

Lesson Plan: Frederic Church: Master of Landscape from Sketch to Final Composition

Grades

All levels

Subject Areas

Visual Arts

Natural Sciences

Estimated Time

Semester assignment

Multiple class sessions; at least (6) *to produce*

Sketches, studies and final work (finished drawing or painting)

Adaptations included

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Student Learning Objectives

Students will be introduced to nineteenth-century American landscape artist Frederic Church and learn about his process of making his dramatic panoramic paintings. Like Church and other Hudson River School painters, students will practice careful observation of natural surroundings, produce annotated sketches, create at least one color study, and make a final drawing or painting.

Essential Question

- What do artists learn from closely observing their natural surroundings?
- How do artists create convincing representations of nature in different media?
- What messages can be addressed through closely observed and carefully rendered images of the natural world?

Resources

“History,” *Olana, Frederic Church’s Masterpiece*, Olana State Historic Site, Hudson, NY
olana.org/explore/churchs-world

Avery, Kevin J. “Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900).” In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.
metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chur/hd_chur.htm

Frederic Edwin Church Biography and Works of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
nga.gov/Collection/artist-info.1138.html

Frederic Edwin Church, *The Andes of Ecuador*, 1855; Oil on canvas
Original Purchase Fund from Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, ARCA Foundation, and Anne Cannon Forsyth, 1966.2.9
Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/the-andes-of-ecuador

“Hudson River School” selections and works by Frederic Church in the collection
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut
hewadsworth.org/collection/hudson-river-school
thewadsworth.org/collection

Parts of the process leading to *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*

Frederic Edwin Church, “Drawing, Effect of Light on Jerusalem, April 2, 1868;” graphite, brush and white gouache on gray wove paper; Gift of Louis P. Church; 1917-4-436-a
Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18198319

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Frederic Edwin Church, "Drawing, Siloam and Jerusalem, Southeastern Corner of the Walls Seen from the Mount of Olives, April 1868;" graphite on gray paper; Gift of Louis P. Church; 1917-4-159, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18195421

Frederic Edwin Church, "Drawing, Mount of Olives, Bethany, Siloam, and Jerusalem, Palestine, February 7 and 10, 1868;" graphite, brush and white gouache on gray paper; Gift of Louis P. Church; 1917-4-454, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18198481

Frederic Edwin Church, "Drawing, Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, March 1868" brush and oil, pen and black ink, graphite on paperboard; Gift of Louis P. Church; 1917-4-763, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18201519

Frederic Edwin Church, "Drawing, Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, March 1868" brush and oil, graphite on cardboard; Gift of Louis P. Church; 1917-4-341 Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18197211

Frederic Edwin Church, *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, 1870
Oil on canvas; Gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, F77-40/1
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
art.nelson-atkins.org/objects/9537/jerusalem-from-the-mount-of-olives

Vocabulary

Representational art: art that represents some aspect of reality, in a more or less straightforward way

Atmospheric perspective: an alternative to *linear perspective* for indicating depth in a two-dimensional image. Objects in the foreground are rendered with saturated colors, defined contours and more clarity of detail while those in the background appear blurry and are generally rendered in cool hues, i.e., blues, purples, and/or grays.

Foreground: the area on and just above the bottom edge of the picture plane that appears closest to the viewer; **middle ground** is above and overlapped by objects in the foreground area and above that would be the **background** that appears to be ever more distant from the viewer

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Horizon line: the implied line in a view of the distance where the sky appears to touch the ground plane (or body of water)

Landscape: an image referencing the outdoors or natural surroundings, either representational, imaginary, or abstracted.

Thumbnail drawing: a *small, generalized sketch* of the **composition** of an artwork—its basic formal elements such as lines, underlying geometric shapes, areas of lights and darks; the relationships among these elements; and how they relate to the picture plane in which they are arranged. Artists use thumbnail drawings to analyze and record the composition of artworks they wish to study and as a way of trying out various compositional arrangements before undertaking a finished drawing or painting.

You might also be interested to discuss information about these materials...

Pencil: Modern pencils are made from graphite, once called black lead. Graphite, like coal, is a natural carbon created from pressure of earth on decayed prehistoric forests. In a process first developed in 1795, graphite is micronized to a fine powder which is mixed with clay and fired at a high temperature to produce a pencil lead. The degree of hardness or softness of the pencil lead depends on the proportion of clay to graphite. The more the clay, the harder the pencil. The pencil leads are immersed in wax to make the marks less scratchy. The wooden casing of the pencil is made from cedar. Pencil marks are permanent but can be made, erased (using rubber, kneaded, gum or vinyl erasers), and re-worked. Pencil lines can vary widely in length, width, texture and can be cross-hatched, smudged, scribbled to create tones and shadows.

Paint/Painting: Paint is a material mixture of extremely finely ground pigment particles held together with a binder (gum arabic, egg, beeswax, acrylic emulsion) that is either suspended or dissolvable in liquid. Liquid paint is applied to a surface and dries. Painting surfaces can be paper, plaster, board or canvas, and is applied with brushes, rollers, sponges, spatulas, knives, airbrush or spray guns. Traditional painting media include brush and ink, watercolor (transparent), gouache or colors (opaque), tempera, encaustic, acrylic and oil.

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Materials for drawing and painting

- Drawing pencils, including 2B, 2H and HB
- Vinyl eraser
- Drawing board or other support for the paper
- All media drawing paper or paper specified for wet media, as appropriate
- Canvas board or stretched canvas for final oil or acrylic painting
- Paints (watercolor and oil or acrylic)
- Appropriate modifiers for paints
- Containers
- Paint palette
- Assorted paint brushes
- Rags

Procedure

Introduce the artist Frederic Church to the class, showing his greatest landscape paintings (*Niagara*, *Andes of Ecuador*, *The Heart of the Andes*, *Icebergs*) and discussing the preparatory drawings and oil sketches that he made before tackling his final canvas (see Resources above).

Subject for artwork: Students will select a place as a subject for investigation. Depending on the changing season, they should take panoramic photographs of the landscape for reference throughout the assignment.

Sketching: The second class session (or alternatively a homework assignment) should be devoted to on-site “plein air” sketching. Students make several (3-5) pencil sketches of the overall scene. Their drawings should include *dominant lines* such as the horizon, architectural features, notable trees or vegetation. Student are encouraged to jot down any significant details about colors, textures, etc. directly on their sketches as Church did.

Composition: Students should bring their on-site sketches to the third class. Students should study their sketches and identify how the placement of dominant features can be visually organized so as to form (in a general way) a geometric shape, e.g. a triangle or s-curve.

Students should make a diagram of the landscape to emphasize the underlying geometric shape and focal points.

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For the fourth and fifth sessions students will develop a composite sketch (in pencil) for their final landscape composition. Referring to their on-site sketches and visual diagram, they need to establish in this drawing the overall arrangement of the composition, including the dominant elements, underlying form(s), highlights and shadows. *This could conclude the lesson unit for K-6th.*

Color study: Students will create a watercolor version of their composition drawing in preparation for the final artwork. Review tips for working in watercolor by watching an on-line instructional film. The watercolor study should establish the artwork's tonal range from highlights to darkest shadows, as well as key color relationships.

Final artwork: Using the sketches, diagram, compositional drawing and watercolor study as reference, students will start their final painting (in gouache, oil or acrylic) by brushing in the general shapes of the composition, using a wash of a mid-value hue such as raw umber or gray.

Add key elements in the foreground, middle ground and background, using thin and more detailed strokes in the foreground. Modifiers can be added to paint mixtures to add actual and visual texture to the composition

Students should build up the paint layer gradually, maintaining the highlights and shadows in tints and shades of various hues.

Keep adding more paint, adjusting colors and reworking the entire surface as needed to maintain a consistency in the overall composition. Pause at appropriate times for peer and instructor critique of individual work.

Artist's statement: Once the final artwork is complete, students should write an artist's statement, to be submitted along with all preparatory work for a final assessment.

(Optional) Discuss various ideas about how one would curate an exhibition of this extensive assignment. Would only the final artwork be exhibited? What about any of the preparatory studies? Students should reflect upon what they learned about themselves as artists through this process of working out their final composition.

Adaptations

For classrooms where painting in oil or acrylics is not feasible, students can create their final artwork with colored pencil or pastel.

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For younger students, begin with a few observational drawings and have them make annotations about color, texture and more. Connect with natural science curriculum when possible. Then, make a second artwork with colored media that somehow combines observations from two or more drawings. Have the students write about their choices in the second artwork and how they built upon their observations.

For students with physical disabilities, modify drawing and painting tools.

Provide various means through which students with cognitive and/or physical disabilities can communicate their ideas or questions.

Adjust timelines to provide sufficient time for students with disabilities to complete the assignment.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on whether they have created artwork that communicates something about a place that has significance for them, and is inspired by the content, style and technique of landscape paintings by artist Frederic Church. The studies and final artwork should display craftsmanship of quality and appropriate use of materials. Students should have documented their process and, in their artist statement, use appropriate art vocabulary to explain the choices they made to visually communicate their ideas

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NC Standard Course of Study, Essential Standards

Meets multiple standards, including the following

VA:CRS.3.Ka Kindergarten

Create art that represents natural and constructed environments

VA:RE7.2.1a 1st grade

Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and identifying the characteristics of form

VA:RE7.1.2a 2nd grade

Perceive and describe aesthetic characteristics of one's natural world and constructed environments.

VA:RE7.1.3a 3rd grade

Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art

VA: Cr3.1.4a 4th grade

Revise artwork in progress on the basis of insights gained through peer discussion

VA:CR2.3.5a 5th grade

Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance

VA: CR2.1.6a 6th grade

Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design

VA: Cr2.1.7.a 7th grade

Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods, and approaches in creating works of art or design

VA: Re8.1.8a 8th grade

Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

VA:CN10.1.1a HS Proficient

Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas

VA: RE 7.11a HS Advanced

Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments

VA:CN10.1.11a HS Accomplished

Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through artmaking.