

Teaching with *Autumn Woods North of Tahlequah* by Wilson Hurley



This document is designed to help teachers present, discuss, and teach about Oklahoma history and art literacy through the use of this work of art. The information and exercises here will aid in understanding and learning from this artwork.

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First Analysis and Criticism

The steps below may be used for group discussion or individual written work.

Before beginning the steps, take two minutes to study the artwork. Look at all the details and subject matter. After studying the artwork in silence, follow these steps:

Describe:

Be specific and descriptive. List only the facts about the objects in the painting or sculpture.

- What things are in the artwork?
- What is happening?
- List what you see (people, animals, clothing, environment, objects, etc.).

Analyze:

- How are the elements of art – line, shape, form, texture, space, and value used?
- How are the principles of design – unity, pattern, rhythm, variety, balance, emphasis, and proportion used?

Interpretation:

Make initial, reasonable inferences.

- What do you think is happening in the artwork?
- Who is doing what?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say to the viewer?

Evaluate:

Express your opinion.

- What do you think about the artwork?
- Is it important?
- How does it help you understand the past?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

Overview of the Artwork

Autumn Woods North of Tahlequah is one of four paintings in Wilson Hurley's *Visions of the Land: The Centennial Suite* that represents the four quadrants of Oklahoma's diverse landscape. The paintings were an official Oklahoma Centennial Project dedicated in 2002. The commission was directed by the Oklahoma Arts Council. Philanthropist Roger M. Dolese made *The Centennial Suite* possible.

As one travels northeast in Oklahoma, the land becomes more rolling and hills appear, rounded with age and partly covered with forest. Wide pastures lie in the valleys and many homesteads and barns cluster near the water courses. In the fall, just southwest of the grocery store at Peggs, there's an array of sumac, oak, sycamore and one old maple, bright red in the quiet, cool sunlight that lingers for a few days before winter comes. - Wilson Hurley

About the Artist

Although he grew up in Washington D.C., artist Wilson Hurley considers Tulsa, Oklahoma home. Born in Tulsa in 1924, Hurley eventually moved to the Washington area as a young boy when his father became Secretary of War under the Hoover administration. Though he had a burgeoning interest in art as a child, Hurley's artistic tendencies were often stifled by his father under the notion that art was not a respectable career. Fortunately Hurley's mother felt differently. She encouraged her son in his talents by taking him to numerous museums where he saw the works of Inness, Bierstadt, Moran, and Church - all artists who would eventually become Hurley's inspiration 30 years later when he began painting full-time. By the time he was a professional painter, Hurley had already earned a degree in military engineering from West Point, as well as a law degree from George Washington University. However, neither career had satisfied Hurley and he turned to his "Sunday hobby"- painting.

Hurley often chooses to paint a particular subject because he finds it beautiful and he wants the viewer to understand how it delights him saying, "A good painting stops the heart and makes the throat ache." Today his works are included in numerous collections throughout the country including the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the Gilcrease Museum, and the Whitney Gallery of Western Art.

Southwest Oklahoma



The land of Oklahoma includes some of the most diverse landscape in the country. Divided into four quadrants (Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest), the terrain of each area has distinct differences.

1. The Northeast region of Oklahoma is often called Green Country for its heavily-wooded area with many rolling hills, mountains, and foliage.
2. Northeast Oklahoma is considerably wetter and greener than most of the state and generally receives more than 40 inches of rain per year.
3. The area is one of the most populous regions of Oklahoma and contains Tulsa which is the state's second-largest city, next to Oklahoma City. Muskogee, Bartlesville, Vinita, and Tahlequah are other larger communities in Northeast Oklahoma.
4. Northeast Oklahoma has more lakes than any other geographical area of Oklahoma.
5. More than half of the state's registered state parks are located in Northeast Oklahoma.
6. The heavily-wooded Ozark Mountains and their foothills dominate most of Northeast Oklahoma.
7. The Ozark Plateau, located in Northeast Oklahoma, is an extension of the Missouri and Arkansas landscape. It is marked by rivers with steep valley walls separated by broad flat areas.
8. The lowest temperature ever recorded in Oklahoma, -27 degrees Fahrenheit, was recorded on January 18, 1930 in Watts, Oklahoma, located in Northeast Oklahoma.

Southwest Oklahoma



9. The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawhuska, is one of the last remnants of tallgrass prairie in the United States.
10. When researching for this painting, Wilson Hurley visited the community of Peggs near Tahlequah. When he saw the woods bright with color, he remarked, “This country is just asking to be painted.”

Suggested Reading

Oklahoma Adventure, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press
Oklahoma Stories: Oklahoma's Climate and Geography, **pages 264-269**

Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts by Clairmont Press
Chapter 2: Where in the World is Oklahoma? **pages 24-57**

The Story of Oklahoma, Second Edition by Baird and Goble
Chapter 1: Oklahoma's Diverse Land, **pages 4-17**
Appendix C: Oklahoma Geography, **page 405**

Final Analysis

After completing the readings and activities, go back and look at the artwork again. Now that the students are more familiar with the subject matter, ask them to write a few paragraphs about their interpretation of the artwork. In their own words, the writing should address the following:

- Description of the artwork and who/what is in it
- How the elements of art and principles of design are used within the artwork
- What feelings, emotions, or information the artwork depicts
- Their opinion of the artwork

Pass Objectives

High School- Oklahoma History

Standard 1. The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.

2. Identify, evaluate, and explain the relationships between the geography of Oklahoma and its historical development by using different kinds of maps, graphs, charts, diagrams, and other representations such as photographs, satellite-produced images, and computer-based technologies.

Standard 6. The student will investigate the geography and economic assets of Oklahoma and trace their effects on the history of the state.

1. Locate the significant physical and human features of the state on a map (e.g., major waterways, cities, natural resources, military installations, major highways, and major landform regions).

High School- The Arts

Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)

1. Identify and apply knowledge of the principles of design: rhythm, balance (symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial) contrast, movement, variety, center of interest (emphasis), and repetition in personal artwork, and the artwork of others.

3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.

4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.