

# WATERCOLOR TREES

## Purpose

- ❑ To help students understand the structure of a tree and its basic shapes.
- ❑ To paint several varieties of trees in watercolor using wet-on-wet, wet-on-dry, washes, masking, and sponge-stippling techniques.

## Docent Provides

- ❑ 1 set of watercolors per student
- ❑ 9" x 12" white construction paper – 3 per student
- ❑ 9" x 12" watercolor paper – 1 per student
- ❑ Water containers for students
- ❑ Laminated pictures of skeleton and tree structures, and laminated tree silhouettes
- ❑ Paper towels
- ❑ Sponges (1/2" squares)
- ❑ 3/4" wide masking tape
- ❑ Water pitcher

## Set Up

- ❑ Attach a 9" strip of wide masking tape to the edge of each student's desk to be used *later* in the lesson.
- ❑ Pass out 1 piece of *construction* paper to each student. An assistant can pass the other papers out throughout the lesson as needed.
- ❑ Display example artwork

## Classroom procedure

- Review tree structure and basic shapes
  - Show skeleton picture: We have a bony structure which gives us our shape.
  - What would you look like without this bony skeleton? A blob? Trees have a structure which gives them their shape too. It is made up of the roots, branches, limbs and twigs.
- Identify geometric shapes of trees using silhouettes
  - Docents draw the basic shapes on the board. Ask the students to name a tree which might fit each shape.
  - Trees usually grow in a shape which resembles a geometric form. You can learn to identify trees by their characteristic silhouette or shape. This is easiest to see in winter after the leaves have fallen.
- Discuss silhouette pictures of trees
  - The trunk sets the main line of direction for the tree. Is it twisted? Straight? Bent?
  - The trunk tapers into the limbs and the limbs into branches and twigs.
  - How does the trunk grow out of the ground? How does it support itself? Roots! Note the spread at the base.
  - How do the branches grow from the trunk? Stiff and upright like a poplar tree? Limber and drooping like a weeping willow tree?
  - Do the branches get smaller or larger as they grow away from the trunk? Smaller.
- Review painting techniques:
  - Priming paints: Add a few drops of water to pigment by squeezing off of brush with fingers and let soak a few minutes before using.
  - Lapping up paint from paint set: “Lap up” or “lick up” paint with brush (do not scrub bristles).
  - Hugging off paint before dipping in water: When changing colors first use paper towels to remove excess paint by “hugging” off paint, then rinse in water container, (this keeps water cleaner, longer).

## **1<sup>st</sup> tree (step 1, foliage): Watercolor Forest – 1<sup>st</sup> piece of construction paper**

- Wet-on-wet technique for dense foliage
  - Brush clear water *on top 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of paper only*.
  - Using tip of brush, DOT on colors... let colors run together.
  - Leave some white spaces. Make foliage go off the top of the paper and off the edge in several places. Use three or four colors. Set aside to dry while you do the 2<sup>nd</sup> tree.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> tree: Gnarled Oak Trunk – 2<sup>nd</sup> piece of construction paper**

- Wet-on-dry rolling technique for bare oak tree
  - Load brush with orange and tip in blue OR yellow and tip in purple.
  - Starting at least 1" from bottom of paper, hold brush near the bristles and wiggle and roll your brush to create a twisted and gnarled trunk.
  - Lift up on your brush to paint smaller branches. Use just the tip to add smallest branches and twigs.
  - Comment on the effect created by using the two colors on the brush.

## **1<sup>st</sup> tree (step 2, trunks): Watercolor Forest – finishing 1<sup>st</sup> piece**

- Pull stroke technique for straight trunks
  - Return to 1st piece of paper with (hopefully dry) foliage.
  - Complete the first tree by adding pull stroke tree trunks.
  - Load brush with two colors (as above) but using the pull stroke this time. Start your trunks approx. 1" from bottom of paper edge and pull your paint brush upward into the foliage. Add odd number of trunks (3 or 5).
  - Add branches using tip of brush and running along trunk before branching out.
  - Note: we do not see all of the trunks and branches through leaves, so stop and go here and there!

### **3<sup>rd</sup> tree: Birch Trees – on WATERCOLOR paper**

- Masking technique for white birch trees contrasting against wet-on-wet color-washed background with sponge-stippled foliage
  - Tear masking tape in strips for trunks, try for three.
  - Press tape strips onto paper, smoothing down edges.
  - Pre-wet your paper, then using several colors do washes over the tape to indicate areas of ground and of sky.
  - Sponge on some slight indications of foliage in the middle area of the painting. (Use sponge sparingly with a light press and lift motion – this is “stippling”).
  - Let dry completely before removing tape – this may need to happen the following day, or after the pine tree painting (4<sup>th</sup> tree) is completed.
  - Finally, complete trees with blue/brown dashes here and there going up trunk side to side to give the texture of its bark.

### **4<sup>th</sup> tree: Pine Tree – 3<sup>rd</sup> piece of construction paper**

- Pull stroke technique for pine boughs.
  - Load brush with yellow and blue, maybe some purple too.
  - Work from top to bottom – make sure brush has wet paint not dripping!
  - Hold brush perpendicular to paper (demonstrate).
  - Using just lines and keeping the triangular shape of the tree in mind, paint squiggly lines, alternating from side to side of the tree.
  - Can use sponge to stipple in some detail in darker pigment.
  - Add trunk and don't forget to skip spaces where foliage is in front of trunk.