

Exploring Nature in Art: The Watercolors of Walter Anderson (K-5)

Two, 50 minute lessons

***Note:** This activity connects to the mini-poster of *Hawks at Sunrise*, c. 1960, by Walter Anderson found in the Fall 2016 K-12 Education Brochure from the Nasher Museum of Art. If you did not receive a brochure, please contact NasherEd@duke.edu.

Overview

Students will look at art by Walter Anderson and discuss artistic representations of nature. Students will create a watercolor painting of a bird or insect and will write an accompanying written description of the animal they chose.

Activity

Lesson One

Begin by projecting an image of work by Walter Anderson from the exhibition *Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art*. For this activity, discuss a work by Anderson that features birds or insects. Options included on the USB drive in this packet are *Hawks at Sunrise*, c. 1960, *Hummingbirds*, c. 1955, and *Cicadas and Grasshopper on Tree Trunk*, c. 1960.

Lead the students in a short visual discussion by asking: **What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?**

Next, repeat the visual discussion process with 1-2 more works by Walter Anderson.

Next, introduce contextual information about Walter Anderson. Anderson grew up and spent most of his life on the coast of Mississippi. He loved nature and most of his artwork was inspired by the natural world. He created drawings and watercolor paintings of the animals and plants on the barrier islands near his home.



Walter Anderson. *Hawks at Dawn*. c. 1960. Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

The Life and Work of Walter Anderson
Born in 1903 in New Orleans, Louisiana, American watercolorist Walter Inglis Anderson studied at the Parsons Institute of Design in New York and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His informal education took place in France and Spain before he returned home to Ocean Springs, Mississippi, to begin his career as an artist. Recognized today as a prominent artist, Anderson spent long periods of his adult life on an uninhabited barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico, where he wrote and painted, inspired and entertained by nature.

He created drawings and watercolor paintings of the animals and plants on the barrier islands near his home.

Then, have the class create a list of the birds and insects that live in North Carolina. Does anybody have a favorite bird or insect? Why is it their favorite?

Discuss the habitats in which the animals listed would live. How do the birds and insects eat, build homes, find water?

Finally, have students select a single bird or insect that they will draw and paint. Students will begin by researching and writing a descriptive paragraph about their animal. Descriptions may include the animal's physical characteristics, habitat, and life cycle.

Lesson Two

Begin by projecting an image of work by Walter Anderson and briefly review his work as an artist.

Then, have students begin their artwork of their selected animal by drawing multiples of the animal in pencil on watercolor paper. Students may include details from their animal's habitat. Encourage students to fill their entire page, like Walter Anderson did.

Possible Variation: Instead of drawing multiple images, students may create stamps of their animal to produce repeating patterns.

After students finish their pencil drawings, they will paint their animals with watercolor.

Extension Activity

Have students research the flora and fauna of the barrier islands of Mississippi. Using their research, try to identify the plants and animals featured in art by Walter Anderson. Research further any animals or plants that are unfamiliar.

Extension Activity

Many of Walter Anderson's watercolors depict animals in their habitat. The animals are often hard to find due to camouflage. Have students research camouflage and list animals that use camouflage to survive. Students may create drawings of an animal camouflaged within its habitat.