

MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

Atmospheric Perspective: Inspired by Kenneth Callahan

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY ROXANN
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Description

During this activity, students will be introduced to the use of color and value in Kenneth Callahan's work and how he creates "atmospheric perspective". They will then apply these techniques and experiment to create their own Northwest landscape watercolor painting.

Age: Second Grade through Fourth Grade

Lesson Duration: 2 Hours

Subjects: Art, Social Studies & Math



Project Sample

Image Credit: Lynn Prewitt

Materials

- Watercolor paints
- Practice paper
- Watercolor paper
- Brushes
- Water in cups
- "Using Linear Perspective to Create Depth in Your Paintings" by Teresa Bernard
- *Long Pool, Granite Falls, WA and Oregon Coast* by Kenneth Callahan (included at the end of this lesson)
- Video on foreground, middleground, and background.
- Video on the color wheel and color properties
- Optional: Kenneth Callahan by Kenneth Callahan

Instructions

- 1)** Discuss students' understanding and prior knowledge on perspective in art.
 - Atmospheric perspective (also called aerial perspective) is the method of creating the illusion of depth, or recession, in a painting or drawing by modulating color to simulate changes effected by the atmosphere on the colors of things seen at a distance.
 - Linear perspective is an artistic technique that creates the illusion of depth on a flat surface. More definitions and examples are included in the attached article by Teresa Bernard.
 - Show students the attached videos on backgrounds and foregrounds, the color wheel, as well as the attached diagram at the end of the lesson explaining linear perspective. This will help to further explain the concepts.
- 2)** Show students the works by Kenneth Callahan included at the end of this lesson and engage in VTS discussions with them about the pieces.
 - VTS is an inquiry-based method of facilitating discussion. Tips and resources on VTS are included at the end of this lesson.
 - Ask students to observe the painting in terms of color, if this hasn't already come up in the discussion. Note the use of dark colors in the mountains and light colors for the road. How does that help us see what is distance versus what is close? How does the painter use shades of brown and blue? What other ways did he use value to show distance?
- 3)** Distribute supplies and have the students experiment with color value on practice paper.
 - For example: using blue, ask students to make it lighter by thinning out the color with water or blending it with white. Then invite them to make it darker by adding black or applying thicker paint.
- 4)** Continue to experiment with brushes to show details, such as grasses or trees in foreground.

- 5) Instruct students to paint mountains as a background on practice paper.
- 6) Ask them to add a foreground that looks closer on their practice paper. This is an opportunity for students to apply what they've learned from Callahan's paintings.
- 7) When students are satisfied that they've played enough, move to the final paper and work to create a scene that shows distance and some close objects. Students can paint whatever kind of nature scene they would like, as long as it has a background and a foreground.
- 8) After the students are finished with their paintings, shift into the reflection activity below.

Closer/Reflection Activity

Bring students together to discuss

- Were you successful in showing background and foreground?
- What difficulties did you have?
- What worked well?
- If you were going to do this again, what would you do differently?
- When might you use this technique again?



Relevant Vocabulary

- ✓ Value
- ✓ Perspective
- ✓ Atmospheric perspective
- ✓ Linear perspective
- ✓ Space
- ✓ Foreground
- ✓ Middleground
- ✓ Background

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills [Washington State Arts Learning Standards](#):

- **Second Grade: VA:Re7.1.2** (Perceive and describe aesthetic characteristics of one's natural world and constructed environments)
- **Third Grade: VA:Cr2.3.3** (Individually or collaboratively construct representations, diagrams, or maps of places that are part of everyday life)
- **Fourth Grade: VA:Cr2.3.4** (Document, describe, and represent regional constructed environments)

Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a research-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development, including critical thinking and communication skills. Here in the MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art, encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. This approach teaches its participants how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

In order to facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.

What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say...?

What more can you find?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

If you are interested in learning more about VTS, [here is their website](#). If you already know and love VTS, but want help finding great images to use in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators

About the Artist: Kenneth Callahan



Image Credit: historylink.org

Kenneth Callahan (1905-1986) was a Northwest abstract painter. Born in Spokane, Washington, he created the majority of his work in Seattle. Callahan described his work as being firmly rooted in nature and art history, and his later works were known for being quite abstract. He is known for being one of the leading artists of the Pacific Northwest school and was recognized by *Life* magazine in 1953 as one of the "Mystic Painters of the Northwest". He spent many years working as a curator at the Seattle Art Museum until 1952. Callahan continued his art career until his death in 1986.

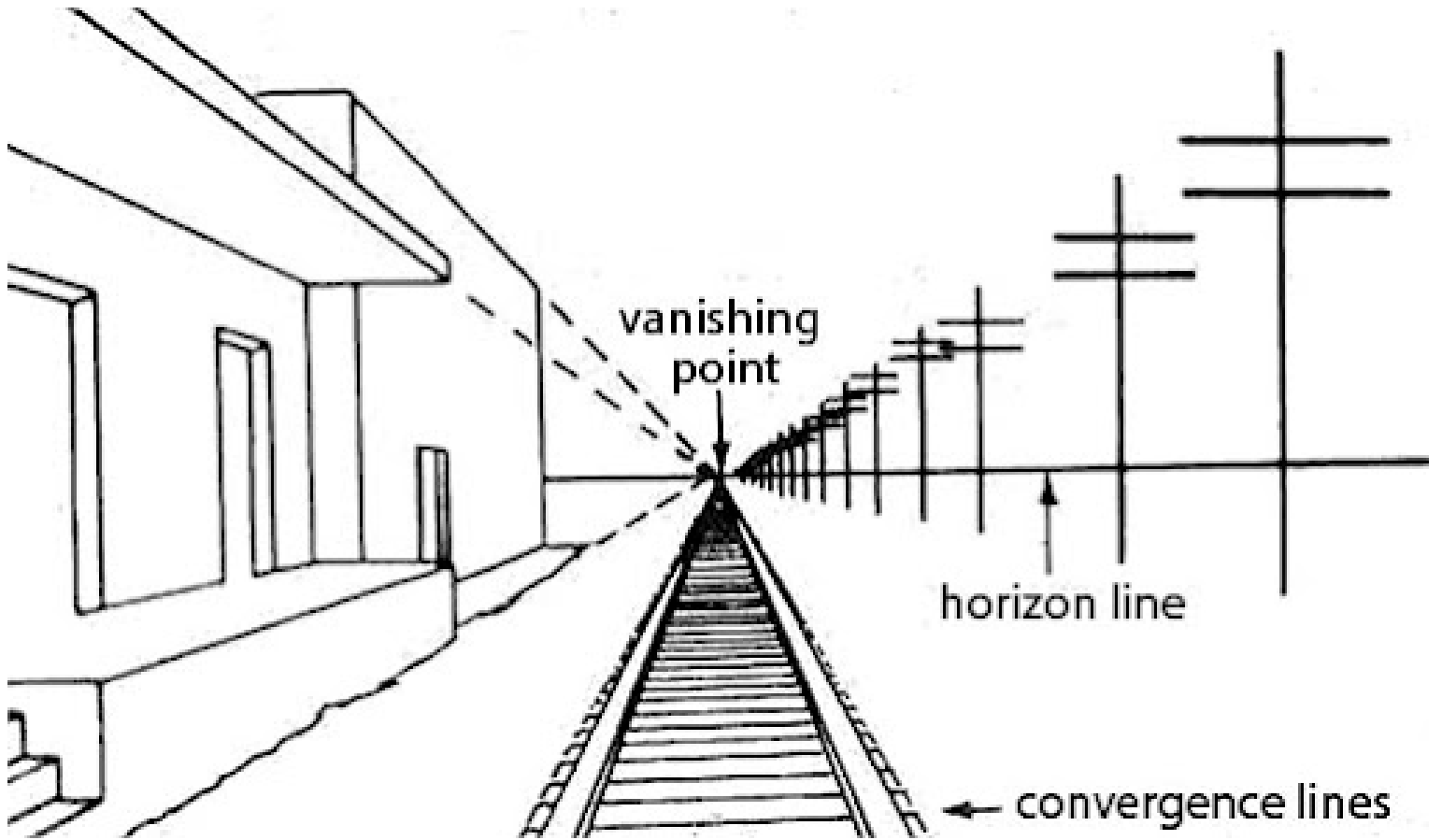
"I think the greatest tribute anyone can give an artist is to say his or her art has given added meaning to their lives" - Kenneth Callahan



Oregon Coast, Kenneth Callahan
Image Credit: Woodside Braseth Gallery



Long Pool, Granite Falls, WA, Kenneth Callahan
Image Credit: Woodside Braseth Gallery



Linear Perspective

Image Credit: Teresa Bernard Art