

Experience as Influence

Ages: 8+ (Grades 3–12)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials Needed: Paper and pencil; scrap paper for notes and brainstorming; markers, crayons, or colored pencils.

Inspiration: Hale Woodruff (American, 1900–1980). *Georgia Landscape*, ca. 1934–35. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred T. Morris, Jr., 1986.82.2. On view in *African American Art in the 20th Century*.



Introduction

Every person has experiences that shape them, and every person's experiences are different and unique. Factors like our family, our cultural identity and heritage, our friends, our surroundings, and our ability to access resources like education, healthcare, employment, and free time all affect how we experience our lives as we grow and change. Let's take a closer look at a landscape work by Hale Woodruff to explore how a place can influence a person.

Look

- What's going on in this painting?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- How would you describe the colors and tone, or effect of lightness and darkness, of this image?
- How would you describe the mood of this image?
- Is this landscape familiar or unfamiliar to you?
- If you could walk into and experience one area of this landscape in person, which area would you choose? Why?
- What do you notice about the lines and forms Woodruff has used to compose this image? How do these lines and forms compare or contrast to those you might see in a real outdoor setting?

Connect

Hale Woodruff was inspired by his studies of Africa and African art, by his travels to Paris where he studied the works of European artists like Vincent van Gogh, by his interactions with fellow artists and friends like Palmer Hayden, and by his time spent living and teaching in places like Atlanta, Georgia and New York City. He told his students to "paint what they knew." *Georgia Landscape* is an example of how Woodruff combined his life experiences—like visiting and sketching nearby wooded areas while he taught at Atlanta University—with his interest in and knowledge of different artists and their techniques. The distinct landscape of Georgia is recognizable in the red clay of the foreground and the pine and oak trees found in the region that Woodruff added to the middle ground, but the forms are distorted and not exactly as they appear in reality. This technique allows artists to convey their feelings and mood through an image along with the visual itself.

Do

1. Brainstorm for a few minutes about an outdoor space (a park, playing field, yard, or other area where you spend time) OR a natural landscape in which you spend or have spent, time.
2. On scrap paper, list some of the features and details that are specific to this space. You can describe features like color, shape, lightness, darkness, dimensions, open, crowded or overgrown areas, etc.
3. On another piece of scrap paper, sketch out some of these features and elements so you have an idea of where they will all appear on a finished landscape composition.
4. To help you organize your sketch, imagine stepping into the scene. The foreground of your image will be the area you step into first. What is located there? The middle ground is the main area of your landscape scene, often the area that your eye is drawn to first when you look at it. The background is what you can see beyond this middle ground space, far into the distance.
5. On scrap paper, make note of some of the emotions you feel when you think of this space, or the overall feeling this space provokes in you when you are there.
6. Now, the challenge: use a fresh piece of paper. First, take a pencil, and try to draw your landscape in one continuous line. Do not pick up your pencil! The second part of the challenge is to avoid drawing sharp corners and clear geometric shapes. Think of the line your pencil makes as being like a wave, not like an arrow.
7. Once you have a drawing that you think represents your landscape in expressive continuous lines, you can go over your pencil marks again or with a black colored pencil, marker or crayon. Last but not least, add color to the features of your landscape to finish up. What colors and tones can you use to help convey the emotions or mood of this space to your viewers?

Reflect

What is your reaction to the challenge of continuous line drawing? How did this way of conveying your landscape impact your ability to convey its features? Do the distorted forms of the familiar place change your emotional reaction to this place? How might you affect the overall mood or feeling of your landscape through different choices of color and tone?

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