
Art Masterpiece: *Return to the Four Sacred Mountains (The Long Walk)*, by Baje Whitethorn, Sr.

Keywords: Landscape, watercolor, primary colors, background, foreground

Grade(s): 4th grade to support social studies curriculum

Activity: Watercolor landscape

Art Print Substitutes: **Any of Whitethorn's watercolor landscapes may be used for this lesson. Use of the PowerPoint highly recommended. The title of this painting is often shortened to "The Long Walk."*



Baje Whitethorn, Sr. poses with a print of one of his landscape paintings. .

Pronunciation Guide:

Baje – baa-he

Whitethorn – white thorn

Dine – “The People” – din-eh

Hogan – “home” – hoe -gone

Website: www.bajewhitethornesr.com

About the Artist:

- Baje Whitethorn grew up on the Navajo Reservation near Shonto, Arizona. He has 11 siblings. They have all chosen to become artists.

- As a child, Baje helped his brothers herd the family sheep, and after their chores they would tell stories. Baje would draw pictures in the dirt floor of their hogan.
- Whitethorn's talent for art was apparent even in grade school. When he graduated from high school, Whitethorne took art classes at Northern Arizona University and at Grand Canyon College. While in school, he experimented with using only the three primary colors (red, yellow, and blue). Whitethorn learned how to mix and create his own colors.
- He is best known for his colorful landscapes depicting his homeland and rich culture, striking landscapes and the harmony of the Navajo way of life. Baje has developed his own technique for painting in a watercolor style using acrylic paint.
- In most of his pieces of art you can find the hidden image of a small folding chair. This symbol is popularly regarded to as Baje's personal trademark: "When I was a boy, my parents and grandparents brought home a new card table with six metallic blue chairs. In the summer months, I would put my face against the cool seat of the chairs. Now, I include the chair in my artwork because it reminds me of my boyhood and because it draws people into my artwork when they try to find it."
- Whitethorn has illustrated eight children's books, two of which he also authored. These include: Sunpainters: Eclipse of the Navajo Sun and Father's Boots. (These may be in your school's library/media center.)
- Currently, Baje resides in Flagstaff, Arizona, and he continues to pursue his childhood interests of storytelling and art. His artwork can be seen at various museums, art galleries, and private collections across the globe, including our own Basha Art Gallery, right here in Chandler, Arizona.

About the Artwork:

Return to the Four Sacred Mountains: This painting is a depiction of an historical event in Navajo history. In 1864, Kit Carson rounded up 8000 Navajos and forced them from their native land. The Navajos were forced to walk 300 miles to a desolate reservation called Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. Here, the Navajo suffered from poor crops and unclean water, many of them died. After four years, the government relented and let the Navajo return to their original

land. They gave the surviving Navajo horses and cattle, but of course they would have to walk the 300 miles back to their homeland. Baje Whitethorne tells the story of their journey home in this piece of art.

Possible Questions:

1. In fourth grade you study the history of Arizona. Have you studied anything about the Navajo Tribe?
2. The Navajo people refer to themselves as *Dine*, which means “*the People*”. The Dine are known for weaving rugs, making jewelry and being story tellers. How did they share their stories? Most stories were never written down but instead were shared from generation to generation through story-telling and drawn images.
3. What is the subject of this painting? What is uniquely Navajo about the subject? (clothes, hair style, jewelry, landscape, hogan, etc.)
4. Whitethorn is famous for painting landscapes. Can you point out what is in the foreground of this landscape? (The front of the painting; what is closest to the viewer.) The background?
5. What colors do you see? Whitethorne typically uses only red, blue and yellow but he mixes them to get other colors. Red, yellow, and blue are primary colors. What are the secondary colors? (orange, purple, green)
6. Explain to the students that some colors are symbolic to the Navajo – Black represents North, White is East, Blue is South and Gold is West.
7. (If you are using *The Long Walk* as your landscape print) Look at the border around the painting – it tells the story of the return journey – the Navajos traveled with cattle and horses (on each side), they traveled through Monument Valley (on top), back to their homeland (on the bottom).

Activity: Watercolor landscape

The students will create a landscape to depict the Navajo reservation that Baje grew up on as a child.

Materials needed:

- Watercolor paper, no smaller than 8” X 10”, one for each student.
- Watercolor paint with or without glitter. *
- Quality brushes, one for each student.

- Cups for water
- Pencils (Students should have their own.)
- Paper towels
- Black Sharpie markers, one per student. (Must be permanent ink, a medium to fine tip. The “permanent” markers from CUSD Warehouse do NOT work well for this project. Sharpie brand is best.)

***Baje Whitethorn’s watercolor paintings often have a shimmery look to them.**

If you wish, you can purchase liquid watercolor with fine glitter. See www.DickBlick.com for purchase. If you use liquid watercolor, make sure you have small cups for each color, or plastic paint palettes. Even offering just one color that has the shimmer affect adds to the final look. Shimmery Blue for water is a great choice.

Watercolor Technique Lesson: done prior to project – 2 mins

Share these points using the classroom document-camera (doc-cam) to demonstrate. Ask the teacher for assistance if you are unfamiliar with the equipment.

- Think of what the word “watercolor” implies: “water” is first, then “color. To properly paint with this type of paint you need to apply both in that order: water first, and then the paint (color.)
- Wet (lightly) the areas you want to paint first with plain water. Then load the brush with paint. The color should glide across the paper and fill large areas quickly.
- Show how you can dip the brush straight into the water and then return to the artwork to continue to move the existing paint across the paper.
- Demo how adding water will lighten the color. Less water will make color appear darker.
- If too much water builds up on the paper, a paper-towel can be used to absorb the excess. Show how to gently dab (press, not wipe) the paper with a paper towel to remove excess water and paint.
- Students will need to experiment. Encourage them.

Process: This project works best when it is done in a guided step-by-step manner. Use the document camera/projector to show the students each step as you go through the list below. Work together.

1. Cover desks with newspaper, if desired.
2. On the white board draw some examples of simple line drawings of the following types of things: a hogan, the sun, mountains, cactus, a fence line or sheep pen are some options. Students can use this as a reference later.
3. Baje focused on color, not on drawn details. We will do the same. Moving quickly we will draw the general landscape.
4. Everyone begins with their paper lying horizontally on their desk.
5. Have students write their name on the back.
6. **Start in pencil and draw each of these elements: (within 5 minutes)**
 - a. A horizontal line about 1/3 way down the paper. The horizon line separates the land from the sky in a landscape.
 - b. A mountain range
 - c. A sun with reaching rays (or a moon)
 - d. A river that stretches from the horizon line to the bottom edge of the paper.
 - e. A hogan (simple lines in triangular shape with an opening for a doorway. See project sample below.)
 - f. Two rain barrels to symbolize the importance of water to sustain life.
 - g. Add a fence line, to represents the sheep (Baje's chore)
 - h. A patterned rug or blanket (made by Baje's mom)
 - i. A folding chair (simple stick figure), which is Baje's trademark
7. **Next 2 minutes:** Everyone can now personalize their project by adding their own desert details to this landscape. (a cactus, a snake, a tortoise, ocotillo plants, coyotes, lizards, etc.) Remind students to keep their drawing simple because the focus of this project is the display of COLOR.
8. **Once their landscapes are complete have students trace over their pencil lines with marker. It is important to do this step prior to painting!**
9. Time to paint. Baje LOVED COLOR! He pushes the use of color from realistic to abstract. Encourage students to push their use of color.

Colors can be used in exaggeration. Purple mountains. Orange sun. Just like Whitethorn, have FUN with COLOR!!!

10. When Baje sits down to paint, he only pours the three primary colors in his paint tray. Red, blue, and yellow. In order to achieve the secondary colors, Whitethorn mixes them on his palette or directly on the paper. Quickly review the "recipe" for mixing the secondary colors.

Red + Blue = Purple

Red + Yellow = Orange

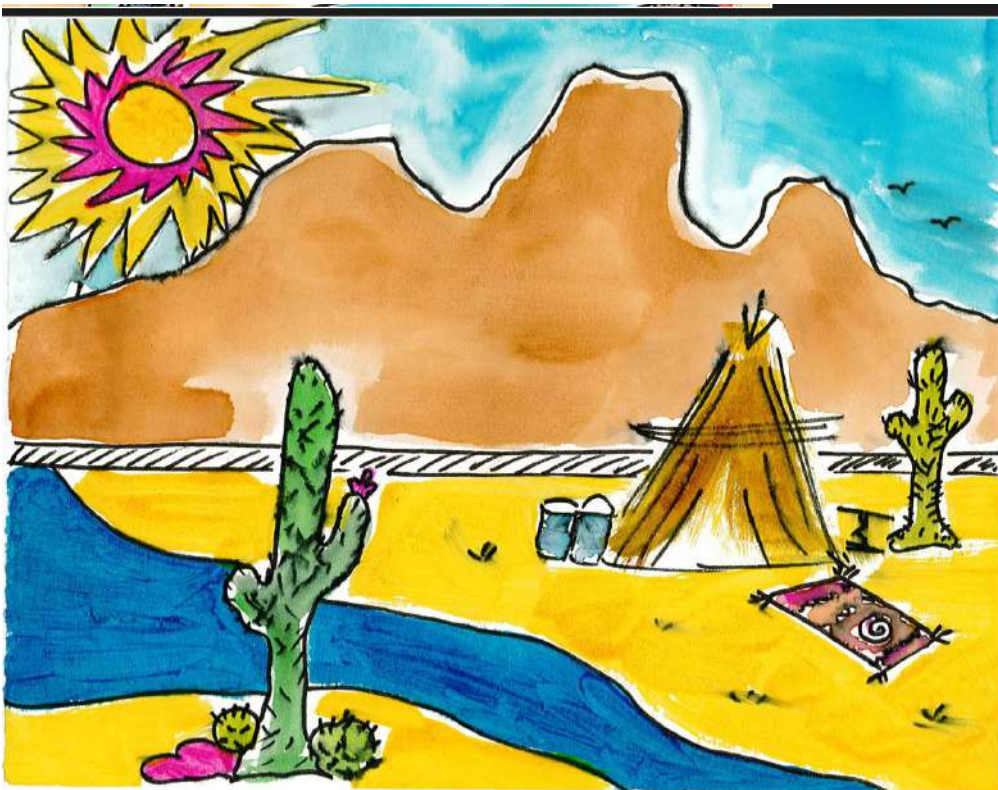
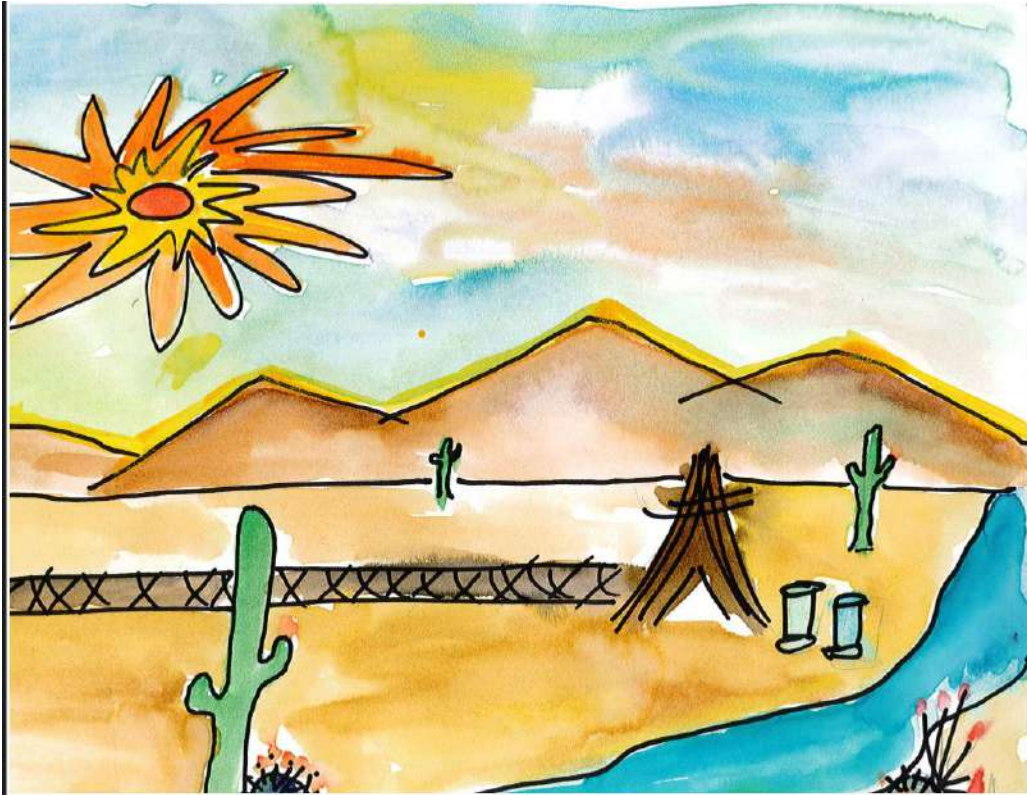
Blue + Yellow = Green

BROWN = All three primary colors mixed together

11. Pass out the watercolors sets, water cups, brushes and paper towels.
12. Remind students to experiment with mixing the primary colors to create the secondary colors. However, due to time restraints they can use all colors in the paint tray.
13. Baje often used shimmery paints. If glitter paint is provided, direct the students to use this color to bring special attention to their painting. For instance, use blue shimmer for the water.



Examples:



Parent Note:

Baje Whitethorne grew up on the Navaho Indian Reservation in Shonto, Arizona. He is best known for his colorful landscapes depicting the Navajo Reservation as well as portraits of his people. His finely detailed paintings are alive with bold rhythms of composition; rocks, canyons, colorful skies, a hogan and ramadas.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students created their own Arizona watercolor landscape.



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