

# Dempsey and Firpo by George Bellows

## Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1924
- Size: 5 feet by 4 feet
- Location: Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC
- Period:
- Style:
- Genre: American realism
- The New York Journal assigned Bellows to make sketches of this boxing match that took place September 14, 1923 between Jack Dempsey of America and Luis Angel Firpo of Argentina for the world Heavyweight title.
- Later, Bellows decided to turn one of his sketches into a painting
- The moment in this painting occurred when Firpo landed a perfect punch to Dempsey's chin, knocking him through the ropes and onto a table where sports writers were sitting. Dempsey had knocked Firpo down 7 times before this punch.
- The sports writers helped Dempsey back up into the ring, and he went on to win the fight in the second round.
- He painted this painting as if the viewer were sitting ringside, in the front row.
- He painted himself in this painting. He is the bald man on the left edge in profile.
- Only seven months after finishing this painting, Bellows died from complications when his appendix ruptured.
- During World War II, the Armed Forces distributed prints of this painting to soldiers in hospitals and camps.

## Artist Facts

- Born August 1882
- Died January 1925 (42 years old)
- He played on the basketball and baseball teams at Ohio State University.
- He was encouraged to play baseball professionally, and illustrate to earn a living, but Bellows really wanted to be a painter so he left Ohio and went to NYC to study art.
- Bellows art depicted the chaos and crudeness of working class people and satirized the upper class.
- George Bellows belonged to a group of artists called The Ashcan School. An ashcan was a bin used to collect ashes from city dwellers' coal furnaces. The Ashcan school wanted to paint city life as honestly and boldly as an ashcan-especially gritty street scenes.
- He taught art in NYC and Chicago.
- Bill Gates bought one of Bellows' paintings for \$27.5 million
- Bellows was married and had two daughters.

## Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Line** is a mark on a surface that describes a shape or outline. Lines may be drawn or implied. They may be straight or curvilinear. They can create texture and be made thick or thin. Lines are often used to wrap around objects to make shapes. They can be horizontal, vertical and diagonal. Lines are usually used to take the viewer's eye around and through a composition.

## Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Line

- What lines do you see in this painting? (The ropes, the lines of the arms and legs.) Are they horizontal, vertical, or diagonal?
- The lines in this painting help take you around the painting. (Start at the Firpo's face. Move down his left arm until it connects with Dempsey's left foot. Follow Dempsey's left leg all the way down his body until it ends at his right hand. The right arm connects with the man in the crowd's left elbow. Follow his elbow up to his face, which connects with the referee's left leg. Follow the referee's left leg up his torso until his head meets the top rope, which takes the eye back to Firpo's head.)
- All of the eyes of the people are looking at the fighters (focal point) creating implied lines to keep the viewer looking.
- Do you see straight or curvy lines?
- Do you see white lines? Where?
- Do you see lines that form triangles anywhere?

## Keywords

- Line, Expression, Mood, Shape, Movement

## Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- Show snippets of the actual fight: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NN0vGHnCLo>  
You can use the apple tv or put your phone under the document reader and hook it up to the audio. Consider showing the beginning where the fighters are introduced (0-1:15), the part where Dempsey actually gets knocked out of the ring (3:00), and the end when Dempsey wins (6:25).
- What would it be like if you were in the audience at this fight? Would it be quiet or noisy? What sounds would you hear?
- What do you see on the far side of the ring.
- Are the sports writers trying to help Dempsey or are they trying to get out of the way? Or both? (They likely want to help him because he was an American boxer and the fight was taking place in New York City.)
- What is the referee doing? (Beginning his countdown)
- George Bellows painted himself into this painting. Can you find him? (bald man on left side)
- What is the mood of this painting? Is it loud and energetic or quiet and subdued?
- Where do you see light in this painting? Where do you see dark?
- Do you sense movement in this painting? Where?
- What colors do you see in this painting? Does the painting seem warm or cool?