

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

STARS: INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION UNIT 1. NIGHT SKY AS INSPIRATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Anchorage Museum collection includes thousands of artworks and objects, some of which are inspired by the night sky. In this unit, you will examine and discuss art from the Museum's collection, create skyscape artwork, and design a constellation.

Artworks which depict the night sky offer information about the location they represent. In Alaska, and at other northern latitudes, long summer days prevent people from seeing much of the night sky. Bright light from the sun (or moon) overpowers light emitted by stars that are farther away from Earth. In the winter, Alaskans experience more hours of darkness each day and observe phenomenon such as the northern lights or a star-filled sky.

STUDENTS WILL:

- Engage in close-looking and discussion about art
- Create skyscape artwork inspired by two photographs
- Design a constellation

MATERIALS

- **Activities 1, 2 & 3:** Night Sky as Inspiration Challenge Activity Sheet
- **Activity 1:** *Moon Over Matanuska* image, [20 Questions Deck](#)
- **Activity 2:** colored pencils (or medium of choice), two outdoor photographs (one containing a large section of sky)
- **Activity 3:** pencil, a view of stars

RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL

- Sixth through eighth grade

KEY TERMS

Naturalism: nineteenth-century art movement focusing on true-to-life, detailed artwork that accurately represents nature

Skyscape: section or portion of the sky as seen from a single viewpoint; may include the horizon

Constellation: groupings of stars that form shapes

ACTIVITIES

This lesson provides three activity sets and explains each of them in detail on the following pages. Activities should be completed in order. Challenge questions are listed under each activity. You can also print the Challenge Activity Sheet, which follows the activity descriptions.

1. **Activity 1:** Close Looking at Art Discussion
2. **Activity 2:** Create Skyscape Artwork
3. **Activity 3:** Design a Constellation



ACTIVITY 1

Close Looking at Art Discussion

[10-15 minutes]

This art lesson is best done with a group so participants can look at and discuss the artwork together. If doing this activity individually, you can use the Night Sky as Inspiration Challenge Activity Sheet to guide your close-looking. There are many correct answers to these open-ended questions so the Answer Sheet only suggests possible answers.



Spence Guerin
Moon Over Matanuska, 1980
Acrylic on polyester canvas
Anchorage Museum collection
1980.68.1

ACTIVITY 1 CONTINUED

Discussion Sequence

CLOSE-LOOKING Invite students to look closely, quietly at the artwork.

OBSERVE Invite students to share observations about the artwork.

ASK Encourage discussion by asking **challenge questions** such as:

1. What things do you first notice when you look at this painting?
2. What colors do you see? What is causing the bright white section of the painting?
3. Does this remind you of somewhere you have seen or been?
4. What type of place do you think this painting is showing? What do you see that makes you think that?
5. What time of year do you think this painting is showing? What do you see that makes you think that?
6. What do you see in the night-sky?
7. Why are there no stars in the painting?
8. What more can you find?

DISCUSS Use this [20 Questions Deck](#) link for more discussion questions.

LEARN MORE See Artist biography and quotes below.

Artist Website: <http://www.spenceguerin.com/index.html>

Artist Biography

Spence Guerin (b. 1941) is a contemporary artist who finds inspiration in the American nineteenth-century tradition of naturalist painting. He brings this tradition to the Alaska landscape, painting from his direct experience with nature. Guerin worked in Alaska for fourteen years in 1970s and 1980s before returning to his family home in Florida. He still occasionally summers in Alaska, where he paints and teaches.

Guerin works in several media: acrylic, watercolor, pencil, and charcoal. He is also known for his small engravings. Guerin uses many mediums to examine the landscape as well as to create portraits, interiors, and urban views.



ACTIVITY 1 CONTINUED

Artist Quotes About the Artwork

"This a wintertime view of the Matanuska River at about mile 70 of the Glenn Highway, looking upstream to the east on a winter night with a full moon. The gravel river bottom is covered with snow, and only a narrow channel of the river is ice-free. Chugach Mountains are in the distance."

"At this time I was doing many of my landscape paintings in the studio from photographs. *Moon Over Matanuska* was constructed from two root photos: a winter daytime photo of the subject above, along the Glenn Highway at about mile 70, and a nighttime moonrise photo made a year or more earlier over Lake Hood."

"Painting a graduated sky blue in acrylic painting was always a difficulty (and one of the reasons I returned to oil paint). I distinctly recall finally resorting to a standard full-size, natural fiber house broom to paint the background sky in *Moon Over Matanuska*, standing over the canvas laid flat on the floor, sweeping thinned color from edge to edge, applying layers of diluted washes of translucent sky blue acrylic paint. In the process, the whole picture was glazed with cold winter night blue and violet."

ACTIVITY 2

Create Skyscape Artwork

[20-30 minutes]

Guerin's *Moon Over Matanuska* was inspired by two separate photographs: a winter daytime photo of the Matanuska River and a nighttime moonrise photo taken at a different location.

Materials

- Night Sky as Inspiration Challenge Activity Sheet or other paper
- Colored pencils (or medium of choice)
- Two outdoor photographs, one containing a large section of sky (these can be personal photographs or photographs found online)

ACTIVITY 2 CONTINUED

Directions

1. Select two photographs of outdoor spaces to inspire your skyscape artwork. One photograph should contain a large section of sky.
2. Create your skyscape artwork by combining your favorite elements from each photograph.

ACTIVITY 3

Design a Constellation

[20-30 minutes]

People have grouped stars into shapes, called constellations, for centuries. You have likely heard of Greek constellations (such as Orion, Scorpius, and Cassiopeia), but cultures all over the world have created constellations and stories to explain their existence.

Materials

- Night Sky as Inspiration Challenge Activity Sheet or other paper
- Pencil
- A view of stars (go outside or use provided Night Sky image)



Till Credner, AlltheSky.com



ACTIVITY 3 CONTINUED

Directions

1. Observe the stars, looking for shapes among the stars. When you find a shape you like, draw the stars in that shape. Connect the stars with lines to create your own constellation.
2. Name your constellation.
3. Create a story about your constellation.

Take it Further: Optional hands-on activity

Create a constellation scope, a tool to learn what different constellations look like. Learn how at this website:

https://www.mos.org/sites/dev-elvis.mos.org/files/docs/education/mos_starlab-k-2_constellation-scopes.pdf

For more constellation cutouts visit this website:

<https://inventorsoftheworld.com/files.wordpress.com/2017/02/ccf58-viewerfile.png>

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NIGHT SKY AS INSPIRATION CHALLENGE ACTIVITY SHEET

ACTIVITY 1. Close Looking at Art Discussion

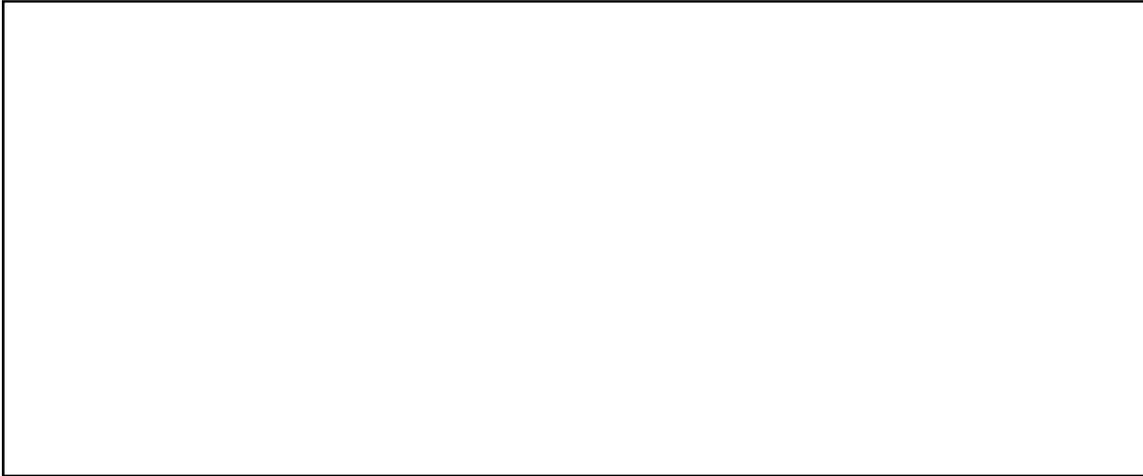
1. What things do you first notice when you look at this painting?
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4. What type of place do you think this painting is showing? What do you see that makes you think that?
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6. What do you see in the night-sky?
7. Why are there no stars in the painting?
8. What more can you find?



NIGHT SKY AS INSPIRATION CHALLENGE ACTIVITY SHEET

ACTIVITY 2. Create Skyscape Artwork

Select two photographs of outdoor spaces to inspire your skyscape artwork. One photograph should contain a large section of sky. Draw your skyscape artwork by combining your favorite elements from each photograph below or on another sheet of paper.



ACTIVITY 3. Design a Constellation

1. Observe the stars, looking for shapes among the stars. When you find a shape you like, draw the stars in that shape below or on another sheet of paper. Connect the stars with lines to create your own constellation.



2. Name your constellation.
3. Create a story about your constellation.



NIGHT SKY AS INSPIRATION ANSWERS SHEET

The Night Sky as Inspiration challenge questions are all open-ended, so there are many correct answers. This answer sheet suggests possible answers.

ACTIVITY 1. Close Looking at Art Discussion

1. Water, snow, mountains, bluffs, clouds, bright white light.
2. Various shades of blue, black, gray, white. The moon behind the clouds is creating the bright white section of the painting.
3. Answers will vary.
4. The mountains and snow suggest this could be a painting could be of someplace in Alaska.
5. The snow suggests it is winter.
6. Clouds, light from the moon.
7. The light from the moon is so bright it overpowers any light emitted from stars.
8. Answers will vary.

ACTIVITY 2. Create skyscape artwork

Answers will vary. Below is an example.

Photo 1:	Photo 2:	Skyscape artwork:
		

ACTIVITY 3. Design a Constellation

Answers will vary. You are successful if you make a picture out of stars, name it, and create a story about your constellation.