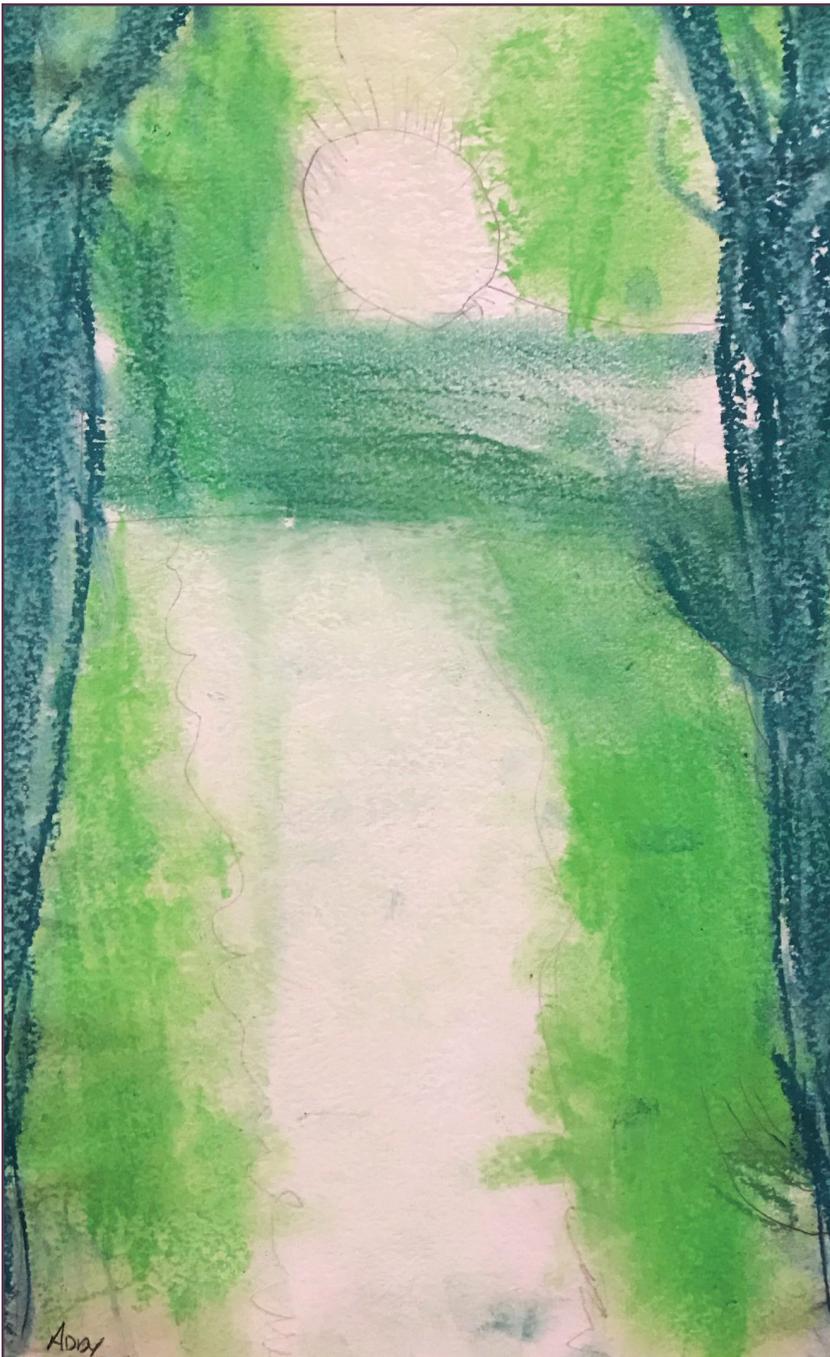


Let's Create a *Plein Air* Landscape

Abstract art inspired by Georgia O'Keeffe



About "Open Air" Painting

"*En plein air*" is the French expression for "in the open air."

"*Plein Air art*" is painting outside, in nature, recreating the environment you are in. Also known as "experience" painting or drawing, this technique dates back many centuries and is derived from the desire to capture light and shadows as they change.

Georgia O'Keeffe was celebrated for her depiction of nature. She shared her view of the world through her artwork. Although her work was abstract, she used observation and *plein air* to arrive at her final works.

Abstraction

Abstraction explores the relationships between forms and colors, while more traditional art represents the world in recognizable images.

Georgia O'Keeffe used abstraction to paint landscapes and flowers in a way that showed how they made her feel.

**ACTIVITY**

Inspired by the work of abstract artist Georgia O'Keeffe, students will use colors, shapes, and forms to create a *Plein Air* landscape painting or drawing that is based on what they can see close up and far away in their own outdoor environment.

MATERIALS:

- Pencil
- Watercolor, Paint, Charcoal, Crayons, or Colored Pencils
- Heavy Paper or Canvas

Let's get started by going outside and exploring what you can see:**Look up at the sky.**

Is it sunny or cloudy? Is the sun directly overhead or lower in the sky?

Can you see the horizon (the horizontal line where the earth and nature meets the sky)?

What do you see above and below the horizon line?

What is in the distance?

Do you see buildings or houses, trees or mountains, a lake or an ocean?

What is near you?

Do you see more trees, bushes, flowers, grass, a light post or building?

What is your perspective?

What direction are you looking? Are you viewing the space around you from above or below?

This project was created by the Neuberger Museum of Art Education team.

nma.education@purchase.edu

Next, create the space.

The idea is to recreate in your artwork the environment (nature, spaces and things) you are viewing, including what you see close up and far away.

Choose your palette.

The colors you choose to use will help to express how you feel in your environment. For example, bright yellows are often used to convey excitement while cool blues show you are calm and relaxed.

Will your palette be warm (with lots of reds, yellows, and oranges) or cool (with lots of blues, greens, and purples)? Will it be monochromatic (using all the same family of colors but varying by vibrancy) or more colorful? You get to decide.

NOW IT'S TIME TO START YOUR PLEIN AIR LANDSCAPE

Step 1

Begin with the horizon line. This line will go across your paper or canvas horizontally and will act as your guide. You can place this line centered or off-center depending on your perspective.

Step 2

Next, fill in the sky. Is it mid-day? Is it sunny or cloudy? Fill the top portion with light colors like blues, whites and grays. Perhaps your sky also has tones of pink, yellows, or green? If so, include those colors as well.

TIP: If you are using paint, be sure to allow time to dry before moving to another section.

Step 3

Once ready, begin painting or drawing what is far away in the background. This is what you see that touches the sky: this could be mountains off in the distance, buildings or houses, or maybe an ocean. Paint along the horizon line and use colors that are a little muted in color to help demonstrate distance.



Step 4

Using a darker palette, paint or color the middle ground with the things you would see just below the horizon but are still farther away. Trees are a perfect example. They should appear smaller in scale because of their distance.

Think about how light reflects off those objects. Does reflected light give your trees an amber glow? If so, include those tones, too.

Step 5

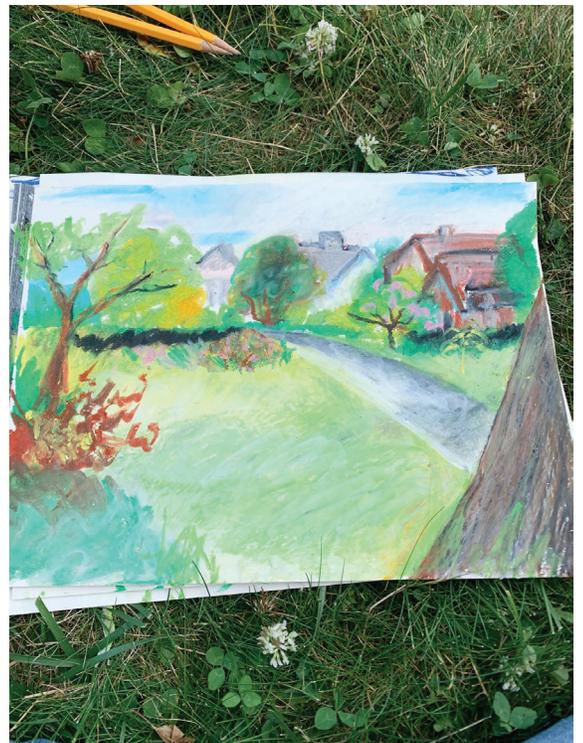
Finally, with more vibrant colors, paint or color the foreground. Include the objects that are nearest to you.

What shapes do you see? Circular and oval bushes? A square house with a pointed roof? The shapes could be irregular or organic, where they slope and curve.

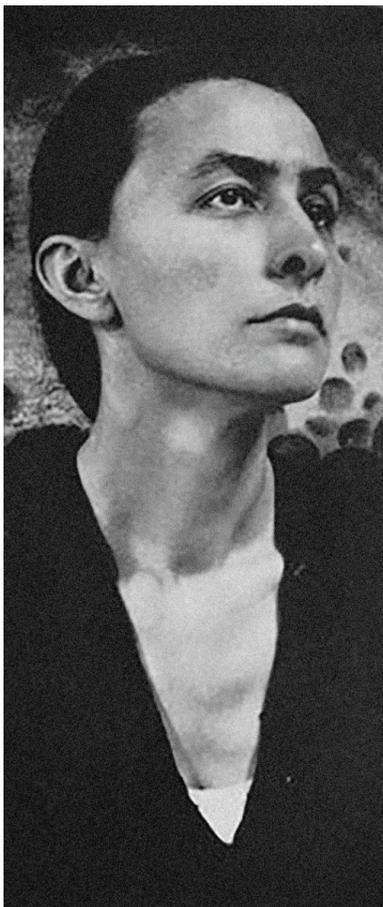
You can be as detailed or as abstract as you want. Use as little or as much color as you feel works best for your creation. There is no right or wrong!

Step 6

When you're done with your artwork, ask an adult to share your creations with us on social media at **#NEUtoDoKids!**



neu About the Artist



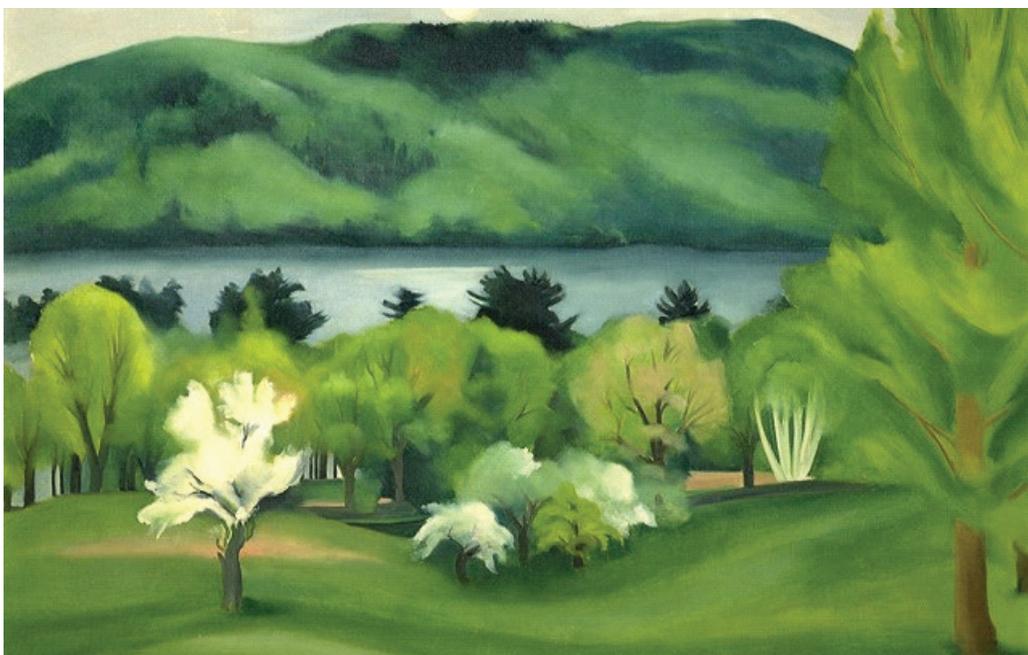
Georgia Totto O’Keeffe (November 15, 1887 – March 6, 1986) was an artist, painter and pioneer best known for her enlarged flowers and botanicals, American landscapes, and cloudscape art. She viewed everyday beauty from a sometimes-different perspective and used strong and soft colors, light, and shadows to tell her visual stories. Her vast portfolio of open sky depictions, sweeping landscapes, floral plumes, and desert sands led her to be recognized as “*the Mother of American Modernism.*”

Georgia was the second oldest of seven children born to dairy farmers Francis and Ida O’Keeffe in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She decided she wanted to become an artist at the age of ten. When she was 18, O’Keeffe began her formal art training in Chicago; she continued her education and training in New York. It was there that she met and married Alfred Stieglitz, a respected art promoter and photographer.

Stieglitz, and his family shared an estate on the shore of Lake George, which is located in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. From 1918 through 1934 she would spend portions of the summer and fall with Alfred and his family at their estate where she painted a number of her now-famous artworks, including this one entitled *Lake George by Early Moonrise*.

I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way—things I had no words for.

—Georgia O’Keeffe



Georgia O’Keeffe, *Lake George by Early Moonrise*, 1930, Oil and gouache on canvas, 24 x 36 inches, Collection Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, SUNY, Gift of Roy R. Neuberger

This project was created by the Neuberger Museum of Art Education team.

nma.education@purchase.edu