



Explore Hendrick Avercamp's painting *A Scene on the Ice*, on view in the National Gallery's West Building. Avercamp was among the first Dutch artists to specialize in depicting winter and to record the landscape and daily activities of the season.

Hendrick Avercamp, *A Scene on the Ice* (detail), c. 1625, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

# 2 On the Ice

The Netherlands (Holland) is laced with canals and rivers that freeze during the winter. In the seventeenth century, it was significantly colder there. From about 1550 to 1850, a phenomenon called “the little Ice Age” produced very cold and long winters that alternated with milder ones. So, during Avercamp’s lifetime waterways froze more often than they do now.

Ice fishing, riding sleighs, ice-skating, and *kolf* were some of the popular outdoor activities enjoyed in seventeenth-century Holland. In *A Scene on the Ice*, Avercamp shows a variety of people working and playing on a frozen river.

## LOOK CLOSELY TO FIND

- A couple ice-skating
- Well-dressed ladies in an elegant horse-drawn sleigh trimmed with bells (The horse’s head is adorned with plumes of wool and feathers, and his shoes are spiked for traction on the slippery surface.)
- Fishermen trekking across the ice with their poles
- A group of people loading a sledge with supplies (Because boats were frozen into the ice, goods had to be transported across the river with sledges – large sleds that people could push or horses could pull.)
- A man fastening his skates, gloves removed
- A pair of boys playing *kolf*, a cross between modern-day hockey and golf (The sport of *kolf*, meaning “club” in Dutch, originated in the thirteenth century but became a very popular sport in seventeenth-century Holland. The object was for players to hit a target, such as a pole in the ice, in the fewest number of strokes. The game was also played on land, but the large expanses of ice in winter made ideal courses.)

# 1 Painting Winter

Hendrick Avercamp (1585–1634) lived in the village of Kampen; family records there indicate that he was deaf throughout his life. After training in Amsterdam, he made a very successful career as an artist, devoting himself almost entirely to painting winter scenes. *A Scene on the Ice* is an example of Avercamp’s keen observation of nature and winter activities.





Hendrick Avercamp, *A Scene on the Ice*, c. 1625, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

# 3

## Brrr!

Avercamp captured the feel of a wintry day. Dressed for the cold, the people in his paintings wear gloves and boots—gentlemen keep warm in top hats or fur caps and wool capes, while ladies are clad in hooded cloaks and hand muffs. Snow-covered roofs and smoke from chimneys further indicate the chilly climate.

The distant expanse of the ice merges with the cloudy sky. To convey a sense of depth in the landscape, Avercamp painted the foreground figures with bright colors, using precise brushwork to render the smallest details. Then, as the scene recedes, the colors become paler, the figures less distinct.



# 4

## Imagine

Avercamp's painting gives us a glimpse into what life was like in early seventeenth-century Holland. Imagine that you could travel back in time to visit this scene. **What activities would you choose to do? What are some sounds that you might hear? What are some things that you might smell? How would you dress?**



## booknook

These books about winter can be found at your local library or bookstore.

### Snowballs

By Lois Ehlert | ages 2 and up

### Snow

By P.D. Eastman | ages 2 and up

### It's Winter

By Linda Glaser | ages 4 and up

### The Snowy Day

By Ezra Jack Keats | ages 4 and up

### Now It Is Winter

By Eileen Spinelli, illustrated by Mary Newell Depalma | ages 4 and up

### Snow

By Uri Shulevitz | ages 4 and up

### When Winter Comes

By Nancy Van Laan, illustrated by Susan Gaber | ages 4 and up

### Winter: An Alphabet Acrostic

By Steven Schnur, illustrated by Leslie Evans | ages 4 and up

### Snowflake Bentley

By Jacqueline Briggs Martin, illustrated by Mary Azarian | ages 6 and up

### The Kids' Winter Handbook

By Jane Drake and Anne Love, illustrated by Heather Collins | ages 6 and up

### Discover Nature in Winter: Things to Know and Things to Do

By Elizabeth P. Lawlor, illustrated by Pat Archer | ages 8 and up

### Winter Poems

Selected by Barbara Rogasky, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman | ages 8 and up

## try this! activity



Artists painting winter

top: George Henry Durrie, *Winter in the Country*, c. 1859, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Avalon Fund

middle: John Henry Twachtman, *Winter Harmony*, c. 1890/1900, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Avalon Foundation

bottom: Camille Pissarro, *Boulevard des Italiens, Morning, Sunlight*, 1897, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

White snow falls

Icicles sparkle

No school today

Time to put on

Earmuffs and mittens, then

Race out to play

## Wintry Poetry

The poem above is an example of an *acrostic poem*—one where the first letter of each line forms a word or phrase (vertically). An acrostic poem can describe a subject or even tell a brief story about it. Each line may contain a single word or an entire phrase.

### Write your own acrostic poem about a winter subject.

First, think about things that make the season special for you. What do you like most about winter—snowflakes, sledding, hot chocolate? Make a list of things that you see or do when it's cold out. For inspiration, take a stroll through the West Building galleries to look for winter paintings.

Next, choose a wintry word to be the subject of your poem. Write the word vertically on a piece of paper. (If you'd like, select a word from the bubbles.)



Then, brainstorm words and ideas to include in the poem, but don't try to write it yet—just list everything that might go with your subject word. After you've gathered your ideas, look through the list of words and begin to decide how they might fit into the poem. Work through all the letters in your subject word until you have created a line for each letter. This can be challenging, and sometimes a first idea isn't always the best. You may need to rearrange words and phrases to complete your poem.