

# Teaching with *Tallgrass Prairie* by Wayne Cooper



This document is designed to help teachers present, discuss, and teach about Oklahoma history and art literacy through the use of this work of art. The information and exercises here will aid in understanding and learning from this artwork.

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# First Analysis and Criticism

The steps below may be used for group discussion or individual written work.

Before beginning the steps, take two minutes to study the artwork. Look at all the details and subject matter. After studying the artwork in silence, follow these steps:

## **Describe:**

Be specific and descriptive. List only the facts about the objects in the painting or sculpture.

- What things are in the artwork?
- What is happening?
- List what you see (people, animals, clothing, environment, objects, etc.).

## **Analyze:**

- How are the elements of art – line, shape, form, texture, space, and value used?
- How are the principles of design – unity, pattern, rhythm, variety, balance, emphasis, and proportion used?

## **Interpretation:**

Make initial, reasonable inferences.

- What do you think is happening in the artwork?
- Who is doing what?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say to the viewer?

## **Evaluate:**

Express your opinion.

- What do you think about the artwork?
- Is it important?
- How does it help you understand the past?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

# Overview of the Artwork

The tallgrass prairie was one of North America's major ecosystems originally spanning portions of 14 states and covering over 142 million acres. It was a complex landscape, harboring a rich diversity of plants and animals, that was shaped by nature.

Today, less than 10% of the original tallgrass prairie remains. Most of it has been converted to farmland. Large, unbroken tracts of tallgrass prairie only exist now in the Flint Hills of Oklahoma and Kansas. In 1989, the Nature Conservancy purchased the 29,000 acre Barnard Ranch as the cornerstone of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. The Preserve now consists of 38,600 acres of land owned or leased by The Nature Conservancy. The Conservancy's goal is to recreate a functioning tallgrass prairie ecosystem using controlled burns and bison. In 1993, 300 bison were reintroduced and will eventually grow to a herd of 3,200 animals freely roaming on 32,000 acres of preserve.

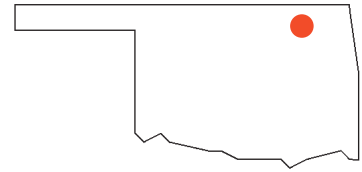
# About the Artist

Wayne Cooper is a painter known nationwide for his portrayals of Western and American Indian subjects. He comes from a background of Indian heritage and was raised on a small ranch gaining first hand knowledge of Oklahoma ranch life.

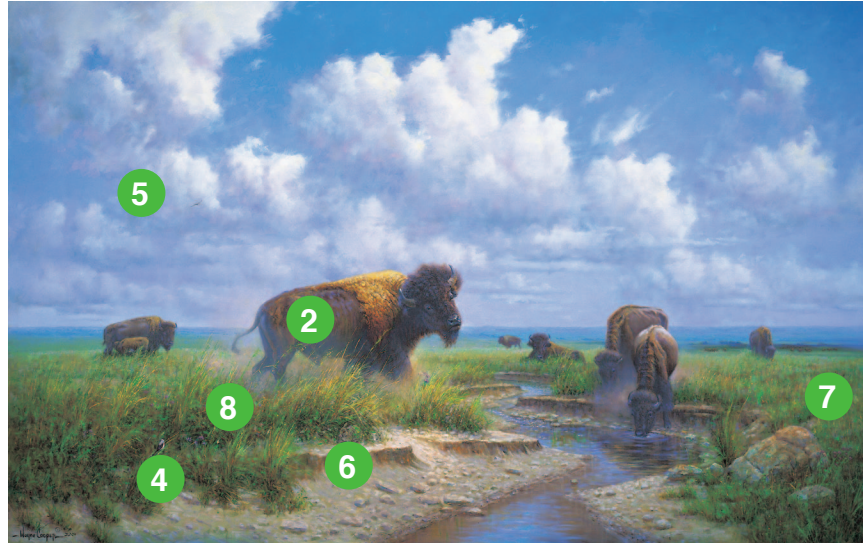
Cooper is listed in Artists USA, *Who's Who in the Midwest*, *Who's Who in American Art*, *International Who's Who in Art and Antiques*, *Universal Directory of the Art and Personalities of the Americas*, and others.

His works consist of oils, water colors, charcoals, pencil, sculpture (bronzes) and lithographs. His works are held in many private and public collections worldwide, including the halls of the Oklahoma State Senate and House of Representatives.

# Oklahoma Details



The Oklahoma Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is located in northeastern Oklahoma.



1. The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is the largest protected remnant of tallgrass prairie left on earth.
2. Today, the area is home to over 2,500 free-roaming bison.
3. Over 700 plant species can be found on the land, as well as 300 bird and 80 mammal species.
4. During the warm months, birds such as the dickcissel and the scissortail flycatcher are seen frequently. Here, the artist included a scissortail flycatcher, Oklahoma's state bird.
5. Rough-legged and red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, and bald and golden eagles are just a few of the birds that can be spotted during winter months.
6. It is also common to see deer, coyotes, and bobcats roaming the prairie. Here, the artist included a rabbit.
7. A prairie is a large, flat, mostly treeless area of moderately dry land often covered with coarse grasses.
8. The most obvious feature of the tallgrass prairie are tall grasses such as indiagrass, big bluestem, little bluestem, and switchgrass. The grasses average between 5 and 6 and a half feet tall with some stalks reaching as high as 10 feet.

# Visual Arts Details

Use this section as a guide to motivate your students to identify various terms and ideas relative to visual arts.



## Creating Depth: Relative Size

The closer an object is to you, the larger in size it will appear. Correspondingly, the farther away an object is to you, the smaller in size it will appear.

This concept is called **relative size**. Artists use this concept to create depth within the composition (placement of objects) on a canvas.

Keeping in mind that this painting is painted on a flat canvas, take some time to observe the objects depicted and think about how they appear closer or farther away from you.

Compare buffalo #1 to buffalo #2. #1 is much larger than #2; however, neither one of them look abnormal in any way. We wouldn't consider #1 to be a giant buffalo, and we wouldn't consider #2 to be a miniature buffalo. The **relative size** of each buffalo is communication how close to or far from the view each one is.

# Experiment

You can experiment with the concept of relative size on your own or with your class. Take two round balls that are the same size, and place them next to each other on a table or desk. When viewed at eye-level the balls should appear to be identical in size (figure 1). You may need to kneel down to the table to view it from eye-level.

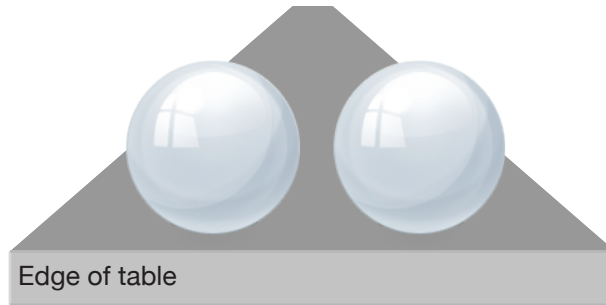


figure 1

Now take one of the balls and place it at the opposite end of the table or desk. Once again, view the balls at eye level. Notice that the ball that is farther away appears much smaller than the ball that is closer to you (figure 2).

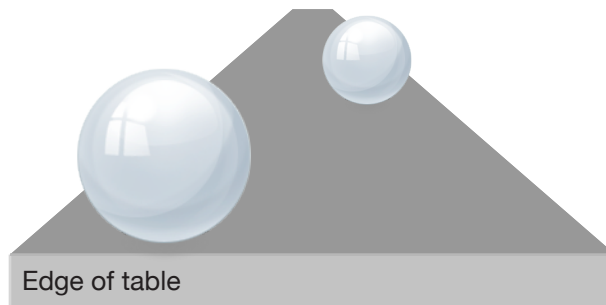


figure 2

Using the same concept and observing details such as the size objects appear to be in relation to their distance helps artists create the illusion of depth on a flat surface such as a canvas.

# Suggested Reading

**Oklahoma Adventure**, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press  
Oklahoma Stories: Oklahoma's Climate and Geography, **pages 264-269**  
State Emblems, **pages 419-420**

**Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts** by Clairmont Press  
Chapter 2: Where in the World is Oklahoma?, **pages 24-57**  
Appendix 2: Oklahoma's Symbols, **pages 503-504**

**The Story of Oklahoma**, Second Edition by Baird and Goble  
Unit 1: Natural Oklahoma, **page 2**  
Chapter 1: Oklahoma's Diverse Land: **pages 4-19**  
Appendix H: Oklahoma Symbols, **pages 410-411**

# Final Analysis

After completing the readings and activities, go back and look at the artwork again. Now that the students are more familiar with the subject matter, ask them to write a few paragraphs about their interpretation of the artwork. In their own words, the writing should address the following:

- Description of the artwork and who/what is in it
- How the elements of art and principles of design are used within the artwork
- What feelings, emotions, or information the artwork depicts
- Their opinion of the artwork



# Pass Objectives

## Grade 4- The Arts

**Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., architecture, contour, medium, mixed media, perspective, symbol).**

1. Know how works of art are made with respect to the materials, media, techniques, and sources of ideas.
2. Describe and use the principles of design: rhythm, balance, contrast, movement, variety, center of interest (emphasis), and repetition in works of art.
3. Describe and use the elements of art: line, color, form, shape, texture, value (light and dark), and space in works of art.

**Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.

**Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will learn to appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.**

2. Demonstrate respect for personal artwork and the artwork of others.
3. Demonstrate thoughtfulness and care in completion of artworks.

## High School- Oklahoma History

**Standard 1. The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.**

1. Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, art, music, literature, photographs, documents, newspapers, and contemporary media).
2. Identify, evaluate, and explain the relationships between the geography of Oklahoma and its historical development by using different kinds of maps, graphs, charts, diagrams, and other representations such as photographs, satellite-produced images, and computer-based technologies.

**Standard 6. The student will investigate the geography and economic assets of Oklahoma and trace their effects on the history of the state.**

1. Locate the significant physical and human features of the state on a map (e.g., major waterways, cities, natural resources, military installations, major highways, and major landform regions).

## **High School- The Arts**

### **Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)**

1. Identify and apply knowledge of the principles of design: rhythm, balance (symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial) contrast, movement, variety, center of interest (emphasis), and repetition in personal artwork, and the artwork of others.
2. Identify and apply the elements of art: line, color, form, shape, texture, value (light and dark), and space in works of art. Discriminate between types of shape (geometric and organic), colors (primary, secondary, complementary, intermediates, neutrals, tints, tones, shades, and values), lines (characteristics, quality), textures (tactile and visual), and space (background, middleground, foreground, placement, one-, two-, and three-point perspective, overlap, negative, positive, size, color) in personal artwork, and the art work of others.
3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.
4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

### **Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

1. PROFICIENT: Analyze a work of art within its cultural and historical context.  
ADVANCED: Analyze common characteristics of works of art and artifacts across time and among cultural groups to analyze and identify influences.
3. PROFICIENT: Compare cultural and ethnic art forms throughout the world that have influenced visual art
5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

### **Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.**

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.