

# A BALANCING ACT

## ABOUT THE ARTIST/ART

Famous for his sculptures that are located all over the world, Isamu Noguchi was born in Los Angeles to an Irish American mother and teacher and a Japanese father whose occupation was that of a poet. His innovative parks, plazas, playgrounds, fountains, gardens, stage sets and public pieces are celebrated throughout the world. Pictured is *Skyviewing Sculpture*, which is a 1969 black painted steel work that rests on brick posts. Its dimensions are 14' high and 17' wide and it weighs 12,000 lbs.



© Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. Photo credit: Art on File, Seattle

## VOCABULARY

### COLOR

- Texture
- Shape
- Value
- Color
- Wet-on-wet
- Dry Brush
- Space

### SCIENCE

- Cirrus
- Cumulus
- Stratus
- Nimbus

### MATH

- Circle
- Rectangle
- Right triangle
- Triangle
- Hexagon
- Quadrilateral
- Trapezoid

## WASHINGTON STATE EARLs

- 1.1—The student understands arts concepts and vocabulary.
- 1.3—The student understands and applies arts styles from various artists, cultures, and times.
- 2.1—The student applies a creative process in the arts.
- 3.1—The student uses the arts to express and present ideas and feelings.
- 4.2—The student demonstrates and analyzes the connections between the arts and other content areas.

## VIEWING/DISCUSSING QUESTIONS

### ACTIVITY WHEN VIEWING SCULPTURE ON CAMPUS

Two activities on campus will prepare the students for the sculpture studio lesson. First, to become better acquainted with the campus sculptures that utilize geometric forms (as is evident in *Skyviewing Sculpture*), students will embark on:

**Geometric Tour** of the WWU Sculpture collection. Since the majority of the works in the collection possess a geometric form, many sculptures can be viewed. Provide students with a handout that lists the following categories (sketching materials to draw the forms viewed can also be provided):

Geometric Form	# of Times Viewed	Name(s) of Sculpture
Circle		
Rectangle		
Square		
Right Triangle		
Triangle		
Hexagon		
Quadrilateral		
Trapezoid		

### SUGGESTED SCULPTURES TO BE VIEWED

Richard Serra—*Wright's Triangle*  
Robert Maki—*Curve/ Diagonal*  
Fred Bassetti—*Alphabeta Cube*  
Beverly Pepper—*Normanno Wedge*  
Lloyd Hamrol—*Log Ramps*  
Norman Warsinski—*Totem*  
Mark diSuvero—*For Handel*  
Donald Judd—*Untitled*  
Nancy Holt—*Stone Enclosure: Rock Rings*

After viewing the geometric forms seen in the campus sculptures, the second activity is to analyze the forms in *Skyviewing Sculpture*. Have students stand inside the sculpture and view the sky through the circular holes. Look for colors, cloud formations, values, textures, and anything else evident. An optional activity would be to have the students take photographs of what they view through the circular cutouts of the sculpture to use for classroom discussion.

Upon the return to class, students can share what sky images they viewed through the circles and the examples of geometric forms found in the sculpture collection.

## STUDIO PRODUCTION/INTEGRATION

### MAKING THE SCULPTURE

Isamu Noguchi stated that when he was asked to design a sculpture for the campus, he told the committee that he wanted "something that would clarify the open space while at the same time drawing the eyes of the passing students up towards the heavens." He also noted that *Skyviewing Sculpture* is "an effort to tie sculpture to the awareness of outer space as an extension of its significance, much as one finds in early observatories."

Therefore, in this lesson, students will paint a sky scene on transparency paper that will then be mounted behind construction paper. Students can be given the option to paint what they saw when visiting the campus collection or to paint another sky scene of their choice. To prepare for the types of skies that can be painted, students will first study skies.

1. Study the different types of skies that can be seen depending on the time of day and season. First, explore the many types of clouds that can be present in the sky. Discuss the appearance of cumulus, stratus, cirrus, and nimbus clouds. Examine the colors, shapes, and textures of the clouds.
2. Next, discuss what the sky looks like at different times of the day. Discuss sunrise, afternoon, sunset, and night by analyzing the colors, shapes, and textures that can be seen at each of the times of day.

### STEPS

1. Students sketch the version of the sky that they would like to portray.
2. Students take a piece of transparency paper and felt pen and sketch the sky that they want to portray.
3. Students paint their skies with tempera paint.
4. The transparency papers are placed into black frames (construction paper) and displayed on the classroom windows so that light can shine through the transparency paper.

### MATERIALS

- Paper and pencil for sketching
- Transparency paper
- Tempera paints
- Felt pens
- 9" x 11" black construction paper that has a hole the size of a paper plate cut in the middle



## ART EXTENSIONS

### ARTISTS WHO PAINT SKIES

Students can study how professional artists have painted skies. Artists to consider are:

#### French Classical Landscape

- Claude Lorraine (for traditional, classical skies)
- English Romantic Landscape:
- Joseph Turner (for colorful, passionate skies)
- John Constable

#### Impressionists

- Paul Cezanne
- Vincent Van Gogh (for skies at night)
- Claude Monet

#### American Landscape

- Winslow Homer
- Frederic Church (for dramatic, yet realistic skies)
- Thomas Coles

Choose one of the artists and teach the concepts of the style or medium. For example, in order to study Winslow Homer, students can create watercolor landscapes. Space is an important issue related to landscapes and can be taught with the following concepts:

#### Basic principles artists use to create space

- Details become less evident in objects that are farther away.
- Colors fade as objects recede into space.
- Overlapping objects create a sense of space; the object that is not overlapped by another is the closest object.
- Linear perspective, i.e. one- and two-point create the illusion of space.
- Objects that are higher on the picture plane are usually farther away.

Two important techniques that can be taught in relation to watercolors and the painting of landscapes are: wet-on-wet—applying wet paint to wet paper, and dry brush—applying paint to dry paper using little water on the brush. Students can complete watercolor paintings of landscapes that utilize these two techniques.

## ASSESSMENT/REFLECTION

### SKYVIEWING SCULPTURE REVIEW

- I found \_\_\_\_\_ geometric forms.
- List the number of rectangles that you found: \_\_\_\_\_
- Sketch one sculpture that contained a circle.
- Describe the type of sky that you painted and tell why you chose this type of sky: \_\_\_\_\_

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- Tell one important fact that you learned about Isamu Noguchi: \_\_\_\_\_

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- If you could ask the artist one question, what would you like to know? \_\_\_\_\_

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## ADVANCED STUDY

1. Noguchi stated that “the central campus at Bellingham, all of red brick, which has won high praise, is an ideal space for study.” Tell what kind of sculpture you would design to enhance this outstanding place to study.
2. Complete the same project as outlined for the elementary studio project, but instead of using transparency paper, use plexiglass for the sky paintings. Attach the plexiglass pieces to wood outlines that have been painted black. Assemble the students’ works together to create a sculptural work. Optional: Instead of circular shapes, use other geometric forms.
3. Make scaled down models of *Skyviewing Sculpture* using paper. Paper could be black or colored to alter how the work is perceived. If using colored paper, discuss how color affects our perceptions of the works.

## RESOURCES

- [The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum](#), a text written by Isamu Noguchi (published by Harry Abrams Publishing Company, 1987) that provides an extensive survey of Noguchi’s life work in the words of the artist.
- [Isamu Noguchi](#), by Sam Hunter, Bryan Ohno Editions, 2000.
- [Noguchi](#), by Bruce Altshuler, Abbeville Press, 1994.
- Isamu Noguchi—American Masters  
[pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/isamu-noguchi-about-isamu-noguchi/675/](https://pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/isamu-noguchi-about-isamu-noguchi/675/)