

CuriARTsity: Z. Vanessa Helder

Subject	Age Level	Time
Art	4th Grade+	60-120 min

Overview

Z. Vanessa Helder was a skilled watercolorist from Whatcom County (she actually graduated from Whatcom High School). She painted a lot during the 1930s and 1940s, and was an important member of the **Precisionist** movement. **Precisionism** is usually defined by hard lines, solid colors, and urban subjects, like buildings. Helder fused that with an eye toward landscape scenes, creating a unique style. In this activity, we're going to try and use watercolors to create a precisionist painting inspired by her.

As part of this activity, we'll also explore a few watercolor **resist techniques**, which are ways in which we can prevent watercolors from overlapping one another. Specifically we're going to use templates and tape to create an outline, and white crayon wax to prevent overlap while freehand painting.

Activity Connections

One of Z. Vanessa Helder's watercolors was brought into the Whatcom Museum collection as part of the Safeco Collection. [Watch Curator Amy Chaloupka's video on the collection for more information](#) (especially about Helder between 1:30 and 2:15 of the video).

Materials

Set of watercolor paints
Blank paper for painting
3-5 watercolor brushes
White crayon
Ruler

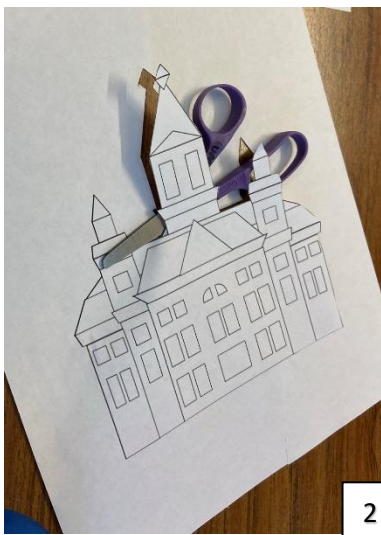
Printed template of Old City Hall (Page 4)
Paper towels
Painter's tape
Scissors
Pen or pencil

Activity

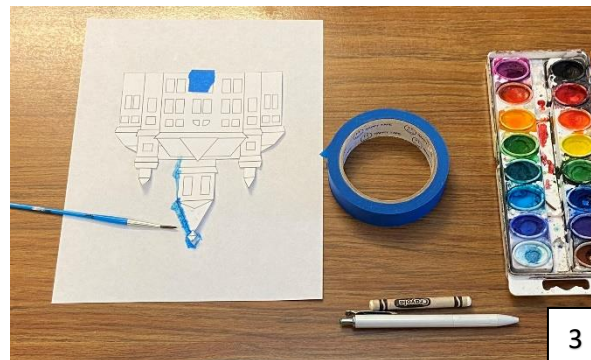
1. After you gather your supplies, begin by cutting the template out.
2. With 1 or more small pieces of painter's tape, tape the template in a central location of the blank page. Painter's tape is important as it won't tear the page if you gently remove it.
3. Now get painting! Follow along the edge of the template, making an outline with your background colors. To be extra careful, use one hand to hold the template flat against the page while you paint with your other hand. You can fill in the entire background at this time, or you can come back later to add more detail.
4. Gently remove the painter's tape, and add the appropriate color to those spots while holding the template down.
5. Let your background dry. This is important so as to not accidentally spread color where it isn't wanted.
6. After your background has dried, trace the outline edges with a pen or pencil. A ruler can be handy to get crisp lines.

7. Flip your painting over, and using painters tape, attach it to the appropriate empty space on the back. Now when you flip over the page you should see the template details through the blank part of the paper.
8. Take the white crayon, and trace along the edge of the color, where you outlined in step 6. The crayon wax pushes away water and creates a buffer to help prevent color mixing.
 - You can still paint over these areas by using just a little water and a lot of paint, so it still helps to be careful. This is useful to get edges though.
9. Taking your ruler and pen/pencil, trace out the interior details you'd like to include.
10. We're finally back to painting! Paint inside the marked areas however you like. Using the white crayon can be helpful to protect small details from being overlapped, for instance the color in the windows.
 - A tip for the windows, paint the window color first, wait for it to dry, cover with crayon, and then paint the exterior color.
 - While Old City Hall is usually red, you can paint it any color you like. Another tip is to vary the colors slightly to create depth. For instance in the demo, bright red was used for the towers and front roof, while orange/red was used for the rest.

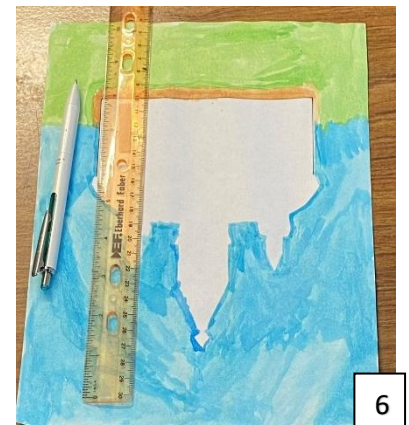
Activity Images



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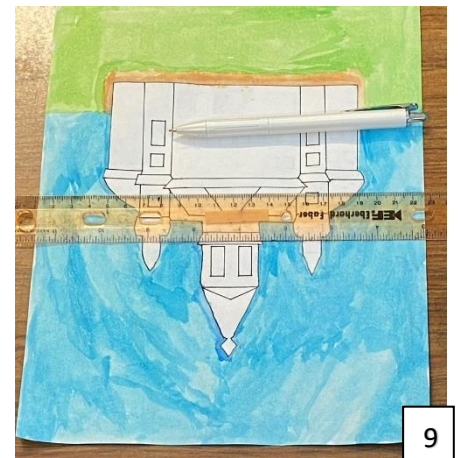
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Related Ideas and Additional Resources

For more information and resources on Z. Vanessa Helder, HistoryLink.org has an excellent biography with images [here](#). For more of her paintings, Helder donated a large collection to the Spokane Art Center, [viewable here](#).

