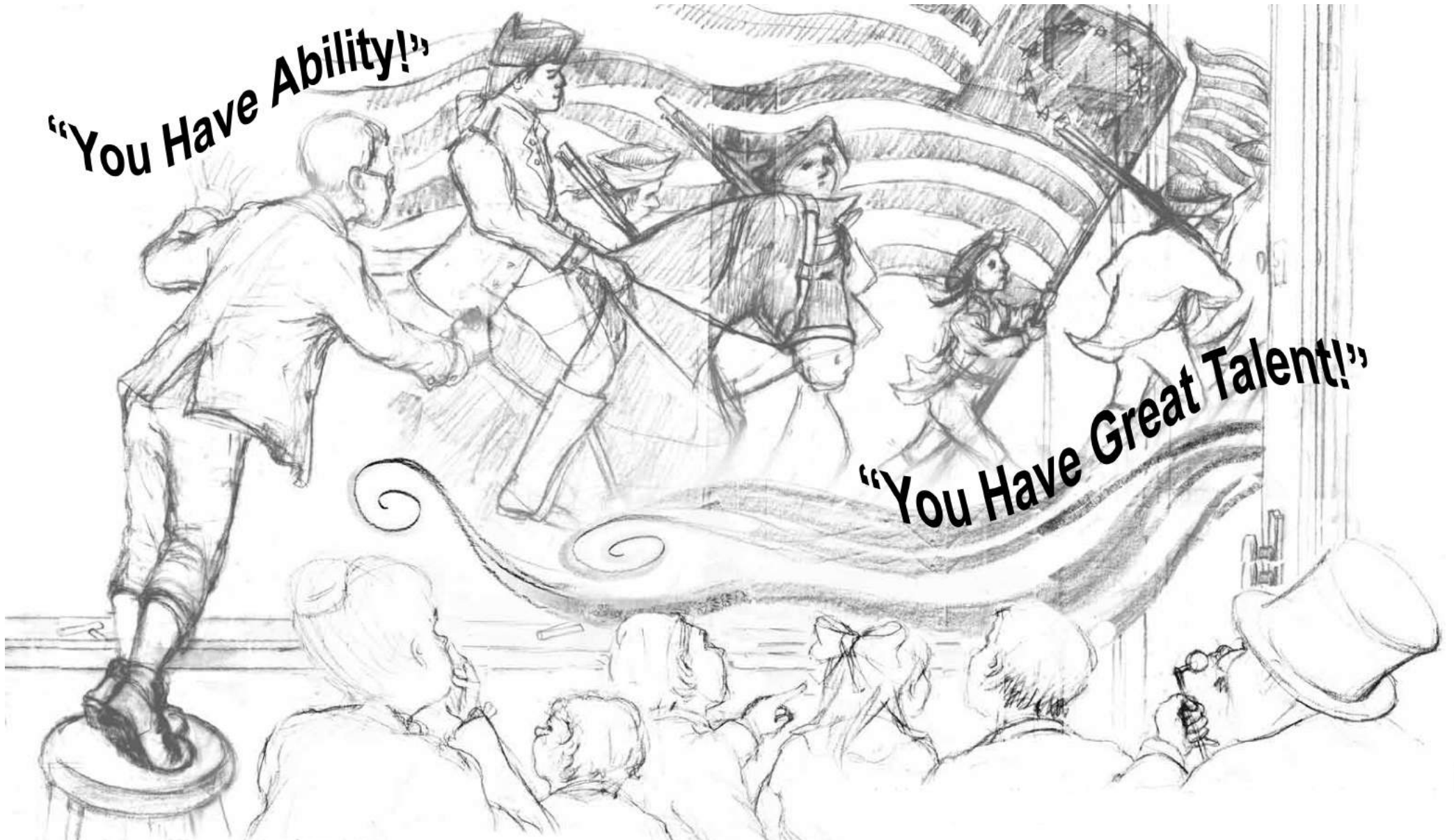
“You’ll Never Amount to Anything if You Continue with the Nonsense.”



“Stop that Norman!”
“Pay attention!”

“Put that Away Norman”



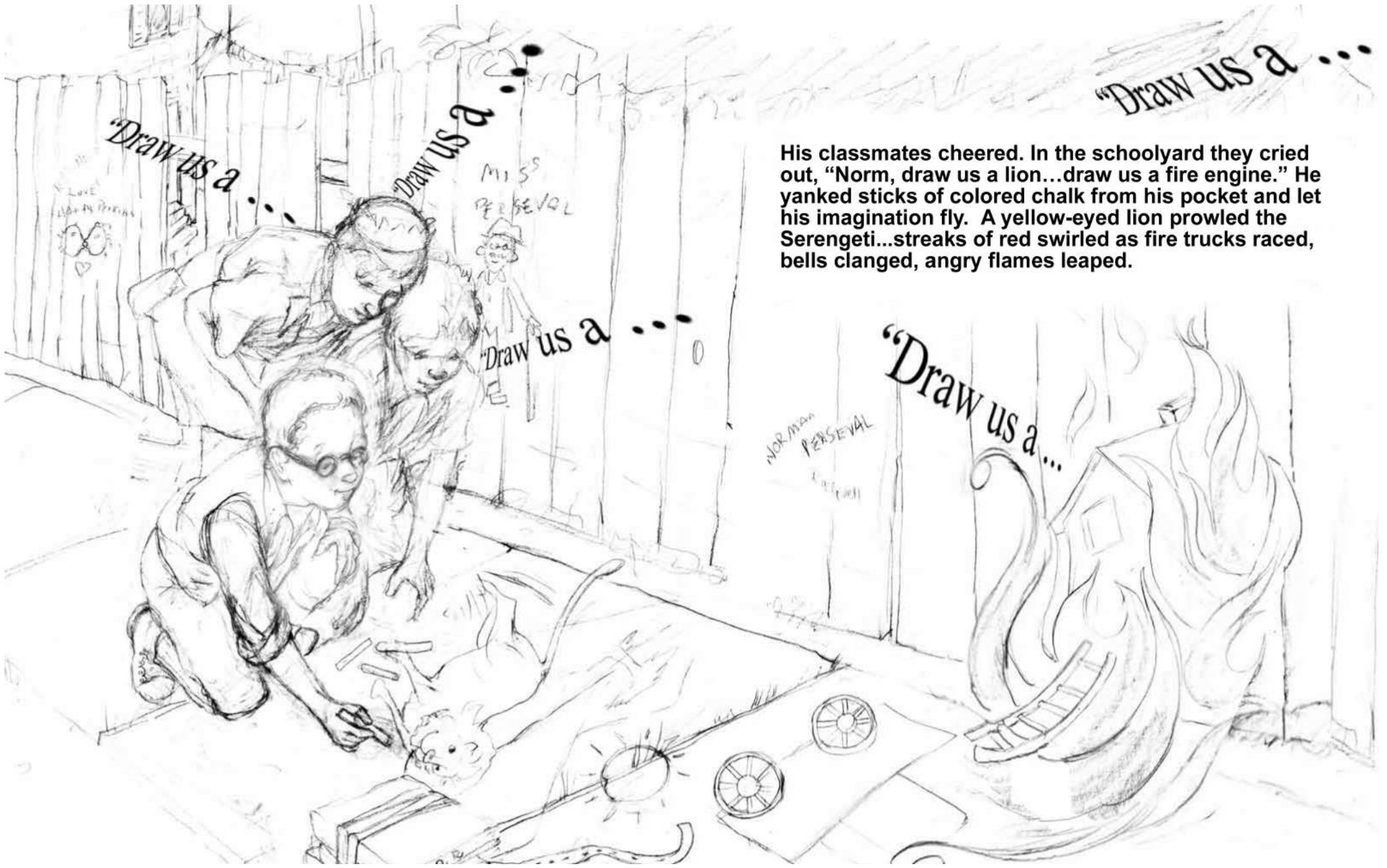


"You Have Ability!"

"You Have Great Talent!"

Finally, one of Norman's teachers admired his art. She came up with a way that he could draw without getting into trouble. "These drawings are excellent," she said. "Come to the board and draw a Christmas picture for us!"

In history class, Norman showed pioneers sweating on the Oregon Trail and George Washington on the march. For science he created murals of birds, lions, and elephants so detailed they almost seemed to breathe.



His classmates cheered. In the schoolyard they cried out, "Norm, draw us a lion...draw us a fire engine." He yanked sticks of colored chalk from his pocket and let his imagination fly. A yellow-eyed lion prowled the Serengeti...streaks of red swirled as fire trucks raced, bells clanged, angry flames leaped.

"Draw us a ..."

"Draw us a ..."

"Draw us a ..."

"Draw us a ..."

"Draw us a ..."

MISS PERSEVAL

NORMAN PERSEVAL



“I want to become an artist!”

Norman knew he'd never be the fastest runner.
He'd never be the smartest or funniest kid in
school.

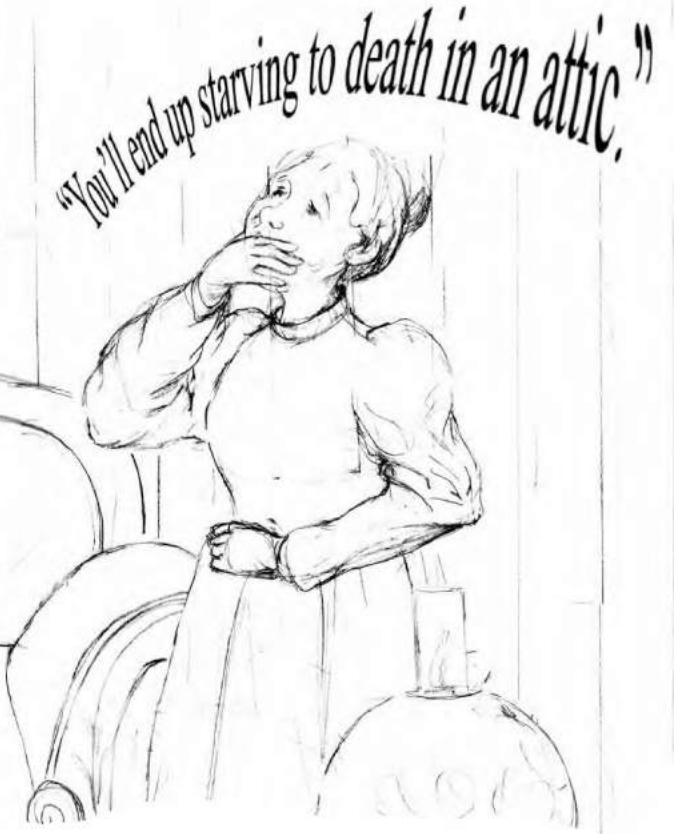
He'd never be a clerk like his father.
Or a fireman like their neighbor.
No, Norman had other plans.

Norman wished his parents could accept his dreams, but he had made his mind up to find his own way.



"I'm going to devote all of my time to art!"

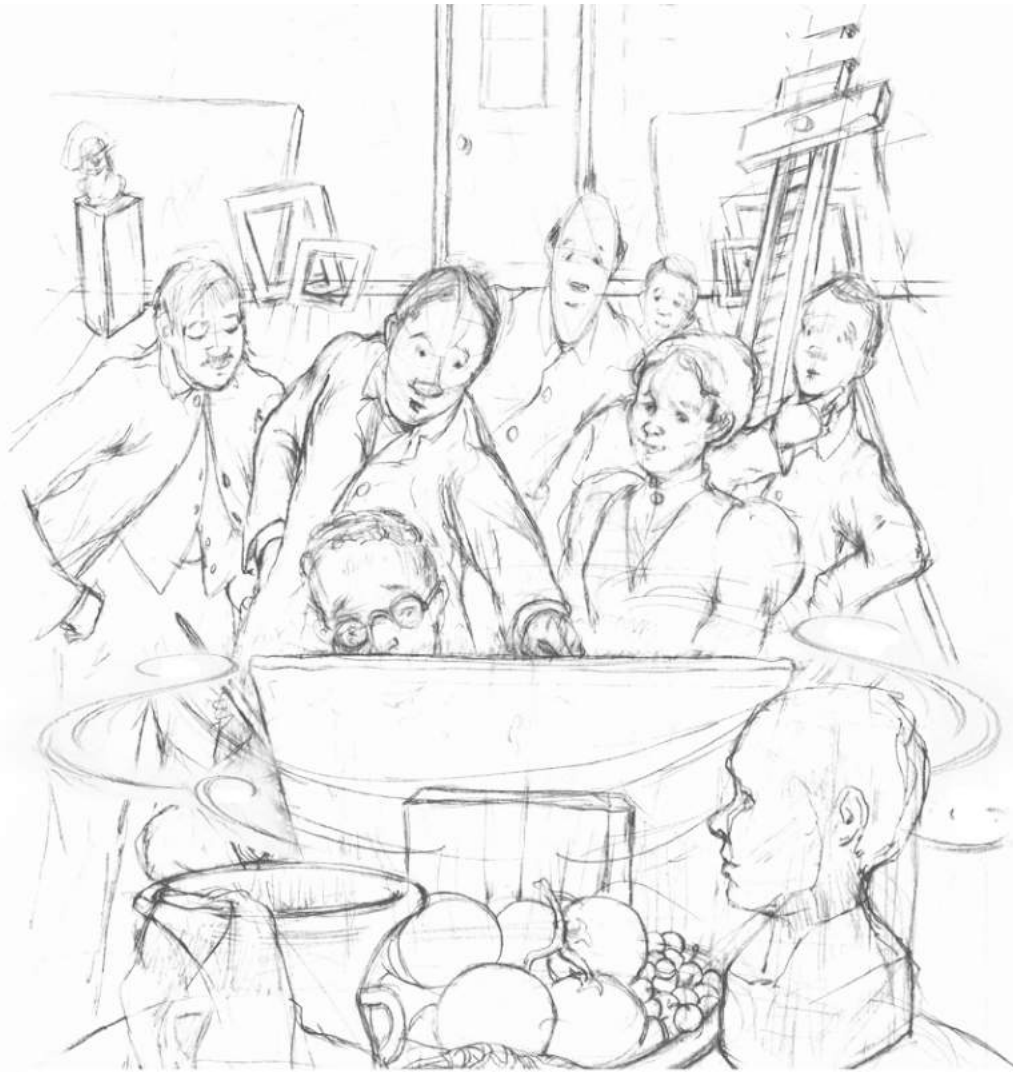
"You're only 14, what about high school?"



"You'll end up starving to death in an attic."

So, Norman worked hard and saved his money for art school.

...He raked leaves, had a mail route, and painted Christmas cards. He also tutored kids in French, even though he didn't speak it!



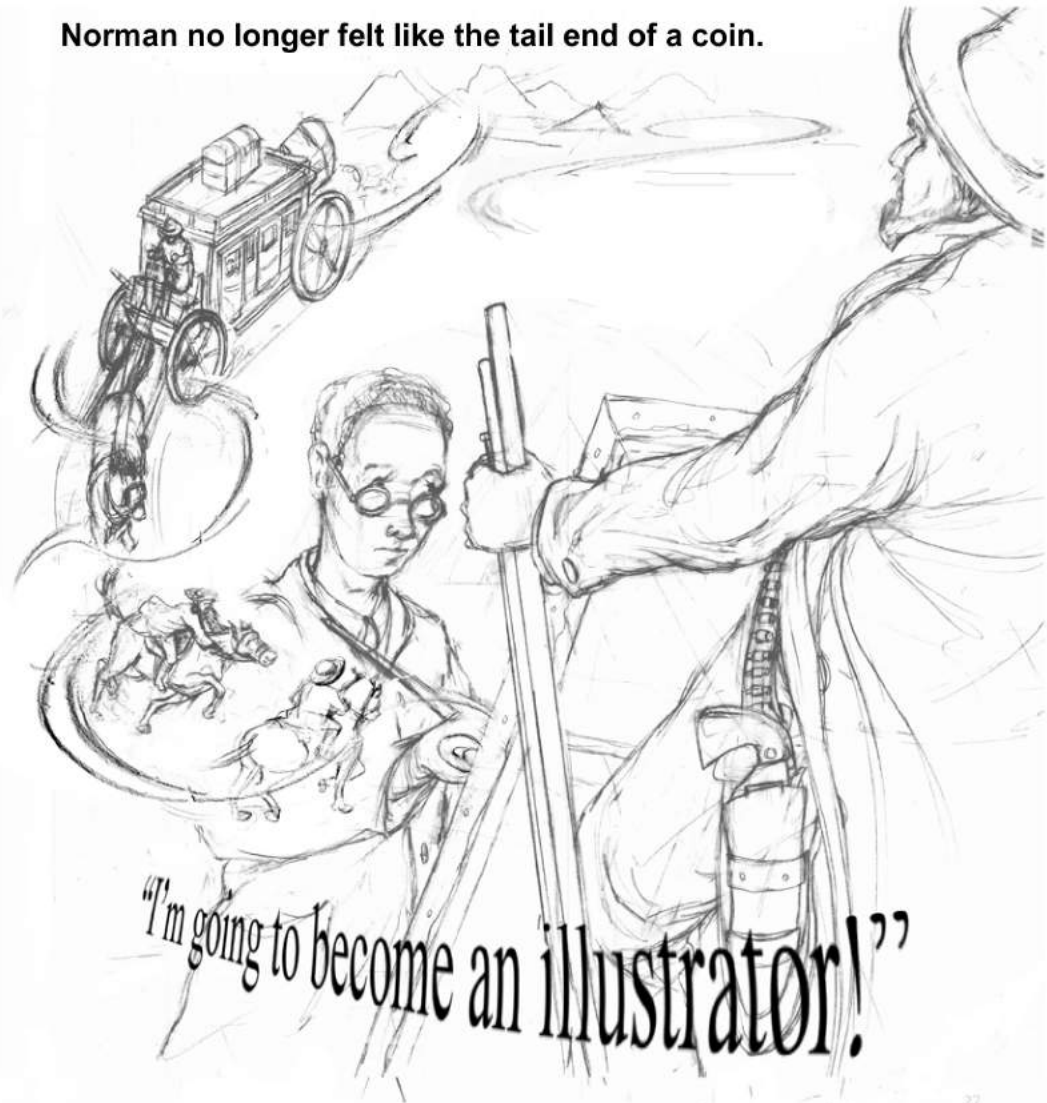
As the youngest student in art school, Norman didn't quite fit in. He wore short pants while everyone else wore long trousers. He devoured books and haunted museums while everyone else sat in cafes.

"Relax kid," they would laugh.

But Norman only worked harder.

When Norman learned to paint like the Old Masters, the other students stopped calling him Kid. No one mentioned his spaghetti arms and it didn't matter if he couldn't kick a football.

Norman no longer felt like the tail end of a coin.



"I'm going to become an illustrator!"



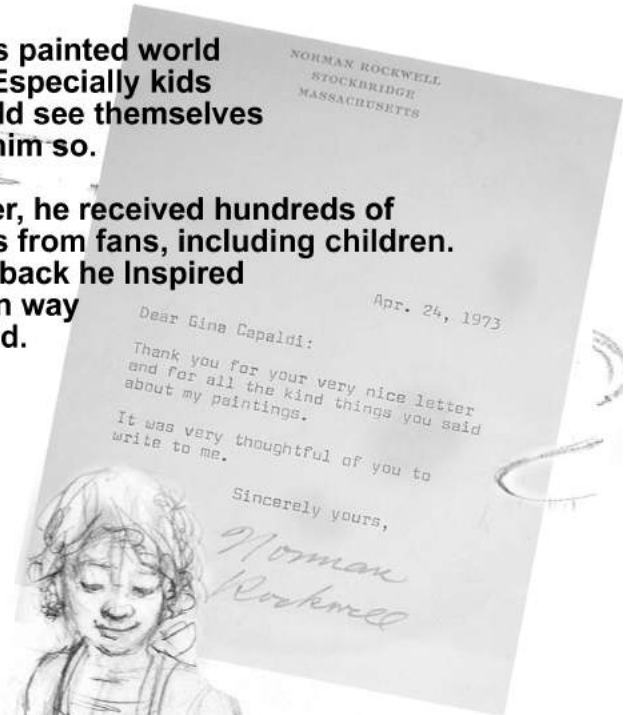
Norman told stories in his paintings.

**He painted kids living in the country and fishing all day.
He painted big happy families sitting around a perfect
dinner table.**

**He painted boys playing football, even with spaghetti
arms.**

In Norman Rockwell's painted world everyone belonged. Especially kids like him! People could see themselves in his work and told him so.

Throughout his career, he received hundreds of letters and comments from fans, including children. When Norman wrote back he inspired them to find their own way of looking at the world. Just like he did!



Norman Rockwell "The Dickens of the Paintbrush"

"It is no exaggeration to say simply that Norman Rockwell is the most popular, the most loved, of all contemporary artists... he himself is like a gallery of Rockwell paintings—friendly, human, deeply American, varied in mood, but full, always, of the zest of living."

—Ben Hibbs, Saturday Evening Post Editor

Norman Perceval Rockwell's life spanned the Gilded Age, The Klondike Gold Rush, the Depression, two World Wars, and the glory days of the American Space Age. He was born February 3, 1894 in New York City. Norman's older brother, Jarvis, was athletic and popular. Norman felt awkward and neglected. He felt that he didn't fit in. As a child he was frail, shy and in many accounts, he had dyslexia, which made reading and doing arithmetic difficult.



From an early age Norman showed artistic promise and it garnered him the attention he craved. In 1908 he enrolled part time at the Chase School of Art, now the New York School of Art, when he was just 14 years old. He later quit high school and attended the National Academy of Design and The Art Students League. As an illustrator, he told stories through his art but the stories did not represent his own life. Norman's paintings often showed happy children in big families with perfect moms and dads, and idealized images of rural life and kids at play.

The growth of magazine publishing created many opportunities for illustrators. By the time Norman was 17

years old he got his first job in 1911 illustrating a children's book. He painted covers for Boy's Life, and became the art director of that magazine while he was still a teenager. In 1916, he sold his first cover to The Saturday Evening Post, a magazine that printed some four million copies weekly.

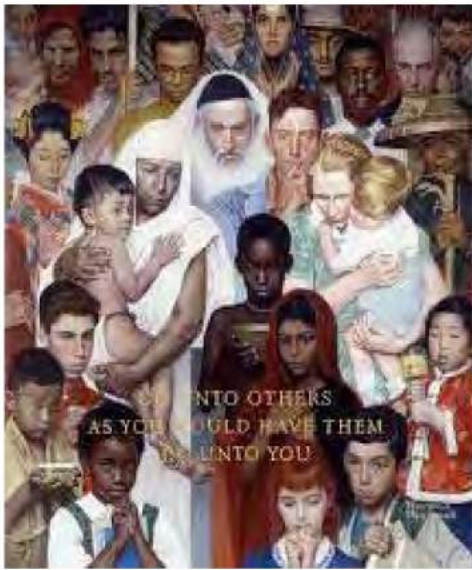
Norman's work quickly become popular, but he was plagued with anxiety and self-doubt. He spent weeks, even months, getting his



pictures to look just right. An excellent observer of everyday life, he captured the details, expressions and gestures of ordinary people getting haircuts or going to the dentist.

Norman continued to paint covers for the Saturday Evening Post and other magazines including Look, McCall's and Ladies Home Journal during the forties and fifties. He became one of the best-known illustrators of the twentieth century.

Throughout his life, he was concerned with political issues and social injustice. When the United States entered World War II, Norman wanted to help with the war effort. He painted four canvases to represent values that Americans were fighting for: freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Under the title, The Four Freedoms, the paintings were shown around the country and raised millions of dollars



in war bond sales.

Norman also addressed important concerns such as integration, civil rights, poverty, and the Vietnam War, as well as triumphs such as humankind's journey

into space. Even when he tackled serious topics his paintings had a sense of hope and optimism.

Over the course of his career Norman Rockwell created more than four thousand images. The hardworking, optimistic, and oftentimes humorous characters in his illustrations represented the best of what it meant to be an American. In 1977 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for "vivid and affectionate portraits of our country."

By the time of his death in 1978, his work was beloved by millions. Some critics complained that it was sentimental and idealized. Others pointed out that he was simply an illustrator, not a fine artist. But in 1999 a selection of his work was taken on tour to such respected galleries as the San Diego Museum of Art and the Guggenheim. The tour was a huge success. Original Rockwell paintings now sell in the millions of dollars.

Rockwell was the people's painter. He reflected the ideals that Americans held dear even in times of suffering such as the Depression and World War II. His familiar images are part of the American consciousness. When he was asked to explain his art, he simply said, "I showed the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed."