



American Campfire

By Jake Tedesco

October 2022

Motivation: This project is designed to introduce the student to the works of American master painters and the great American landscape. We will explore different paint and brush techniques. We will also explore the use of multiple light sources and the ability to use our materials to our advantage in creating an iconic image.

Visual Arts Language:

Ellipse: A circle that has been stretched in one direction that looks like a flattened circle.

Landscape: Type of painting involving and outdoors scene.

Light Source: Natural and artificial processes that emit light

Reflections: Light bounces off objects and it is the reflected light that is seen. When it is dark and the light source has a color, the object is defined by that color.

Shadows: Light that has been blocked by an object, creating a dark area. They are important to establishing depth in a painting.

Silhouette: When an object has a light source directly behind it, only the outline of the outer edge is seen. This is because eyes adjust the brightest portion of the image, and the details of the silhouetted image are too dark to see.

Cultural and Historical Connection:

This project was inspired by the work of Albert Bierstadt (1830- 1902) and many summer nights spent outdoors by a campfire. The American Landscape has been a subject of wonder amongst many artists throughout America's history, not just limited to Bierstadt. Especially so during the expansion of the United States during the 19th century. One particular type of landscape that has always caught my eye is that of a night scene with a star-filled sky and a bright warming campfire to entice the viewer. It is an iconic and traditional image that stirs up fond memories in just about every American heart.

Bierstadt was a German American painter who was best known for his landscapes of the American West. While he was not the first or only painter to record these sites, he became one of the best known throughout the 19th century. While there are other painters of note (including Winslow Homer, another American master who covered this subject) Bierstadt is one of the foremost.

Bierstadt was born in Solingen, Germany, however his family moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1833, when he was just 3 years old. Bierstadt took to art at an early age and spent much of his youth sketching with whatever he could find. In 1851 he discovered oil paints and took to the medium

quickly. He spent several years teaching others how to draw, but in 1857, he devoted himself exclusively to painting. Starting in 1859, Bierstadt embarked on the first of many journeys through the American West. His first was with a land-surveyor for the US government where he sketched the land that was being surveyed. These sketches later resulted in finished paintings. In 1863 he returned to the West, this time with a known author. Bierstadt continued making journeys westward throughout his life, which remained the inspiration for his work.

During his time, Bierstadt was considered a member of the Hudson River School. This was not actually a school, but a collection of like-minded painters. Their style included carefully detailed paintings with ambient, glowing light, sometimes called Luminism. This style, incorporated with natural elements of fog, clouds and mist defined Bierstadt's style. By his peers, he was criticized for his use of enormous canvases. This was thought to be egotistical, however his painting was as desirable then as they are now.

Today many of Bierstadt's surviving paintings reside in museums throughout the US. In Colorado, Mount Bierstadt and Bierstadt Lake are both named after the artists. In 1998 the US Postal Services issued a set up commemorative stamps entitles "Four Centuries of American Art" and one of Bierstadt's paintings we selected for the set. His paintings are just as impressive and relevant today as they were when they were painted and remind us of a more romantic period in US history.

Supplies:

1" or size 12 flat bristle brush

Size 1 or 2 round brush

Tempra or acrylic paint in the following colors: Black, white, orange, *dark green, and * light yellow

Paint tray/ palette. Should hold 6 colors

Black canvas board 8" x 10" **PROVIDED BY AAYF**

Pencil

Paper towels

Resource: Visual Guides

Pre-Prep: Paint pallets

- White, black, and orange
- Mix Dark green: 3 parts green to 1 part black.
- Mix Light Yellow: 10 parts white to 1 part yellow.

Pencil Sketch: Do not distribute paint or brushes until sketch is completed.

- Complete project label and affix to the back of the paper. Turn over orienting paper horizontal.
- Remind students to use a light hand. Heavy pencil marks will leave dents in the paper that will be visible even after we paint. Since the paint will cover up any mistakes, there will be no need to erase.
 1. Start by drawing the "horizon line". This is the line where the sky and ground meet.
 2. Draw an ellipse in the foreground below the horizon line.
 3. Draw some hills in the background above the horizon line.
 4. Draw some tree trunks. Branches will be added with paint later in the project.
 5. Collect the pencils as they will no longer be needed for the remainder of the project.

Painting: Large brush

With our large brush, we will be using long, smooth strokes. Point out that we do not need to use a large amount of paint as we want it to dry evenly and do not want "globbs" on our paper. They will not dry and will mix with other paints later. Also explain that the black of the canvas will be part of our picture. It is important to avoid painting certain areas to get the effect we want to create.

1. Collect the pencils and distribute paint. Tell students not to touch the paints until instructed to do so. We will be using the paints in a specific order as we will not be washing the brushes. If they do not follow the specific order, the paints will mix incorrectly, and project will not look right. It is best to explain this before handing out the brushes. Once the explanation is given, hand out brushes.
2. Start by dipping into the orange paint and filling in the ellipse in the foreground. Explain that we want an even coat and not a lot of paint is necessary.
3. Dip into the green paint and paint the hills above the horizon line. Use smooth strokes and avoid paint "globbs".
4. Continue with the green paint and finish the foreground. Paint all the way to the bottom of the paper and around the orange ellipse we painted earlier. (Note: steps 3 and 4 can be combined, but we do them separately to allow paint time to dry. While we work on the mountains, the orange ellipse is drying, helping keep the paint colors from bleeding together).
5. Dip into the black paint and paint the tree trunks. Again, using long smooth strokes and avoiding paint globbs. Also add some large branches. Make sure to go all the way to the top of the paper.
6. Collect the large brushes as they will no longer be needed for the remainder of the project.

Painting: Small brush

Again, point out that students are not to dip into any paint until instructed to do so. We will be painting in a certain order and will not be washing the brush. With the small brush we want to use just the tip to create fine details. Again, we do not need large amounts of paint and want to avoid globbs, just as we did with the large brush.

1. Dip into the white paint. Using just the tip of the brush add stars to the night sky. They will just be dots scattered throughout. Avoid putting them on the trees and hills we painted earlier.
2. Dip into the light yellow and start painting flames. Making serpentine shapes coming up from a point in the middle of the orange ellipse.
3. Continue with the light yellow and add reflections on the black tree trunks. Point out where the reflections will be. Remember that our fire is the light source, and the reflections will be on the side of the tree closest to the fire. They will also be visible on the bottom of the large branches overhead.
4. Still using the light yellow, add circular lines around the orange ellipse in the center of the foreground to create reflections on the ground.
5. Dip into the orange and add to the flames. Again, using serpentine shapes, but do not trace the light-yellow shapes from earlier. Make new ones, they can overlap the previous marks.
6. Continue with the orange and add additional reflections on the trees. Both on the trunks and the branches. Again, avoid tracing the previous marks made by the light yellow, make new ones.
7. Dip into the black. Add small branches to the large branches we already painted. Put some shadows behind the tall trees, pointing away from the campfire.
8. Continue with the black and add some coals to the fire and perhaps a log shape. Put these in the middle of the ellipse under the serpentine shapes from earlier.
9. Still using the black, add some plants and animals around the fire. An owl or bunny is easy to add. Small plants work nicely as well. Explain we are creating "silhouettes" of the animals, so there should be no detail other than the outline.
10. Finally, wipe the brush off as best you can use a paper towel and dip back into the light yellow. Use the light yellow to add reflections to the animals and plants. Ask the students to identify where those reflections would be based on the work we have done so far (they will be on the sides closest to the fire).

Last step: Explain that artists take credit for their work, and we need a signature once the piece is completed. Artists sign small, as to not take away from the piece itself, and typically in the bottom right corner. Have the students sign their names using the small brush and the color of their choice, then congratulate them on a job well done.

Docent Notes: From the artist

- This project is designed to avoid washing brushes during the project. This allows us to get the project done in the time allotted and minimize clean up.
- I recommend emphasizing to your students that they must only use the paints when instructed to do so. We use our colors in a very specific order based on how dark or light the color is. If they accidentally dip in the wrong color, it is easiest to take their brush and hand them a clean one then to try and clean their brush. This is important as it will keep their painting looking good and prevent contamination of the other colors.
- If a substantial amount of paint is left over, and it's not too contaminated, it can be saved for a few days to use in other classes. The best method is to take your containers and stack them with sheets of cardboard in between in a large plastic bag, then seal the bag as best you can. If air is kept off the paint, it will not dry out.
- This project does not require much adaptation for the various grade levels:
 - With the upper grades, I recommend challenging them on their brush skills. We want to see correct paint usage, meaning even strokes. We want to see paint colors that are not blended. With the small brush, we want to see fine lines. Practice using just the tip of the brush to create fine line work and avoid globs on our paper.
 - With the lower grades, we can leave a few things out to avoid frustration. The additional animals and plants can be added or not, if they are added, we can skip the reflections on the animals. Instead, we will settle for a nice silhouette.

Aesthetic Valuing:

1. In this painting, there are two light sources, can you identify them?
2. How did multiple light sources affect what you painted?
3. What color are trees?
4. Have you sat around a campfire in the dark?

Presenting Artist: Jake Tedesco is an artist, instructor, and life-long South Bay resident. Focusing on teaching his students to “see to draw”, his techniques are the continuation of a 30-year tradition started by his mother, Julia Tedesco, a well-known and respected member of the South Bay community.

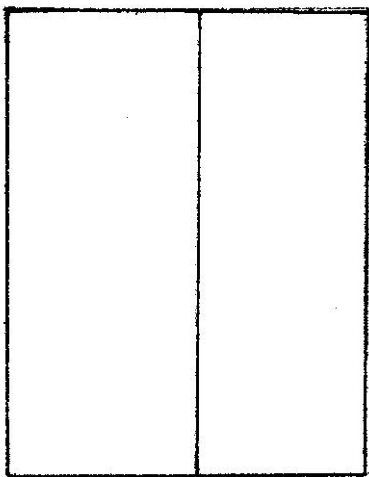
Jake has been providing and instructing enrichment classes for Elementary Schools throughout the South Bay for the last 11 years. He currently instructs regular classes with his program, "Art with Jake Online". Aside from teaching, he is an illustrator, painter and graphic designer, working with a wide range of clients on a variety of projects. In his free time he enjoys time with his son and is forever creating something new.

At Your Fingertips is a Palos Verdes Art Center school-based outreach program in partnership with the Palos Verdes Unified School District and the Palos Verdes Library District. Founded in 1976, this volunteer program annually brings quality visual arts education to almost 7,000 transitional kindergarten through fifth grade students at public and private schools on the Palos Verdes Peninsula Art as well as schools and organizations beyond the Peninsula.

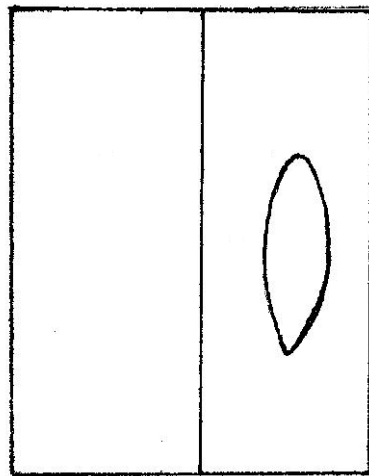
We thank PTA, PTO, and Booster Club for their support.

Visual Guide

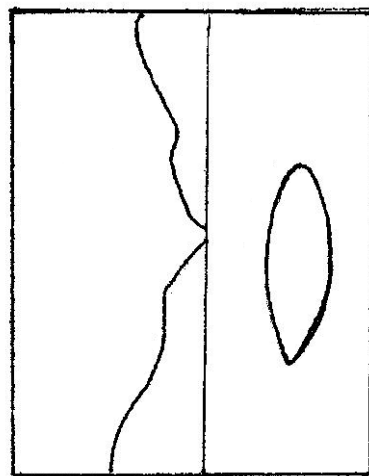
Part 1: Sketch



1. Start with the horizon line.

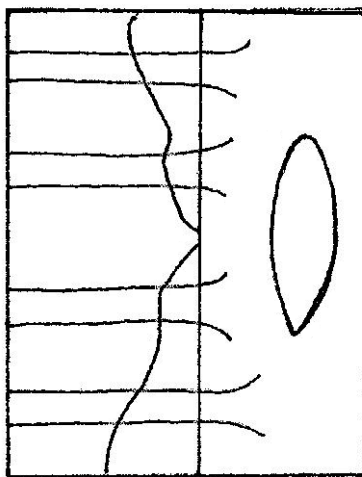


2. Add an ellipse below the horizon line.

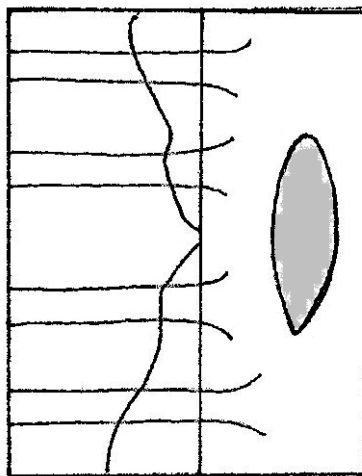


3. Draw some hills above the horizon line.

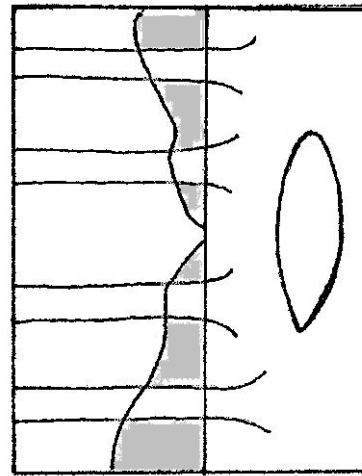
Part 2: Big Brush



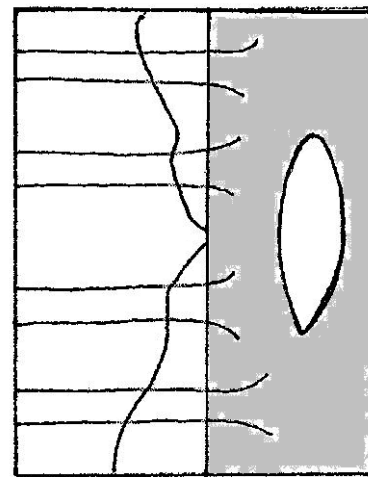
4. Draw some tree trunks to the top of the paper.



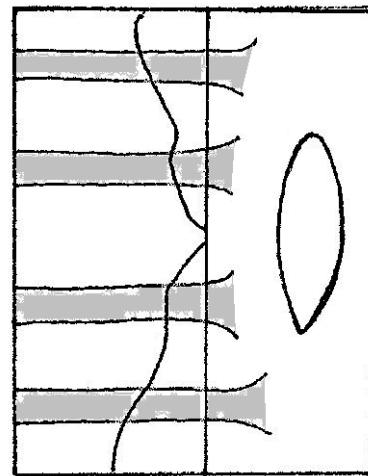
1. With orange paint, fill in the ellipse.



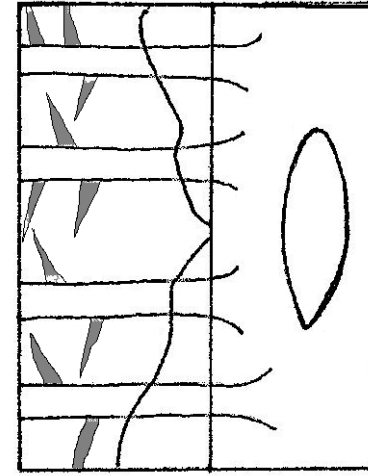
2. With green paint, cover the hills above the horizon.



3. Continue with green, paint the rest of the foreground.

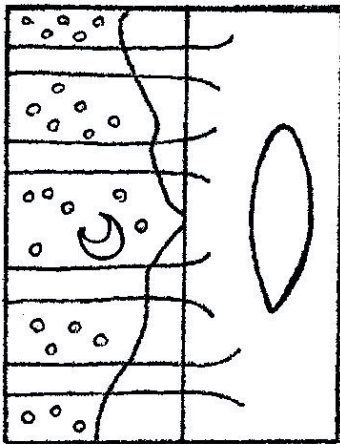


4. Use black for the tree trunks.

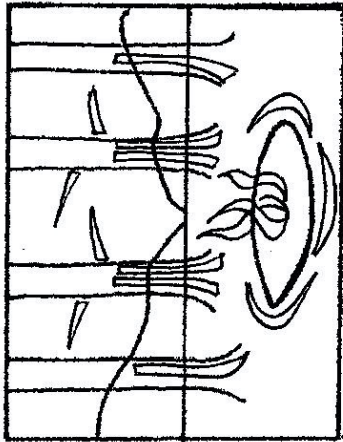


5. Use black to add some large branches.

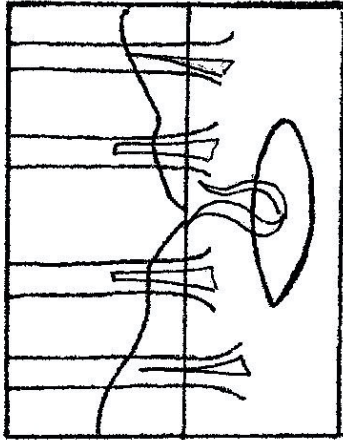
Part 3: Small Brush and Detail



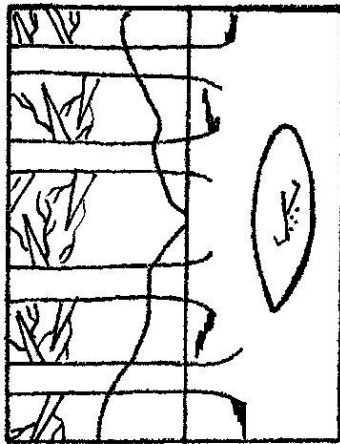
White Paint: Use the tip of the brush to add stars and a moon if desired.



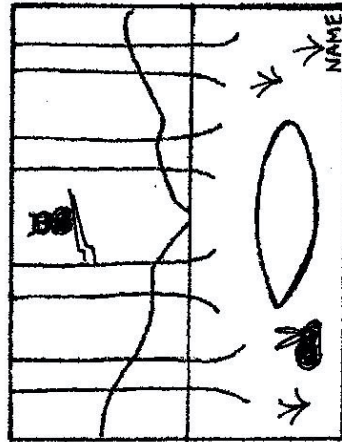
Light Yellow: Add some serpentine shaped lines to the center of the ellipse. Paint rings around the ellipse and add reflections to the tree trunks.



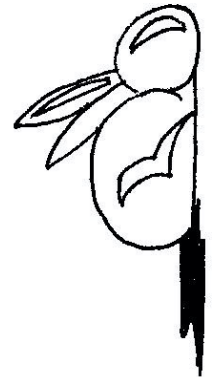
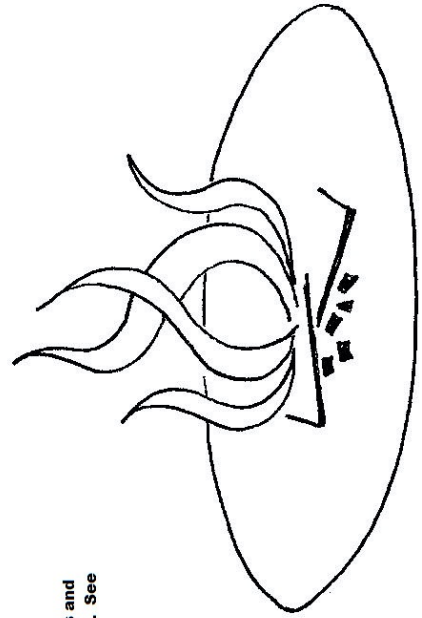
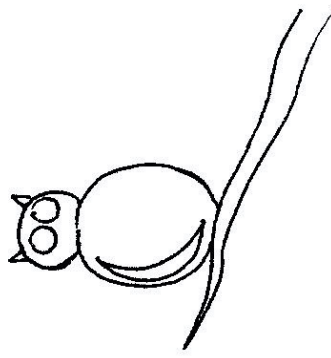
Orange: Add more serpentine lines to the fire and additional reflections to the trees.



Black: Add small branches to the trees and shadows behind the trees. Put some shadows behind the trees.



Details: Use black and light yellow to add some animals and plants. Be sure to add reflections and shadows as well. See illustrations.



Illustrations show basic shapes of simple animals and outline where the light yellow reflections would be best placed, along with suggested shadow placement.

AMERICAN CAMPFIRE

Inspired by the art of Albert Bierstadt
and the American landscape.

You can find these materials in one of the Palos Verdes Library District libraries

Techniques of the Artists of the American West

Adult Nonfiction 751.4 TECHNIQUES

Dissects and studies twenty-one classic Western paintings, and analyzes the lives and styles of the artists, including Bierstadt, Remington, O'Keefe, and Catlin.

Come Look With Me: Exploring Landscape Art With Children

J Nonfiction 758.1 BLIZZARD

The author introduces young people to 12 magnificent landscape paintings. Through these carefully selected works and a thought-provoking text, the author guides students toward an imaginative new way of looking at art.

The Hudson River School: American Landscape Artists

Adult Nonfiction 758.1097 YEAGER

A large format book filled with paintings of several different famous landscape artists. Accompanying text helps you understand each artist and their role in this "Hudson Valley" artistic endeavor or community.

The Hudson River School: Artistic Pioneers

DVDs Nonfiction 759.147 HUDSON

The early American art movement of landscape portraiture centered around New York's Hudson River Valley in the mid-1800's is explored in this documentary, detailing the work of Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Albert Bierstadt, and more.

The Hudson River and Its Painters: A Studio Book

Adult Nonfiction 758.1097 HOW

Examines the historical development of the artists who formed the first native American school of painting--the Hudson River School.

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THE MET TIMELINE OF ART HISTORY:

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