

## STUDENT HANDOUT

***Symbolism in A Centennial of Independence*** for *Celebration and Satire*

Henri Rousseau painted *A Centennial of Independence* after seeing an illustration of a provincial French dance in a magazine. In his painting, Rousseau included some aspects of the original illustration but made the image his own. One way the artist transformed the original was by adding symbolic elements. For example, he changed the mountain dwellers caps of the peasants into Phrygian (or liberty) caps.

Rousseau also added to the center of the painting two female dancers holding the French tricolor flag and the flag of the city of Paris. The blue, white, and red colors of the French flag have special meanings. The color white has taken on different meanings over time, and has been associated with the king, clergy, and navy. Blue and red, colors associated with the city of Paris, were popular among French revolutionaries.

In Rousseau's painting, the two dancers personify France's First Republic (1792–1804) and Third Republic (1870–1940). Behind the circle of dancers are liberty trees with star-shaped leaves, planted during the French Revolution and other commemorative celebrations.