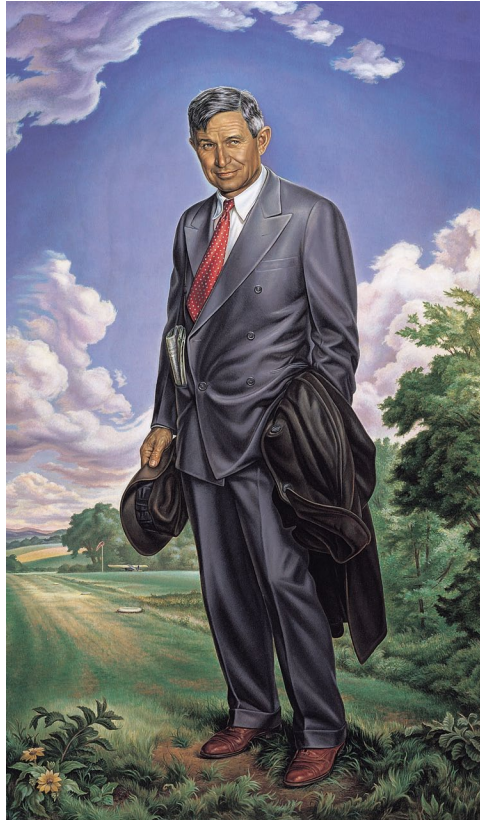


Teaching with *Will Rogers* by Charles Banks Wilson



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.

Contents:

- First Analysis and Criticism
- Overview of the Artwork
- About the Artist
- Details
- Suggested Reading
- Final Analysis
- PASS Objectives

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

At the time of his death in 1935, Will Rogers was America's most widely read newspaper columnist and his Sunday night half-hour radio show was the nation's most-listened-to weekly broadcast. He wrote 4,000 syndicated columns and six books, becoming a prominent radio broadcaster and political commentator. In 1934, he was voted the most popular male actor in Hollywood and starred in 71 films and several Broadway productions. It was his unique sense of folksy humor and his honest, intelligent observations about the government and America that earned the respect of the nation.

Commissioned by the Oklahoma State Legislature, Charles Banks Wilson completed this life-size portrait of Rogers in 1963 for the state capitol rotunda. To capture the 'easy dignity' of Oklahoman's favorite son, Wilson studied all available published sources even though the artist painted the famed humorist a year before his untimely death. The outcome was that of Rogers standing on a pastoral airstrip. Rogers was implemental in the introduction of passenger air travel to the masses. The eight-foot tall painting is a commanding presence in the rotunda as Will Rogers greets his viewers with a slight grin.

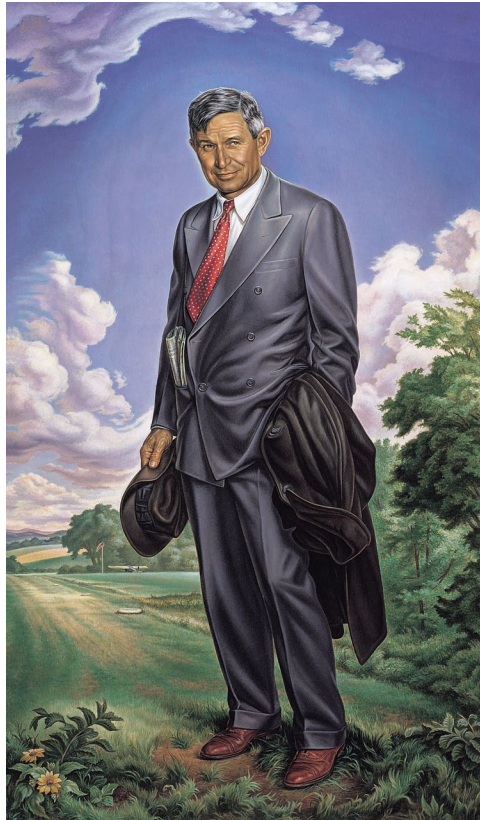
About the Artist

Charles Banks Wilson Charles Banks Wilson was born in 1918 in Arkansas and grew up in Miami, Oklahoma. Educated at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1936-1940, he was given an award from the Chicago Society of Lithographers and Etchers, and his work was added to the Art Institute collection. While at the Art Institute, he also began a project whereupon he sketched portraits of numerous members of Oklahoma's American Indian tribes – a project that would soon become a lifelong artistic journey.

Wilson completed his education in Chicago and later returned to Oklahoma in 1943, where he established a permanent studio in Miami. Two years later, he began teaching night classes in drawing at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College. Eventually he became head of the art department, a position he held until 1960. During this period he continued to illustrate books and produce lithographs from his own press.

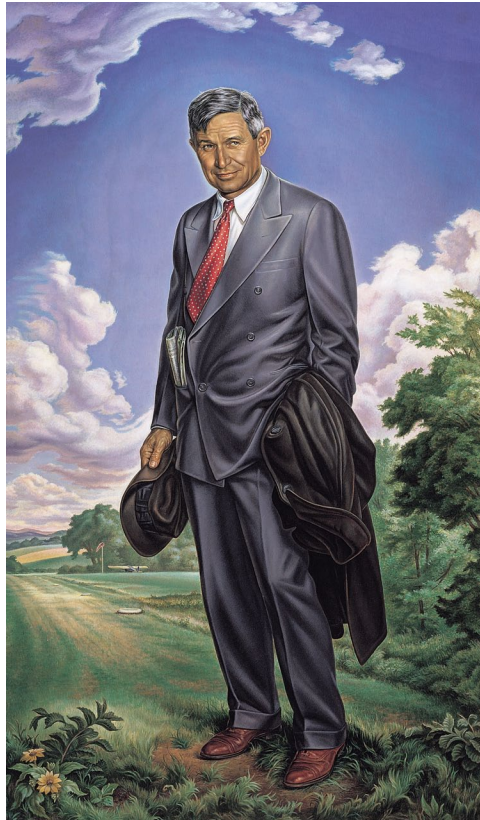
In 1957, he completed his first portrait commission for Tulsa oilman and collector Thomas Gilcrease. Perhaps one of Wilson's greatest achievements came when the U.S. Senate selected four of his paintings to be shown in 20 world capitals. In 2001, he was named an Oklahoma Cultural Treasure and is a member of the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

Details



1. Will Rogers was a man of many talents. He went from roping in Wild West shows to vaudeville, and then to writing in national newspapers, radio, and movies.
2. For the painting, Charles Banks Wilson studied more than two dozen books about Will Rogers and the hundreds of photographs and motion pictures featuring Rogers.
3. Rogers was a member of the Cherokee tribe and was known as the “Cherokee Kid.”
4. Rogers’ humorous political columns eased the pain of the Great Depression for many Americans.
5. The painting stands at eight feet in height.
6. Rogers was the most air-traveled person of his time and was called the “Patron Saint of Aviation.”
7. Rogers is depicted standing on an airstrip in a pasture, symbolizing his love of aviation.

Details



8. Rogers was a generous and caring man. During the last days of her life, Miss Alice Robertson was a guest of the Will Rogers Hotel where Rogers hoped the mineral water baths would relieve the pain of her disease.
9. Rogers was flying with fellow aviator and Oklahoman Wiley Post when they crashed in Point Barrow, Alaska on August 15, 1935.
10. Both houses of Congress suspended deliberations upon learning of Rogers' and Post's deaths, and a period of national mourning followed.

Suggested Reading

Oklahoma Adventure, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press

Chapter 19: Dirty Thirties, **page 94**

Oklahoma Stories: Oklahoma's Favorite Son, **pages 335-340**

Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts by Clairmont Press

Chapter 15: Section 1: The Roaring Twenties, **pages 383-384**

Chapter 15: Section 2: The Great Depression, **pages 394-395**

Further Resources

PBS offers a series of lesson plans for On Stage at the Kennedy Center. Will Rogers is highlighted in [Lesson One: Mark Twain and Will Rogers – American Originals](#)

C-SPAN's series of lessons titled *American Writers* highlights Will Rogers in [The Cowboy Philosopher on Prohibition: Video Lesson Plan](#)

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- Social Studies

Standard 5. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the unique features which contributed to the settlement of the state of Oklahoma.

1. Identify major historical individuals, entrepreneurs, and groups, and describe their major contributions (e.g., Sequoyah, the Boomers and the Sooners, and Frank Phillips).

Grade 4- The Arts

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

1. Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context.
2. Identify themes and purposes of works of art and artifacts in history and culture.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.
4. Identify how visual art is used in today's world including the popular media of advertising, television, and film.

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).

Standard 3. The student will evaluate the social, economic, and political development and contributions of Native Americans from prehistoric settlement through modern times.

4. Identify significant historical and contemporary Native Americans (e.g., John Ross, Sequoyah, Quanah Parker, Jim Thorpe, Will Rogers, the Five Indian Ballerinas, the Kiowa Five, and Wilma Mankiller).

Standard 8. The student will examine factors that contributed to the political, economic, and social history of Oklahoma during the twentieth century.

1. Identify significant individuals and their contributions (e.g., Jerome Tiger, Frank Phillips, Kate Barnard, Angie Debo, Ada Lois Sipuel, Clara Luper, George Lynn Cross, Ralph Ellison, Robert S. Kerr, Henry Bellmon, and Reba McEntire).

High School- The Arts

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

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.

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.