

Discovering the Story: A City and Its Culture

Landscape Stories

An Arts Enrichment Activity for
Grades K-3

Based on *The Underground Railroad, 1893*
by Charles T. Webber



Charles T. Webber (1825-1911)
United States (Cincinnati)
The Underground Railroad, 1893
Subscription Fund Purchase, 1927.26

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OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine *The Underground Railroad* painting and observe what event is being depicted, and how the artist chose to interpret the event.
- Students will compare *The Underground Railroad* painting with two other paintings that depict a journey to freedom.
- Students will understand that artists create works of art that communicate a message, viewpoint or opinion.
- Students will visualize and paint their own journey to freedom scene within the context of a landscape.

PRE- VIDEOCONFERENCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY

Definitions can be found in the [Glossary](#) on the [Discovering the Story](#) Website.

Background
Center of Interest
Foreground
Landscape
Middle Ground
Narrative Art
Political Art
Realism
Scene

MATERIALS

- Print reproduction of [The Underground Railroad](#) – class set downloaded and printed from the *Discovering the Story* website
 - Pencils
 - Paint -- watercolor or tempura
 - Paintbrushes of various sizes, including small brushes
 - Thick paper -- ideally 12”x18” or larger
 - Containers for water
 - Paper plates for paint and mixing colors
 - Paper towels or rags for wet brushes
 - Newspaper or other large paper for protecting tables
 - Clothesline and clothespins or drying rack
- (dry media such as crayons or colored pencils may replace painting supplies)

BRAINSTORMING/GETTING STARTED

- Display an image of *The Underground Railroad* for all the students to see. Ask students, “What’s going on in this picture?” Allow time for a discussion to unfold.
- Introduce the concept of the Underground Railroad. Share with students that Charles T. Webber painted this painting about thirty years after slavery ended. Since he didn’t paint this scene directly from observation, he had to use what he knew about the Underground Railroad (the painting shows actual people from history), plus use his imagination to tell his own unique version of the story. Why do you think Charles T. Webber chose to paint this story? Is it an important story to remember? Why?
- Charles T. Webber chose to put the people in his painting in a landscape scene.
 - What parts of the painting look closest to you? This area is the foreground of the painting.
 - What parts look farthest away? This part is called the background.
 - The area in between the foreground and the background is called the middle ground. What do you find in the middle ground?
 - What time of day do you think this painting takes place? Why?
 - What time of year does it take place?
 - What makes you say that? Charles T. Webber's painting communicates to the viewer that freedom seekers traveled through extreme weather conditions. Why did he do this?
 - Why would people risk travel during this season?
- Show students images of two other paintings that tell the story of the Underground Railroad: *The Life of Harriet Tubman* and *Freedom River* by Jacob Lawrence. How are these paintings similar to *The Underground Railroad* painting? How are they different?
- Next, each student will create his or her own Underground Railroad landscape painting. Ask students to come up with scenarios based on what they know of the Underground Railroad. Ask the following questions:
 - What points in a freedom seeker’s journey would be interesting to depict? Deciding to escape? Leaving home? Hiding along the journey? Finding a safe house? Arriving at freedom?
 - What could the landscape look like with each of these scenarios? Would it be dark or light? Summer or winter? Rainy and cold or sunny and warm?
- Write answers on the board to generate student ideas.

PROCEDURE

1. Cover tabletops with newspaper to protect them.
2. Distribute paper and pencils to each student.
3. Ask each student to lightly sketch people in a landscape, doing something along an Underground Railroad. Their goal should be to tell a story with their artwork. Students should make sure they have indicated a foreground, middle ground and background.
4. After sketching, students can paint their picture.
5. Distribute paintbrushes, paper plates, water and paper towels to each student.

6. Tell students that while Charles T. Webber used oil paints to create his painting, they will be using a different kind of paint -- paint that can be thinned with water.
7. Ask students to start painting the parts of the painting closest to the viewer first, and to gradually work back, painting the background last.
8. Ask them to think about the time of day and time of year in their paintings when making color choices. To make the background of their paintings look farther away, students can add more water to their paint when painting that section.
9. When finished, clip paintings to a clothesline to dry or arrange in a drying rack.

DISCUSSION/PREPARATION FOR VIDEOCONFERENCE

- When paintings are dry, students can show their paintings to the class and tell their classmates the story that takes place in it. Time allowing, some students may also have a chance to share their landscape stories with the Museum staff member during the videoconference.
- Hang up completed paintings next to the image of *The Underground Railroad*.

VIDEOCONFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

- Students will interact with the Cincinnati Art Museum staff through a sixty-minute [videoconference](#).
- Students will learn about Cincinnati's contribution to the Underground Railroad.
- Students will use Museum objects to reinforce activities completed in preparation for this [videoconference](#).

CONCEPT

A [videoconference](#) conducted by the Cincinnati Art Museum staff extends student learning through emphasis on the viewing and discussion of art objects. During this [videoconference](#) with the Museum, students will explore Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement and major tristate figures, such as Levi and Catharine Coffin, John Parker and John Rankin.

SCHEDULE

- **5 minutes** Introduction to CAM staff (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)
- **10 minutes** Brief discussion of student pre-videoconferencing activities.

- **10 minutes** Museum staff will lead students in an in-depth investigation of C.T. Webber's painting *The Underground Railroad*
- **15 minutes** Museum staff will lead an interactive discussion with students on Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement.
- **10 minutes** Questions and student sharing of art projects.
- **5 minutes** Closing (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)

ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

NATIONAL STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Grades K-4

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts.

Benchmark 1: Knows the differences between art materials (e.g., paint, clay, wood, videotape), techniques (e.g., overlapping, shading, varying size or color), and processes (e.g., addition and subtraction in sculpture, casting and constructing in making jewelry).

Benchmark 2: Knows how different materials, techniques and processes cause different responses from the viewer.

Benchmark 3: Knows how different media (e.g., oil, watercolor, stone, metal), techniques and processes are used to communicate ideas, experiences and stories.

Benchmark 4: Uses art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner.

Standard 3: Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.

Benchmark 1: Selects prospective ideas (e.g., formulated thoughts, opinions, concepts) for works of art.

Benchmark 2: Knows how subject matter, symbols and ideas are used to communicate meaning.

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Benchmark 1: Knows that the visual arts have both a history and a specific relationship to various cultures.

Benchmark 2: Identifies specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times and places.

Benchmark 3: Knows how history, culture and the visual arts can influence each other.

Standard 5: Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.

Benchmark 1: Knows various purposes for creating works of visual art.

Benchmark 2: Knows how people's experiences (e.g., cultural background, human needs) can influence the development of specific artworks.

OHIO STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Grades K-4

Creative Expression and Communication: Students create artworks that demonstrate understanding of materials, processes, tools, media, techniques and available technology. They understand how to use art elements, principles and images to communicate their ideas in a variety of visual forms.

Benchmark A: Demonstrates knowledge of visual art materials, tools, techniques and processes by using them expressively and skillfully.

Benchmark B: Uses the elements and principles of art as a means to express ideas, emotions and experiences.

Benchmark C: Develops and selects a range of subject matter and ideas to communicate meaning in two- and three-dimensional works of art.

Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts: Students understand the impact of visual art on the history, culture and society from which it emanates. They understand the cultural, social and political forces that, in turn, shape visual art communication and expression. Students identify the significant contributions of visual artists to cultural heritage. They analyze the history, cultural, social and political contexts that influence the function and role of visual art in the lives of people.

Benchmark A: Recognizes and describes visual art forms and artworks from various times and places.

Benchmark B: Identifies art forms, visual ideas and artistic styles and describes how they are influenced by time and culture.

Analyzing and Responding: Students identify and discriminate themes, media, subject matter and formal technical and expressive aspects in works of art. They understand and use the vocabulary of art criticism to describe visual features, analyze relationships and interpret meanings in works of art. Students make judgment about the quality of works of art using the appropriate criteria.

Benchmark A: Identifies and describes the visual feature and characteristics in works of art.

Benchmark B: Applies comprehension strategies to respond to a range of visual artworks.