



## What the River Sees

In order to protect a natural resource,  
we must first understand it

(art + social studies) (art + science) (art + literature)

*"The face of the water, in time,  
became a wonderful book...and it  
was not a book to be read once and  
thrown aside, for it had a new story  
to tell every day." - Mark Twain,  
from "Life on the Mississippi"*

Authors, poets, artists, and  
songwriters have all been drawn to  
the river as muse, finding it so much  
more than just a body of water.  
Entire genres of art have followed  
rivers and their adjoining landscape;  
two generations of artists aligned  
with the Hudson River School  
started in the Catskills and followed  
western expansion in North and  
South America. It has been said  
that Impressionism began on the  
banks of the Seine in France and the  
Thames in Great Britain.

Claude Monet wrote to a friend  
about the excitement he felt  
following a plein air painting session  
at the river's edge. "The Thames  
was all gold. God it was beautiful, so  
fine that I began working a frenzy,  
following the sun and its reflections  
on the water."

Personification is the attribution

of human qualities to something  
nonhuman. We know that a river  
does not actually have a sensory  
experience, but we can imagine  
what it would be like if a river could  
see things as it passes by. We can  
wonder what it would think or how it  
might feel it goes through changes  
of place, climate, and season.

As a collaborative piece, this lesson  
challenges students to create  
sections of a real or imagined river  
that can be joined together to make  
a linear, flowing storyline. From the  
river's beginnings in mountains,  
springs, or creeks to the place where  
it meets a larger body of water—the  
delta and wetlands.

Caring for our natural resources  
means doing what we can to  
understand them and not take them  
for granted. If we take the time to  
think about what a river sees on  
its journey, then we can be better  
friends and neighbors to it.

**GRADES 3-8** Note: Instructions  
and materials are based upon a  
class size of 24 students. Adjust as  
needed.

### Materials (required)

**Pacon Tag Board**, 100 sheets,  
white, 9" x 12" (13111-1003); share  
one across class

**Blick Construction Paper**, Assorted  
colors, 50 sheets, 9" x 12" (11409-  
1003); share two across class

**Blick Essentials White Glue**, 8 oz,  
(23882-1005); share one between  
two students

**Supertite School Glue Super  
Sticks**, Pkg of 2, 0.32 oz (83825-  
1001); share one pkg between two  
students

**Blick Art Tissue**, 12" x 18", Light  
Blue, 50 Sheet pkg (11308-5017);  
share one across class

**Smart-Fab Fabrics**, 48" x 40 ft roll,  
Sky Blue (62500-5094)

**Mr. Sketch Scented Marker Set**,  
Assorted Colors, Set of 12 (21215-  
0129); share four to six sets across  
class

**Crayola Colored Pencil Set**,  
Assorted Colors, Set of 12 (20519-  
1009); share four to six sets across  
class

**Armada Lollypop Scissors**, 7",  
(57057-1007); need one per  
student

**Roylco Decorative Paper**, 8 1/2" x  
11", class pack of 248 sheets (11262-  
1170)

### Optional Materials

Hangman Poster and Craft Tape, 15  
ft roll (17354-1001)

**Ready to order materials?**

Go to [www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/what-the-river-sees](http://www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/what-the-river-sees) to access a product bundle for your convenience.

## Preparation

1. Print out the template on pages 3-4 and tape together to form one piece. Trace with a pencil onto a 9" x 12" piece of white cardstock, posterboard, illustration board or bristol board. Each student will need one of these river sections.

## Process

1. Provide a variety of media for creating:
  - Papers, including colored construction papers, magazines for clipping collage images, decorative and drawing paper.
  - Drawing supplies: pencils, colored pencils, markers (both fineline and broad), oil pastels, etc.,
  - Scissors, tape, glue sticks and white glue for adhering.
  - Tissue, vellum, fabric or plastic wrap to create the effect of flowing water.
2. Cut templates from board. Each student starts with one piece. There is no right or up or down positioning of the river section, it can be positioned in any manner. Explain that everyone will be creating portion(s) of a river. The project may be based on a particular body of water that is familiar, local, or has great significance. The river could also be imaginary. Students may work in groups on a portion of the course or be assigned a stage so there is a defined beginning and end.
3. The river itself, as well as the things that neighbor it along its banks will be made from mixed-media/collage items glued to the river. Rocks, beaches, cliffs, and marshes may be things the river "sees" in sections that are rural or natural. In urban and developed sections, there may be bridges, dams, power plants, factories, or houses.

The river can be colored to indicate what it is like at the particular stage that is represented. Wildlife or pollutants may be drawn in. For cohesiveness, a material indicating water may be glued to the surface of the river to flow from one section to the next. Semi-translucent materials like tissue paper or lightweight fabric work well, as does transparent plastic food wrap.

4. As students design and embellish their portion(s) of the river, provide some questions to answer about each section that is created to help students consider elements of the storyline. For example:

- Who is living in/by the river?
- What buildings or land formations are near the river?
- How do humans use the river?
- What does the river feel or need?

As an option, students can prepare written answers to these questions along with their visual interpretations.

5. When finished, hang each section so that the straight edges align. The river will curve up and down depending on which way the sections were designed. Use poster tape for safe attachment to walls of hallways and rooms.



*Step 1: Cut river sections from board using template provided.*



*Step 2: Choose or assign portions of the river's journey and design what the river sees around it, on its surface and beneath it.*



*Step 3: Hang river sections together to make a flowing, storytelling collaborative installation.*

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## National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

### **Creating**

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

### **Presenting**

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

### **Responding**

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

### **Connecting**

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.