

# ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAM

# LESSON PLAN

## AT-HOME ART PROJECT: Landscape Perspective INSTRUCTIONS



Photo taken by William Notman, 1864

### INSPIRATION ARTIST:

#### **Robert S. Duncanson (1821-1872)**

Robert Duncanson was trained in the family skills of house painting and carpentry in Michigan but decided to pursue a career as a landscape artist. This ambition moved him to relocate from Canada, where his family moved when he was young, to Cincinnati, Ohio. Here, he taught himself the art of landscape painting.

To support himself as an artist, Duncanson became a traveling painter, roaming throughout Ohio and Michigan seeking commissions. In 1848, he received his most important commission when he was asked by abolitionist minister Charles Avery to paint *Cliff Mine, Lake Superior*, which launched his career as a landscape painter.

Duncanson's art also caught the eye of Nicholas Longworth who commissioned him to paint eight landscape murals in his residence, which is now the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati, OH. Together these murals create one of the largest existing pre-Civil War domestic murals in the nation.

Receiving sponsorship to travel abroad in 1853, Duncanson became the first African American artist to make the traditional "grand tour" of Europe to further his art education. He captured landscape scenes throughout his travels from England, Italy, Canada and Scotland. He was highly regarded as a landscape painter; the Queen of England, among others, purchased his work. While he primarily painted landscapes, Duncanson also painted portraits of prominent abolitionists from Detroit to Cincinnati. Duncanson spent several years touring with his art and became an internationally recognized artist. In October 1872, while installing an exhibition in Detroit, Michigan, Robert Duncanson suffered a seizure and died. He was perhaps the most accomplished African American painter in the United States from 1850-1860.

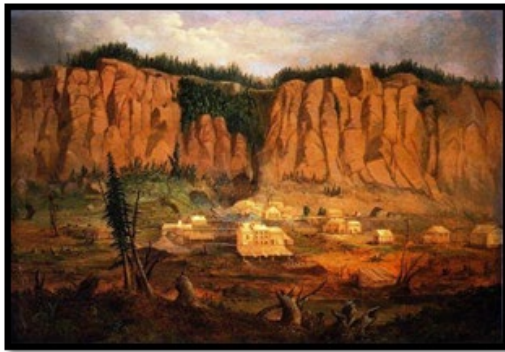
**Fun Fact:** Robert Duncanson's painting *Landscape with Rainbow*, 1859 was loaned by the Smithsonian Museum and given as a gift by Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri to President Joe Biden on inauguration day, 2021. The painting depicts a countryside scene sparsely populated with cows and people, with a rainbow above symbolizing renewal and hope.

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*Landscape with Rainbow, 1859*



*Cliff Mine, Lake Superior, 1848*



*Landscape with Family by Lake, 1858*

## **MATERIALS NEEDED FROM HOME:**

- White Paper (any size)
- Pencil and Eraser
- Colored Pencils (or other coloring tools)

**ART PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Participants will create an artistic landscape scene considering a special family outing. The Landscape will be a pencil drawing using specific technique to capture depth and perspective, while considering the romantic, peaceful landscape style of Robert S. Duncanson.

## **VOCABULARY:**

**Landscape Artwork:** a landscape painting or drawing refers to an artwork whose primary focus is natural scenery, such as mountains, forests, cliffs, trees, rivers and valleys

**Scenery:** the natural features of a landscape considered in terms of their appearance

**Perspective:** an art technique for creating an illusion of three-dimensions (depth and space) on a two-dimensional (flat) surface

**Horizon Line:** also known as “eye level”, refers to a physical/visual boundary where sky separates from land or water

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**Focal Point:** the area in the composition to which the viewer's eye is naturally drawn

**Background:** is the plane or area in a composition perceived furthest from the viewer

**Foreground:** the visual plane or area that appears closest to the viewer

**Composition:** the positioning and arrangement of elements within a pictorial space and work of art

### PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. Take a moment to look at the example paintings of Robert S. Duncanson. Do you consider them to have a romantic and peaceful feeling? What makes you think this?
2. What do you notice in these landscape paintings? What details stand out to you?
3. What landscape scene comes to mind when you think of a special family gathering?
4. Have you ever drawn a landscape scene before? What type of landscape do you imagine when you think of a peaceful and restful scene?

### ART MAKING PROCESS:

#### Step 1:

Robert Duncanson was known for painting peaceful landscape scenes. Some of the scenes he recreated from seeing them in real life, and some were imagined. Think about what peaceful landscape scene you might want to create. Landscapes are not necessarily limited to depictions of land, they can also include images of seascapes, cityscapes, or urban landscapes. The unifying element of any of these is that they all center around some kind of scenery.

Take a moment and think about what landscape scenery makes you feel happy, a place that brings you peace and seems relaxing to you. Think about where you like to visit, maybe someplace you have been with your family. Do you have a photo of it? If so, you can refer to it when creating your landscape. If not, you can use your memory.

#### Step 2:

When you have the landscape in your mind that you want to create, think about the orientation of your paper. Landscape orientation refers to a scene that is wider than it is tall. A Portrait orientation is an image that is taller than it is wide. You will want to work on your paper in the landscape orientation. Use your pencil and begin to lightly draw the scene on your white paper. Drawing lightly at first allows you to easily erase if you change your mind on something – “draw it light until you get it right”. Begin with the horizon line – this line divides the sky from the ground (**FIG. 1**).

#### Step 3:

Think about the objects or what imagery you want to have in your landscape and where you will place them in your scene. What will your composition look like? Think about where you want the viewer's eye to be drawn to in your scene, what is the focal point? Think about how you will create perspective in your landscape.

#### Drawing Perspective Technique:

Foreground - The area BELOW the horizon line is known as the *foreground plane*. Objects from the horizon line DOWN toward the bottom of your paper are drawn larger, to give the impression that they are closer to the viewer. The closer the object is to the bottom of the paper, the larger and more clearly you can see the details in the object. Objects that

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are drawn up, closer to the horizon line from the bottom of your paper, are drawn smaller to give the impression that they are farther away.

Background - The area ABOVE the horizon line is known as the *background plane*. Objects drawn from the horizon line UP toward the top of your paper are drawn larger, but are farther away from the viewer so less details are seen. Objects that are drawn down, closer to the horizon line from the top of your paper, are drawn smaller to give the impression of being farther away.

This technique of intentionally drawing objects larger and smaller from the horizon line in your landscape helps create perspective and depth in your scene **(FIG. 2)**.

### Step 4:

Continue using your pencil to outline and add images to your scenery. Be open to changing things up as you draw. It is ok if you change your mind and want to add or omit images.

Once you are happy with the layout of the objects in your scenery, go back and use your pencil to add details. For example - leaves to your trees, grass blades or flowers, design to a picnic blanket, patterns and texture in tree trunks or water etc. Keep in mind that objects in the foreground are larger and closer to the viewer and will show more details than those in the background, where images seem further away. Think about where the light is coming from in your landscape and use the side of your pencil to add light and dark shading if you'd like **(FIG. 3)**.

### Step 5:

When you feel you are done adding details and shading to your landscape with your pencil, hold your landscape scene out at arms distance. Think about if there is anything else you would like to add to your landscape composition.

### Step 6:

When your drawing is complete, it is time to add color. Adding color can create an emotional undertone to your artwork. Robert Duncanson's landscape paintings were often described as romantic, calm and peaceful. What colors make you feel relaxed and peaceful? What colors will you choose to bring a tranquil and comforting feel to your landscape? Use your colored pencils (or any coloring tools you might have) to lightly add color to your scene, considering the feeling of each color and the amount of color that you use to create lighter and darker tones. Experiment using the side of your pencil to apply light color to your overall work of art. Your pencil lines and shading will show through your coloring. You can also try blending and layering colors **(FIG. 4)**.

When your landscape is completely colored in, your artwork is complete!

### POST PROJECT PROMPT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did you choose to create the landscape scene that you did?
2. Were you able to show perspective and depth in your drawing? Why or why not?
3. What do you think is the feeling that your artwork expresses?

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## ART PROJECT STEP-BY-STEP EXAMPLE:



FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

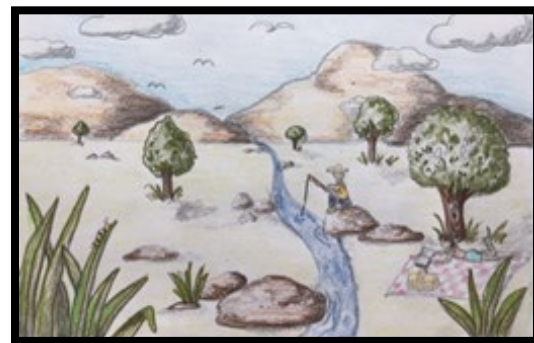


FIG. 4

## OTHER ARTISTS FROM THIS ERA TO CONSIDER (Slavery and the Abolitionist Movement: 1790-1860) :

- Joshua Johnson
- Prince Demah



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## CITY OF CARLSBAD LIBRARY SOURCES:

### Digital

[Gale in Context: Biography database](#)

[Gale in Context: High School database](#)

[SIRS Discoverer database](#) (grades 3-8)

[SIRS Issues Researcher database](#) (grade 6 - adult)

[ProQuest eLibrary](#)

### Print

Children's:

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[Words with wings: A treasury of African American poetry and art](#) / Rochelle, Belinda

## ONLINE SOURCES:

1. ARTnews (inaugural gift): <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/robert-s-duncanson-painting-inaugural-gift-1234581817/>
2. Detroit Free Press (tombstone): <https://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/arts/2019/06/20/artist-robert-duncanson-tombstone-grave-dia/1505438001/>
3. Taft Museum: <https://www.taftmuseum.org/duncanson-murals>
4. Smithsonian American Art Museum: <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/robert-s-duncanson-1353>
5. Cincinnati Enquirer: <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/16760927/the-cincinnati-enquirer/>
6. Cincinnati History & Library Archives: <http://library.cincymuseum.org/aag/bio/duncanson.html>

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