

Adopt an Artwork 2025 -2026

Place, Identity, and Interpretation: Reimagining the Landscape through "Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River"

Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River, Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach

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Christiana High

6th-12th

Visual Art

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will analyze and interpret *Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River* by Delaware artist Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach. They will explore how artists convey a "sense of place" through visual language and how Leach's work reflects the social, environmental, and artistic context of early 20th-century Delaware. Students will connect this analysis to their own identities and environments by creating an original landscape (traditional or conceptual) that communicates a personal or cultural relationship with a place meaningful to them.

This lesson emphasizes observation, interpretation, technique, and reflection — connecting artistic choices to intent and context. It aligns with DTGSS components in Student Engagement, Instructional Design, and Assessment of Learning.

TIME REQUIRED

Six 60-minute classes

STANDARDS FOR INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

- Standard 1: Learning Environment – Builds a respectful, student-centered space for artistic exploration.
- Standard 2: Planning & Preparation – Designs lessons using real-world relevance and interdisciplinary connections.
- Standard 3: Instruction & Assessment – Uses formative critique and reflection to guide improvement in creative work

STUDENT “I CAN STATEMENTS”

- I can analyze how artists use landscape to communicate meaning, culture, and identity.
- I can apply technical and compositional skills to create a work that expresses a personal connection to place.
- I can evaluate and defend artistic choices in my own work and others’, using art vocabulary and evidence.

MATERIALS

- High-resolution image of Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River (digital or printed)
- Sketchbooks
- Graphite pencils, erasers
- Canvas board or watercolor paper (1 per student)
- Acrylic or watercolor paints
- Brushes
- Palettes
- Optional: mixed media (collage, photography, digital tools)
- Access to research materials (library or internet) on Ethel Leach, Delaware landscape, or local history
- Reflection journals or artist statement handouts
- Projector/slides for visual analysis

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Lesson 1. Warm-Up/Introduction

- Display Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River.
- Students silently observe, then free-write for 3 minutes: What story does this place tell?
- Discuss artist Ethel Leach’s background, her role in the Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, and the early Delaware art scene.
- Guiding discussion:
 - How does the artist use light, texture, and composition to create atmosphere?
 - What emotions or messages might the artist be communicating about this environment?
 - What do we know about the St. Jones River ecosystem or its historical lotus beds?

Lesson 2. Visual and Contextual Analysis

- Students complete a visual analysis worksheet (elements, principles, symbolism, mood).
- Introduce key art-historical themes: Regionalism, American Impressionism, and Ecological Art.

- Students hypothesize how Leach's time period and location influenced her choices.
- Connect to DE social studies content (DTGSS connection): human-environment interaction, local geography, industrial vs. natural Delaware.

Lesson 3. Concept Development & Sketching

- Students brainstorm their own "sense of place." Prompts:
 - What landscape represents you?
 - How can you use light, color, and space to express a feeling or memory tied to a location?
- Students create thumbnail sketches exploring composition and perspective.
- Peer feedback on strongest concept (Gallery walk format).

Lesson 4. Studio Work

- Students create final artwork using chosen media.
- Teacher conferences with each student to discuss
 - Concept clarity
 - Technical execution
 - Alignment of visual choices to intent

Lesson 5. Reflection and Critique

- Gallery walk & peer critique using "Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Judge" protocol.
- Students write a 1-page artist statement addressing:
 - Why did I choose this place?
 - How does my artwork reflect personal or environmental meaning?
 - How did Ethel Leach's work influence my artistic decisions?
- Exit Ticket: "How can landscapes be more than pictures — how can they be arguments, memories, or stories?"

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

- Formative:
 - Sketchbook entries
 - Participation in discussions
 - Peer critiques
 - Teacher conferences
- Summative:
 - Final landscape artwork (technical skill, concept, composition)
 - Artist statement (clarity of intent, contextual understanding)
 - Reflective critique (verbal or written)

VOCABULARY

- Regionalism: American art movement focused on local scenes and rural life.
- Atmospheric Perspective: Technique to create depth by altering color and clarity.
- Plein-air: Painting outdoors from direct observation.
- Composition: The arrangement of visual elements in artwork.
- Context: The circumstances, environment, and culture in which an artwork is created.

- Intent: The artist's purpose or message behind the work.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Biggs Museum of American Art. Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River. Dover, DE. Collection of the Biggs Museum.
- Delaware Department of Education. "Visual and Performing Arts Standards." education.delaware.gov, 2020.
- Delaware Department of Education. "Delaware Teacher Growth and Support System (DTGSS)." education.delaware.gov, 2020.
- Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. St. Jones Watershed Overview. 2019.
- Leach, Ethel Pennewill Brown. Selected Works, 1915–1935. Wilmington Society of Fine Arts Archive.