



## READING THE IMAGE

This painting by Henri Rousseau has a silvery, dream like quality. What time of day do you think it is? What buildings do you see? Why do you think the light is on up in the window? Who is there? If you could step in the painting where would you be? What sounds would you hear?

The setting in a painting, just like the setting in a story, creates a feeling or mood. Rousseau sets his story at night, with the moon as the only source of light. He uses dark cool colors — greens, blues and grays.

How does color help create the mood, or the way the painting makes you feel?

## MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST

Henri Rousseau never went to school to study art; he taught himself how to draw and paint. In fact, he didn't become a full time artist until he was 50 years old. Some critics made fun of him because of his childlike style but he never lost confidence. He even saved their bad reviews in a scrapbook!

At times, Rousseau had so little money that he would exchange one of his paintings for a loaf of bread. Eventually, to support his wife and 9 children, he took a job collecting tolls for the city of Paris. For that reason, he was given the nickname "le Douanier," which means "customs officer" in French. Do you have a nickname? If so how did you get it?

Rousseau had a vivid imagination. He claimed that while in the army, he served in Mexico, which inspired his paintings of tropical birds and plants. Other people said that he made that up and had never been in Mexico; those paintings were inspired by much less exotic trips to the Paris Zoo and Botanic Gardens. Have you ever exaggerated the facts to make a better story?

Rousseau didn't care what they thought. He said, "Nothing makes me happier than to contemplate nature and paint it." Being outside, seeing trees and grass, going for a walk and hearing birdsong can make us all feel better!

## YOUR TURN

Use this line drawing as a starting point for your own version of Rousseau's painting. You can change the color, season, time of day, add flowers, people or animals – whatever you like. Write a story to go with your picture or write a story to go with Rousseau's original painting. Share your picture and story, and see what others have done at [communitygallery@sbma.net](mailto:communitygallery@sbma.net).

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Henri Rousseau, *The Castle at Night*, 1889, Oil Painting on linen. SBMA, Gift of Wright Ludington.

