

Plein Air Landscape Painting



Best for: grades 7-12

Description: experience the outdoors in creative ways with “plein air” (French for “outdoors”) painting techniques and create your own personalized landscape.

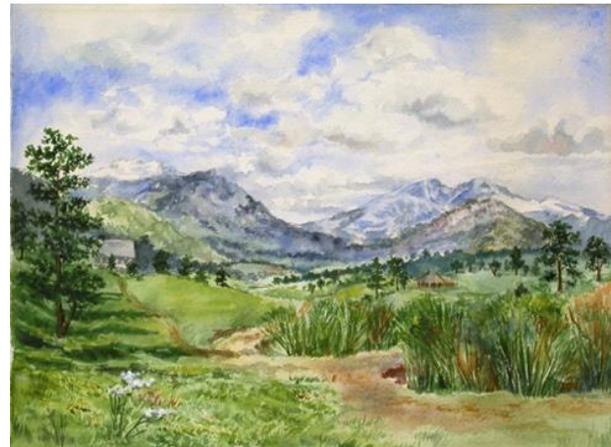
Vocabulary: plein air, Impressionism, dollop, opaque, horizon, primary colors

Required materials:

- 9 x 12” canvas board
- acrylic paints (red, yellow, blue, white, black)
- paint brushes (small, medium, large)
- paint palette (or paper plate)
- cup for water
- paper towels
- pencil and eraser

Optional materials:

- extra fine brushes
- more acrylics (orange, green, violet, yellow ochre, etc.)



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Instructions

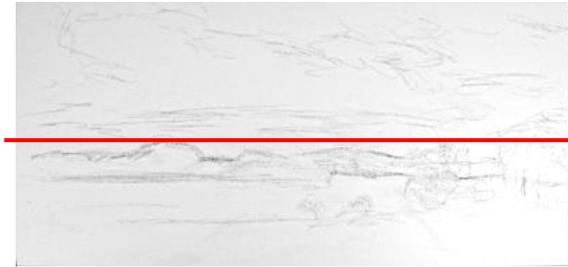
1. Visit the outdoors and select a viewpoint to paint.

Helpful hint: while outside, photograph the view for reference (ex: colors, sunlight levels). Use a camera to also help compose the landscape and capture movement (ex: clouds, position of the sun).



2. Lightly draw the horizon line and basic shapes of the largest elements in view (ex: hills, trees, clouds).

Helpful hint: try applying the rule of thirds (ex: 1/3 of landscape view is of land, 2/3 is of sky). See resources below for details.



3. Line palette with small **dollops**, or amounts, of paint, leaving a center space for color mixing.

Helpful hint: take a moment to observe the main colors of your view. Select colors and arrange **dollops** following a pattern (ex: blues, greens, browns, lighter colors, darker colors) for ease of locating colors while painting.



Note: if working with only **primary** colors (red, yellow and blue) leave spaces between for mixing.



Helpful hint: mix colors by slowly adding darker colors into the lighter colors (ex: add a small amount of blue to white to create light blue / add only a little black to blue for a dark blue). Clean brush fully before mixing in new colors.



4. Use a large brush to paint the basic shapes and color tones of the largest elements in view (ex: light blue rectangle for sky area, white ovals for clouds, etc.).

Note: paint background in several thin coats of light colors diluted with water, or for richer, thicker, more **opaque** colors, use less water.



5. Paint foreground, textures, shadows and additional details.

Helpful hint: work from largest to smallest shapes, lighter to darkest colors and larger brushes to smaller ones as you refine your painting.

Note: while painting outdoors, shadows, conditions and colors can change over time. Clouds are ever-changing and moving. The goal of **plein air**, or painting outdoors, is to quickly capture the impression of a whole scene outdoors rather than precise details.



6. Once finished, clean brushes and palette. For brush and palette cleaning, use the following steps:

- a. Rinse brush with water.
- b. Wipe brush onto paper towel until no more color appears on towel.
- c. Repeat steps a-b as needed.
- d. Gently massage in a small amount of liquid soap, then rinse.
- e. Form bristles into a point (this prevents bristles from getting warped or bent permanently).
- f. Lightly dry brush.
- g. Gently wipe palette with paper towel until all color is gone. If paint remains, ball up paper towel and push into each well or indentation for harder-to-clean areas.
- h. Rinse and dry with paper towel.



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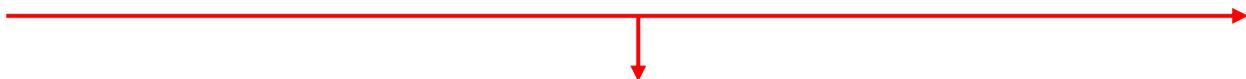
Extensions

For extra challenge:

1. Paint with an Impressionist's palette by mixing purple or blue instead of black to create darker colors.

For further technique:

1. If painting over several days, wrap paint palette with plastic wrap to preserve wet paint for later use. Note the time of day on the back of the canvas so you can return to that same location under those similar sunlight conditions.



Web Resources

[Video: the "rule of thirds" in art](#)

[Plein air painting origin](#)

[Seven tips for painting en plein air](#)

[Impressionism—what is that?](#)

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