



1st Grade: MARCH

The Large Turf

Albrecht Dürer

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About the Artist

The following information is provided to give classroom teachers a comprehensive understanding of the artist and artwork. Use your judgment on what to share with your students based on their level of curiosity, observation/inquiry skills, comprehension and age-appropriateness.

Albrecht Durer

The third of eighteen children, Albrecht Dürer was born in Nuremberg, Germany, on May 21, 1471, to Albrecht (senior) and Barbara Holfer. Dürer's father, a prosperous goldsmith, permitted all his sons to apprentice in his shop with the hopes they would become goldsmiths and make jewelry. It wasn't long before young Dürer's extraordinary talent for drawing became apparent and his father reluctantly agreed to let him pursue his passion in art.

At age fifteen, Dürer shifted his apprenticeship from his father's shop to the workshop of painter, stained glass designer and engraver, Michael Wolgemut who was well-known throughout Nuremberg for producing a variety of work including woodcuts for books. At this time Nuremberg was considered the center for publishing in Europe and the market for books was rapidly increasing. Dürer developed his skills in printmaking during this apprenticeship and gained a respected reputation for the high quality of his engravings.

When the second apprenticeship concluded, Dürer left Nuremberg and traveled throughout Germany, the Netherlands, and Venice to study and practice his art. Studying the work of Giovanni Bellini, founder of the Venetian School of Painting, was the highlight of this trip. The travels broadened Dürer's understanding of art and advanced his skills of painting and drawing.

While away from Nuremberg, Dürer's parents made arrangements for their son to marry Agnes Frey, daughter of a wealthy brass worker who specialized in jewelry and musical instruments. Upon his return, Dürer complied with his family's wishes and married Agnes on July 7, 1494, although he did not have feelings for her. While his marriage to Agnes lasted the remainder of his life, it yielded no children. It was a marriage that raised Dürer's status in the community and provided funds for a studio. Interestingly enough, three months after his marriage, Dürer traveled alone to Italy.

Traveling in the 15th century, usually done on foot, horseback, or boat, was rather treacherous. However, Dürer seemed to enjoy these long journeys. He loved to observe and paint different landscapes along the way. Months spent in Italy exposed Dürer to various artistic styles including the Greek classics. While in Italy,

Dürer became very interested in the use of mathematics in art, in particular that of proportion and perspective and soon became known as Leonardo (da Vinci) of the North. This interest in math and art prompted him to write several books on this subject, many of which were published after his death.

Dürer returned to Nuremberg in 1495 to set up his studio. He faced a bit of a problem as he had become more famous abroad than at home in Nuremberg, so he set about building his reputation in Nuremberg, selling his engravings and etchings as well as painting. It wasn't long before Dürer's reputation spread and he soon became a portrait artist for the most prominent individuals in the area. He also received many commissions for altarpieces—another one of his specialties. Dürer took great interest in creating both prints and paintings of a religious theme. All in all, this was the most productive period of Dürer's career.

As an etcher and engraver, Dürer produced multiple prints of his work. The greater number of prints available and the lower cost to produce them meant more people were exposed to his work and could afford to buy them. This self-promoting process also meant Dürer was able to share his work with individuals across the economical spectrum, somewhat a novel thought for that time period. To make sure his name "got out there," Dürer included his initials on his prints to distinguish them from other artists. The easily identifiable small D under the legs of a large A was his trademark.

Dürer was multi-talented as an artist, writer, and intellectual, a true Renaissance man. His intellectual circles included such individuals as Willibald Pirckheimer (humanist and poet), Luca Pacioli (mathematician), and Martin Luther (Reformation leader). In his 1498 self-portrait, Dürer's appreciation of the Renaissance spirit was evident. He took great pride in his own appearance and his fashion sense. A bit conceited indeed, the portrait exhibited the aristocratic ideal of the Renaissance while portraying a Christ-like similarity. Dürer painted many self-portraits throughout his career which continued to give insight into his persona.

Albrecht Dürer died on April 6, 1528, at the age of fifty-seven. He was buried at the St. John Cemetery of Nuremberg, Germany. His last years were fraught with pleurisy and depression. Dürer is remembered as a prolific artist, producing etchings, woodcuts, drawings, and paintings. He is regarded as the founder of the German High Renaissance and the greatest German artist. Because of his international study and self promotion via his prints, Albrecht Dürer is credited as being the first German to be internationally famous during his own lifetime. He left more than twelve-hundred works of art, letters, and journals as his legacy.

Discipline-Based Art Education

The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience.

Art Aesthetics

Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

Art Production

Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

Art History

Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

Art Criticism

Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

ELEMENTS OF ART

- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area enclosed by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light.
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

COMPOSITION

- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

ARTISTIC STYLES

- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE BOOKS

Children's literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Cucumber Soup* by Vickie Leigh Krudwig
- *Dirt* by Steve Tomecek
- *Growing Seasons* Elsie Splear
- *Life in a Bucket of Soil* by Alvin Silverstein
- *Microscopic Life in the Garden* by Brian Ward
- *The Mighty Asparagus* by V. Radunsky
- *Wiggling Worms at Work* by Wendy Pfeffer

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- Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History, Volume Two*. New York. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1995.733
- <http://en.easyart.com/arthistory/artist/Albrecht%20Durer-96.html>
- www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?bio/d/durer/biograph.html

About the Art

The Large Turf was painted in 1503, watercolor and gouache, on paper, 16 x12 inches. It is part of a collection at Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, Austria.

Albrecht Dürer was a master of observation, especially as it related to nature. In a large scale image, Dürer's ability to capture landscapes in detail was brilliant. Even on a small scale, Dürer was able to create extraordinarily keen detail in isolated natural objects such as insects, a pair of squirrels, or hares. The majority of his drawings and paintings dealing with small isolated natural objects were executed during his travels.

One such painting, *The Large Turf*, is an example of Dürer's ability to effectively capture a scene so simple and ordinary as a cluster of grasses. As if plucked out of the lawn, the cluster of painted grass, weeds, and soil created a study of an otherwise, un-noticed micro-landscape, and botanically accurate. Dürer chose to paint a natural, raw arrangement, untouched by human hands. A close look at the still life shows such plants as yarrow, dandelion, and pimpernel, to name a few. Dürer painted another similar work called *The Small Turf* which is also in the collection of Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, Austria.

The Large Turf, sometimes called *The Large Piece of Turf*, changed the course of botanical illustration from the Middle Ages. It had been common to capture the medicinal and decorative form of the botanical, often rendering it in a more stylized version. Here, Dürer captures pure realism in a microscopic view!

Directed Observation

Show students an image of *The Large Turf* and tell them it was painted with watercolor and gouache on paper in 1503 by Albrecht Dürer at the age of thirty-two. Invite students to quietly study the work. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. What does the word turf mean?
2. Look carefully at *The Large Turf*, at every part as if you were a small bug. Describe the various leaves and grasses. What words describe the different shades of green, plant surface textures, lines and shapes.
3. Describe what you see in the front, mid-ground, and background of the painting.
4. Can you find a plant that you think is the most important one in the painting? Why

do you think it is important?

5. What does the artist, Albrecht Dürer, do to make these plants look so real?
6. How would the plants look if it was morning? Raining? Windy? Autumn?
7. How are these plants different from a bouquet of flowers? The artist thought the plants were worth painting. Are they? What does this tell you about the artist?
8. The artist gave a close-up look at the plants and soil. Why do you or don't you find this interesting?
9. Artists like to share their interests with the viewers. What are you interested in that you would like to paint? What close-up view would you like to share?

Things to Do

1. Use an empty toilet paper tube as a telescope to locate an interesting view of something outdoors at the ground level. Create several sketches of what you see. Choose the most interesting sketch and enlarge on a large circle of paper.
2. Watch out for small animals or insects while pulling up an interesting cluster of plants/weeds. Place the "still life" onto a piece of poster board and bring indoors to paint or place your turf cluster against a paper-lined wall. Shine a light on the plants and trace the shadow of the plants onto the paper. Paint the lines and shapes. This can be a collaborative or individual project.
3. Write a story about the bugs that might have lived in Dürer's turf.
4. Lay on your stomach and look at the ground-level view of a grassed area. Look to your left and right to see 180 degrees. Using a long, horizontal piece of paper, draw or color what you see. Consider different landscapes such as sea grasses, forests, vegetable or flower gardens, wheat, or cornfields. Include bugs and worms which live or visit the environment! When completed, fold the long paper into an accordion book or leave unfolded. Display on a wall for all to see.
5. Cut out images of plants found in gardening magazines. With diluted blue paint, paint an entire piece of paper. Once dry, begin to glue tall plants higher in the back and gradually place smaller plants in the front until the composition is complete!
6. With shapes, lines and textures as a focus, collect samples of real plants. Press them until flat. Brush paint onto them. Place a piece of paper on top, rub, and pull off the paper to reveal a print of the plant. Or, place a piece of paper over the flattened plant and using the side of a paperless crayon, make a rubbing of the plant.