

Landscape Detective

Detectives use clues around them to help put together a story of what happened in order to solve a mystery. Today, you'll use your five senses to investigate one (or more!) of our landscapes. What is a landscape? Landscapes are exactly what they sound like – pictures of natural land! Of course, there are many different types of land in the world, in the United States, and even in Virginia – so you will notice some differences in these paintings. If a landscape is pictures of natural land, what do you think a cityscape is? What about a seascape?

Activity Steps

Virginia has many different regions and types of land – from water, to gently rolling hills, to mountains and coal deposits. The regions can be divided into geographic regions like the Coastal Plain (or Tidewater), the Piedmont, the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Valley and Ridge, and the Appalachian Plateau. Watch our [Five Regions of Virginia](#) video or read this [Website Article](#) to explore different images.

However, Virginia can also be divided into cultural regions – which focuses on the similarities and differences of groups of people who live across the state. You can learn more about this in the [Our Commonwealth](#) exhibition, which divides the state into the Tidewater, Northern, Central, Shenandoah Valley, and Southwest regions.

Explore the links above and then visit our museum or choose your favorite painting from our [collections database](#) - and look closely. Imagine you are in the painting and go through the steps below to become a landscape detective in order to build a story about the image.

CLUES: Answer the questions below to gather your clues.

1. Let's start easy – what do you see? Don't just focus on the big picture – what are all of the small details that are easy to miss?
2. What is your *point of view*, or, what are you looking at as the viewer? For example, are you surrounded by mountains, or looking at far away mountains?
3. What do you see in the foreground, middle ground, and background?
 - a. Foreground – the part of the painting that is closest to you, the viewer!
 - b. Middle Ground – the part of the painting that is in the middle, between the foreground and background
 - c. Background – the part of the painting that is farthest away from the viewer, and usually behind the main object of the painting

P.S. You can share with us too! Tag us in a picture of your story and share with our social media @VMHCeducation on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook.

4. Use your five senses to imagine you are in the painting. We've already done "See".
What would you:
 - a. Smell?
 - b. Hear?
 - c. Taste?
 - d. Feel?

5. Use that information to start to create a story, using the landscape in the painting as the setting:
 - a. What clothing would your character(s) be wearing? Why?
 - b. What items would your character(s) have with them? Why?
 - c. Why is/are your character(s) in this location?
 - d. How did your character(s) get to this location? How does the time period impact the types of transportation available to them?
 - e. What jobs might your character(s) have? How does where someone lives affect the jobs that they have?

6. What questions do you have about the painting?

STORY: Put all these pieces together and write your story below! Remember, a basic story needs a beginning that sets up the characters, a middle that has some sort of conflict, and an ending that resolves that conflict.

SOLVE: Time to solve the mystery! Share your story with a family or friend. Can they guess which painting you wrote your story about?