William Sidney Mount was born on November 26, 1807, in the village of Setauket, New York. After his father died in 1814, he was sent to live with an uncle in New York City where he was introduced to music, theater, and city life. Mount was trained as a printer in New York City in his early 20s and painted portraits, which provided a regular source of income. Following the death of his mother and brother in 1844, Mount took a break from printing to travel. After a year of unprofitability, he visited Thomas Cole (1801–1848), famous landscape painter, who showed Mount the art of etching and painting, which proved to be the path he needed to begin painting again.

In 1846 Mount exhibited several genre scenes and portraits. He was immediately portrayed by publishers and his images were distributed to hundreds of Americans. Even though he often sold over a thousand prints each year, Mount continued to paint large works. He realized he could turn his reliance on portraits into something more permanent by depicting scenes from American life. Mount became increasingly known for his genre paintings, with themes of music, dance, picturesque landscapes, and historical subjects, such as the Civil War and the American Revolution. His works included life-size portraits with battle scenes and historical settings.

In 1850 Mount produced his first painting, "The Power of Music," which was met with rave reviews from critics after it was exhibited at the National Academy of Design. No American artist had previously created portraits of a group of Americans, and audiences loved the honesty, realism, and realism of the image. Although Mount had little success to his genre painting he continued to produce portraits, which provided a reliable source of income.

Mount found his artistic skills in New York City in 1831, when he moved back to Long Island permanently. He was able to show his paintings to the American public when he left out of the city. People saw a correlation between the accuracy of the real subject and his work, which helped Mount's reputation as an artist. Mount's work continued to be admired by American artists and visitors to the American public. He was born out of the city. People saw a correlation between the accuracy of the real subject and his work, which helped Mount's reputation as an artist. Mount's work continued to be admired by American artists and visitors to the American public.

William Sidney Mount featured children in some of his famous genre paintings. Patrons were interested in the subject because images of young people represented an optimistic outlook for America's agrarian future. After the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861, people became aware of the lives and deaths of soldiers. Mount included children in some of his paintings to appeal to the public's need to preserve the memories of their loved ones. Death portraits were more popular during a time that they thought was pure and innocent.

Mount chose to stay in the United States and not travel to Europe. From 1833 to 1866 Mount painted many children and engaged in the highly profitable business of painting death portraits. The child mortality rate was extremely high, and parents wanted to preserve the memories of their loved ones. Death portraits were very popular, but they were not as expensive as portraits. Mount was able to charge a higher price for death portraits because the extra money was seen as very useful. "The anxiety of mind I have to undertake is such an effort to the benevolent." These long hours spent with children and their parents left Mount with a larger body of work than many people expected. The genre paintings are reproduced as proems for the first time.

Discussion Questions
How would you describe a genre painting? Why was it important in earlier American art?
What was unique about Mount's approach to genre painting?
Why did Mount choose to stay in the United States and not travel to Europe?
Where did Mount get his inspiration for his paintings?
WILLIAM SIDNEY MOUNT
American, 1807–1868

THE BLACKBERRY GIRLS
1840, OIL ON PANEL

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