

Landscape and Still Life

How do artists create the illusion of depth on a flat surface?

How do writers create layers of meaning in text?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will look at a landscape and a still-life painting to see how the artists used overlapping, size, color, foreground, and background to create the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. They will create a tunnel book in which to explore landscapes and techniques to create the illusion of depth.

LENGTH OF LESSON: Three 45-minute periods

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT VISUAL ARTS AND WRITING

Visual Arts

- Artists use the elements of art and special techniques to create the illusion of depth on a flat surface.
- Artists use background and foreground to set the scene of an artwork.
- Artists select what parts of a landscape to include within the boundaries of the paper, canvas, or container.

Writing

- Writers use precise, rich language incorporating layers of meaning to create depth of understanding in a text.
- Writers use time and/or place to set the scene for the reader.
- Writers select what parts of a story to highlight within the boundaries of a book.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Visual Arts

- Identify ways artists show depth on a flat surface
- Create a tunnel book, a book form that shows depth
- Understand how to use background and foreground in an artwork

Writing (optional activities)

- Identify ways writers show depth in a story, such as subplots, vivid description, and text that has multiple interpretations
- Write a description of a painting using the elements of art
- Write a piece as if they were in a painting, describing the background or scene

FOR THE TEACHER

Looking and Seeing

Some things to notice when looking at Gabriele Münter's [Staffelsee in Autumn](#) and Lilly Martin Spencer's [Still Life with Watermelon, Pears, and Grapes](#):

- Diagonal composition: A winding path or a river that moves away from us on the diagonal (from foreground to background) can create the illusion of deep space.
- Size relationship: When we see something in a picture we know is small, like a mouse, which appears larger than something we know is big, like a house, the mouse looks closer. →

- Changes in size: An object, like a tree, that is close to us seems much larger than a tree of the same size that is far away.
- Overlapping objects: An object, like a piece of fruit, looks close to us when it overlaps and partially hides another object, even if the other object is larger.
- Changes in color: An artist may choose to make a distant mountain range seem hazy and less detailed than objects close to us by using less intense colors (see *Love's Young Dream*). These changes in color can give the illusion of depth because intense colors seem closer to us.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Read about [Gabriele Münter](#) and [Lilly Martin Spencer](#) on the ABC website.

SUPPLIES

- Student journals
- 4¼" x 5½" construction or cover stock paper, two sheets per student (four pieces can be cut from one sheet of 8½" x 11" paper)
- 4¼" x 11" copy paper, two sheets per student (two pieces can be cut from one sheet of 8½" x 11" paper)
- Several sheets of colored construction or copy paper, or access to paper scraps
- Pencils, colored pencils, markers, and crayons
- Glue sticks
- Scissors

VOCABULARY

A **landscape** is a work of art that shows an outdoor scene. It can include the natural world (plants and animals) as well as seascapes (views of the sea) and cityscapes (buildings and towns). There can be people in a landscape, but the picture is not about them.

A **still life** is a work of art that shows a variety of objects, like fruit, books, musical instruments, toys, and flowers.

Foreground is the part of the picture that seems closest to the viewer.

Background is the part of the picture that seems farthest from the viewer.

Middle ground is the part of the picture midway between the foreground and background.

Point of view is the angle or perspective from which you see something.

Composition is the way the objects, people, and elements of art are arranged in an artwork.

Overlapping is a way artists create the illusion of depth. When one object covers part of another object, the object in front looks closer to the viewer.

Negative space is the area around, inside, and between objects, forms, figures, or shapes.

Positive space is the object, form, figure, or shape in a work of art.

Symmetry means an object is the same on the opposite sides of a central dividing line.

Asymmetry means an object is not the same on the opposite sides of a central dividing line.

Elements of art are color, line, shape, form, space, value, and texture. Artists use these tools to create all visual art—representational, abstract, and non-representational. (See Vocabulary list for definitions of individual elements of art.)



INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN: OBSERVE, CREATE, AND REFLECT**Observe: Quick Write**

Before beginning the lesson, show Gabriele Münter's [Staffelsee in Autumn](#) to students. Give students a few minutes to respond to the image. Use any of the following prompts:

- If you could walk into this painting, describe what you would see, smell, hear, feel, or taste.
- If you lived in one of the houses pictured here, what would you do for fun?
- What do you think is on the other side of the mountain?

Introduction

A **landscape** is a work of art that shows an outdoor scene. Before the camera was invented, landscape drawings and paintings were the only way to show people how faraway places looked. A landscape can record what a place looks like and can express how an artist feels about a place.

Some landscapes look so real you can tell what time of year it is and what the weather is like. Artists who want their landscapes to look realistic use special techniques to show space and depth. Tell students they can look for these techniques in works of art to understand how artists create the illusion of depth on a flat surface.

Observe: Look and Discuss

Ask students to look closely at Münter's *Staffelsee in Autumn* and begin describing and interpreting what they see. Visual Thinking Strategies (vtshome.org) is a highly effective method for facilitating productive conversations about art with your students and introducing new vocabulary in a meaningful way. Following the conclusion of this initial exploration of the work, you may wish to revisit certain concepts in more depth using some of the questions below.

- How did the artist show it is autumn in this landscape?
- How do you think she felt about this place? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What is the **point of view**? Do you feel like you could step in the picture and walk around? Where would you be when you stepped in? Where do you think the artist was when she made this picture?

Remind students of **foreground** and **background** and introduce **middle ground**. Ask them to identify some objects in each.

Ask students to find examples of:

- different size relationships (the animal in foreground is larger than the houses and trees in the background on the far shore)
- changes in size (trees in the foreground are larger than trees in background)
- **overlapping** (houses are in front of the trees; trees overlap one another)
- changes in color (dark blue mountains in back)
- diagonal composition (river/lake moves from lower left to upper right; far shoreline does same)



Can students find other examples? If time allows, compare Münter's landscape to Brownscombe's [Love's Young Dream](#) to see how another artist used these techniques.

Now have students look at Lilly Martin Spencer's [Still Life With Watermelon, Pears and Grapes](#). This is a still-life painting. A **still life** is a painting or drawing of objects.

Ask students to look for examples of depth in this picture.

- What object is closest to us? How can you tell? Which technique for showing depth did the artist use to create this illusion?
- Can you find any diagonal lines in the still life that create depth? Where? (The right side of the table.)
- Order the objects from nearest to farthest. How far do you think it is from the closest grape to the back of the watermelon?
- How is the depth of this still life different from the landscape? Describe the difference in depth

Composition, Symmetry, and Negative Space

Introduce composition, symmetry, and negative space to students. Artists need to determine where to put all the separate parts of their story, landscape, portrait, or still life together in one picture. They have to plan the **composition**, or the arrangement of objects in the picture.

Symmetry is familiar to all of us because our bodies are divided into a right and left side. The human body is symmetrical—the same on the right and left sides of a center line. Many trees are **asymmetrical** because their branches do not spread equally on either side of the trunk. Ask students to find examples of symmetry and asymmetry in the classroom. Next have them look for examples in Spencer's still life.

- Are there any examples of symmetry in individual parts of the picture?
- Are there any examples of asymmetry?
- Is the picture itself symmetrical or asymmetrical? What do you see that makes you think so?

There are two kinds of space in art: positive and negative. **Positive spaces** are the objects in a picture. **Negative spaces** are the empty spaces around objects in a picture. Negative space is any area behind, between, inside, and around the objects in a picture. The shapes of positive spaces are the shapes of the main subjects of the work. Negative spaces also have shapes. Imagine that the objects in a picture were cut away. The shapes that are left are negative spaces. The shapes of the negative spaces are determined by the shapes of the positive spaces.

- Where do you see negative space in this picture? Name all the places you can find negative space.
- What color are the negative spaces?
- Imagine you could take away the fruit in this picture. Describe the shapes that would be left.

Create: Tunnel Book

1. Tunnel Book

Download instructions for the [Tunnel Book](#) and have students prepare the covers and sides of the book. Before assembling the book, students will create a scene on the back cover and will attach cut-paper elements to the accordion folds, creating layers of shapes that can be viewed through the front cover.



2. Showing Depth in the Landscape

Have students think of a landscape, seascape, or cityscape (or any outdoor place) they would like to represent and think of the things they would like to put in it. Using drawing tools, cut paper, and/or collage, have students create a scene on the inside of the back cover of the tunnel book. Ask students to take risks and experiment with different examples of overlapping, size relationships, and color changes in their work.

Next have students create three or more landscape elements or shapes to glue to the accordion folds. Plan the shapes so they can all be seen when viewed from the front cover; they can be glued one behind the other and on alternating sides. Cut out the shapes and glue them to the front of the folds so the viewer can see the whole shape.

Finish assembling the book following the [Tunnel Book](#) instructions.

Reflect

Display the finished books around the classroom and give students time to look at each other's books. Ask students to look for different examples of depth and to discuss what they did to create the illusion. How does the book form help them show depth? What else do they notice about each other's books?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Visual Arts and Writing

- Have students imagine they are inside the house in *Staffelsee in Autumn*. Ask them to describe or draw what they think they would see from the window.
- Ask them to describe or draw what the Staffelsee landscape would look like in another season, like winter or spring, or on a rainy day.
- Ask students to describe stories they have read or movies they have seen that show depth, such as subplots and vivid description, or that could be interpreted in different ways.
- Have students make a drawing that shows depth. Encourage them to experiment with one or more techniques to create the illusion of depth, such as overlapping, size relationships, diagonal composition, etc.

Earth Science

Wind, water, ice, and waves are elements responsible for reshaping land surfaces. Slow processes like erosion or rapid processes such as landslides, volcanic eruptions, or earthquakes alter the landscape as well. Using different processes with a variety of media can alter a work of art. Have students create two tunnel books, one showing the landscape before being reshaped by one of the processes of nature—the other afterwards. For each book, ask students to use a different process with media (review Lesson 2—watercolor and plastic wrap, addition of salt, crayon resist or rubbings). This project would work well in groups.

Physical Science

Students can create a tunnel book showing the components of building parallel circuits—wires, batteries, and bulbs can be in the foreground and middle ground; the final circuit can be in the background.