

Activity: Landscape Painting

Using Wilson Hurley's Centennial Suite paintings as a starting point, students will create their own landscape paintings. Students will experiment with various techniques to create an effective composition including foreground, middle ground, and background. Students will also learn how to render the illusions of depth and reflection of light in painting.

Grade Level: 9 – 12

Class Time: Approximately one and a half hours

Students will:

- Use foreground, middle ground, and background techniques.
- Learn to emphasize the reflection of light on surface, such as sunlight.
- Learn to paint a landscape.
- Learn various painting techniques.

PASS Objectives Addressed:

High School- Visual Arts

Standard 1:1,2,3

Standard 2:5

Standard 3:1,3,4

Standard 4:2,3

Materials

12" x 18" white paper (medium to heavy weight)

Tempera and watercolor paints (various colors)

1" flat paintbrushes

Watercolor brushes and detail paintbrushes

Pencils

Water, sink, paper towels

Clean sponges (optional)

Resources

Images from the Centennial Suite by Wilson Hurly found on the Oklahoma Arts Council website:

- [*A Storm Passing Northwest of Anadarko*](#)
- [*Autumn Woods North of Tahlequah*](#)
- [*Spring Morning Along the Muddy Boggy*](#)
- [*Sunset at Roman Nose State Park*](#)

Teacher Preparation

The teacher may find it helpful to review an online landscape painting demo such as [*A Small Landscape Painting*](#).

Instructions

A. Vocabulary

Review the following vocabulary with the class. Ask the students if they are already familiar with the words and ask them to give the definitions. Discuss as a class.

- Landscape – a picture with mostly natural objects in a scene showing open space and depth
- Reflection – the mirroring of an object or objects on a shiny surface
- Space (open) – objects portrayed far apart on the picture plane
- Foreground – the area of the picture plane containing larger objects, more details, and brighter colors
- Middle ground – the eye-level line, usually on or close to the horizon line on a landscape
- Background – the area of the picture plane containing objects that are higher, smaller, and more neutral in color
- Water-base paint – any paint that dissolves easily in water
- Wash technique – a method in which paint is used on a wet paper surface; the intensity of the paint is adjusted by adding clear water to pigment on brush

B. Study the images

Show the students the images from Wilson Hurley's Centennial Suite from the Capitol Art Collection. You may choose to have students view individually on computers or by projecting the images using an LCD projector.

C. Identify

Have the students identify the background, middle ground, and foreground in each image.

D. Observe

Point out to the students the differences between the background, middle ground, and foreground in each image. Notice the background areas are more neutral (duller colors) and vague in detail. The foreground shapes are brighter, larger, and placed at the bottom of the image.

E. Explain

Explain that the students will paint a landscape with a creek as the main focal point. After making a light sketch, they will use water-based paint to create the sky and background. Then using watercolor paints and the wet wash technique, they will fill in the middle ground. With tempera paints, they will add foreground objects and details. Finally, they will create the illusions of depth and reflection of light.

F. Model

Using the directions below, the teacher may demonstrate the process for the students. These instructions may also be distributed to the class by handout or projected so the students may follow along with the demonstration.

Landscape painting instructions:

1. Gently fold the paper in half horizontally.
2. Unfold it and press flat.
3. Lightly sketch a landscape with a creek starting at the fold and coming forward, down to the bottom of the page, with parallel lines (sides of the creek) farthest apart at the bottom.
4. Continue to lightly fill in shapes to represent the foreground.
5. With a clean sponge or wide brush, paint a thin wash of clean water across the top half of the page.
6. Load your brush with a sky blue hue and make a graded wash from the top down to just above the fold. Add a little color to your brush and paint in hills if you like.
7. Freshen your brush and make a new line of blue on the fold for the top of the creek. Again, make a graded wash downward staying within the creek lines you sketched.
8. While the paper is still damp, switch to mixed greens of tempera and then paint in general areas of trees just above and down to the fold.
9. Immediately but gently fold the paper again, and press the back to transfer the green of the trees onto the damp creek area below to create a soft reflection on the water.
10. Unfold the paper. At this point, you can let the paint dry and finish the details and other areas later or continue.
11. Remember to make background areas neutral (duller colors) and vague in detail. The foreground shapes should be brighter, larger, and placed at the bottom of the page.
12. Review objectives, vocabulary, process, and clean up.

Based on the demonstration, have the students generate a rubric which they will use to self-assess their own paintings. The rubric will also help for class critique.

G. Apply

Instruct the students to begin their own paintings by following these instructions:

- Pass out paper and pencils. Fold the paper in half, horizontally. Unfold and press flat.
- Sketch a landscape with a creek that goes from the fold to the bottom of the paper. Include a few trees and other shapes on and above the fold line.
- Pass out paints, water brushes, and paper towels. Moisten watercolor paints.
- Paint top half of picture with sky blue graded wash. Using the same or similar color, wet wash in the creek space.
- Change colors and add trees above the creek using tempera paints; fold, press, unfold.
- Complete the rest of the painting.
- Clean up and allow painting to dry.

H. Reflect

Lead a classroom critique in which the students explain how they followed the objectives in the rubric. Have each student explain if and how they successfully created foreground, middle ground, and background. Have them also address their use of techniques to depict the reflection of light.