



LeConte Stewart: Depression Era Art

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Lesson Plans for Educators • October 12, 2011

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Image List

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Great White Throne, Zion National Park, 1927
Oil
Gift of William N. Hite
1979.036
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Oil on panel
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About the Artist

LeConte Stewart 1891-1990

"Especially in his paintings from the Depression years, Stewart achieved a bleak clarity of vision that has been compared to Hopper's."

~ Wallace Stegner

LeConte Stewart was one of the most accomplished and beloved artists working in Utah during the twentieth century. After studying art at the University of Utah, Stewart traveled east in 1913 to train with a number of important artists. Under the instruction of John Carlson, whose technique and philosophy Stewart incorporated into his own work, he learned not only the mechanics of painting, but also how to convey emotion in paint. Stewart returned to Utah in 1914 to paint the small towns, farms, and deserts that had captured his imagination as a young boy growing up in Glenwood, Utah. He accepted commissions for murals, jobs at commercial lettering companies, and continued painting landscapes through the 1920s.

Confronted in 1929 with the demoralizing effects of the Great Depression and high unemployment in Utah, Stewart left the peace and solitude he found in nature to document the human toll of the crisis. In his depictions of the West's vernacular architecture -storefronts, gas stations, hotels, old homes, and canneries- Stewart used minimal forms and the expressive properties of line, mass, and hue to convey the devastating impact of the Depression. Stripped to the essentials, Stewart's paintings from this period evoke not only his own personal history of loss (five siblings and his mother), but also that of the nation.

During this bleak time, Stewart taught high school and painted billboards to support himself and his family. By the time Stewart joined the faculty of the University of Utah's Art Department, where he served as chair from 1938 to 1956, he had come into his mature style. His paintings, at once sweeping and intimate, reveal his cogent vision and dedication to his craft. In the classroom, Stewart taught composition, the use of hue and value, and the importance of eliminating distracting, extraneous details to convey the mood of a scene.

Preferring the outdoors to the studio, Stewart could often be found painting with his students in nearby fields or on the foothills of the Wasatch. Only outdoors could he teach them to find purple in a shadow, silver in sage, and how to work with the ever-changing light. An important part of his work with students was teaching the process of composing a painting. A composition began with the selection of a scene and sketches in pencil and then oil, which served as the foundation for the final painting in the studio.

Until his death in 1990, Stewart painted or sketched nearly every day. Believing that a landscape artist must paint outdoors, Stewart could be found teaching or often painting alone on the roadsides or fields near his home. He preserved on canvas the rural scenes that he revered for a lifetime.

Great White Throne, Zion National Park



"Painting the Great White Throne is a little bit like painting El Capitan in California, or painting Yellowstone Falls," said Donna Poulton. "It was the one image that everybody was overwhelmed by when they went to Zion. ... Some cliffs are so high and narrow that it's hard to get perspective. I think they were able to stand back from the Great White Throne and take everything in, so every artist that came to Zion did it."¹

Beautiful landscapes and symbolic environments characterize LeConte Stewart's work. His trademark broad expanses of Utah land are varied and unique. One such work takes Stewart's usual settings of Northern Utah, to the South; featuring the massive stone creations in Zion National Park. This work is entitled *Great White Throne, Zion National Park*, which captures the pristine surroundings of Southern Utah's backdrop.

Obvious contrast of white stone against the distinctive red rock illustrates nature in grand form. Why does such a place draw wonder and the artist's need to portray such potential? While some of Stewart's landscapes show signs of human life, such as homes, railroads, or people, *Great*

White Throne contains no sign of such existence, allowing signs of time to diminish. The endless beauty and layers of time shine in Stewart's work through color, perspective, and scenery.

Stewart's composition was created on the eve of the Great Depression; a time when uncertainty and financial difficulties were beginning. Contrasting this reality against the majesty of Zion National Park allows nature to stand supreme. National parks were only established about ten years prior in 1919; symbolizing the budding potential of America amid a future depression.

LeConte Stewart (1891-1990), American
Great White Throne, Zion National Park, 1927
Oil
Gift of William N. Hite
1979.036

¹(<http://www.standard.net/topics/features/2009/07/10/artistic-visions-utahs-canyons-and-deserts>)

Great White Throne, Zion National Park

City and Nature Themed Collages Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

Objectives:

1. Students will learn to analyze a painting's mood, balance, rhythm, and harmony.
2. Students will identify a medium (music) connecting to the theme of nature.
3. Students will understand how historical background adds depth to a painting.
4. Students will communicate their understanding of concepts and meaning in their own expressive collage.

Duration: approximately 1½ hours or two 45 minute class periods. Lesson may be stretched for greater complexity and depth.

Materials:

Image of *Great White Throne, Zion National Park* 1927 by LeConte Stewart

Magazines (to cut images and pictures)

Cardstock

Glue-stick

Musical selections:

“America the Beautiful” by Katharine Lee Bates (1895)

version found online here: <http://pl.st/s/663351313>

“Rhapsody in Blue” by George Gershwin (1934)

selection found online here: <http://pl.st/s/1422353>

Concepts/Key Terms:

Mood- an overall feeling or emotion, often equated with expression.

Balance- the way the elements of art are arranged to create a feeling of stability; a pleasing or congruent arrangement of parts in a design or composition.

Harmony- a way of combining elements of art to accent their similarities and bind the picture parts into a whole. It is often achieved through the use of repetition and simplicity. In music harmony occurs when sounds complement each other.

Rhythm- a visual tempo or beat; design that refers to a repetition of elements to produce the look and feel of movement.

Collage- a picture or design created by adhering flat elements (newspaper, text, illustrations, photographs, etc.) to a flat surface. Collage was originally a French word from *coller*, meaning “to paste.”

Examples: Francis Picabia (French, 1879-1953), *L'Oeil Cacodylate*, 1921, oil on canvas, with collaged photographs, postcards and other papers, 148.6 x 117.4 cm, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. See Dada and deltiology.

Activity (rhythmic collages):

To introduce the painting, ask students to close their eyes as you describe the rich setting (using imagery and detail) of *Great White Throne, Zion National Park* by LeConte Stewart.

Ask students to open their eyes and show them Stewart's actual piece. Listen to students' remarks as how similar or different their mental picture was from the actual piece. Converse with the class as to possible reasons why this may be. Let this springboard the discussion into how important imagination and individual perception are when looking at a picture, listening to a story, or learning (this idea will be revisited later in the lesson).

As students view Stewart's composition briefly give a background sketch highlighting the artistry as well as the historical background. Define the key words together and ask students what subject some of the words also go with music like rhythm, harmony, or mood. Talk about how the same words can be in different subjects.

Since Stewart's piece was painted a few years after the newly formed Zion National Park, have students listen to "America the Beautiful." After hearing the piece have students move to one new friend and write down three feeling or describing words (abstract nouns for older grades) that the piece reminded them of or how it made them feel (more elaborate option is to play musical chairs and every time the piece stops students write down one of the feelings with the new person next to him/her). Next ask them to write down one reason why this piece is similar to the artwork.

Discuss and have students share together as a class. Engage many students into the discussion as further connections to nature and key terms are made (see background notes). Highlight the beauty of America and all the timeless potential of Zion rock formations etc.

Repeat the process with Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." This time however make sure and draw attention to the unique sounds and jazz rhythms more characteristic of city life (contrast city vs. nature). Now would also be a good time to show contrasting pictures of the city during the 1920's or other pictures of such by Stewart (see packet). Ask what kind of mental pictures their imaginations saw when the piece played as students share the feelings and emotions they wrote down. Have them describe the kind of rhythm, balance and harmony that would be in an artwork of the city or that comes to mind with "Rhapsody in Blue."

Have students choose either "America the Beautiful" or "Rhapsody in Blue" to portray in their own collage. Bring the focus back to the beginning of the lesson and imagination. How are they going to show their feelings, emotions, pictures, rhythms, etc. that they heard and felt in a visual display? Model a few possibilities in some photographs from magazines you have already cut out.

Students will now begin cutting out pictures according to their own vision of their chosen song. The three feelings and pictures they wrote down and shared earlier will be used as their guide and roadmap (make this clear to help them narrow in the assignment).

Play the music a few times as students are cutting and pasting.

When collages are done have the class share their collage, their guiding emotions and feelings, and the corresponding song to their composition.

The Day Before Christmas



"I am amazed how trees lose their leaves every winter and bloom forth every spring. The creative power to do that is marvelous; it is beyond my comprehension.... When I encounter a tree, a personality, a spirit comes forth which is wonderful. To see the growth and structure...causes me to bow down in humility. Many times I have come home bowed down with reverence, thankful that I am an artist."

~ LeConte Stewart

Scenic landscapes and picturesque environments guided Stewart's work. His trademark broad expanses of Utah land were varied and unique. *The Day Before Christmas* highlights a snowy path bordered by trees all leading to a lone

home at the base of a mountain. A sense of loneliness exists but the grandeur of the snow and tracks on the road alludes to more.

The snowy scene allows Stewart to show a different landscape calling on his artistic abilities. While the snow appears a wonderful white, the artist's eye knows many colors went into creating the hue, shine, and tone of the white color.

Stewart painted this composition in 1929, on the eve of the Great Depression. Fittingly, the piece is titled, *The Day Before Christmas*. Unlike the happy anticipation of Christmas, in forthcoming years, viewers may see this piece with historic perspective knowing that it is also on the eve of a remarkable time in Utah history.

The Day Before Christmas

Creating Storyboards with Expressive Color Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze color to understand an artist's perspective and theme.
2. Students will learn and define what theme is and extend a theme into one of their own stories.
3. Students will practice interpreting others' works of art using concepts of color and theme.
4. Students will articulate in writing and or speech what they see and have expressed.

Duration: approximately two days of 1 ½ hours or two 45 minute class periods. Lesson may be stretched for greater complexity and depth of concepts.

Materials:

Image of *The Day Before Christmas*, 1929 by LeConte Stewart

Cardstock or paper

Colored pencils, markers, crayons (a large variety of color choices given the intent and focus of the lesson)

Color wheel examples to supplement discussion (possible website to use:

http://classicshades.com/color_wheel.html

Storyboard examples to reinforce intent of storyboard (explain their storyboard will use mostly colors and not as many images) (possible website to use: <http://www.storyboards-east.com/storybrd.htm>)

Storyboard worksheet (see attached)

Optional children's book supplement "How Artists See the Weather: Sun, Wind, Snow, Rain"

ISBN: 10: 0789204789

Concepts/Key Terms:

Color- when light is reflected off an object, color is what the eye sees. The primary colors are red, yellow and blue. The secondary colors are orange, purple and green. Complimentary colors are those opposite to one another on a color wheel.

Perspective- creates the feeling of depth through the use of lines that make your image appear to be three-dimensional. The closer the image is, the more detailed it will appear, and the larger it will be.

Theme- the subject or main idea of a talk, a piece of writing, a person's thoughts, or a work of art (e.g. "the theme of the sermon was reverence.")

Activity:

Day 1: While students are viewing the painting, begin by telling them the background (see information on *The Day Before Christmas*). Once students know a little bit about the setting, location, time period, Stewart's technique etc., have students participate in a class discussion and introduction to key terms to get a larger grasp and make connections with the painting. See essential questions throughout the instructions below.

Ask students to list feelings they feel as they look at this painting. Write them on the board to be used later. As they are contributing words, dig a bit deeper with them and ask why they think they feel that way. Model a feeling of your own to illustrate thought process and relationship (e.g. "I feel cold because the bright light of the snow LeConte painted is so real").

After a few feelings have been explored, link the discussion to his use of color using application to their own lives. Name an emotion or thing (i.e. anger, happy, sad, summer, baby, grass) and ask students to shout out the first color that comes to mind.

Show visual examples of color wheels and have a little fun with the student's use and ideas of color (favorite colors, least favorite colors, memories with color, etc.)

Go back to Stewart's painting and ask students what color he painted the snow. Explain that it is actually many colors (especially blues). Connect the ideas of how artists see things differently sometimes and that we are artists as well; that we must see the world around us with fresh eyes. Ask them to explain what this means.

Explain how our emotions and memories are tied to colors and can express feelings and stories. Go back to the board and use the students' feelings about the painting to further make the connection (e.g. "When I said I felt cold, I saw white and blue snow which made me shiver. The cold feeling also makes me think of being alone."). Explain how loneliness, or being alone can be a theme (see key terms and concepts) because it is a main idea. As a class, try to point out other possible themes for the painting using the original brainstorm of feelings on the board.

Ask students to create a story around Stewart's picture using the theme of "cold" or "loneliness" (list other themes you discussed as a class). Listen to some possible scenarios or beginnings of stories. Have students quickly turn to a neighbor and discuss possible plots.

Ask the class if they could see a story in the picture. Ask them, "but what if some of you have different stories than the others even if you have the same theme?" They will discover and explain there can be different kinds of stories.

Here the discussion leads into the storyboard activity. Explain what a storyboard is (use the website above to show examples) and why they are useful.

After students have the worksheet make sure they have a theme of their own chosen. Their mission is to tell a story (using the theme as a guide) using mostly colors to illustrate the story. They may finish at home as we will be doing the second step the following day or period.

Day 2: Students will trade their storyboard with a peer. The peer will write down how he/she interprets the picture in the form of a feeling, theme, and event. Once every student has interpreted for someone they will have some time to share what the author saw and intended.

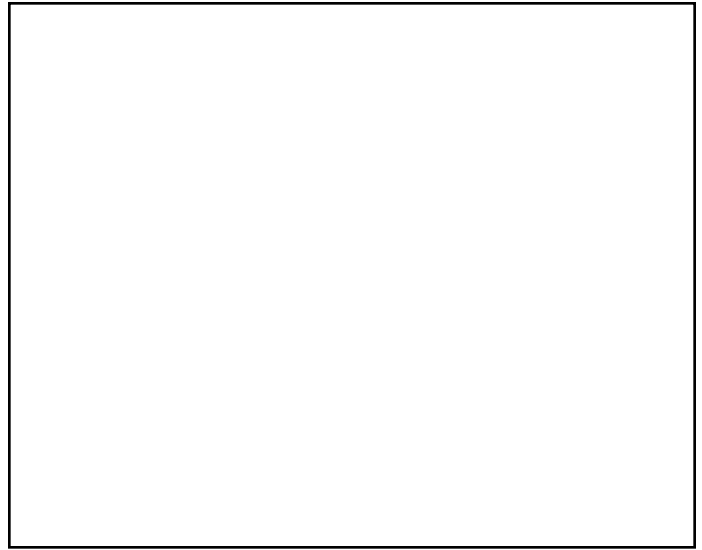
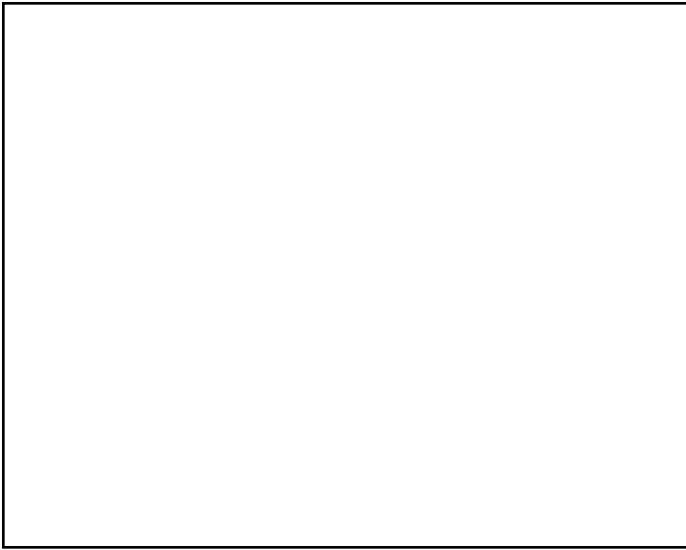
Come together as a class and share some examples of interpretations (the peer will explain). Then have the artist say what he/she actually was thinking and trying to express.

Look at Stewart's painting as a class again and talk about how the artist sees things in a different way. By using color and perspective, a theme and idea of a painting can have many ideas and interpretations. Remind students of the actual use of color to create white bright snow. That is, we as the audience see white, but the artist's eyes had to see many colors to create a mood and emotion. Extend this discussion of perspective, color, and theme, into the Great Depression and how many people had unique experiences as well.

Hang storyboards up to keep the discussion and experience fresh in their minds for while or to connect to other lesson.

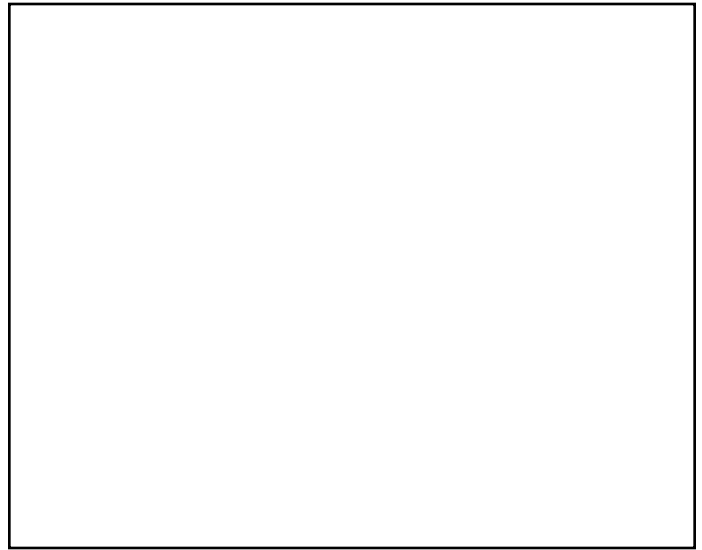
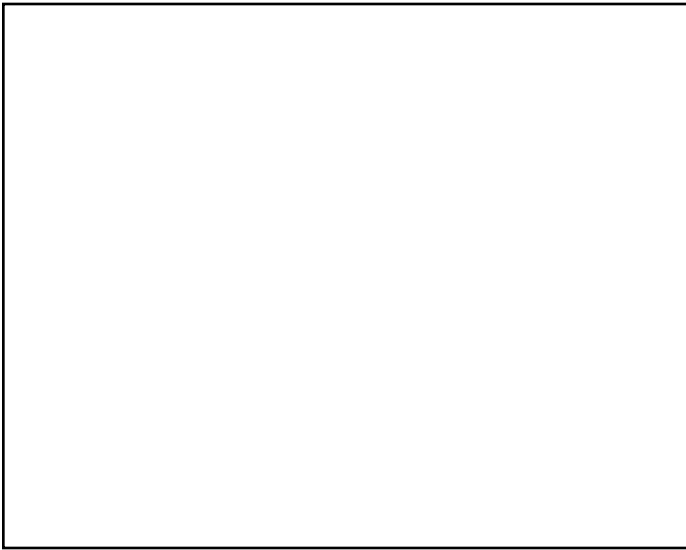
Name _____

Storyboard



Theme: _____
Feeling: _____
Event: _____

Theme: _____
Feeling: _____
Event: _____



Theme: _____
Feeling: _____
Event: _____

Theme: _____
Feeling: _____
Event: _____

The Victorian



“I believe that an expression of a subject is vital; to try to see in the thing itself the mood and the impression it gives. To me art is an expression of the sense of a thing rather than a reproduction of it.”

~ LeConte Stewart

The Victorian illustrates a beautifully melancholy home on a hill. The pencil on paper rendering allows the detail and subject of the work to shine in a different light. Stewart’s composition is a sketch of an earlier oil painting of the same scene. The sketch illustrates a blueprint of lines, angles, perspectives and form.

Seeing both the pencil on paper work as well as the oil composition of *The Victorian* illustrates the artist’s journey by observing the transformation and process of duplicate scenes. The pencil rendering is 11 x 17 in.

Standing homes is a repeating motif in Stewart’s work. During the Depression many homes were foreclosed and abandoned. The beautiful Victorian house on the hill elicits many feelings Stewart himself experienced.

Such themes, moods, and point of view are displayed in *The Victorian*. As an adolescent Stewart was isolated and alone given that many of his family members had died. He stayed in his childhood home when his father remarried, but reported feeling left out and isolated. Feeling alone is something Stewart was familiar with, just as the lone house on the hill. The tones of pencil are grey and forlorn, creating a tone of wonder and seclusion.

LeConte Stewart (1891-1990), American
The Victorian, 1934
Pencil on Paper
Purchased with funds from the Friends of the Art Museum
1976.062

The Victorian

Treasured Places Drawings Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze a painting's mood, tone, traits, and characteristics.
2. Students will communicate their feelings about a work of art.
3. Students will connect to and identify a place of meaning in their world with a work of art.
4. Students will practice expressing their chosen place using the technique explored in the painting and class discussion.

Materials:

Image of *The Victorian*, 1934 (pencil on paper) by LeConte Stewart

Image of a personal place of meaning (instructor's example) to model conversation

Legal size drawing paper and pencils

Other image options by Stewart to incorporate in discussion include: *Red Fire Plug*, *Rooftops and Ruts*, *Ogden Shops*, *Double Gabled*, *Eyes Wide Open*, *Deserted Home*, and *The White House* (found online through Utah Museum of Fine Arts: <http://umfa.utah.edu/LeConteVirtual> , <http://umfa.utah.edu/stewart>, as well as Springville's Museum of Art site: <http://sma.nebo.edu/collections/index.html>)

Supplemental option: Children's books focusing on the story of a home, personification of a place or house, The Great Depression, or favorite places, etc. (e.g. *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, *The Hidden House* by Martin Waddell, *Dust for Dinner* by Ann Turner, *The Dust Bowl* by David Booth, *When I was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant)

Concepts/Key Terms:

Motif- a recurring element or concept, usually in a figure or design.

Mood- an overall feeling or emotion, often equated with expression.

Tone- a quality of color; the general effect in painting of light, color, and shade.

Characteristics- a feature of quality belonging typically to a person, place, or thing.

Structure- any means of arranging or putting together a work to form a cohesive and meaningful whole.

Process- to perform a series of actions or steps taken to achieve an end.

Essential Questions for Discussion:

Look at the image of *The Victorian* by LeConte Stewart. How does the drawing make you feel? What kind of emotions would you list if you were to describe how this house might feel right now (personification-list characteristics)? What kind of mood and tone (discuss terms) does this piece have? How would this picture change if it were a happy house? What about an excited house (continue listing varied emotions/feelings). What colors do you see in this image (only pencil)? Why might the artist choose to do a picture like this (structure)? The artist drew this picture after he painted the same house in oil paint? Why would he choose to depict the same house in a different way (process)? Let the discussion flow according to student answers and inquiries. Frame the discussion to the painting while incorporating the background and history of Stewart and the Great Depression.

Show other works by Stewart (listed above). Carry on with the discussion about the similarities and differences (traits and characteristics) in his portrayal of his houses (discuss motif). Incorporate questions from above as well to connect ideas. In art it is common to have a focus in the picture. How does Stewart send a message about his chosen object through his lines (structure) and colors (tone)? Look and compare the multiple pictures.

Discuss a place with meaning and memory. Show a picture (if available). In your own background story, mindfully tie in characteristics, mood, tone, feelings, as you analyze and discuss your picture. What could a possible motif be for you? Have students quietly think (or write) about list of places they think have strong memories in one column. In another column have them list characteristics, traits, mood, tone, etc.) Have a few volunteers share their lists. Be sure to connect Stewart's experiences and works to their own stories and chosen places.

Extension: Share some picture books before, during, or after the class discussion to enrich meaning and correlation (see suggestions above).

Activity:

Start the class by discussing and analyzing the works by Stewart (see "essential questions"). Make sure to explain and model the key concepts and terms.

Segue the discussion to their own treasured places that have meaning.

After the discussion of the students' favorite places have them decide on one that they are going to portray.

Pass out paper (legal size option is closer to actual dimension of Stewart's work) and pencils. Discuss framing of the picture and general ways to get started. Given that the work is done in pencil they may feel safer to explore because they can erase. Remind students however that this is still their piece of art and not a "sloppy copy." Students should look at their list of expressions, characteristics, traits, etc. of their place as they draw their picture.

An informal artists round-table will be the culmination. Students will show their chosen place and briefly share and describe a little bit about why they chose it. Prompt students to incorporate the characteristics, tone, mood, etc., while explaining and sharing their work. If students are uncomfortable, a friend or peer may share for the student as long as the peer understands and has discussed the work with the creator.

Display pictures around the room (with artist's permission) for further discussion and connection to future lessons and activities.

*This lesson will work well with the next one on *The Victorian*, 1927 (oil).

The Victorian, North Salt Lake City



A repeating motif in Stewart's work is images of homes. Many stand alone, isolated; yet stunning. Stewart explained feeling as an "outsider," and felt an "indescribable loneliness" after his mother and siblings passed away. A home should be a refuge and a comfort, but Stewart's experience with a new home after such tragedy did not match such expectations.

The Victorian, North Salt Lake, is painted with muted colors of brown, gray, and black. During the Great Depression artists also struggled. To make the paints last longer, artists during the Great Depression used turpentine to thin out

the oil paints. This created the washed out tones. The color pallet evokes a remoteness and solitude. A certain mysterious beauty looms in the reflection of the windows and soft drab colors in the exterior of the house, causing questions of ownership and life inside the home. There are telephone poles and wires suggesting a landscape of potential communication, yet no people are shown in the painting.

Stewart allows the viewer to think about the changing nature of communities and landscapes during the Great Depression through the lonely house, while suggesting the people in general were going through great changes and sacrifices as well. The Victorian house is large and beautiful, but a certain sadness on the hill cannot be ignored.

*see background for *The Victorian*, 1934, pencil, for additional reflection and information on these pieces.

LeConte Stewart (1891-1990), American
The Victorian, North Salt Lake City, 1927
Oil on board
Gift of Marilyn H. Hite in memory of Mattie Wattis and William H. Harris
1979.035

The Victorian, North Salt Lake City

Creating Mood in Painting Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

*This lesson can be used in conjunction with previous plan, *The Victorian, 1934*, pencil. Both are functional on their own, but connections and layers may enrich each other. Some of the materials and objectives are applicable to both.

Objectives:

1. Students will analyze a painting's perspective, tone, and meaning.
2. Students will communicate their feelings about a work of art.
3. Students will connect and identify a place of meaning in their world to a work of art (if doing both lessons on *The Victorian*, extend this idea into more layered ideas of belonging).
4. Students will practice expressing their chosen place using the technique explored in the painting and class discussion.

Materials:

Image of *The Victorian, North Salt Lake, 1927* (oil on board) by LeConte Stewart

Image of a personal place of meaning (instructor's example) to model conversation

Student's image (pencil) from previous lesson (if applicable)

Watercolors, paintbrushes, paper

Other image options by Stewart to incorporate in discussion include: *Red Fire Plug, Rooftops and Ruts, Ogden Shops, Double Gabled, Eyes Wide Open, Deserted Home*, and *The White House* (found online through Utah Museum of Fine Arts: <http://umfa.utah.edu/LeConteVirtual> , <http://umfa.utah.edu/stewart>, as well as Springville's Museum of Art site: <http://sma.nebo.edu/collections/index.html>)

Supplemental option: Children's books focusing on the story of a home, personification of a place or house, The Great Depression, or favorite places, etc. (e.g. *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, *The Hidden House* by Martin Waddell, *Dust for Dinner* by Ann Turner, *The Dust Bowl* by David Booth, *When I was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant)

Concepts/Key Terms:

Perspective- the technique artists use to project an illusion of the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional surface. Perspective helps to create a sense of depth.

Tone- a quality of color; the general effect in painting of light, color, and shade.

Meaning- intended to communicate something that is not directly expressed.

*to review: **Motif**- a recurring element or concept, usually in a figure or design.

*to review: **Mood**- an overall feeling or emotion, often equated with expression.

Essential Questions for Discussion:

When you see a work of art, what determines your perspective? Why do you see what you see? Why does one generally create a story around a painting (discuss meaning and background experiences)? Think about this painting from the perspective of the artist. Why would he paint such a piece in your opinion (meaning

and connection to the role of the artist)? What was he trying to say? Was he trying to say anything or just create something interesting to look at? How do the colors (tone) make a difference in this painting? Why? (if the students have discussed the sketch of *The Victorian*, compare and contrast the two). For older grades talk about the juxtaposition of the ideas of loneliness and a home. How does this contrast further deepen the meaning of this painting? Why? What do the telephone poles add or take away in terms of the artwork itself? What do the telephone poles add or take away in terms of the meaning and perspective of the artwork?

* If you have already completed the sketch from the previous lesson, start asking questions of how they differ and why Stewart would create two different pieces of the same house.

Extension: Share some picture books before, during, or after the class discussion to enrich meaning and correlation (see suggestions above).

Activity:

Start the class by discussing and analyzing the works by Stewart (see “essential questions”). Make sure to explain and model the key concepts and terms.

Segue the discussion and have students brainstorm a place in their life that has a unique perspective (whether to them or unique in and of itself).

After the discussion of the students’ places have them decide on one they are going to portray. *note- if you completed the previous lesson, students have completed this step.

Pass out paper and watered down paints (remind them of how artists would water down their paints during this time period). Discuss framing of the picture and general ways to get started (e.g. sketching first etc.). If students have a sketch from the previous lesson, have students refer to their work. Consider asking students how the watered down paints affected the mood and subject of their work. How would their work be different with fully saturated paints?

Students will show final product and write an artists statement to go along with the painting. Be sure the statement includes the words explained in the discussion and illustrates perspective.

Display pictures around the room (with artist’s permission) for further discussion and connection to future lessons and activities.

The Green Front



Though many businesses in Utah did not survive the Great Depression, W.D. Adams & Sons General Merchandise Store in downtown Kaysville, Utah was an exception. The general store sold anything from fruits and vegetables to horse feed and was a hub of activity. It managed to survive the foreclosures that affected nearly 35% of business and agriculture in Utah during the Great Depression.

The Green Front was probably composed on a Sunday when the store was closed, given Stewart's appreciation for solitude and focus while painting. After painting the study on location, he would most likely move to his studio to finish the piece where he would have more control over his composition.

Stewart typically composed his images from a distance and represented large landscapes and broad perspectives, but here he used the entire canvas to depict only part of one store. Why would he choose such an intimate view? This unusual composition illustrates only part of the store. Such perspective and use of space create meaningful symbols of businesses and ideas of the Great Depression.

The Green Front

Synecdoche Collages Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

Objectives:

1. Students will connect ideas of space, proportion, and background to a central theme and message.
2. Students will learn synecdoche (older grades) in poetry and transfer the definition to the work of art.
3. Students will use their judgment to choose a portion of their own picture to recreate.
4. Students will be able to articulate their rationale for their chosen recreation.

Duration: approximately 1 ½ hours or two 45 minute class periods. Lesson may be stretched for greater complexity and depth.

Materials:

Image of *The Green Front*, 1935 by LeConte Stewart

Student's copies (have students bring at least two copies in order to cut and experiment) of a favorite picture (i.e. from a magazine, personal photograph, newspaper clipping, school picture, etc.)

Scissors, tape, cardstock, coloring materials of choice (for image recreation)

Mark-making supplies (particular materials such as colored pencils, charcoal, etc. left up to the teacher)

Poems with examples of synecdoche include:

T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (<http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html>) one specific example to highlight may be:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of ragged seas

Robert Frost, "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening"

(<http://www.ketzle.com/frost/snowyeve.htm>) this entire poem can be a larger synecdoche where the journey through the woods and forests represent life's journey as a whole.

William Shakespeare's, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen: lend me your ears" speech from *Julius Caesar*, Act III scene ii (<http://www.william-shakespeare.info/act3-script-text-julius-caesar.htm>)

Concepts/Key Terms:

Space- an element of art that refers to the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within things. It can be described as two-dimensional or three-dimensional; as flat, shallow, or deep; as open or closed; as positive or negative.

Background- the area of scenery behind the main object, especially when perceived as a framework.

Foreground- the area of a picture of field of vision, often at the bottom, that appears to be closest to the viewer. Also, to give priority to one aspect of a thing over another.

Synecdoche- a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole (as hand for sailor, the crown for the queen).

Proportion- a principle of design referring to comparison; the relationship of one part to another or to the whole with respect to size, quantity, or degree; a ratio.

Activity:

While students are viewing the painting, begin by telling them about *The Green Front*. Once students know a little bit about the store, location, time period, Stewart's technique etc., have students participate in a class discussion and introduce key terms to get a larger grasp and make connections with the painting. See essential questions.

Essential Questions for Discussion:

What are three observations you instantly thought of while viewing this painting (have students jot them down to promote participation and thought time)? Knowing that Stewart usually did broad landscapes, do you have ideas why the artist would zoom into this particular store (define and explain proportion, space, background, and foreground)? When you are taking pictures of interesting objects or places do you ever zoom in on your camera? Why do you do this? Does it make a difference? Does it tell a different story? Why or why not? Aren't you afraid of missing the other scenery or objects around the object you are zooming in on? Explain. Why would Stewart choose such an intimate (close) view?

Let the answers and thoughts to the last question lead into a definition and discussion of synecdoche (see definition and materials above). After explaining and giving examples of synecdoche have students come up with examples (in pairs or groups no larger than four) of their own. Even if examples are not exactly perfect, if they are getting the general intent of the definition that is important. Explain to the students that it is most often found in poems, but can be used to enlighten many things in the world (like a painting).

Show two to three poems containing synecdoche (on overhead or on LCD screen). To avoid overwhelming the students try pointing out the particular lines that contain synecdoche to begin with, and have them explain to you and the class possible reasons why the lines are synecdoche.

Next hold up *The Green Front* again and merge the concept together. Ask for reasons why or how this composition is also synecdoche like the poems. After listening and encouraging discussion, tie in any loose ends needed to have student's thinking come full circle with this concept (remember to continually reiterate the definition of synecdoche in explanations). Come back to the question of why Stewart could have used a part to represent the whole one more time since students now have a more complete picture of this concept (e.g. this one store can tell a story of other stores during the Great Depression, or how this store is unique because it stayed in business etc.).

At this time decide whether to move into the art project (students will have needed to bring their own pictures) or to wait until the next day.

Students will take out their copies of their pictures and discuss what part of their picture to zoom in and focus on. Model the thought process with one of your own pictures. Talk about proportion, and detail, and how you decided what part of the picture to focus on. Give students time to do the same.

Once a decision is made, students will cut that portion out (this is why multiple copies are needed so different angles and choices can be experimented). The student can tape the portion down on his/her desk and begin replicating that portion on a larger piece of cardstock (the particular materials such as colored pencil, charcoal, etc., are up to teacher discretion and availability).

The next day students will write and then share why they chose the particular portion of their picture. Hearing multiple accounts and stories will broaden student perspective and awareness of choice in painting. As students tell the stories of the process, the teacher will continue to point out synecdoche and space, and how it communicates a story.

Private Car



“I have said my say in paints, what I find difficult to say in words.” ~ LeConte Stewart

LeConte Stewart’s iconic painting, *Private Car*, 1937 illustrates a Depression Era scene and attitude. Utah had been suffering from high unemployment and struggling businesses before the Depression. Stewart portrays the attitude and tone of Utah in the Great Depression through the vastness of abandoned houses, factories, and stores in some of his works.

In *Private Car*, images of progress, such as the railroad tracks, telephone poles, and railroad cars are juxtaposed against a large generic field that could be located anywhere. The faceless men on top and in the boxcars of Union Pacific represent the unknown thousands who migrated to find work in the west. Contrasting the idea and reality of economic ruin and human toil of the time with images of progress is artfully perplexing and thoughtful.

While such a sight could be anywhere, Stewart witnessed a similar scene in Ogden, Utah, where he noted the manager of the depot would arrive to work in a chauffeured limousine. One day a train stopped in Layton, Utah, with a cocky youth standing in the doorway. Stewart was struck by the contrast of the chauffeured manager and the cocky youth owning the boxcar, perhaps inspiring him to paint *Private Car*.

LeConte Stewart (1891-1990), American
Private Car, 1937
Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Church History Museum

Private Car

Realism and Escapism in Depression Era Art Lesson

written by Jennie LaFortune

Objectives:

1. Students will recognize and discuss contrast.
2. Students will understand how to make meaning in context.
3. Students will show knowledge of concepts in an activity.

Materials:

Image of *Private Car*, 1937 by LeConte Stewart

Student backpacks, objects around the room, etc. for mini treasure hunt (lower grade lesson)

Film clips of films made during the Great Depression contrasting film clips representing this time period, but made after the Great Depression (older grade lesson)

Film suggestions made during the Great Depression include: Fred Astaire films (list found here: <http://www.themave.com/Astaire/FredFilms.htm>), Busby Berkeley films, such as *42nd Street*, *Gold Digger*, and *Flying High* (list found here: http://golden_age_films.tripod.com/html/berkeley/buzfilms.htm)

Film suggestions made later representing the Great Depression Era include: *Grapes of Wrath*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Paper Moon*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*, *Charlie Chaplin*, *Bonnie and Clyde*

Concepts/Key Terms:

Contrast – differences in values, colors, textures, shapes

Juxtaposition- an act or instance of placing close together or side by side, especially for comparison or contrast.

Symbolism- the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.

Discussion and Activity (lower grade lesson):

1. Begin discussion by asking students to write down (or draw depending on grade level) three things they notice in Stewart's *Private Car*.
2. After giving students time to observe and think, have them pair-share with a neighbor allowing practice time to articulate thoughts on the painting. Ask for students to share a few of their thoughts and observations with the class.
3. Model some of your thoughts while adding insights to the students' observations. Include an explanation of contrast (use the boxcar vs. the field, difference in colors, values, textures, etc.).
4. Talk a bit about the Great Depression (depth and background depending on level). Use the background provided. Explore the contrast in society as well, connecting the literal contrast discussed to the social and historical background (explain that art can connect the two).
5. Engage the students with the story about when Stewart observed the manager of the depot arriving to

work in a chauffeured limousine (see above) and ask for comments about the contrast of such a scene (use image) during a struggling economic time.

6. Instruct students they need to use their “artist eyes” as they will be going on a treasure hunt. Students will get in groups of two or three and search for unique objects (found around the room, in their desks, backpacks and or outside – see attached checklist to hand out to students).

Consider using paper or play glasses as their “artist eyes.” This is a good way to develop the concept of looking through a new “lens”.

7. Give students time (approx. 15 minutes) to explore with background supervision as they collect their objects to discuss and share with the class.

8. Once students have their objects and have completed their checklist, arrange each group to join one other group (students will then be in groups of 4-6). Have students arrange their objects and observe their collections.

9. Instruct students to put their objects into groups that go together or are “similar.” Depending on the grade level, have students assign a category name to the groupings.

10. The groups will then rotate to another group and write down why that group arranged their objects the way they did. Model a discussion and dialogue before having students do this on their own. Make sure they know that their thoughts and insights are valid and there is not necessarily a set of right or wrong answers.

11. Share as a group and highlight how completely different objects and items can go together to make a story depending on perspective. Discuss contrast in the groupings.

12. Bring the discussion back to Stewart’s *Private Car* and have students find contrasting or different parts of the painting and reinforce (have them discuss aloud) why they go together to make a story.

Discussion and Activity (older grade lesson):

1. Begin by examining and conducting a discussion on Stewart’s *Private Car*. Scaffold the discussion using questions such as: what do you notice about the objects in this painting? How is contrast shown in this work? Be specific. What is unique about the men in this picture? What could this detail symbolize? Is the location of the painting specific and obvious? Was such a choice deliberate? Ask leading questions about the telephone poles and railroad cars (illustrating the contrast of progress against a generic field). Depending on class knowledge, discuss the Great Depression. Use the background provided. Explore the contrast in society as well, connecting the literal contrast discussed to the social and historical background (explain that art can connect the two).

2. Engage the students with the story of Stewart’s possible inspiration for this iconic painting when he observed manager of the depot arriving to work in a chauffeured limousine (see above) and have students make meaning in context.

3. Segue the discussion to portrayals of society during the time of Stewart’s painting using film. Explain that due to the conditions of the Depression (as discussed above) people looked for entertainment and escapism (ask for interpretations and understandings of this concept).

4. Show selected film clips made during the Great Depression (suggestions above). Instruct students to take notes on qualities and insights in one column of their paper as they watch selected clips.

5. Briefly ask for examples of observations
6. Show selected film clips of films made after the Great Depression portraying the time period. Remind students to take notes on qualities and insights in the other column of their paper as they watch selected clips.
7. Students will get into groups of four and discuss their findings. The burning question they will discuss and then share to the class is, why do the two time periods vary greatly in representation and contrast? Why is this so? Connect your group's findings to Stewart's painting, *Private Car*.
8. Have groups present their thoughts.
9. Wrap up loose ends and make sure students understand the contrast of film periods and why this is unique to the society. Further enforce that Stewart's pieces were painted during the Depression and also very realistic and authentic of the time period.



Treasure Hunt Checklist (lower grade lesson)

Directions: As you wander around our classroom and school, collect objects that fit the description below. Be quiet as you are on a secret mission to use your artistic eyes to find your objects. Only take objects that do not belong to someone else (unless they are in our classroom or your backpack).

- Look for something that contains the color red and yellow
- Look for an object that is at least 6 inches long
- Look for an object that has something to do with numbers or math
- Look for an object that makes you think of your favorite season
- Look for an object that is musical
- Look for an object that you need every day at school