



1884

Oil on canvas

28 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (72.7 x 113.7 cm)

WINSLOW HOMER

American, 1836–1910

LET'S LOOK

What do you think is happening in this painting?

What is the weather like?
How can you tell?

What do you think the ropes connect to on either end?

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

If you could step into this painting, what would you hear, smell, see, touch, and taste?

Why do you think the artist chose this moment of the story to depict?

How do you think the story will end?

THE LIFE LINE

This painting depicts a suspenseful moment during a heroic rescue. Crashing waves, dark threatening skies, and fierce winds surround the two figures in the center. Remnants of a sinking ship are barely visible in the upper left. Only a thin rope supports the weight of the man and woman, who are suspended above the turbulent sea. The woman's clothing and hair are soaking wet, her head hangs back, and her right arm dangles above the water. She holds onto the rope with her left hand, indicating that she is conscious. Perhaps the figures on the distant cliff on the right wait to help the man and woman as soon as they reach the shore.

One year before he painted *The Life Line*, American artist Winslow Homer witnessed a demonstration of a lifesaving device like the one shown in this picture. He included details that show how it worked. For example, the slack of rope in the water on the left indicates that the people are being pulled to safety by the lower rope on the right. In addition, notice how only the right half of the upper rope has water droplets along its bottom edge. The left half was wrung dry as the pulley moved from left to right.

Homer left some details of this story a mystery. A red scarf flaps in the wind and hides the man's face. Why could this be? Homer also left the conclusion of the story unclear. It is up to us to imagine how this adventure ends.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: The George W. Elkins Collection, E1924-4-15