

# Contour Lines

Grade 4 – Lesson 2

(*Art Connections*, Level 4, pgs. 28-31)

## Big Idea

*Contour line drawing can suggest a three-dimensional form.*

## Learning Targets and Assessment Criteria

**Target 1:** Identifies and interprets contour line drawings. (Arts EALR 1.1 *Elements of art: Descriptive line – contour line drawing*; 2.3 *Applies a responding process to the arts – art analysis*)

**Criteria 1:** Describes and analyzes how contour lines can render the inner and outer edges of a form, creating the illusion of three-dimensionality.

**Target 2:** Creates a contour line drawing. (Arts EALR 1.1 *Elements of art: Descriptive line – contour line drawing*; 1.2 *Skills and techniques: Contour line drawing*)

**Criteria 2:** Draws the inner and outer edges of a form.

**Target 3:** Creates blind contour line. (Arts EALR 1.2 *Skills and techniques: Blind contour line drawing*)

**Criteria 3:** Draws the inner and outer edges of a form without looking at drawing.

## Local Art Reference



**Miniature: Line Drawing of Artist at Work**, ca. 1600

*Persian*

62.205

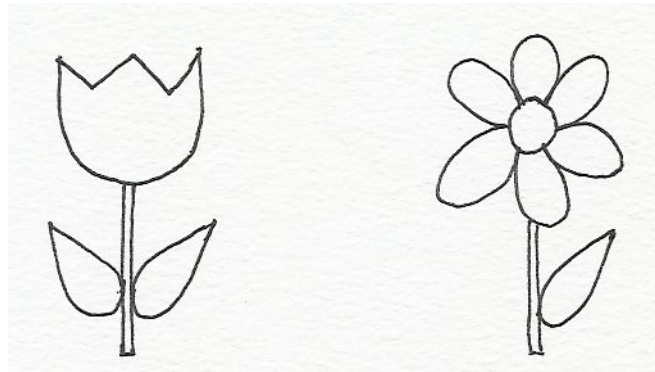
(NOTE to Teacher: See **Art Background** section at end of lesson for more information about this work of art.)

## Looking at Art Questions

(Note to Teacher: Show the Persian miniature contour *Line Drawing of an Artist at Work* above, Matisse's *Les Glaieuls* (study for *The Flowers*) and Mark Uqayuittuq's *Friendly Spirits* from *Art Connections*, Level 4, pgs. 28-29.)

1. What do these three images have in common? (They are all line drawings, they all show some detail but are somewhat simplified, etc.)
2. What kinds of details did the three artists show in their drawings? (The artists showed the outlines of the forms and the edges of inside details of the forms)

3. In art, we call these kinds of lines **contour lines**. Contour lines are lines that define the outside and inside edges of a form. Oftentimes, an artist doing a contour line drawing won't pick up his or her pencil very often. Can you find a place on any of these works of art where the artist followed a contour from the outside to the inside of the form?
4. Artists use contour line drawing to train our eyes to record what we are really seeing, rather than what our minds THINK we are seeing. In our minds we have symbols that stand for the common objects we see every day, for example, we might draw a flower like this:



Have you ever seen a flower that looks just like either of these? How do they look different from Matisse's flowers?

5. These flowers are symbols, or representations of the idea of flowers, that we carry in our minds. **Contour line drawing** is a way to trick our minds into drawing what we really see instead of drawing the symbols we know.

## **Art Making Activity**

(See the **Create** section *Art Connections*, Level 4, pg. 30)

### **Make (Blind) Contour Line Drawings**

*How can you draw exactly what you see, rather than what you THINK you see?*

#### **Activity 1 – Contour Line Drawing (Shoe)**

1. Take off one shoe, and place it in an interesting position on your desk.
2. Remember the two tricks you know to doing successful contour line drawings:
  - a) Look at the object you are drawing most of the time, and only rarely look at your drawing;
  - b) Try to make your eye and your pencil travel at the same speed around the object.
3. Focus your vision on the uppermost, left point of your shoe. Now slowly move your eye around the contours of the shoe while you move your pencil at the same rate of speed.

4. Try not to lift your pencil off the page the whole time.

### **Activity 2 – Blind Contour Line Drawing (Shoe)**

1. The second drawing we are going to do is called a **blind contour line drawing**. It's called a blind contour drawing because you make the whole drawing without looking at it.
2. Put your drawing paper underneath the piece of newsprint on your drawing board.
3. Do a second contour line drawing of your shoe, but this time without looking once.
4. Compare your two contour line drawings of your shoe. Which one is most accurately observed?
5. NOTE to Teacher: You might choose to have the students add color to their favorite contour line drawing. If you want to do this, have them do a finished contour line drawing of their shoe on watercolor paper (8x11). After finishing the drawing, ask the students to go back over their lines with fine line marker. Then, ask the students to tape it down on all four sides of their paper to a laminated art mat or the masonite drawing board. Now, they could use watercolor paint to paint their shoe. Maybe they could even add a cast shadow under the shoe with the paint to suggest greater depth!

### **Activity 3 – Contour Line Portrait**

1. Now, we're going to use contour lines to describe a human head, neck and shoulders.
2. Look at a person sitting diagonally across from you (so you are not looking the person straight in the face, but from a slight angle).
3. Place your pencil at the top of your paper, and focus your vision at the top of the person's head. Slowly move your eyes down your friend's face as you move your pencil down your page.
4. Be sure to record the inner contours of your friend's head (eyebrows, edges of hair, features) as well as the outer contours.

5. When you finish your contour line drawing, you can add subtle watercolor values for the shadows you see on your friend's head.

### Each Student Needs

#### Activity 1 – Contour Drawing (Shoe)

- 1 sheet of 8x11 drawing or watercolor paper (see note in red above about whether to offer the option of adding color to the drawing afterwards)
  - Sketching pencil – 2B-4B
  - Drawing board
  - Fine line marker
- (Optional if adding color):
- Blue tape
  - Set of watercolor paints
  - Watercolor brushes
  - Water containers
  - Paper towels

#### Activity 2 – Blind Contour Line Drawing (Shoe)

- 1 sheet of 8x11 drawing paper
- Drawing board
- 1 sheet of 12x18 newsprint clipped to the drawing board, to cover the student's drawing from himself
- Large clip
- Sketching pencil – 2B-4B
- Fine line marker

#### Activity 3 – Contour Line Portrait

- 1 sheet of 11x14 watercolor paper
- Drawing board
- Blue tape
- Soft lead drawing pencil (2B-4B)
- Fine line marker
- Set of watercolors
- Water medium brush
- Water containers
- Paper towels

### Vocabulary

Contour  
Contour Line  
Blind Contour Line

### Tips for Teacher

#### *During Class*

- It is helpful to demonstrate contour line drawing before the students try it (even if you are inexperienced). Assign a student to watch your eyes while you are drawing, so that you can prove to them that is most helpful to look at the object you are drawing about 80-90% of the time (vs. looking at your drawing more).

### Tips for Teacher (cont.)

#### *Contour Line Portraits*

- Arrange students so that they look at their subject from an angle. A  $\frac{3}{4}$  view reveals more contours on the human head, and will yield a more interesting portrait.
- You may want to offer students the option of going over their contour lines with a thin line marker, before adding values to their portraits.
- You may also choose to let the final step of adding values be optional for students.

## Self-Assessment

After you finish all your contour drawings, please check whether you have accomplished the following tasks:

- I drew the inner and outer edges of the forms I observed
- I made a blind contour drawing (drew the inner and outer edges of a form without looking at my drawing)

Then in your sketchbook, please answer the following question about it:

*Which of your contour drawings best captured the form you were observing? Why do think so?*

## Reflecting on Our Art (adapted from *Art Connections*, Level 4, pg. 31)

- **Describe:** Describe your process of contour line drawing.
- **Analyze:** What did you find challenging? What surprised you?
- **Interpret:** Which of your contour line drawings best captured the form you were observing? Why do think so?
- **Decide:** Did you improve as you did more contour line drawings? What strategies did you use to make your drawings successful?

## Art Background (for **Miniature: Line Drawing of Artist at Work**, ca. 1600, by an anonymous *Persian* artist)

Some Islamic manuscripts feature members of the court at work. A royal court was filled with a variety of people, including soldiers, scribes, doctors, magicians, entertainers, artists, cooks and pages. Artists such as the one depicted here in great detail played important roles in court life. Through their work, artists entertained and amused the ruler and his entourage and demonstrated the ruler's worldliness and sophistication as a supporter of the arts. The importance of painters, particularly those who created illustrations for books, can be seen in the large number of illuminations that exist to this day.

In this image, we see a contour line drawing artist at work in a landscape setting. The artist copies the work of another master, with the original propped up before him. Copying works by others was not considered derivative or unimaginative in the Islamic world. Aspiring painters were required to perfectly copy the works of known masters before they were allowed to branch out and develop their own styles.

### Excerpted from the Seattle Art Museum *Close-Ups* online at:

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=single&currentrecord=55&page=collection&profile=objExplores&searchdesc=WEB:CloseUps&newvalues=1&newprofile=objects>

## Assessment Checklist

Student	Describes and analyzes how contour lines can render the inner and outer edges of a form, creating the illusion of three-dimensionality	Draws the inner and outer edges of a form	Draws the inner and outer edges of a form without looking at drawing	TOTAL 3
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<b>Total Points</b>				
<b>Percent Comprehension</b>				

*Teacher Notes:*

## Letter Home

*Dear Family,*

*Today we learned that a **contour** is the inner and outer edges of a form. We learned that artists use **contour line drawing** as a way to develop their skills in recording exactly what they see, rather than what they think they see. We looked at contour line drawings by Henri Matisse, Mark Uqayuittuq, an Inuit artist from Alaska, and an anonymous Persian artist from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Then we made our own contour line drawings of our shoes and of each other. We even made one **blind contour line drawing** when we did the whole drawing without looking at our paper.*

*At home, you could encourage your child to practice doing more contour line drawings of anything in your home (fruit and plants are good subjects to start with). Observational drawing takes practice, like any other skill. The more contour line drawings your child does, the better s/he will get.*