

Walking Into a Landscape

We live in and experience landscapes every day—at school, at home, at work, on the commute, and through many other settings and experiences. Often, we don't pay much attention to these "everyday landscapes," but just as often they hold special meaning for us. Our personal landscapes may bring a sense of comfort, peace, or drama; and may even strike us as extraordinarily beautiful. Artists can help us learn to explore and examine our surroundings. What can we learn by taking the time to look carefully at the world around us? What can we take away from observing artist's depictions of landscapes they have experienced or observed? This lesson challenges students to look closely and examine different landscapes and imagine they are experiencing them firsthand. Students will describe their experiences by referencing their five senses as they "walk" through their chosen landscapes, addressing each layer of space: foreground, middle ground, and background.

Curricular Areas

English Language Arts, Visual Arts – Aesthetic Response

Grade Level

Adaptable to all grade levels

Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Writing.CCRA.W.3](#)
- [CCRA.SL.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Speaking and Listening.CCRA.SL.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3.A](#)

Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are also available in the Artstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase.

- [Summer Landscape](#), 1876, by George Inness
Artstor search (alternative image): Inness, Campagna
- [Grand Canyon of the Colorado River](#), 1892 and 1908, by Thomas Moran
Artstor search: 1975-182-1
- [Newport Coast](#), 1902, by William Trost Richards
Artstor search (alternative image): Richards, Newport beach
- [The Valley of Oaxaca](#), 1988, by Jose Maria Velasco
Artstor search: Valley Oaxaca, Velasco



Grand Canyon of the Colorado River, 1892 and 1908

Thomas Moran, American

Oil on canvas

53 x 94 inches (134.6 x 238.8 cm)

Framed: 74 1/8 x 112 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches (188.3 x 285.8 x 19.1 cm)

Gift of Graeme Lorimer, 1975

1975-182-1

Lesson Process

1. **Observe:** Display the landscapes from the image list and have students spend several minutes looking closely at the works of art. Each student should select one as the focus of the lesson and imagine what it would be like to travel through this landscape. What would he or she see, hear, smell, and feel while moving through the scene? What could he or she imagine happening in the scene?
2. **Respond:** The students should study the details of the foreground, middle ground, and background of the painting. To help focus their observations, have students roll a spare piece of paper into a tube. Use this tube as a telescope to help focus on details of the painting.
3. **Instructions:**
 - a. Write about the things you see in the foreground of the painting. After recording your observations, add a few sentences describing any sounds, smells, or textures you associate with the foreground.
 - b. Next, write about the things you see in the middle ground and again add sentences about smells, sounds, textures, etc.
 - c. Then, write about what you see in the background of the painting. Add sentences about smells, sounds, textures, etc.
 - d. Finally, imagine what could be happening in the far distance or even off the canvas and record this observation.
4. **Compare:** Group students together who selected the same landscape. Have them share their writing, making note of which things they all saw, and which things someone saw while someone else missed seeing. Compare writing about the other senses as well to look for common reactions and differences. Have each group record their thoughts on the comparison process, indicating what students gained from each other's observations.
5. **Analyze and Discuss:** As a large group, share these thoughts from each group. Look back at each landscape as a class and discuss new insights.

Assessment

- Using your notes from earlier, write about your landscape in a first-person format. This could be a journal/diary entry, a letter to a friend, or a monologue/narrative. The assessment should include other senses, and should involve something happening in the scene.
- Consider a landscape that has personal significance and that you see often: perhaps a view from your bedroom window, a location on the way to school, or even a favorite family vacation spot. Write about an event that took place in this landscape in a brief narrative that includes as much sensory detail as you can remember.

Enrichment

- Find a photographic image on the Internet similar to the place that is depicted in your landscape from the assessment. If it was a view from your bedroom window, find a photograph that is similar. If it was a vacation memory, find a photograph of that location. What similarities and differences can you find between your memory landscape and the photograph?
- Create an imaginary landscape—someplace you have never been, or even someplace that doesn't actually exist. Write about this imaginary landscape, remembering to include the five senses in your narration.