

Famous Floridians: Winslow Homer

Winslow Homer was a self-taught American painter and illustrator. He spent many of his winters in Florida, the Bahamas, and Cuba. While in these tropical places, he painted mostly in watercolor. He painted scenes of the sea, its fishermen, and their families.

Homer was born in 1836, in Boston. He began his career as an illustrator for the popular magazine, *Harper's Weekly*. His illustrations were mainly engravings. They had a clean outline, simple form, contrast of light and dark, and often included lively groups of people. These qualities were to be found in his art throughout his career.

He recorded the Civil War through art. At the Virginia front he painted his first important oil, *Prisoners from the Front*. It is now in the Metropolitan Museum.

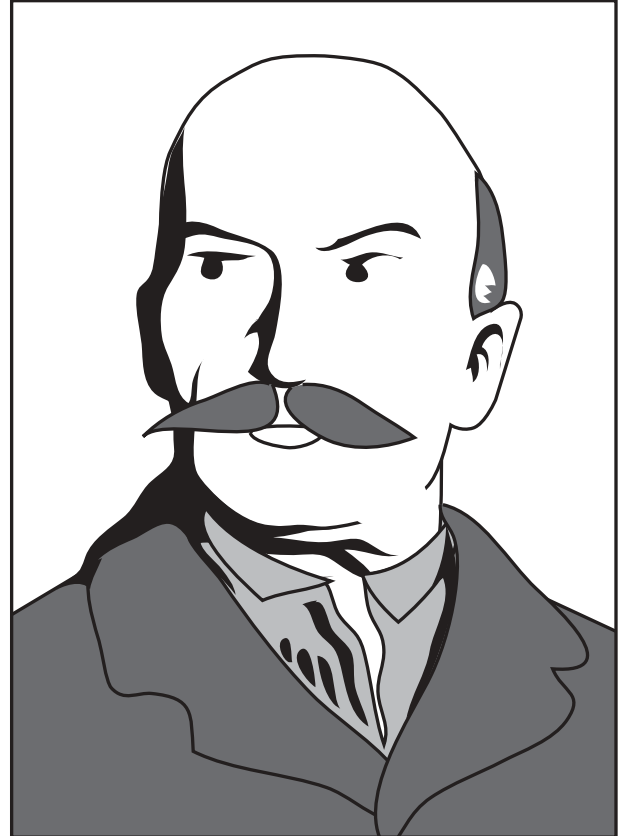
Following the war, he concentrated on country scenes. After a stay in an English fishing village, his pictures became more dramatic. He began to emphasize marine subjects. In 1873, he began working in watercolor.

Homer made his first trip to Florida in the winter of 1885-1886. He enjoyed the warmer climate and fishing and painting opportunities. In the years following, he made several mid-winter trips by steamer from New York to Florida. He stayed in various locales around Florida and the nearby Caribbean islands. His favorite Florida locations included Jacksonville, Enterprise (on the St. Johns River), Homosassa, Tampa, and Key West.

In 1899, he painted one of his most powerful works, the frightening *Gulf Stream*. It shows a solitary black sailor in a small, disabled boat. The sailor appears overwhelmed by sharks and alone on the sea. When asked for a description of *Gulf Stream*, Homer said, "I regret very much that I have painted a picture that requires any description."

Homer's many watercolor scenes of the tropics were painted in a technique considered advanced for the day. He painted scenes of nature but with a fresh, spontaneous flair.

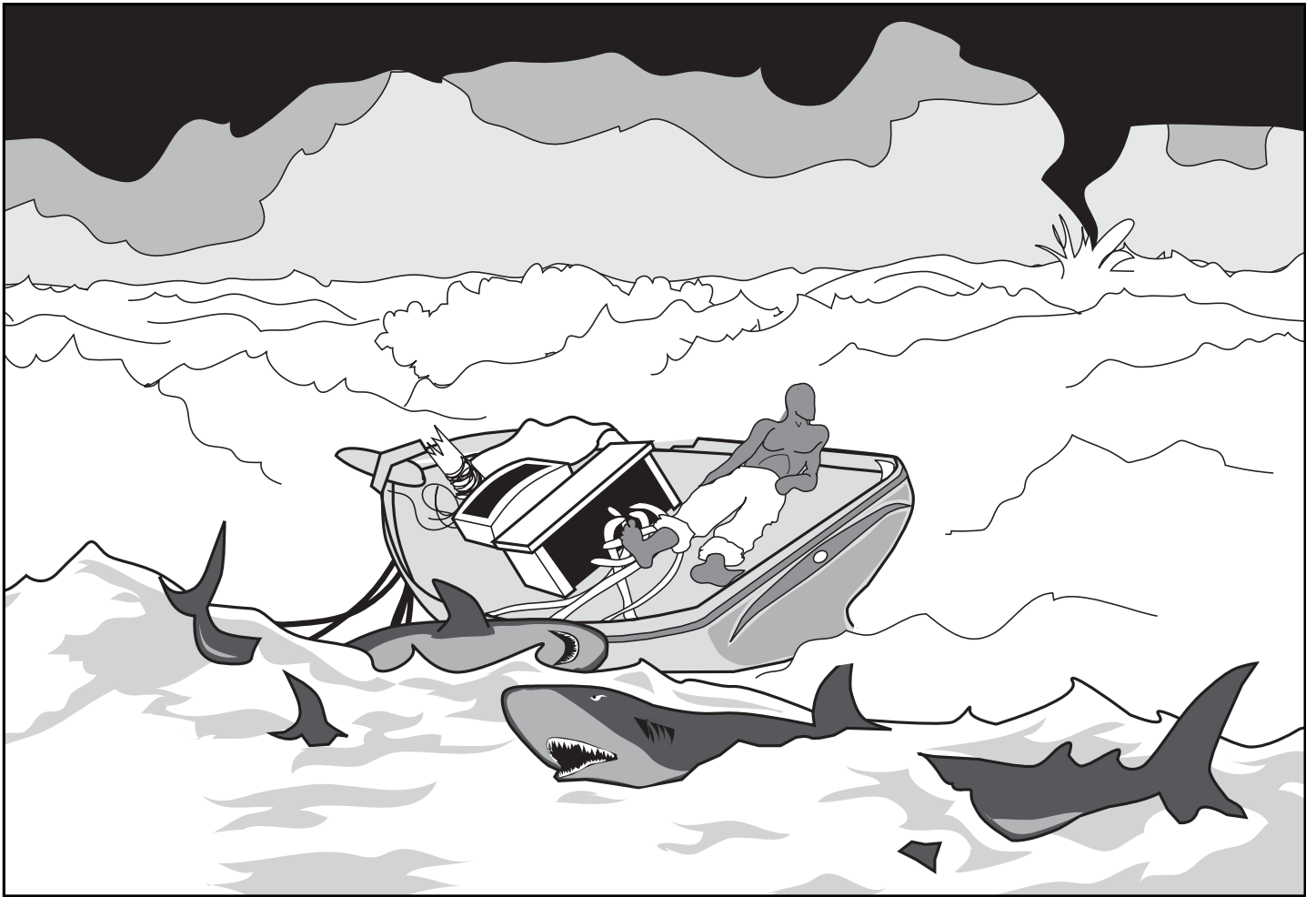
His 1903 painting, *Key West, Hauling Anchor*, is simple-looking—blue sea, white boat, a patch or two of red shirt. But the painting beautifully portrays the blue water over a Florida sand bottom.



Winslow Homer painted many Florida locations.

In 1904, Homer painted at least eleven watercolors during a stay of approximately a month in Homosassa. While there, Homer wrote to his brother Arthur describing Homosassa as, “Delightful climate here about as cool as our September—fishing the best in America as far as I can find.” The Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park has a permanent exhibit highlighting Winslow Homer’s watercolors of the Homosassa River.

Homer once remarked, “You will see, in the future I will live by my watercolors.” Today, 150 years later, this appears to be true. Winslow Homer is now considered a master of watercolors and one of the great painters of the sea. A naturalist painter, he is often considered one of the greatest American artists of his time. He made a significant contribution to the works of art that have recorded the beauty of Florida.



The Gulf Stream, 1899