



1890

Oil on canvas

52½ x 72¼ inches (132.4 x 183.5 cm)

**THOMAS HOVENDEN**

American (born Ireland),

1840–1895

### LET'S LOOK

What is happening in this painting?

What is each person doing?

How do you think each is feeling?  
How can you tell?

What do the clothing, furniture, and other objects tell you about when and where this story takes place?

### LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What could the relationships between the people be?

Choose a person or animal in the painting and imagine their thoughts.  
What are they thinking?

## BREAKING HOME TIES

With a look of love and concern on her face, a mother rests her hands on her son's shoulders, bidding him farewell as he leaves home to seek his fortune. The young man stares ahead, uncertain of what the future holds. Family members of all ages have gathered together in this tender moment, from the boy's forlorn younger sister in the **background** to his grandmother at the table. Even the family dog, his eyes begging the young man to stay, senses the sorrow that fills the air. The boy's father carries a suitcase toward the driver who stands in the doorway, indicating that the departure is imminent. The figures' plain clothing and the mismatched, well-worn chairs communicate the family's modest means.

Thomas Hovenden, an Irish-born artist who **immigrated** to the United States in 1863, painted *Breaking Home Ties* in 1890. It was a time of great change in the nation, with growing industry and expanding cities. As young men left rural areas to seek jobs in urban centers, many Americans saw their way of life shifting. The public related to the story in *Breaking Home Ties* and appreciated its depiction of the hopes and fears of everyday Americans. To achieve a sense of honesty and realism in his pictures, Hovenden used family and friends as models and included familiar objects from his home in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. Additionally, Hovenden may have personally identified with the **subject matter** in this image, as he was orphaned at age six and left his homeland as a young man.

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