

## **BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS**

*Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) – “Montana Landscape”*

Oskar Kokoschka was born March 1, 1886, in the Austrian town of Pöchlarn. He had this to say about his father and early life, “From him I learned to endure poverty, rather than to work slavishly at distasteful work.” He spent most of his youth in Vienna, where he entered the Kunstgewerbeschule in 1904 or 1905. While still a student, he painted fans and postcards for the Wiener Werkstätte, which published his first book of poetry in 1908. That same year, Kokoschka was fiercely criticized for the works he exhibited in the Vienna Kunstschau and consequently was dismissed from the Kunstgewerbeschule. At this time, he attracted the attention of the architect Adolf Loos, who became his most vigorous supporter. In this early period, Kokoschka wrote plays that are considered among the first examples of expressionist drama.

His first solo show was held at the Galerie Paul Cassirer, Berlin, in 1910, followed later that year by another at the Museum Folkwang Essen. In 1910, he also began to contribute to Herwarth Walden’s periodical *Der Sturm*. Kokoschka concentrated on portraiture, dividing his time between Berlin and Vienna from 1910 to 1914. In 1915, shortly after the outbreak of World War I, he volunteered to serve on the eastern front, where he was seriously wounded. Still recuperating in 1917, he settled in Dresden and in 1919 accepted a professorship at the Akademie there. In 1918, Paul Westheim’s comprehensive monograph on the artist was published.

Kokoschka traveled extensively during the 1920s and 1930s in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. In 1931, he returned to Vienna but, as a result of the Nazis’ growing power, he moved to Prague in 1935. He acquired Czechoslovak citizenship two years later. Kokoschka painted a portrait of Czechoslovakia’s president Thomas Garrigue Masaryk in 1936, and the two became friends. In 1937, the Nazis condemned his work as “degenerate art” and removed it from public view. The artist fled to England in 1938, the year of his first solo show in the United States at the Buchholz Gallery in New York. In 1947, he became a British national. Two important traveling shows of Kokoschka’s work originated in Boston and Munich in 1948 and 1950, respectively. In 1953, he settled in Villeneuve, near Geneva, and began teaching at the Internationale Sommer Akademie für Bildenden Künste, where he initiated his Schule des Sehens.

Kokoschka’s collected writings were published in 1956, and around this time he became involved in stage design. In 1962, he was honored with a retrospective at the Tate Gallery, London. Kokoschka died February 22, 1980, in Montreux, Switzerland.

## **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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### **Description**

1. Is there considerable activity in the picture? Why do (don't) you think so?
2. Describe the entire scene in your own words.
3. How would you compare the size of the people to the landscape? The buildings to the landscape? Which dominates the scene, the mountains or the village, or does one dominate the other?
4. Is this type of landscape familiar to you? If you have been to the mountains, is this how they look to you?
5. How does the artist make things look close or far away?

### **Color:**

1. Name all the colors you see in this painting. What about different tones? For example, how many greens do you see? Dark or light colors?
2. Do the colors help create a mood? What is the mood?
3. Do the colors tell anything about the season? The weather? The climate?
4. How are the colors painted on? In large areas of color? In patches? In lines?
5. Can colors help to tell whether the scene is quiet or busy?

### **Texture:**

1. What different textures do you see here?
2. What helps you know how things in the painting feel?
3. Are most of the textures in this work similar or contrasting?

### **Reaction:**

1. Where did the artist intend for you to be standing while looking at this painting?
2. Was the artist in a hurry when he painted this, or does it look well planned?
3. Do you think the artist was more concerned with making the picture look real, or with creating a feeling about the landscape? Explain.
4. Is his understanding or interpretation of a landscape the same as yours? How would you paint a landscape? Do you like the way he did it? Is it interesting to you? Why or why not.

## **SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

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### 1. Finger paint landscape

Materials: finger paints, finger paint or construction paper, foil pans or Styrofoam trays for paint.

Have students finger paint a landscape. Give each student the basic colors of paint on a pan or tray. A dab of each primary color, red, blue, and yellow, would force them to experiment and mix their own secondary colors.

### 2. Monochrome mosaic

Materials: stack of old magazines, white construction paper, scissors, glue

Have each student choose a favorite color. Looking through magazines, find as many shades of that color as possible. After accumulating an assortment of shades, glue them on construction paper in an interesting arrangement.

### 3. Textured landscape

Materials: tissue paper, construction paper for background, water colors or tempera paint, glue

Crumple tissue paper and glue down in areas that have texture. For example; mountains, hills, tree trunks, etc. Leave some spaces open for flat areas. When crumpled paper dries, complete picture with paints.