



MORSE
MUSEUM

WATERCOLOR TECHNIQUES PART 1



Wild Cherry, c. 1901
Watercolor Sketch, Alice Carmen Gouvy, American, 1863–1924
Tiffany Furnaces, Inc., New York City, 1902–20 (89-006)

GRADES/LEVEL:

Kindergarten–5th grade/Elementary School

TIME REQUIRED:

1-2 class periods

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- learn about different watercolor techniques.
- practice using different watercolor techniques through specific art exercises.
- develop a familiarity with and a confidence in using watercolor as a medium.

MATERIALS:

- Watercolor paint sets
- Watercolor paper (any size)
- Paintbrushes
- Cups of water
- Paper towels
- Water-based markers
- Plastic wrap
- Salt

VOCABULARY:

Color: the reflection or absorption of light from a given surface.

Geometric shape: a shape with clearly defined edges (circles, triangles, rectangles, etc.).

Organic shape: a shape with curved or irregular edges (clouds, leaves, puddles, etc.).

Resist: a material added to a work of art to repel paint or dye.

Texture: how the surface of something looks or feels.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Alice Carmen Gouvy (1863–1924) and Lillian A. Palmié (1873–1944) were two Tiffany designers selected to work in his enamel department at Tiffany Furnaces, a department which other employees somewhat enviously referred to as “little Arcadia.” At Tiffany’s idyllic workshop, Gouvy, Palmié, and others were able to freely pursue their creativity without the stresses of the artist’s more commercially driven shops. Watercolor studies, examining plant species in detail, lined the walls, and these designs served as guides and inspiration for many of Tiffany’s enamels and ceramics.

The use of watercolor as a medium became more widespread in the nineteenth century thanks to a series of inventions that made watercolor pigments portable, less expensive, and more readily available. This gave even those with a casual interest the means and tools to explore the medium. Watercolor has continued to be popular and a fun way to experiment with color, texture, line, shape, and value.

Here are some helpful resources for teaching the five watercolor techniques presented in this lesson:

- A video that demonstrates using the wet-on-wet technique to create a slice of watermelon.
<https://youtu.be/0OV-XPfPFDA>
- A lesson plan and video that demonstrates the mixed-media technique by using watercolor paint and water-based markers to create a pineapple.
<https://arttoremember.com/about/lesson-plan/realistic-pineapples/>
- Includes images and brief descriptions of how to create texture with plastic wrap, salt resist, and spatter painting.
<https://www.projectswithkids.com/watercolor-techniques-for-kids/>

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Give each student one sheet of watercolor paper, a set of watercolor paints, a paintbrush, a cup of water, and some paper towels. Have students fold the watercolor paper into fourths to create individual spaces for each technique. Unfold the paper and lay flat.
- 2) Start with the wet-on-wet technique. Have students use the paintbrush to cover the top left area of the paper in just water. Have students go over the area two or three times to ensure saturation since watercolor paper can be very absorbent. While the paper is still wet, have students choose two colors from their paint sets. Have students dip their brushes in the chosen colors and then add the paint to the wet surface. This can be done with brushstrokes, dabbing, or any combination of application techniques students would like to try. Have students observe how the paint behaves and what kinds of lines, shapes, colors, and textures emerge.
- 3) Move to a new area of the paper. Give each student a set of water-based markers to experiment with mixed media. Have students use markers to draw designs or pictures in the empty space. Then, have students use paintbrushes to brush water and watercolor paint over the top of the markers. Observe what happens. Encourage students to try different amounts of water in different areas of the space, and look for similarities and differences in how the colors react. Also encourage students to add details with paint or marker once their designs have somewhat dried.
- 4) Move to one of the two remaining areas of the paper. Have students choose one paint color. Have students cover the entire area with one color of paint. As with the wet-on-wet technique (see step 2), encourage students to saturate the paper. While paper is still wet, have students sprinkle salt over the wet area to experiment with a salt resist. Leave the salt on the colored area until completely dry, but gently remove any excess salt that may have spilled to other areas of the paper right away.

- 5) In the final area, have students choose two paint colors they have not previously used. They may use the wet-on-wet technique from earlier, or experiment with the amount of water used to apply the paint in the last space. While the paint is still wet, have students cover the final area with a small piece of plastic wrap to create texture. Encourage students to leave bubbles and imperfections in the surface of the plastic, and to “rumple” the plastic wrap in different ways. Allow the paint to dry completely with the plastic wrap on top. For best results, remove plastic wrap when students come for their next lesson.
- 6) On a second sheet, scrap sheet, or the back of the current paper, give students the option to add a fifth technique called spattering. Since this technique requires good motor skills and can get messy, it is presented here as optional. Have students select a color of paint. Holding their paintbrush in one hand, have students tap the handle of their paintbrush with the first two fingers of the opposite hand to create a spatter effect with each color. Have students experiment spattering on both wet and dry areas of the paper. Observe how the saturation of the paper can affect the texture, color, and value of the paint.
- 7) Allow everything to dry completely, and have students keep their papers as a reference for Watercolor Techniques Part 2.

ASSESSMENT:

Students should:

- be able to name and visually identify the watercolor techniques presented in the lesson.
- be able to describe the processes of achieving the watercolor effects presented in the lesson.
- be able to use materials, tools, techniques, and process to achieve expected results in two- and/or three-dimensional artworks.