Geography of the Plains
Artworks from the Mulvane Art Museum’s Collection

Financial assistance for this original project was provided by the Topeka Community Foundation (2001).

Mulvane Art Museum
Barbara Yoder and Kandis Barker (2001)
Revised for web edition by Kandis Barker and Jill Zinn (2011)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Objectives and Overview of Materials.................................................................Page 3

II. List of Images......................................................................................................Page 4

III. Looking at Art: An Introduction.................................................................Page 5

IV. Unit: Geography of the Plains.................................................................Page 6

V. Glossary of Terms........................................................................................Page 22

VI. Resources........................................................................................................Page 27

VII. Teacher Questionnaire................................................................................Page 33
OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEW OF MATERIALS

Objectives:

- To provide students with a general appreciation of art.
- To provide students with a basic understanding of art concepts.
- To provide students with knowledge of the Mulvane Art Museum’s collection.
- To provide students with knowledge of techniques used by artists.
- To provide students with the basis from which to analyze works of art.

Content:

- Images of works from the Mulvane’s permanent collection.
- Text to accompany each image.
- Glossary of art terms.
- Resources.

This unit meets the following Kansas Curricular Standards for Visual Arts:

*Standard #2:* Using knowledge of the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design.

*Standard #4:* Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

*Standard #5:* Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of art.

*Standard #6:* Making connections between the visual arts and other disciplines.
Geography of the Plains

Works of art from the Mulvane Art Museum Permanent Collection

Images

1. Robert Sudlow
   *Scanning from Arthur’s Hill*
   Oil on Canvas
   1994

2. Larry Schwarm
   *Flint Hill Sunset, Chase County, Kansas*
   Photograph
   1990

3. Bea Opelka
   *Approaching Storm*
   Oil on canvas
   n.d.

4. Keith Jacobshagen
   *Black Birds*
   Hand-colored etching (one of four)
   1987

5. Birger Sandzen
   *Dream Lake*
   Lithograph
   1925
Looking at Art: An Introduction

This Curriculum Guide is designed to offer you ways to begin a dialog with your students about art. Using a variety of questioning strategies, we offer you some basic bulleted questions that will help you engage your students in conversation and lead them to further thought and discussion.

There are many good reasons to study art. We can enjoy an aesthetic experience by being aware of art’s various properties. For example, we may notice the sensory properties – color, line, shape, space, value, and texture. Known also as the elements of art, these make up the basic vocabulary of the artist. While looking at art we may also note the formal properties, also called the principles of design. These refer to how the artist has used the elements of art and include the concepts of unity, repetition, contrast, balance, movement (or direction), and emphasis (or center of interest). Technical properties address the artist’s choice of medium and technique. For example, are we looking at a watercolor or a bronze sculpture? Did the artist use chisel or chalk? Lastly, expressive properties attend to the mood or meaning of the art based on the visual elements. What sort of feeling does the artwork create? What might the artist have intended to communicate? Attending to the properties of art - sensory, formal, technical, and expressive – helps viewers to experience works of art more completely.
**Geography of the Plains**

The Mountain-Plains states of North America are the source of much twentieth-century regional American art. The Mulvane Art Museum boasts a rich collection of such works that date from early explorations of the land through Depression-era Regionalism to the arts of the present.

The chief source of inspiration for Mountain-Plains art is the natural world. The theme of these paintings, photographs and prints is most often the land itself, notable for its vastness and grandeur. We refer to such works of art as **landscapes**.

A landscape is, quite simply, a picture of the outdoors. English artists were the first to bring the notion of the landscape to America. They were concerned that people would not remember what the natural world looked like in the face of rapid urbanization. Landscapes often record the special character of a place. Some depict the beauty of nature in a poetic tradition while others seek to capture a particular mood or feeling about a place.
Robert Sudlow
1920 – 2010

- A native of Holton, Kansas, Sudlow taught at the University of Kansas from 1947 to 1987.

- He chose the Kansas prairie in the Flint Hills region as the theme for most of his work. His art reflects the light, color, and weather patterns of the region.

- Sudlow painted from high places, looking down across wide horizontal expanses of land and capturing on canvas the physical reality of his environment.

- Most often, Sudlow painted in the open air, permitting him to experience the landscape and the spiritual relationship he formed with it.

- He spent many summers on the California coast. However, he painted the California landscape rather than the ocean.

- In the spring of 2001, in his eighties, Sudlow exhibited his Kansas landscapes in Eutin, Germany.

- Sudlow continued to live and paint in the hills south of Lawrence, Kansas, until his death in 2010.
Scanning from Arthur’s Hill
1994
Robert Sudlow
Oil on canvas

Cultural and Historical Information

Robert Sudlow, a native Kansan, enjoyed painting out-of-doors. His favorite subject to paint was the ever-changing scenery of the prairie Flint Hills. The Flint Hills are a rocky expanse of grasslands that covers much of central Kansas. Sudlow often took his materials to a high place, and painted quickly, attempting to capture the impression of the view before him. Afterward, he took the painting back to his studio to finish it.

Sensory Properties

• Besides blue, what colors do you see?
• Does this appear to be a spring scene or an autumn scene?
• How does Sudlow’s choice of colors reveal what season it is?

Formal Properties

• Is this composition balanced?
• Describe how the artist achieved balance in the artwork.
• What is the center of interest here?

Technical Properties

• Does it appear that the artist painted broadly or with fine detail?
• Would you say this painting looks real or abstract? Why?

Expressive Properties

• What sort of mood does this scene create?
• What might the absence of people in this work imply?
Larry Schwarm  
b. 1944

- Schwarm was a staff photographer at the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas, from 1978 to 1981.

- He worked as an advertising/commercial photographer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 1982 to 1988.

- Schwarm received his M.F.A. from the University of Kansas.

- He has been a Professor of Art at Emporia State University since 1988.

- Schwarm frequently photographs the changing conditions of the Kansas Prairies.

- He also photographs prairie fires. He captures images of fields on fire as well as scenes showing the landscape before and after the fires.

- His prairie fire photographs are bright with red, yellow, and orange hues contrasted against black, scorched earth.

- Other landscape compositions include serene woodlands, waving fields of wheat, and vibrant sunrises.

- A native of Greensburg, KS., Schwarm took photographs of Greensburg just hours after the tornado destroyed the town in 2007. Schwarm said, “Relationships between man and nature, with its inherent cycles of destruction and renewal, have been an enduring theme in my photographs.” (Center for Great Plains Studies, Larry Schwarm. Emporia State University, Emporia, KS., 2011. [http://www.emporia.edu/cgps/photo-project/larry-schwarm/index.html](http://www.emporia.edu/cgps/photo-project/larry-schwarm/index.html))
Flint Hills Sunset, Chase County, Kansas

Larry Schwarm
Flint Hills Sunset, Chase County, Kansas

1990
Larry Schwarm
Photograph

Cultural and Historical Information

Larry Schwarm, a professor of art at Emporia State University, specializes in photographing the prairie lands of his state. Often, Schwarm features prairies that have been set on fire. At certain times of the year, farmers must burn back the old grasses in order to renew the land for new growth to take place. The artist follows the farmers into the middle of the burning prairies in order to take pictures, at times risking his life.

Sensory Properties

- Where do you find the darkest values in this photograph?
- Where are the lightest?
- Name the types of lines you see.

Formal Properties

- Besides color, what contrasts do you find in the landscape?
- How do your eyes move through the scene?

Technical Properties

- Squint your eyes and look at Schwarm’s picture: Is it still obviously a photograph or could it be mistaken for an abstract painting?
- How does this photograph share some of the qualities of the painted landscape by Robert Sudlow?

Expressive Properties

- The subject of this photograph is a sunset in the Kansas Flint Hills. What words best describe the scene?
Bea Opelka  
b. 1937

- Opelka was raised on her grandparents’ farm in Lithuania.

- Her early experiences on the farm – walking through meadows, picking wild flowers, napping beneath great spruces – instilled in Opelka a love of nature.

- Opelka has experimented with many media and movements, including abstract expressionism.

- The artist now lives and works in Kansas. Among her favorite subjects to paint are the Kansas Flint Hills.

- Bea Opelka’s landscapes are painted in oil on canvases ranging up to several feet in length and width.

- Her landscapes are filled with contrasts – wet and dry, smooth and rough, soft and hard – and soft, subtle colors that re-create believable terrain.

- Opelka’s detailed portrayals of the land are intimate while simultaneously conveying a sense of enormous space.
**Approaching Storm**

No date  
Bea Opelka  
Oil on canvas

**Cultural and Historical Information**

Although she came to the United States as an adult, Bea Opelka has grown to love her adopted home. In an expression of her feelings about the Kansas landscape, Bea Opelka said, “The landscape appears real to me...I am fascinated by its earthiness. Mud, dirt, weeds, and grasses are unpretentious, yet infinitely beautiful...When all else is in turmoil, there is a peacefulness out there that helps put everything into perspective.” (Exhibition Catalog: *75 Years, 75 Treasures.* Mulvane Art Museum, Topeka, KS., 1999.)

**Sensory Properties**

- Name the individual **colors** present in this painting.
- Are the colors mostly bright or mostly dull?

**Formal Properties**

- What is the **center of interest** in this landscape?
- Does the vast sky seem to be in **balance** with the land? Why or why not?

**Technical Properties**

- Did the artist most likely use a big, thick brush to paint the sky or a tiny, fine brush?
- In what ways does the painting resemble a photograph?

**Expressive Properties**

- Are the clouds peaceful or menacing?
- What words would you use to describe the overall **mood** of this painting?
- What time of year might it be? Explain.
• Jacobshagen was born in Wichita, Kansas.

• He studied at Wichita State University, the Art Center College of Design, the Kansas City Art Institute, and the University of Kansas.

• The artist received his M.F.A. at KU, studying under landscape artist, Robert Sudlow.

• Jacobshagen’s paintings show the conditions of weather and light and the effects that they have on the land.

• The painter/printmaker says that landscape painting is history, mythology, personal anecdote, and religious symbolism all rolled into one.

• Text is often a part of Jacobshagen’s works. While in the outdoors, he records his impressions in a journal as well as sketches them.

• Jacobshagen’s landscapes may be recognized by their wide, expansive skies and narrow strips of distant landscape.

• Currently, Jacobshagen teaches at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.
**Black Birds**

1987  
Keith Jacobshagen  
Hand-colored etching (one of four)

**Historical and Cultural Information**

Although born in Kansas, Jacobshagen now lives and paints in Nebraska. The landscape in Nebraska is similar to that of Kansas. The artist begins the process of creating his artwork by sketching scenes in the outdoors. He also takes photographs to serve as reminders. However, Jacobshagen says that he does not intend to create pictures that look like photographs. He is interested in painterly representations of the landscape.

**Sensory Properties**

- Describe the **lines** you see in the sky.  
- What do the lines seem to represent?  
- Besides the rounded appearance of the trees, what **shapes** do you find?

**Formal Properties**

- How does the artist’s placement of the lines in the sky help create a **center of interest**?  
- Besides the lines, what has been **repeated**?  
- When a picture looks nearly identical on both sides, we say it is **symmetrical**. This work is symmetrical, isn’t it?

**Technical Properties**

- The title of this etching is **Black Birds**. How has Jacobshagen suggested birds? What **technique** do you think he used?  
- How is an etching like this different from an oil painting? How are the two **media** similar?

**Expressive Properties**

- What, if anything, do black birds represent?  
- Does the etching suggest an ominous **mood** or an upbeat mood? Why?
Birger Sandzen
1871 – 1954

- Born in Sweden, Sandzen studied art with Anders Zorn, one of his country’s greatest painters and etchers.
- Zorn taught Sandzen to use color and to paint broadly and vigorously without fear.
- Sandzen later studied in Paris where he was influenced by the pointillist painter, Aman-Jean.
- Sandzen learned to paint with pure colors that blend when viewed from a distance.
- The Swedish artist was invited to teach at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas. He came expecting to stay two years but, instead, he stayed sixty.
- Among Sandzen’s favorite subjects to paint and etch were the Kansas prairies and the Colorado Rocky Mountains.
- He founded the Prairie Watercolor Painters in 1933 to enable regional watercolorists’ opportunities to exhibit their work.
- For promoting relations between his homeland and the United States, the Swedish government honored Sandzen by bestowing knighthood upon him.
- Sandzen’s works are found in the Sandzen Museum in Lindsborg as well as in collections the world over.
Dream Lake

1925
Birger Sandzen
Lithograph

Cultural and Historical Information

A painter of long experience, Sandzen made his first print in 1916, at a friend’s request. Soon after, the artist became an avid printmaker. Sandzen, a native Swede, made numerous on-site sketches and paintings of the Kansas Flint Hills and the Colorado Rocky Mountains. This particular print, Dream Lake, earned Birger Sandzen a bronze medal at the Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1926.

Sensory properties

- What kinds of lines do you find in this print?
- What words best describe the lines in the trees?

Formal Properties

- What shapes has Sandzen repeated throughout this print?
- Are they organic shapes or geometric shapes?
- How do your eyes travel around the picture?

Technical Properties

- Sandzen has created a type of print called a lithograph. You may read in the glossary about how this printmaking process differs from etching.

Expressive Properties

- What is the overall mood of the scene?
- What is the weather like?
- How do the bending trees contribute to the overall mood of this work?
abstract – Having little or no reference to the appearance of natural objects, but instead a generalized form based on reality.

aesthetics – Visual properties by which a work is critiqued.

alla prima – Italian term meaning “at first.” A technique of painting directly onto a surface without using under-painting or under-drawing.

aquatint – A form of intaglio printing in which the artist uses resin dust to resist the biting action of the acid. Works well for producing tonal areas.

armature – Framework made of materials such as wood, wire, etc. to support material being modeled.

Art Students League, NYC – Founded in 1875. First independent art school in the U.S. and a major force in 20th century art movements.

assemblage – Technique of creating 3-dimensional works of art by combining a variety of elements, such as found objects, into a compositional whole.

balance – A visual feeling of weight.

B.C.E. – Before the Common Era.

blind contour method – A process for drawing that requires artists to focus solely on the subject rather than the surface on which they work.

C.E. – Common Era.

chiaroscuro – Italian, meaning “light/dark.” Refers to the use of value contrasts to represent light and shadow.
**circa/ca.** – About/around.

**collage** – An artistic composition made up of various materials (e.g., printed matter, photographs, and cloth) attached to a flat surface.

**color** – The character of a surface that is the result of the response of vision to the wavelength of light reflected from that surface. A visual phenomenon that is made of light and depends on light.

**composition** – In an artwork, the arrangement of the elements of art using the principles of design.

**conte** – Crayon-like drawing material; pigment suspended in wax.

**contrast** – An abrupt change such as one sees when placing two dissimilar colors or objects side by side. Contrast creates variety within a work of art. Some examples of contrasts are large/small, rough/smooth, cool/warm, and opaque/transparent.

**cross-hatching** – A system of parallel or perpendicular lines drawn to create tonality.

**elements of art** – Line, shape, color, value, texture, and space. Also called “sensory properties.”

**emphasis** – That which directs attention to a particular part of a work. This may be the **focal point, or center of interest.** There may be several areas of emphasis in one artwork.

**etching** – A printmaking process in which a metal plate is covered with an acid-resistant substance called “ground.” The surface of the ground is removed where the point of the scribe makes contact with the plate. The image is drawn into the ground. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath and the acid cuts, or “bites” the image onto the plate. Because the acid etch creates a clear and precise cut in the plate, the image that results after the plate is inked and run through the press is a sharply defined line.

**expressive properties** – The mood or meaning of a work of art.

**focal point** – (See “emphasis.”)
**formal properties** – Principles or properties by which artists use the elements of art. These include balance repetition/rhythm, movement, contrast, emphasis, unity. Also called “principles of design.”

**gouache** – An opaque water-soluble medium.

**Harlem Renaissance** – A significant 20th century African American cultural movement in Harlem, New York City.

**icon** – An image or symbolic representation that frequently has sacred significance.

**impasto** – An Italian word meaning “in paste.” In impasto, oil paint is applied thickly to a surface to create texture.

**intaglio** – Any printmaking technique in which lines and areas to be inked and transferred to paper are recessed below the surface of the printing plate. For example, etching, engraving, drypoint and aquatint are intaglio processes.

**landscape** – The depiction of an outdoor scene.

**line** – A mark created by a pointed tool such as a pencil, pen, or brush moving across a surface.

**lithography** – A printing process that does not involve engraving. Instead, a crayon or other greasy medium is used to draw on a smooth surface such as a stone or plate. Lithography is based on the fact that grease and water repel one another.

**medium/media** (singular/plural) – The material with which an artist works such as ink, bronze, oil paint, or watercolor.

**montage** – A composition made up of pictures or parts of pictures previously drawn, painted, or photographed.

**movement** – The direction the viewer’s eyes take when looking at a work of art. Sometimes it refers to the depiction of actual movement or action within the work.

**organic shape** – An organic shape is one that is natural or derived from nature (in contrast to a geometric shape).
patron – A supporter of an artist. Patrons might commission an artist to create a work especially for them.

perspective – The illusion of depth in a two-dimensional work.

polychromatic – Having many colors; random or intuitive use of color combinations.

portrait – A work of art showing a likeness of an individual.

pre-Columbian – Latin American art created before the 1492 arrival of Christopher Columbus in the western hemisphere.

principles of design – Principles by which artists use the elements of art. These include balance, repetition/rhythm, movement, contrast, emphasis, and unity. Also called “formal properties.”

realism – In art, the depiction of something as it appears in true life. In contrast to abstraction, realism closely resembles actual reality.

repetition/rhythm – A regular flow created by actual or implied connections between various parts of an artwork. Uniform rhythm results in a pattern while alternating patterns provide interest and help to move the viewer’s eye through the work.

sensory properties – Line, shape, color, value, texture, and space. Also called “elements of art.”

serigraph (also called “screen printing”) – A printmaking technique in which stencils are applied to a screen (fabric stretched across a frame). Paint or ink is forced with a squeegee through the unblocked portions of the screen onto paper or another surface beneath.

shape/form – Area contained between implied lines. (Shape refers to height and width. Form refers to height, width and depth.)

space – The interval between pre-established points.

symbol – An object or sign that stands for something else.

technical properties – The medium and technique used to create a work of art.
**terra cotta** – Italian for “baked earth.” A porous, reddish ceramic-ware fired at low temperatures; also called earthenware.

**texture** – The tactile or surface quality of an object or material.

**three-dimensional** – In art, this refers to a work in the round. For example, a sculpture is three-dimensional. It may be measured up and down (height), across (width), and front to back (depth). In some cases, viewers may walk all the way around a three-dimensional object.

**Tokaido** – A highway that runs along the Pacific coast of Japan. An especially significant transportation artery during the 19th century.


**unity** – That which makes all parts of an artwork work together to create a unified, harmonious composition.

**value** – The relative lightness or darkness of a surface created by the amount of light reflected from it.

**wash** – A highly diluted color used over a broad area.

**woodcut** – Oldest method of printmaking. Involves artists cutting away the surface of the block upon which they do not want the ink to adhere. The desired image remains as the printing surface.
RESOURCES

Some Resources for Art Materials:

United Art & Education
P.O. Box 9219
Ft. Wayne, IN  46899-9219
1-800-322-3247

Sax Art Education/School Specialty
P.O. Box 1579
Appleton, WI  54912-1579
1-888-388-3224

Triarco Arts & Crafts
2600 Fernbrook Lane, Suite 100
Plymouth, MN  55447
1-800-328-3360

Dick Blick Art Materials
P.O. Box 1267
Galesburg, IL  61402-1267
1-800-828-4548

Nasco Arts & Crafts
901 Janesville Ave.
Ft. Atkinson, WI  53538-0901
1-800-558-9595

Discount School Supply
P.O. Box 6013
Carol Stream, IL  60197-6013
1-800-627-2829
Some Resources for Posters and Reproductions:

Crystal Productions  
P.O. Box 2159  
Glenview, IL 60025  
1-200-255-8629  

Davis Publications  
50 Portland St.  
Worcester, MA 01608  
1-800-533-2847  

Shorewood Fine Arts Reproductions  
129 Glover Ave.  
Norwalk, CT 06850  
1-800-677-6947  

Some Resources for Periodicals:

Arts and Activity Magazine. (Series). Publishers Development Corp.  

Scholastic Art Magazine. (Series.) Scholastic Publishing.  

SchoolArts Magazine. (Series). Davis Publishing.  

Some Web Resources:


ARTS EDGE


Education Place – Activity Search.


J. Paul Getty Museum/Resources for the Classroom.


The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
<http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/classroom.asp>.
Some Books:


Teacher Questionnaire and Evaluation

1. Did you present all of the 5 works to your students or did you select from among them?

2. How would you evaluate your students’ interest in the presentation?

3. Which particular works of art most appealed to your students?

4. Which particular works of art least appealed to your students?

5. Did you find the glossary of terms helpful for your presentation of the materials?

6. What suggestions for change or modification do you have? (You may write on the back of this page.)

Please send completed questionnaire to:

Mulvane Art Museum, Education
1700 SW College
Topeka, KS  66621.