

15-A American Landscape, 1930

Charles Sheeler (1883–1965)



15-A Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), *American Landscape*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 24 x 31 in. (61 x 78.8 cm.). Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (166.1934). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

The Art

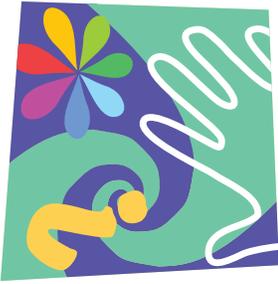
This oil painting is of a landscape showing factory buildings, a railroad track, a smokestack, and a canal, rather than a nature scene. A man crossing the railroad tracks is the only person visible in the painting. Everything seems so clean and perfect that the scene looks frozen in time. The painting is in a style the artist called “Precisionism,” which uses sharply painted forms and is influenced by modern technology. The painting does resemble other landscapes, though, by the quiet or stillness of its scene.

The Artist

Charles Sheeler worked as a professional photographer, often taking pictures of America’s factories and machinery. At one time, he was hired by the Ford Motor Company to photograph the company’s large automobile plant. He took pictures of canals, conveyor belts, assembly lines, and more. With six weeks of work put into producing the photographs that tell the story of Ford Motor Company’s success at the time, it is not surprising that this painting resembles some of his photographs from that project.

The Historical Perspective

Because the title of this painting includes the word “landscape,” we might expect to see a calm scene—one with flowing water, trees, paths, or beautiful flowers. Instead, Sheeler paints a landscape that reflects the nature of America at this time—its movement toward industry, or the machine age. In Sheeler’s painting, the forces of industry have taken over the forces of nature that once defined America.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at this painting—the objects, the background, the way it is painted and the colors used. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary, and identify books that relate to the theme or themes in the painting.

Describing



- ✓ What do you see in this painting? Make a long list of all the things the children see and count aloud with them how many they find. A small group of children could use a magnifying glass to focus attention on certain objects in the painting.
- ✓ Do you see any shapes in this painting?
- ✓ Eventually add some of the new vocabulary to the words children use. For example, the water is a canal, the large building is a factory, etc.

Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- Does any part of the painting look like anything in our town (or community or neighborhood)? Children might say: we have railroad tracks; it's a factory; we have big buildings.
- Do you know what a factory is? You may have to explain that it's a place where people work to make things. Use local examples if appropriate.
- What do you think people make in this factory? What are some things in our classroom that could be made in a factory? Children might say: blocks; tables; chairs; windows; doors; etc.
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this painting?

Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

cargo
dam
factory
horizontal
landscape
machines
reflection
round
small/smaller/smallest
smoke
square
tall/taller/tallest



Books

Come Look with Me: Exploring Landscape Art with Children by Gladys S. Blizzard (Charlesbridge Publishing, 1996)

This book presents 12 color reproductions of landscape paintings by such artists as Vincent Van Gogh, M.C. Escher, and Georgia O'Keeffe, with questions to stimulate discussion and background information on each artist and painting.

Landscapes by Claude Delafosse (Scholastic, 1993)

Die-cut and transparent pages introducing landscapes as portrayed in art are featured.

Let's Look All Around the Town by Harold Roth (Grosset and Dunlap, 1988)

A photographic journey includes a construction site, fire house, market, and stores along Main Street.

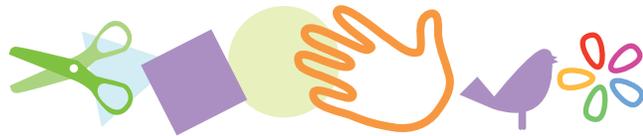


Connecting and Extending continued...

Related Educational Experiences

- ✓ If appropriate in your location, invite a factory worker to talk to the children about his or her work.
- ✓ Allow the children to “paint” a landscape by having simple pictures near the easel and on tables, with watercolors and paper available.
- ✓ Have the children match cutout shapes—like rectangles, squares, etc., to parts of the picture.
- ✓ During outdoor time, children can talk about clouds and sky. Some might want to paint “cloud pictures” while outdoors.
- ✓ Demonstrate a canal in the water table.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children’s learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children’s learning related to the “A Head Start on Picturing America” artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.



Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

- ✓ talk about a local factory and learn about the jobs there and what the workers make.
- ✓ sing the song “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” while waiting on long lines or going on car or bus trips.