Watercolor Techniques: Depicting a Landmark

You will create a watercolor of an accident at a landmark, experimenting with a variety of techniques to create a dramatic, abstract setting. You will need these materials along with this handout: watercolor paper (9" x 12"), translucent and opaque watercolors, wash brushes (1-inch), blow dryer, color wheel (optional for reference), paper towels, Q-tips®, salt, cameras (cell phone or digital), and smaller synthetic watercolor brushes.

Getting Started

Step 1 Moisten the paint by adding a few drops of water to your watercolor. Set your sheet of watercolor paper in the landscape orientation. Make sure you have paper towels on hand to keep your brushes clean between each step. Dip your 1-inch brush with water; remove the excess on the side of the water container and brush evenly across the surface of the entire sheet of paper.

Step 2   Create a **wash layer** by loading the brush with color for the sky. Brush evenly across and all the way down the sheet. Notice how the wet paper distributes the color in a consistent and very gradual way; this is called a **graded wash.** If you want to remove some of the color, simply **blot** with paper towel. Use a blow dryer to accelerate dry time. Apply an **analogous color** with the 1-inch brush to define the horizon from the sky; analogous colors are colors that are closely related on the color wheel (blue, blue violet, violet).

Establish Atmosphere and Texture

Step 3   Use a **scumble** technique to create fog, smog, or stormy skies by applying layers of opaque watercolor to the wash layer. Using an erratic figure-eight motion to create this technique, dip the very tip of the brush in the paint and blot excess paint and water on a paper towel. Make sure to build the intensity of color with each layer. Remove unwanted color from areas by blotting with a paper towel. Use a blow dryer to accelerate drying.

Step 4   Distinguish the horizon from the sky. Build subsequent layers with a variety of brushes and colors (blue and orange, red and green, yellow and violet). Change the angle and direction of your brushstrokes to create movement.

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Exploring Textures & Creating Movement

Step 5   While the paper is still damp, lift paint from the paper by blotting with a paper towel or Q-tips. You may also sprinkle salt to create a crackled effect. Use a blow dryer to ensure it is completely dry before you flick the paper from behind to remove the salt.
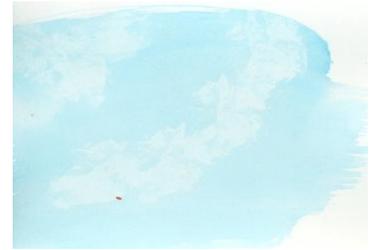
**Step 6**   You may use a variety of parallel and overlapping brush marks to create movement.

Step 7   Share your painting with a partner and discuss what he or she likes about the abstracted landscape, and what may need further definition.

Establishing the Landmark

Step 8   Work with photographs of landmarks from your city for inspiration. You may use a cell phone camera or digital camera to photograph little or well known landmarks of your city. You may use a viewfinder to isolate a detail to include in your watercolor.

Step 9   Use the spaces below and a smaller watercolor brush to create four quick thumbnail sketches of the landmark you are going to include.

Step 10   Decide where in the composition you will place your landmark and paint it on your watercolor from your favorite thumbnail sketch. Consider how you will use color and contrast to focus the viewer's attention.
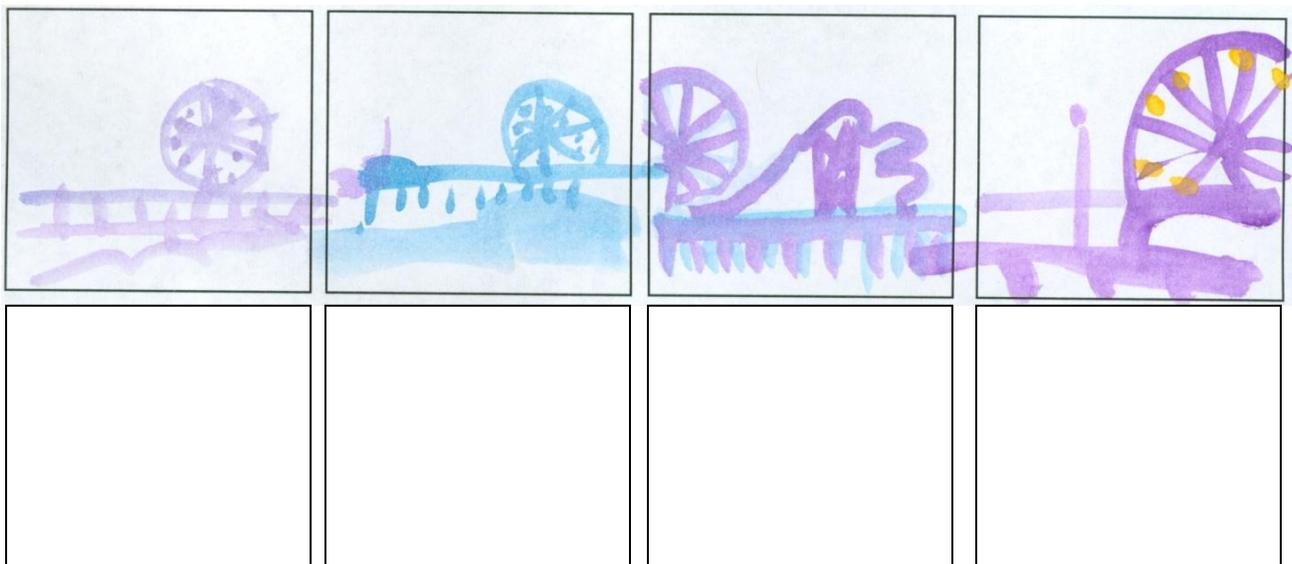
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What Is the Story?

Step 11 Use images of a train, plane, boat, bike, or car accident for inspiration. What element from a terrible accident will you include? Use the boxes below to create thumbnail sketches of details from the accident. These should be done very quickly, spend no more than one minute on each. Paint your image(s) on your watercolor. Consider how the object will relate to the landmark. Consider how both the object and landmark will relate to the atmosphere you created in Steps 3 through 7.

Scraping and Highlights

Step 12 Create highlights by **scraping** the painting with a thumbnail to reveal the white of the paper. Be sure that your paper is damp for best results if you are scraping and scratching. You may also add highlights with opaque watercolor or gouache.