

## **GROWING CHAMPION CLASSROOMS: Lesson Plans for Arkansas Educators**

These lesson plans and accompanying poster files are based on the 2012-2014 traveling art exhibit *Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey, Drawings by Linda Williams Palmer*. The exhibit was organized for travel by the Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. "Growing Champion Classrooms" materials fulfill the mission of the Committee: to educate the public about Arkansas women artists and to contribute to the cultural life of our state. The Committee created this outreach material in support of teachers who encourage students to appreciate Arkansas' natural resources.

"Growing Champion Classrooms" includes 2 art lesson plans, visual aids, and activities for K-2, 3-5, and 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. While the lesson plans relate to 6 of the 18 images from the original traveling exhibition, all images are provided online and educators are encouraged to use them as is appropriate to enrich units in a variety of disciplines. However, the "Growing Champion Classrooms" lesson plans are primarily organized to encourage original art making in honor of the artist and the art work that inspired this educational component. The plans are designed for traditional and non-traditional educators in our state, identify applicable State Frameworks, and include options for Common Core guidelines.

### **PAINTING STICKS WITH STICKS!**

**Grade Level:** Early Elementary (K-2)

**Subjects:** Visual Arts, English- Language Arts

**Time Required:** 2 sessions, 50 minutes per session

**Authors:** Virmarie DePoyster, Lisa Krannichfeld Walden

The Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts gratefully acknowledges the generous sponsors of "Growing Champion Classrooms" **Entergy Arkansas** and the **School of Forest Resources, University of Arkansas at Monticello**. "Growing Champion Classrooms" is supported in part by the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage, and by the National Endowment for the Arts.



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### **Lesson Overview:**

Students will learn about color pencil artist Linda Williams Palmer and her works of art. Students will analyze her piece *Northern Catalpa* and learn how the artist's use of line variation captures the wild nature of the tree's branches and limbs and adds a sense of movement to the artwork. Students will discuss the historical background behind this tree as stated by the artist. Students will show their understanding of how the use of different lines can create visual interest in a work of art by using non-traditional materials as "brushes." Students will also experiment with value by watering down black ink to achieve different grays in their drawings. After students have made several drawings of branches, trunks, and limbs students will work together to combine their drawings collaboratively to create one giant tree art piece. The students will write a short narrative explaining what they learned, how they created their artworks and how they feel about it (an artist's statement.)

### **Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Investigate, name, and draw different types of lines.
- Use nontraditional materials as tools for painting.
- Practice drawing from direct observation and in a large scale format.
- Experiment with achieving different values by mixing varying amounts of water with ink.
- Work collaboratively to create a combined work of art.
- Reflect on their art making through writing a short narrative artist statement.

### **Standards utilized in this lesson:**

#### **Common Core:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3- Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

#### **Visual Arts:**

VA.5.K.1- Investigate lines.

VA.6.2.1- Develop representational mark making skills using various wet and dry media.

VA.6.2.10- Create works of art using a variety of collaborative methods.

VA.6.1.2- Experiment with grade-level appropriate elements of art and principles of design in a 2D product.

**Materials:**

- Linda Williams Palmer's *Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey* poster, **Northern Catalpa**
- Artist biography, artist's process, attached
- Definition of a champion tree, attached
- Historical background information, on poster
- Various sticks to use as "brushes" (thick, thin, dull, pointy, long, short)
- Large white drawing paper
- India Ink and water
- Writing paper and writing utensil

**Glossary:**

1. Line: An element of art used to define shape, contours, and outlines; also to suggest mass and volume.
3. Value: an element of art that refers to the use of lightness and darkness in a piece of artwork to create an illusion of form and depth.

**Procedure:****Day 1**

1. Display Linda Williams Palmer's poster, **Northern Catalpa** and allow students to take time to closely look at the work of art.
2. Share with students Linda Williams Palmer biography and artist's process, attached.
3. Discuss with students what inspired Linda to paint and her journey to documenting Arkansas champion trees. Definition of champion tree, attached.
4. Ask students to share their initial observations about the artworks on poster. Share as many nouns as possible to describe the drawing. (Examples: bark, branch, foliage, leaf, light, seed, trunk, soil, pollen, weeds)
5. Start a discussion about the work of art by discussing the following:
  - Take a moment to look closely. What do you notice about this tree?
  - What kinds of lines do you see both in the trunk and branches?
  - Are certain kinds of lines used in certain areas of the artwork?
  - How does this tree look different from other ones you see every day?
  - What do you think the artist found special and different about this tree that made it interesting to draw?
  - What do you see that supports that idea?
6. Now, share with students that this tree has a historical background. Catalpas are known for their beautiful clusters of white flowers that bloom in May and June. They are famous for these orchid-like blooms and for large bean pods that hang for months from the trees. Fishermen so value Catalpa worms that some even steal the worms in the dead of night from a neighbor's tree.  
Circumference: 257 inches  
Crown Spread: 53 inches  
Height: 67 inches

7. After sharing Linda Williams Palmer's story behind the drawing, ask students if hearing the real story affects what words or phrases they would use to describe the drawing.
8. Students will then collect different types of sticks, in different sizes and shapes, to use as paint brushes. After collecting several from outside bring students back inside to practice using them on sketch paper. Students can lay their paper on the floor and dip the stick tips into ink diluted with various amounts of water. Also have them experiment with drawing upright, with their paper taped to a wall or easel. After students have practiced using various sticks and drawing various types of lines take them back outside with supplies to begin drawing by observing real trees.
9. Have students take around 5 sheets of paper and position themselves in front of the tree they wish to draw so that they have a clear view. Students may lay their paper on the ground to draw. Have students pick a different area of the tree to draw on each paper focusing on using different kinds of sticks in each to create a variety of lines. One paper may be a section of a trunk, another may be a cluster of branches growing to the right, and another may be branches growing to the left. When they are finished they should have 5 different line drawings of 5 different areas of their tree.

## **Day 2**

1. Have students critically look at their 5 drawings. Have students dilute their ink with various amounts of water so that they can go back in to add a variety of grays to their line drawings. Have students focus on filling in their trunks or branches with various grays. Traditional brushes can be used or paper towels can be dipped into the ink washes and wiped onto the paper.
2. After the drawings have dried have students collect in small groups to combine their drawings to create one large tree. Have them discuss and decide where to include each other's drawings in the larger artwork. All of their drawings may not be used in the end product. After the students are finished hang the trees up so each group can view the finished product.
3. Have each group of students present their collaborative tree art and explain their process of creating it to the entire class. These verbal explanations will help them later write their artist statements.
4. Using writing paper and pencils have students write sequentially what they did for this project: from first learning about Linda Williams Palmer's artwork, to collecting sticks, to painting with sticks, to collaboratively producing a work of art. Also have them reflect their feelings throughout the process. Peer edit or teacher edit as necessary.

## **Assessment:**

Students will be assessed on:

- Did the students participate in collecting sticks and creating 5 different drawings of tree parts using them?
- Do their drawings use line and value variation?
- Did the students work together in small groups to create a collaborative combined work of art?
- Did the students clearly explain their artistic process to the class both verbally and written?



LINDA WILLIAMS PALMER  
*Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey*  
**NORTHERN CATALPA**

*(Catalpa bignonioides)* - Grant County, Prattsville 2010

Colored pencil on paper by Linda Williams Palmer - 48" h x 48" w framed

Detail: *Leaves and Blossoms, Northern Catalpa* by Linda Williams Palmer - 14" h x 18 1/2" w framed

CHAMPION STATISTICS

Circumference: 257"    Crown Spread: 53"    Height: 67"    Bigness Index: 337

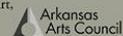
Catalpas are known for the beautiful clusters of white flowers that bloom in May and June. They are famous for these orchid-like blooms, and for large bean pods that hang for months from the trees, some over 1' long. I'm told that fishermen so value Catalpa worms that some will even steal the worms from a neighbor's tree in the dead of night. Back in the day, stagecoaches stopped under this Northern Catalpa. Drivers knew they could always find water in the spring and the small lake behind it. - LWP



EDUCATIONAL SPONSORS



"Growing Champion Classrooms" materials are based on the 2012-2014 exhibit *Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey*, Drawings by Linda W. Palmer, and are provided by Entergy Arkansas and the School for Forest Resources, University of Arkansas at Monticello, with support, in part, by the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage and by the national Endowment for the Arts.



*Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey*  
Drawings by Linda Williams Palmer  
Introduction

Many of us have lived with trees so long that we take them for granted. We climb them as children, and we rest in their shade. We write poems about them, and we harvest them for our fireplaces, our furniture and our paper. We study them in school, and we mark the seasons by their foliage in spring and fall. This exhibit gives us an opportunity to contemplate the trees we sometimes take for granted: to notice their singular beauty and to consider what events have taken place in their presence over time.

Linda Williams Palmer is one of the few artists who have created a series based on individual trees. She is the only artist who has chosen to interpret the largest of each species in Arkansas: the champion trees. This exhibit tells why and how she did it, and shares the results of her artist's journey through excellent colored-pencil drawings of trees that communicate majesty and familiarity at the same time.

Each tree portrait represents a specific place, time of day, and season chosen by the artist — often after multiple visits, copious notes, and interaction with the site. Photographs communicate the scale and size of the actual trees, and hint at the humble locations where they took root. Exhibit writing provides anecdotes and information about the trees and the artist's process. It is our hope that this combination of information will encourage Arkansans to appreciate our state's natural and artistic heritage, and inspire them to celebrate the beauty and history that is sometimes found in their own backyards.

The Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts

*Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey*  
The Artist's Process

Linda Palmer grew up playing in the woods by her family home in eastern Oklahoma. As a first-grader, she played under a large oak tree on the playground. These childhood experiences inspired her interest: many of her drawings included trees. Trees are still a significant part of Linda Palmer's artistic life. She is captivated by how weather and season, light and shadow, and time of day affect the visual impression of a tree. She calls upon her preferred medium, Prismacolor Pencils, to accurately represent her observations while artistically interpreting the majesty of the champions.

Palmer developed her own technique of layering different colored pencils on textured paper. In this series, her mastery enables her to achieve colors found in nature, add implied texture to that of the paper, and suggest the fragility of delicate leaves and blossoms. For example, the trunk of the Shortleaf Pine is composed of 25 different colors. The brilliant autumn leaves of the Cherrybark Oak contrast with the partially-rendered ones to capture the thin dryness that precedes their fall to the ground.

Her technique is time-consuming, and demanding—especially for large work: colored-pencils make slim lines and layering cannot be erased. However, Palmer chose this medium because that's how she pictured the drawings in her mind. She soon realized that the time required by her technique allowed her to interact with her subject, and therefore better translate her feelings and imaginings about each tree onto paper. The largest drawing in this series took her eight weeks to finish, working an average of 5 hours a day 6 days a week, or 240 hours.

Add actual drawing time and preparatory research to understand the investment Palmer has made over the past 5 years to bring this series to the public. Travel (in the thousands of miles), reference photographs, and interviews with landowners and residents combined to create an impression that helped her interpret the special thing she sees in each selected tree. Sometimes it's the trunk that speaks of age and history. Sometimes it's the composition of branches against the sky. Linda Palmer has developed her "artist's eye" through many years of drawing and painting. She knows when a drawing is complete: "...when another stroke would detract from what I want to say." Rather than thinking about the hours put into the work, Linda Palmer measures her success by her pleasure with the result: a drawing that becomes a visual statement honoring nature, memory, and time.

*Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist's Journey*  
Champion Trees

An Arkansas champion tree is the largest example of its species. Trained foresters make the final assessment, but often the public is the first to notice a specimen and nominate it for the list maintained by the Arkansas Forestry Commission. A champion tree is re-measured every 10 years to confirm its status: younger examples of the species have champion potential, and existing champions can be felled in a storm or fall victim to an uninformed pruning.

Arkansas champions have been nominated by individuals, art museums, cities, churches and cemetery associations, hunting clubs and wildlife refuges, and the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs as well as timber and paper companies, national and state parks, and the Arkansas Fish and Wildlife Service. A wealth of information is available through the Arkansas Forestry Commission website to guide those who want to nominate a potential champion. Think of the trees you've seen and consider the three necessary measurements to that process.

- Trunk Circumference (inches): measure at 4.5' above ground level  
If the tree forks at or below 4.5', record the smallest trunk circumference below the fork; if the tree is on a slope, measure 4.5' up the trunk on the high and low sides and average the numbers; if the tree is leaning, measure the circumference at 4.5' along the axis of the trunk at a 90 degree angle to the trunk
- Height (feet): measure from the base of the trunk to the topmost twig  
Use a clinometer, laser, hypsometer. Or use a straight stick! Hold the stick vertically at arm's length: the length of the stick above your hand must equal the distance from your hand to your eye. Walk backward away from the tree until the stick section above your hand is the same length as the tree in your field of vision. From where you are standing, measure the distance to the tree. This measurement is the approximate height.
- Average Crown Spread (feet): measure at points where water drips from the tree's canopy to the ground  
Measure the widest crown spread (greatest distance between any two points along the drip line). Turn the axis of measurement 90 degrees and find the narrow crown spread. Average the two measurements with the formula: (wide spread + narrow spread) divided by 2 = average crown spread.

These measurements combine to calculate the official "Bigness Index (BI)" of a tree with a point system: one point for each inch of circumference, one point for each foot in height, and one point for every 4 feet of crown spread. The "bigness" point system accounts for the differences among species. Tree age calculations are not included in the index: boring into a trunk for a core sample is potentially damaging and not recommended. Bigness defines champions, and was calculated to confirm all 142 of the currently confirmed Arkansas species.

The Arkansas Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts gratefully acknowledges generous support for the educational component “Growing Champion Classrooms”, poster sets and art lesson plans based on the content of the 2012-2014 touring exhibit “Arkansas Champion Trees: An Artist’s Journey.” Sponsors Entergy Arkansas and the School of Forest Resources, University of Arkansas at Monticello, have made it possible for traditional and non-traditional educators across the state to use the materials to inspire and enrich learning long after the tour concludes. “Growing Champion Classrooms” is supported in part by the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage, and by the National Endowment for the Arts.

