



Objective: To explore that a flat painting can convey a sense of depth.

## A) Introduction/Vocabulary

Today we are going to talk about some ways artists create the illusion of a background and foreground in their art. Does anyone know what the words **background and foreground** mean? (The part of a picture which looks farther away or behind other parts of the picture is the background. The part that looks closest to you is the foreground.)

When you look at a painting, there isn't really a part of the painting that is closer to you or farther away from you than any other part, is there? A painting is flat. If an artist wants his picture to appear to have a background and foreground, he has to trick our eyes. Some ways to trick our eyes is size, placement, overlapping and color. Let review a few terms that will explore more about architecture:

If I told you to draw a picture with a foreground and background, what would you do? How would you trick my eye into thinking some things were near and some were far? Let's talk about some of these ideas a little further.

(use visual aids provided here)

1. **Size** – One way artists portray near and far is by making things smaller when they want them to appear farther away. Why? When we see a car a long away, it looks smaller than it is, doesn't it? Here is an illustration. Which ball looks farther away?
2. **Placement** – This example shows another trick artists use. They put things toward the bottom of the picture when they want them to appear near and put the things higher up when they want them to appear in the background.
3. **Overlapping** – Artists also use overlapping to show near and far. If I put shape #2 in front of two other shapes like this, #2 looks closer, doesn't it?
4. **Color** – Artists also know how to use color to fool our eye. Who remembers what cool colors are? Cool colors are colors we think of when we think of cold, such as blues, grays, greens or purples. What are the warm colors? The warm colors are the colors that we think of when we think of fire. Reds, yellows and oranges are warm colors. In painting, warm colors come forward and cool colors go into the background. So, sometimes artists use cool colors in their art when they want things to appear to be far away and warmer colors in areas that are to appear.
5. **Atmospheric Perspective** – When we look at things a long way off, they often look hazy, don't they? This is because we are looking through the air which has dust and particles in it. It makes the colors look less bright and intense to us. If I have on a red dress and I stand right next to you, my dress looks very red. If I stand across the street, it doesn't look as bright does it? Some artists make colors less intense in the background. This is called atmospheric perspective.
6. **Texture** – When something is very close you can see it very clearly. In fact, you can see many details. Artists can make things seem near in a painting by making them detailed. They can make them so detailed you can see textures. Who can remember what texture is? Texture is the way something feels on the surface.
7. **One Point Perspective** – When the real or imaginary lines of a painting come together at the horizon line, it is called one point perspective. The horizon line is where the land and sky meet. A road across a desert drawn with one point perspective would look like this example.



Let's look at some pictures by artists who have used these tricks in their painting to make it appear that some things are close and some far away.

## B) Artwork

Title: *St. George Killing the Dragon*, Bernardo Martorell, 1430-1435

Artist: Bernardo Martorell, 1430-1435

Details: Painting

- This painting shows St. George defending the princess from the dragon, while the king and his subjects watch from a distant castle.
- Let's review some of the tricks Bernardo used to create depth in this picture.
  - What persons or objects are in the foreground of this picture? (Dragon, St. George on a horse, bones) What makes you believe they are in the foreground? (large size - bottom placement, overlapped objects seem farther back, texture detail such as the dragon's scales, surface of the ground.)
  - What do you see in the background? (Castle, king, queen, people, fields, trees, sky) What techniques were used here to make you believe they are in the background? (Small size, high placement, overlapped by objects farther forward, less texture, castle and sky are cooler colors)

Title: *Train Station*

Artist: Walter Ellison, 1936

Details: Painting

- Ellison was an artist who liked to paint scenes that told the stories of his life and other African-Americans living in the early part of the 20th century. Here Ellison depicts white people boarding southbound trains headed to vacations in Florida while black people board northbound trains to seek better jobs and a new life in northern cities like Chicago.
- Ellison used one point perspective to make the halls on the right and left seem to extend very far into the distance. Even though the center hall stops at a wall, you can see that if the lines formed by the edges of the hall were extended, they would eventually cross at the horizon line.
- What other techniques has Ellison used? (People and columns are bigger in the foreground and smaller in the background; colors in the foreground are brighter and warmer while colors in the background are duller and cooler; people and columns overlap with things behind them.)



## Reinforcement Activity

**Materials provided:** colored paper and white paper

**Children provide:** scissors, crayons and glue

Everyone is going to create a summer picture using near and far. The pictures should each have a house, a swimming pool and a tree. Have the children cut the shapes of the house, pool and tree out of the colored paper and glue the shapes on the white paper in a way that creates a sense of near and far. Instruct them to fill the white paper with their design and remind them of the vocabulary while they work. The children may decorate their shapes if they wish.

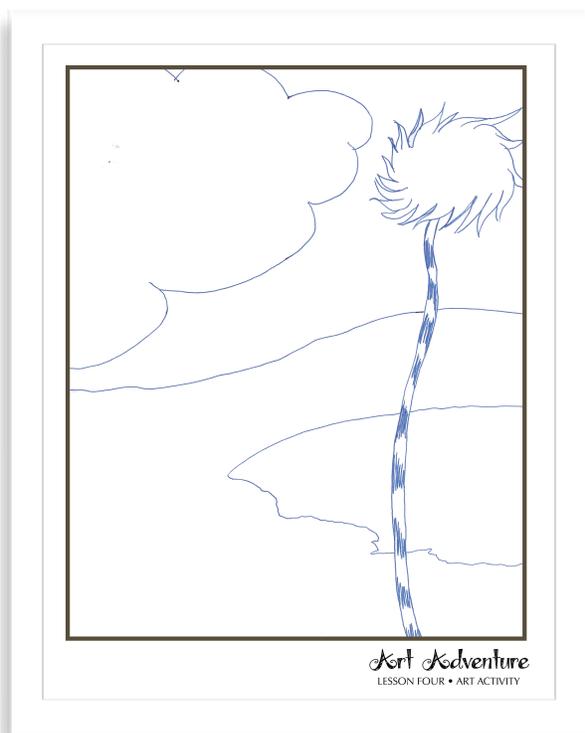
## Optional Activity

**Materials provided:** White Paper with Truffula Tree

**Students provide:** pencils and crayons/color pencils/ markers

### **Instructions:**

Each student should be provided a sheet of white paper with the Truffula tree drawing on it. With a pencil the students are to draw 1-3 truffle trees in different sizes behind the tall tree in the foreground. Once the trees are drawn they can color their artwork with crayons, colored pencils or markers.





## **Additional Background Material:**

*This material is provided to give you, the discussion leader, additional information about the artists and paintings that may help you answer questions or generate additional discussion with the children if time permits. You are not expected or required to cover this information in the classroom.*

### **Bernardo Martorell, St. George Killing the Dragon, 1430-1435**

Saint George Killing the Dragon is the central panel of a now disassembled altarpiece devoted to the popular saint. The panel was executed by Bernardo Martorell, (circa 1400-1452), one of the greatest Catalan painters of the first half of the fifteenth century. (Catalonia is now a northeastern region of Spain.) This particular legend centers on the city of Silene, and tells of the rescue of the princess and her people from a horrible dragon. According to the legend, sheep and townspeople had been offered as victims to feed the dragon. The town decided by lot who would be sacrificed. Finally when only a few people remained – as suggested by the scattered bones – the daughter of the king drew the deadly lot. The panel shows the saint defending the princess from the dragon while the king and his subjects watch from a distant castle. Even though St. George lived in the 3rd century, Martorell clothed his subjects in contemporary dress and included symbolic and pictorial detail that would easily be understood by the illiterate medieval viewer. The figure of St. George is central to the composition. A striking attention to detail is combined with rich color and textural effects, adding drama and excitement to the scene. Stucco builds up the surface of the canvas to emphasize the halo, crown, horse gear, sword, dagger and lance. These raised elements are then gilded or painted. The entire surface of the dragon is modeled in relief, using paint mixed with a sandy material and thickly applied. The story was meant to excite the imagination and interest of the viewers while providing an important lesson of the church on the triumph of good (St. George) over evil (the dragon).

### **Walter Ellison, Train Station, 1936**

Walter Ellison (1900-1977) was born in Eatonton, Georgia, but as a teenager he moved to Chicago with his family. Ellison studied at The Art Institute of Chicago and became part of the cultural explosion in African-American arts called the “Harlem Renaissance,” named for its origin in New York City’s Harlem neighborhood. He painted scenes from his own life that tell both his story and the stories of other African-Americans living during the early decades of this century. Train Station shows white people headed south for vacations in Miami, Palm Beach, and Tallahassee while black people head north for work in Chicago, New York and Detroit. This was the time of the Great Migration, during which thousands of rural southerners moved to cities in the North for jobs. Porters in orange suits not only assisted both sets of travelers with luggage and directions, but also provided the immigrating African-Americans with news, information, and support on their journey to the North. Ellison painted Train Station in 1936, during the period in southern history when “Jim Crow” laws required public spaces such as railway stations to provide separate facilities, such as waiting rooms and washrooms, for blacks and whites. This is reflected in a sign over a doorway identifying an area set-aside for “colored.” In another interesting detail, the artist put his initials on a suitcase in the front, right side.