



1st Grade: JUNE

Cloud Study

John Constable

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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.

John Constable

John Constable was born in East Bergholt, Suffolk, England, June 11, 1776, into a well-to-do family. Constable was inspired to be a painter by the beautiful landscapes he enjoyed as a youth. As a young man, Constable worked at the family mill before he transitioned into the art world, beginning as an assistant to an engraver in London. Later, as a student at the Royal Academy school, he received little praise or recognition. Constable worked hard pursuing his passion for painting beyond art school.

Constable believed an artist must spend a great amount of time observing his subject matter and, as a landscape artist, Constable did just that. The more time he spent outdoors doing open air painting, the more sensitive he became to the English countryside and the ever-shifting conditions of the sky. Each time the sky shifted, Constable completed another sketch to record what he viewed overhead. Just as an artist in today's world might use a photograph, Constable's quickly rendered oil sketches served as references when painting the final version in his studio. Despite his less than impressive years at the Royal Academy, Constable developed some very impressive paintings. His profound love for nature, his observation skills and his ability to capture details in the beautiful countryside, enabled Constable to gradually build his reputation as a noteworthy artist. His landscapes were painted with such emotion and conviction that he was known as a romantic landscape painter. He often said painting was simply another word for feeling.

John Constable's slow start as a painter provided limited earnings, not enough to support a wife, so he had a seven-year courtship with Maria Bicknell. At the death of his father in 1816, Constable was awarded an annual share of the family's mill business which made the marriage possible. Unfortunately, the family of the bride did not approve of the union and marked their disapproval by their absence at the wedding. The couple was blessed with seven children. In 1828, shortly after the birth of their last child, Maria began to exhibit health problems. When she died later that same year from pulmonary tuberculosis, Constable plummeted into a state of depression. Despite success in his work, he never recovered emotionally from the death of Maria. Constable continued to live and paint in his beloved Suffolk and Hampstead.

While he never left England himself, his work began to be exhibited in Paris, France. Constable's paintings, now six-foot long canvases, caught the eye of French connoisseurs and patrons. The king of France even awarded Constable a gold medal for the painting *The Haywain*. Most importantly however, Constable's work was considered influential as other artists looked to it for guidance. As a result, in 1829 at age fifty-three, John Constable was finally awarded full membership in and title of Academician in the Royal Academy. Constable's ability to capture light in his paintings laid the groundwork for the Impressionistic movement. While his home country of England was slow to recognize his talents, today England acclaims Constable as one of the greatest English Romantic landscape artists.

John Constable died March 31, 1837, at age sixty-one and was buried next to his beloved wife in Hampstead.

About the Art

Cloud Study (above) was painted in 1822, oil on paper which was laid on a board. It is 12 x 19 1/4 inches in size and is in the Courtauld Institute Gallerie, London. Another such study is posted below to show the various cloud studies of John Constable. These studies were not intended as final paintings but rather as preparation work for a final work of art.



John Constable was diligent about observing landscapes and cloud formations in open air. He translated what he observed into pictorial studies done in oil on paper. This allowed him to do quick sketches of the clouds which rapidly changed. This type of study and the time devoted to this made Constable a master

at painting the sky. To him, "the sky was the keynote, standard scale, and the chief organ of sentiment."¹ This dedication was testimony to his love of nature.

Notice the layering of clouds when viewing *Cloud Study*. The darker blue in the distance represents the backdrop and the outer atmosphere. High flying cirrus clouds are straight, wispy white lines. The lower, bellowing clouds are capped on top with white, reflective of the sun's light. The cloud's under sides are darkened a bit as these are not exposed to the sun. The outer atmosphere and clouds do not contain any warm tones that a rising or setting sun might exude.

Certainly the range of whites and blues adds a great deal of variety to the work. The layers of foreground, mid-ground and back-

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:

- *Cloud Dance* by Thomas Locker
- *Clouds* by Gail Saunders-Smith
- *Cloudy Day* by Robin Nelson
- *The Cloud Book* by Tomie de Paolo
- *The Man Who Named Clouds* by Julie Hannah

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- www.britainexpress.com/History/bio/constable.htm

ground clouds support the illusion of depth (space). There is also a textural quality in the many cloud surfaces.

Be sure to look at Constable's paintings: *Hampstead Heath*, *The White Horse* or *The Haywain* to get a feel for his landscapes and the powerful sky

Directed Observation

Show students an image of *Cloud Study* and tell them it was a "sketch" made by John Constable in 1822 when the artist was 46 years old. 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. Describe what you see in this painting. Describe how the artist, John Constable, used colors, shapes and textures. What makes one cloud seem like it's in front of another? How does the top of a cloud differ from the bottom of a cloud?
2. What makes this sketch different from a finished painting?
3. Compare/contrast the sketch to a completed painting by John Constable such as *The Haywain*.
4. John Constable wanted to be a very good artist so he spent a lot of time observing and sketching what he saw. He especially loved "open air" sketching. What do you think that means?
5. Why do you think it is good to practice sketching what you see?
6. John Constable loved to watch the sky. He loved to see the clouds and how they move. Often they changed shape as they moved through the sky. Share what you know about clouds.
7. John Constable loved to sketch and paint the countryside because he thought it was beautiful. Paintings of the countryside are called landscapes. Where have you seen a beautiful landscape? Describe it then create a painting of it with a beautiful sky.
8. Describe the differences between making a small sketch and a large painting.
9. John Constable was able to balance his beautiful sky with a wonderful landscape. Look carefully at a completed painting by Constable to determine where he placed the horizon line—the place where the sky and earth meet toward the bottom, middle or top of the painting. Do you prefer more sky, less land or less sky, more land?
10. What would you like to know about John Constable?
11. What can we learn about the sky and clouds from John Constable?

Things to Do

1. Spend time outdoors observing cloud forms and cloud movement. Make binoculars from toilet paper tubes glued together for focused observation. Discuss what colors you see in the cloud forms. Find those colors in your crayon box or try making the various shades of grey or blue by putting different pressure on a crayon. Record what you see each time and vary the materials you use. Try crayons, watercolor paint, colored pencils, oil pastels, and chalk. (Be sure to tell students not to look at the sun when observing the sky!) After a few days of rendering sketches, display them. Consider binding these sketches in a book form.
2. Consider visiting parks or other wide-open spaces to observe both land and sky. How do they change day to day? How do they change from morning to afternoon? Make sketches of these landscapes noting varying light, colors, textures, values, lines, forms, shapes and space. Note varying weather conditions. Choose your favorite sketch to render as a large painting.
3. Choose a favorite sketch of a sky and a favorite sketch of a landscape. Combine these both to develop a complete painting.
4. Paint a favorite landscape (sky and land) while observing it outdoors. This process is called Plein Air, French for "open air"
5. If you live in a part of the country that has seasonal changes, make a painting of your favorite outdoor landscape in each of the four seasons.
6. Using three sheets of paper, fold each sheet in half—the long way. Then fold each half in half again to create four equal parts. Open all three sheets of paper. Take sheet #1 and create an imaginary landscape where the top fold serves as the horizon line. (The top 1/4 will be the sky area and the bottom 3/4 will serve as land area. Sheet #2 will have the horizon line at the 1/2 fold leaving equal portions for the sky and the land areas. Sheet #3 will have 3/4 of the space for sky area and 1/4 space for the land. Choose your favorite and add color to finish it off!
7. Explore different kinds of landscapes. Try drawing a city, country, desert, beach, mountain, and forest, to name a few.
8. Study photographs that record your community's history to see how its landscape has changed over the years. Make a sketch to predict how you think it will look in the future.
9. Visit an art museum and study how different artists painted the sky differently. Which paintings do you like the best? Who do you think painted the best sky?