



## Landscape Poetry Painting

by Nellie Scott, SDMA educator

### Literature Inspiration

**Title:** *October's Bright Blue Weather*

(from *Sonnets and Lyrics*, 1886)

**Author:** Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–1885)

**Source:** <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/poemiddle.htm>  
(a website containing poetry recommended for upper elementary students)

### Grade Level

Upper Elementary (3rd–5th grades)

## General Description

Interpreting a poem using visual representation encourages students to think critically about what a poet is trying to say and the means he or she uses to convey these ideas. It also helps students better understand their own beliefs about a poem. For centuries, art has been a source of inspiration for poets and poetry has, in turn, inspired great works of art. American artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hudson River School of Painting, such as Asher B. Durand and Thomas Cole, responded to the changing American landscape as well as the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century poets writing about it. Reflecting on the change of season and the splendor of the autumn landscape, *October's Bright Blue Weather* by 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet, Helen Hunt Jackson, recognizes autumn's importance and creates for the reader a visual landscape as she touches on and describes the amazing changes that take place during the harvest season. In reading this poem, students will have the opportunity to visualize the poem's words for themselves which, similarly to art elements in a painting, come together to create an overall composition, and to create their own visually descriptive works of art.

Like many artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in this lesson, students will join poetry with painting. They will learn to use images and color to create a landscape inspired by Helen Hunt Jackson's poem *October's Bright Blue Weather* or another descriptive poem about nature. Incorporating the visual art techniques foreground, middle ground, background, horizon line, and perspective, students will gain painting skills while also relying on their own imaginations to recreate individual impressions of what they've read.

## Objectives

### Students will. . .

- read a poem and illustrate it through a painting.
- explore the use of adjectives and descriptive words in a poem and interpret those words into images.
- view the work of landscape artists and learn what distinguishes a landscape painting from other genres of painting.
- learn to define and employ the art techniques of foreground, middle ground, background, horizon line, and perspective in a painting.

### (Warm and Cool Colors Extension Activity Objectives)

- learn to define warm colors and cool colors.
- observe the work of other artists and how they use warm and cool colors to express mood and emotion in their work.
- use color choice in a painting as a way to express the mood and emotion found in work of poetry.

**Project Time:** Allow approximately one hour and thirty minutes from start to completion.

**Note:** Approximately thirty minutes should be allotted for reading the poem, discussing it, and sketching a landscape. An additional hour should be provided for both demonstrating painting techniques and for students to paint.



## Adaptation Suggestions

**(for younger students grades K–2 and grades 6–12):**

This lesson can be adjusted for younger elementary grades by simplifying the length of the poetry examples and decreasing the number of art elements needed in the final landscape. This lesson can be adjusted to fit the needs of middle school and high school students by including a more in depth introduction to the work of famous landscape artists and through a more extensive exploration of color mixing and the use of perspective in painting. *Please see the **Resources** section of this lesson for a list of landscape artists.*

## Vocabulary

(Visual Art Vocabulary: **background, cool colors, foreground, horizon, middle ground, perspective, primary colors, secondary colors, and warm colors**; English Language Arts Vocabulary: **poetry**). *Please see appendix for vocabulary definitions.*

**California State Standards:** *Please see appendix.*

## Materials

*(Please see the **Resources** section at the end of this lesson for suggested books, images, and more).*

- A variety of poems about nature or copies of *October's Bright Blue Weather* by Helen Jackson Hunt
- Images of landscape art
- 9" x 12" canvas board (or heavy weight watercolor paper)
- Acrylic paints (red, blue, yellow, orange, purple, green, brown, black, and white) (gallon size containers of paint are more economical)
- Styrofoam trays or paper plates (to hold paint for mixing colors)
- Paintbrushes (small and medium sized—one of each for every student)
- Sponges or paper towels (for blotting paint brushes—can be shared among 3–4 students)
- Water containers (paper cups, plastic cups, aluminum cans, etc— one for every two students)
- Pencil (one for every student)
- Newspaper or plastic table cloths for covering tables

## Preparation

- Arrange materials on table prior to students' arrival. See diagram to the right for recommended set up.
- Create an example of the project before the lesson. Even if you choose not to share the work with students, it will help you to better understand the lesson.
- Collect poems about nature for students to read and use as inspiration for their landscape paintings. If necessary, make photocopies of the various poems to disperse among the tables. Each student will need to easily view a nature poem.
- Collect images of landscape paintings.

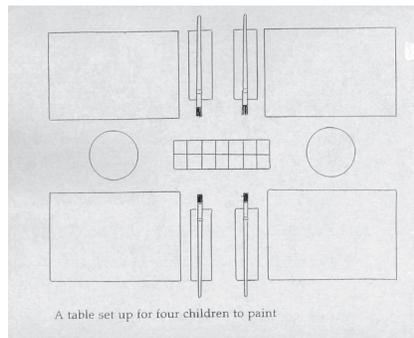


Table set up to paint

### *October's Bright Blue Weather*

O SUNS and skies and clouds of June,  
And flowers of June together,  
Ye cannot rival for one hour  
October's bright blue weather;

When loud the bumblebee makes haste,  
Belated, thriftless vagrant,  
And goldenrod is dying fast,  
And lanes with grapes are fragrant;

When gentians roll their fingers tight  
To save them for the morning,  
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs  
Without a sound of warning;

When on the ground red apples lie  
In piles like jewels shining,  
And redder still on old stone walls  
Are leaves of woodbine twining;

When all the lovely wayside things  
Their white-winged seeds are sowing,  
And in the fields still green and fair,  
Late aftermaths are growing;

When springs run low,  
and on the brooks,  
In idle golden freighting,  
Bright leaves sink noiseless in the hush  
Of woods, for winter waiting;

When comrades seek sweet  
country haunts,  
By twos and twos together,  
And count like misers, hour by hour,  
October's bright blue weather.

O sun and skies and flowers of June,  
Count all your boasts together,  
Love loveth best of all the year  
October's bright blue weather.



## Procedure

### Motivation

1. Have students look through books of poetry or photocopies of nature-related poems. Each student should select a poem.
2. Students should split into pairs and read aloud their poem choice to their partner. Students should take turns describing to each other the images that they can see in their mind from the words they have read and write those down in the form of a list.
3. Display landscape images for the students. Discuss, as a group, what makes these works similar (outdoor scenes, nature, etc.) Define landscape art and painting.

### Pre-Painting

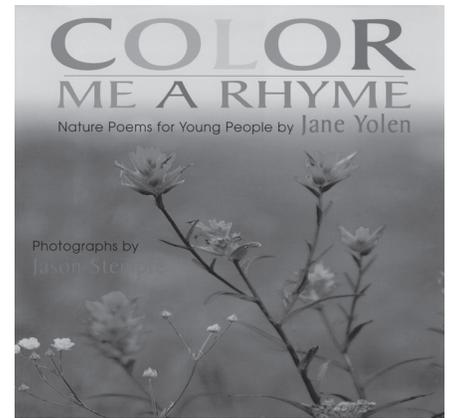
1. Discuss the parts of a painting: foreground, middle ground, background, and horizon line. Draw the parts on the board for students to see (as seen to the right).
2. Demonstrate the use of perspective in a landscape work (things that appear closer are larger, while objects that are smaller appear far away). This creates perspective, or the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface (as seen below and to the right).
3. Using the lists of images developed from their poem as inspiration, students should begin to sketch a landscape composition onto the canvas board or paper (making sure to include a horizon line, foreground, middle ground, background and objects in perspective).

### Painting

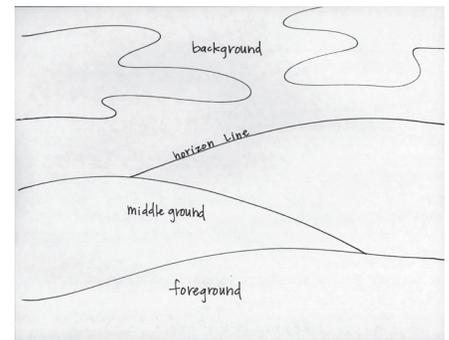
1. Demonstrate the steps of painting, beginning by filling in large areas of color to express the sky and land (holding the paint brush straight up and down, rather than like a pencil), and leaving no white space behind.
2. Have students begin to paint in large areas of color onto their canvas boards (or watercolor paper).
3. After the large areas have been painted, allow them to dry for a few minutes (Acrylic paints will dry quickly, particularly if a fan is used).
4. While their works are drying, students may use this time to review their poem and consider what details they will include in their painting.
5. After the large areas have dried, students may begin painting details.
6. To conclude, have students share their poems and paintings with the class.

### Teaching Tips

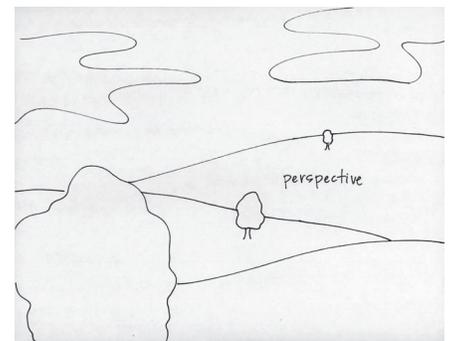
- Emphasis should always be placed on the process, not the product. Despite the fact that students may be working from the same piece of poetry, students' interpretations of it will vary.
- One of the benefits to using Acrylic paints is their quick drying time. Remind students that they may paint over areas that they are dissatisfied with and make changes.
- If teaching this lesson to more than one group of students, think about displaying unique student examples from the first group for student from later groups.



Nature-inspired poetry book



Parts of the painting



Perspective in drawing



## Extension Activities

- Have students create an artist's statement describing their work or process.
- Reverse the process! Have students create a landscape from their imaginations and write a descriptive poem about it.
- Introduce students to Ekphrasis poetry—poetry inspired by art. Plan a visit to the San Diego Museum of Art to look at art and find inspiration. For a lesson plan on Ekphrasis poetry, view the following web site: [http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=1093](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1093).
- Create a poetry-inspired landscape painting using warm and cool colors.

### Procedure

Bring out the landscape images and display them for the students. Discuss each artists' color choices and, using descriptive adjectives, talk about how certain colors remind us of particular feelings (e.g. to some, yellow expresses feelings of happiness, excitement, or joy while to some, blue is royal, calm or sad). Introduce the concept of warm colors (reds, yellows, and oranges) and cool colors (blues, purples, and greens). Typically, warm colors are associated with feelings of happiness, warmth, and passion, and cool colors are associated with feelings of sadness, calm, or loneliness. When colors are used together, they create an experience greater than individual colors. Ask students to consider the feeling behind the poem they read. When painting, they should use colors that suggest the mood in their poem.

## Resources

### Nature-Related Poetry Book Recommendations

- Glimpses of nature: poetry for children*** (2005) by Victoria Berkhin  
***New and selected poems: volume one*** (2005) by Mary Oliver  
***New and selected poems: volume two*** (2005) by Mary Oliver  
***Footprints on the roof: poems about the earth*** (2002) by Marilyn Singer  
***Color me a rhyme: nature poems for young people*** (2003) by Jane Yolen  
***Shape me a rhyme: nature's forms in poetry*** (2007) by Jane Yolen

### Examples of Landscape Works Currently on View at SDMA

- George Innes, *Farm Landscape*, oil on panel, 1883  
 George Wesley Bellows, *Winter Road*, oil on canvas, 1912  
 Maurice Braun, *Southern California Landscape*, oil on canvas, 1934  
 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Purple Hills*, oil on canvas, 1935  
 Asher B Durand, *Landscape Composition: In the Catskills*, oil on canvas, 1848  
 Ishida Yutei, *Landscape of Four Seasons*, ink, gold, and color on paper, late 18th - early 19th century, Japan  
 Huang Binhong, *Landscape of the Que and Hua Mountains*, ink on color paper, 1951, China  
 Yun Shouping, *Autumn Flowers*, ink on color paper, 1688, China

### Books about Painting with Children

- Children and painting*** (1992)  
by Kathy Weisman Topal  
***Painting with children*** (2003)  
by Brunhild Muller

### Resources Available at the San Diego County Library

- Come look with me: exploring landscape art with children*** (1992)  
by Gladys S. Blizzard  
**On order [Ages 6–12]**  
 This book uses colorful and well-reproduced landscapes created by famous artists on one page, along with brief texts about the artist and picture.

- The Hudson River School: American landscape artists*** (1996)  
by Bert D. Yaeger  
**758.1 YAE [Adult]**  
 This book resents history and images of the Hudson River School.

- Side by side: new poetry inspired by art from around the world*** (2008)  
by Jan Greenberg  
**On order [All ages]**  
 Presents a series of international poems each paired with a work of art meant to reflect the intent and imagery of the poem.

