ART ON THE MOVE

A Teaching Packet
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NOTE TO THE READER

Art on the Move examines the theme of travel and motion in art. The nine works of art discussed and reproduced in slides consist of paintings, prints, photographs, and sculptures in the permanent collection of The Art Institute of Chicago and, in the case of one work, at O'Hare International Airport. The art represents a cross-section of cultures and time and, in doing so, sheds light on the many forms and purposes of travel throughout history.

For each of the nine works, information is provided about its production and meaning. Background on the artist and the culture in which the work was made is also included. Glossary words are underlined the first time they appear in the text. Each entry concludes with three classroom suggestions, ranging from questions about the work of art to writing, art, and math activities. You are encouraged to adapt all of the written material to meet the grade level, abilities, and interests of your students.

It is our hope that Art on the Move will serve as a valuable resource in the classroom, inspiring you and your students to embark upon travels of the imagination and to The Art Institute of Chicago.
### ART ON THE MOVE

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INTRODUCTION

Transportation: the conveyance of goods and people over land, over water, and through the air.

Chicago as Hub

“The boys have done it!” wired Katharine Wright to a friend one winter day in 1903. The boys were her brothers, Orville and Wilbur (1871-1948; 1867-1912), who had just made four historic flights off a windswept dune near Kitty Hawk, N. C., in a flying machine they had built themselves. It was the first manned power-driven vehicle to stay aloft, even if for only twelve seconds. The air age was now officially launched. Soon the Wright’s biplane evolved into modern monoplanes, with propellers eventually giving way to jets and turbofans. Airports sprouted up in major cities and beyond, and unimaginable destinations began to be reached in record times.

Today, Chicago is the busiest air hub in America -- the culmination of a long heritage of the city as a transportation center. Although an early nineteenth-century visitor had complained: “The appearance of the country near Chicago offers but few features upon which the eye ... can dwell with pleasure,” the site straddled the mid-continent’s major water routes, the Great Lakes and rivers that flow into the Mississippi. First Native Americans, then explorers, fur traders, and missionaries traveled by canoe, raft, and small boats, with occasional short portages over land,
east to the ocean, north to Canada, and south to the Gulf of Mexico. All water routes converged at Lake Michigan’s southernmost tip, now Chicago. As settlers pushed west after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Chicago became a staging point for land routes leading to the vast new territories.

The year 1848 saw the completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal between Lake Michigan and the Des Plaines River, which provided the final link of an all-water route between the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. But by that time, steam trains had started to chug across the nation. Chicago once again became the major switching point for rail transport of people and goods throughout the country. This transformation occurred with lightning speed. In 1848, the city’s first tracks were laid linking Chicago with Galena; six years later, Chicago was the railway hub of the West, and by the turn of the century, seventeen separate railway lines came in from all directions.

With the advent of the air age, Chicago’s location again made it a hub. City residents campaigned to make Chicago the mid-continent’s major crossroads for this wondrous new mode of transportation by holding an international aviation meet, attended by as many as three to four million people, from August 13 - 20, 1911. “Pilots spent as little time as possible on terra firma,” marveled one visitor, “and the sky above the park was continually dotted with the birdmen.” The fact that early planes were unable to fly coast-to-coast without refueling bolstered Chicago’s cause, and in 1927 an unprepossessing spot on the Southwest Side became the airport known today as Midway. (Midway was officially named in 1949 after the success of American Naval Air forces in the World War II battle
of the same name.) By the 1940s, it had become the busiest airport in the
country. Today, with over sixty-six million passengers arriving and
departing annually, O’Hare International Airport (named after World War
II naval aviator Lieutenant Commander Edward O’Hare) has supplanted
Midway and Chicago still reigns supreme in the air age, just as it had on
water, then rail.

Although Chicago contains some of the foremost examples of modern
architecture and design, the structure and spaces associated with the
groundbreaking invention of flight have received scant attention. The
exhibition Building for Air Travel: Architecture and Design for Commercial
Aviation (October 19, 1996 - January 5, 1997) is the first such examination
in an art museum of the history of architecture and design of airports,
aircraft factories, and airline interiors, as well as of the impact of flight in
our world today. And it is only fitting that this pioneering show be held in
the nation’s commercial aviation hub at The Art Institute of Chicago, whose
mission has long included educating the public about architecture and
design.

The World of Travel

A solitary hiker with nothing more than a backpack ... White sails of a boat
on the horizon ... The silver speck of a plane high in the sky ... Travel has
always stirred the imagination, from the young child who hears the
haunting sound of a train whistle at night to those who recall journeys of
their past. Throughout the ages, artists have responded to this lure and
taken remarkable voyages, while sometimes never leaving the shelter of their studios.

The nine slides selected here reveal the world of travel and motion as explored in art. Drawn predominantly from the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago, the works demonstrate how artists have used the evocative theme of travel to fuel imagery in their art. As arranged here, the slides survey, in a sense, the history of transportation, of moving from one place to another -- first by foot, then by water, next by train or trolley, and ultimately lifting off, soaring through the sky.
WALKING

Slide 1

Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858)

*Branch Road at Motomachi, Totsuka*, from the series

*Fifty-Three Stations on the Tôkaidô*, 1833

Woodblock print on paper (9 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.)

Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1925. 3504

A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.

Chinese sage Lao Tzu , c. Sixth Century B.C.

During the peaceful and prosperous Edo period in Japan (1603-1868), traveling became one of life’s joys. People journeyed by foot and horse for business purposes, religious pilgrimages, or mere pleasure. An artist particularly noted for chronicling some of these major Japanese travel routes was Utagawa Hiroshige. Forswearing his father’s inherited administrative position in the fire department, Hiroshige studied painting and produced designs for *ukiyo-e color woodblock prints*. After 1830, Hiroshige focused on the subject of landscape and over the next twenty years produced thousands of designs for landscape prints, most famous of which was his *Tôkaidô* series.

The Tôkaidô, or Eastern Seaboard Highway, was the most popular road from the new political capital of Edo, now called Tokyo, to the imperial
capital of Kyoto, where the emperor lived. Hiroshige traveled along the Tōkaidō on an official mission of the ruling shogun, or military ruler of Japan. Throughout the trip, he kept a picture diary which resulted in the acclaimed *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō* series.

The fifty-three stations refer to official stops along the 292-mile Tōkaidō. Depending upon how fast one walked, the journey took twelve or so days, with the traveler coming upon a variety of rest facilities. Often situated near important monuments or towns, each stop had its own regional flavor. Here, Hiroshige depicts the branch road to Kamakura at Motomachi, which was one-half mile from the Totsuka Station. The waitress on the left greets her incoming guests, with their names printed on hanging signs in anticipation of their arrival. A man dismounts from his horse and a woman unties the strings of her traveling hat. To the right, an older man crosses the bridge, also heading toward the restaurant. Although the woodblock print illustrates details of the actual site, Hiroshige's main purpose with the series was to convey the romance of travel and the beauty of nature. The series depicts all four seasons as well as various times of day. Color woodblock prints like this were sold as souvenirs much as postcards are today.

This slice of Japanese life would disappear soon after Hiroshige's death in 1858, with the subsequent fall of the shogunal government and rapid Westernization of the island nation. Subdivisions replaced expansive panoramas like Hiroshige's view, and instead of traveling by foot, today people board the Shinkansen, or bullet train, that zooms alongside the Tokaido, now one of the busiest highways in the world, at speeds up to 168
miles an hour. But here, Hiroshige's delightful image of the nineteenth-century foot traveler surrounded by the beautiful countryside prevails. As he wrote amid the agonies of death:

I leave my brush at Azuma,
I go to the Land of the West on a journey
To view the famous sites there.¹

Classroom Suggestions

1. Color woodblock prints like this one were sold as souvenirs in shops, much as postcards are today. They documented places that travelers encountered as they walked from Edo to Kyoto. What can students learn about Motomachi from examining this print? Have students bring in postcards that they have purchased while traveling or received from someone on a trip. Have each student trade with a partner and write a fictitious note to a friend from that location, describing the place photographed and the activities that s/he engaged in while visiting. Have each student find the postcard location on a map.

2. Hiroshige kept a picture diary of his journey from Edo to Kyoto, which resulted in the series Fifty-Three Stations on the Tōkaidō. Have students keep a picture diary of places that they encounter on a walk -- to school, in

¹ "Azuma is the Eastern Capital. The Buddhist Heaven is supposed to lie in the west where the sun goes down."
their neighborhood, etc. From these sketches, have each student create more finished works and number them to create a series. Each series can receive a title.

3. The Tôkaidô was 292 miles in length. Create some math problems for students to solve, such as the following: A) If people walked 16 miles per day, how many days would it take them to travel the entire distance? B) Imagine a road in the United States of the same distance. If a car traveled 60 miles per hour, how many hours would it take to travel the entire distance?
Boat Model

Egyptian; Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 11/12 (c. 2134-1784 B.C.)
Wood with pigment (41 in.; 104 cm)
Gift of Henry H. Getty, Charles L. Hutchinson, Robert H. Fleming, and Norman W. Harris, 1894.241

The destination intended for this boat was the final one -- the afterlife. Placed in a tomb, the wooden boat was a replica of actual boats that sailed up and down the Nile River, Egypt’s main route of transportation. Ancient Egyptians believed that after death the soul returned to the body preserved by mummification; they therefore stocked their tombs with items for the deceased to use in the afterlife. Initially these objects were relatively simple -- pottery and stone vessels, as well as paintings and statues. But as time passed, the articles became more complex, and also reflected the wealth of the deceased. Thus Egyptians stocked their tombs with furniture, real clothing and wigs, and even baskets and jars of food. Since they believed that models were substitutes for the real article, they also filled tombs with wooden or stone models of entire houses, bakeries, breweries, workshops -- and boats like this.

Because there were few roads in the surrounding deserts, boats were the most important means of transportation in ancient Egypt, and crossing the
Nile by boat was as common as walking across the street today. Workers rowed to their jobs; nobles sailed to their estates; cargo boats transported stones, food, and other products from one part of the country to the other. Even the great temples and pyramids had canals from the Nile leading up to their entrances.

Here, just as in life in ancient Egypt, the wooden model contains fourteen seated rowers, their arms outstretched to grasp the oars (now strapped to the sides of the boat to prevent damage to the model). At the bow, or front, stands the captain as lookout to help navigate the river. Wearing white short kilts with black wigs and beards, the oarsmen were not slaves but free men hired to work on the boat. Their red-painted skin reflects their outdoor profession, and each of their carved faces bears slightly different characteristics. The large rudder-oar in the stern, or rear, steered the boat, as did a rectangular-shaped sail, now missing.

Before, however, this model boat could be used for routine transportation in the afterlife, it was believed that it had to make a symbolic journey. And that was to carry the deceased’s soul to the sacred city of Abydos, where the god of the afterlife, Osiris, was buried. Only after this pilgrimage had been made, could this little wooden boat begin its daily -- and eternal -- voyages in the afterlife.
Classroom Suggestions

1. Boats were the most important means of transportation in ancient Egypt, moving people and goods up and down the Nile. What modes of transportation are in your community? How have the geographical features, development, and population of the community affected the prevalence and popularity of these modes?

2. Assign the class the exercise of stocking an ancient Egyptian tomb with objects that were needed to live a full, productive afterlife. Have each student select one object from the categories of buildings, animals, people, and entertainment to draw or create in clay. An accompanying research and writing project can be a description of why this object was of great value to the culture.

3. The oarsmen on this model boat were paid workers. Have students make a list of transportation jobs in our society. What skills are needed by the individuals in these professions?
TRAINS & TROLLEYS

Slide 3

Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)

Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare, 1877
Oil on canvas (23 1/2 x 31 1/2 in; 59.6 x 80.2 cm)
Mr. And Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1933.1158

Rushing with movement, filled with steam, the enormous glass-and-iron vault of Paris’s Gare Saint-Lazare, or Saint-Lazare station, epitomized the excitement of the new industrial age. The station was initially built in 1836, some ten years after the first steam-powered freight and passenger rail service had been developed in England. In 1868, Saint-Lazare station and its surrounding streets were redesigned under Baron Georges Haussmann’s (1809-1891) massive urban renovation plan that transformed Paris into Europe’s first truly modern city. One year after its remodeling, the station was handling some thirteen million passengers per year.

Modern urban buildings like Saint-Lazare station were a favorite subject for the avant-garde group of French painters, now called the Impressionists, whose en plein air, or out-of-doors, painting in pure, bright colors and short, quick brushstrokes changed western art. One of those painters was Claude Monet, whose trailblazing works of the 1860s helped define the basic tenets of Impressionism and whose late, great water-lily
murals, painted nearly sixty years later, helped launch the course of modern art. Not only did Gare Saint-Lazare link Paris to many of the suburban and rural spots favored by the Impressionists, but the bustling modern station exemplified the artists’ rapidly changing world. As young students, they had walked for a half-day to reach the countryside; in the 1870s, expanding rail lines made quick and easy day trips common. Their interest was not the literal depiction of the new buildings, like the station, but rather the fleeting and dynamic impressions of a city in motion.

With special permission from railway authorities, Claude Monet painted approximately a dozen paintings of Saint-Lazare station in 1877. For several, he actually positioned himself down in the tangle of tracks and train switches. In other works, as seen here, his vantage point was within the station proper. There is even a story that he convinced the station master to stop all the trains and cram their engines with coal so that he could capture the enormous billows of smoke and steam as they puffed into the station.

Using a head-on perspective and the Impressionists’ rapid, often sketchlike, brushwork to imply rather than describe shapes, Monet captures in the Art Institute painting the intensity and flux of the celebrated depot. The travelers -- workers, clerks, business people, vacationers, and shoppers -- are dwarfed by the huge industrial train shed. Monet treats these people as staffage. Reduced to a mass of simple, dark strokes that heighten the sense of motion, they flicker in and out on the surface of the painting, like butterflies. Time has halted for an instant, but not stopped; if we blink our eyes, the people will have moved on.
Also Impressionistic is the supremacy of light and air. Against a backdrop of luminous sky, clouds of steam and smoke fill the gabled glass roof, rising beyond the train shed toward the sky. The most vaporous substance is given the most materiality with layers of scumbled paint. Beyond this radiant haze, our eyes are drawn by the receding lampposts and traintracks to the new streets and buildings of modern Paris.

Upon seeing these station paintings in the 1877 Impressionist exhibition, French novelist Émile Zola (1840-1902) declared: “This year [M. Claude Monet] is exhibiting some superb station interiors. One can hear the rumble of the trains surging forward, see the torrents of smoke winding through vast engine sheds. This is the painting of today: modern settings beautiful in their scope. Our artists must find the poetry of railway stations as our fathers found the poetry of forests and rivers.”

Classroom Suggestions

1. Have students imagine that they can step inside the painting and be at Gare Saint-Lazare. What senses are activated? What can they see? hear? smell? feel? Have students compile a list of one-word responses (e.g. tracks, “hiss”, steam, heat) and use to compose poems that express the experience of being at the train station.
2. Have students study the advent of the railroad in Paris. How did it affect the life of Impressionist artists and change the daily lives of people? How did the railroad change the access, use, and character of cities and rural areas? A similar study may be done of the advent of the railroad in Chicago or any major American city.

3. Monet painted approximately one dozen paintings of Gare Saint-Lazare in 1877. Have students discuss why an artist would paint the same subject on several different occasions. If students have access to cameras, have each select a subject which is a hub of activity (such as a room of the house or a classroom) and take several pictures over a period of several days. What is unique about each photograph? Seen as a series, what story do the pictures tell?
Walter Ellison (American, 1899-1977)

*Train Station*, 1936

Oil on canvas (7 3/8 x 13 5/8 in.)

Charles M. Kurtz Charitable Trust and Barbara Neff Smith and Solomon Bryan Smith funds; through prior funds of Florence Jane Adams, Mr. And Mrs. Carter H. Harrison, and Estate of Celia Schmidt, 1990.134

© Estate of Walter Ellison; Derrick Beard

Whereas railroads represented motion and new technology to Claude Monet, trains had other associations for the American painter Walter Ellison. Just as he has depicted in this small painting, Ellison followed the route of many southern African Americans around the time of the Great Depression (1929-39), leaving his rural southern home for industrialized northern cities. Called the Great Migration, this mass exodus from 1910 through 1970 included over six million African Americans who came North seeking jobs and freedom, hoping to leave poverty and discrimination behind. Chicago attracted the greatest single number of migrants -- some sixty thousand -- by World War I (1914-18). The largest industrial center of the nation, Chicago promised jobs in meat packing, rail, and steel, and it was to Chicago that Ellison journeyed, pursing his interest in painting at the School of the Art Institute. His work was included in both the first exhibition of African American art held in Chicago in 1940, as well as in the monograph *The Negro in American Art* of the same year, giving him his sole national recognition.
For many African Americans, railroads offered their ticket out. As one migrant later recalled: “You couldn’t do without the train spiritually. It was the vehicle that could take [you] to heaven before you died. Heaven meaning away from here.” The station in this 1936 painting may be the very train station in Macon, Georgia, where Ellison embarked for Chicago. Painted with broad areas of color and an exaggerated perspective, the artist divides his station into three sections to illustrate segregation in the South. On the left, well-dressed whites, assisted by black porters, board trains through arches with names of popular southern resorts, such as Miami. In the foreground, a little girl holds a dog who peers into the center aisle, where the orange-suited porter directs a black man toward the trains heading North.

A prestigious job for African Americans, porters were able to break the barriers of segregation and enter white-only areas, as shown here. They also were an invaluable conduit of news and helpful information for the newly uprooted blacks during their migration North, which Ellison depicts on the right. Their worldly possessions in sacks, boxes, and trunks, black mothers, fathers, and children rush for the three most popular northern destinations -- Chicago, Detroit, and New York. If they did not hurry, they might run the risk of harassment or arrest to force them to remain as cheap labor in the South. Also typical of segregated public spaces all over the South are the separate facilities for blacks and whites, clearly indicated by the doorway marked “Colored” toward the rear of this section, on the left.
While Ellison leaves the illustration of the actual trainride to our imagination, a child later described the experience of a friend: "As soon as she got on the train to leave ... she felt free. Said she felt like she was being born all over again. Sure she was sitting in the Jim Crow section, up front where all the coal, smoke, and dust rose up, got in the windows and ruined your clothes. But she said the chugging of the train couldn't hardly keep up with her heart, she was so excited."

**Classroom Suggestions**

1. In this painting, Ellison tells a story about some people in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. What story is being told and how has Ellison communicated it to the viewer? (Note in particular how the artist divided the picture into three sections.) Have students select individuals in the painting and imagine their experiences. What are their thoughts at the station? Are they reflecting on their past or planning their future? What happened in the days and years prior to the moment depicted and what will happen in the days and years to come?

2. One traveler who migrated to the north called her journey "bittersweet". Have students make a list of the difficult and pleasant aspects of moving and starting over somewhere else. If there are students in the class who have moved in recent years, have them share their experiences. What can students do to make newcomers feel welcome?
3. The train was regarded as a vehicle of opportunity by Ellison and many other individuals during the Great Migration. Have students investigate their own family's travel history, asking their parents and relatives how and why they came to where they currently live. (If possible, have students tape record these family interviews.) Where had they lived before, and what did they hope to leave behind or find ahead? How did they travel to their current home -- by car, bus, train, plane, or boat? Can they describe the journey? How is life different where they currently live? Have students mark on a map the former homes of their family members.
Robert Frank (Swiss, b. 1924)

*Trolley, New Orleans*, 1955

Gelatin silver print (8 1/2 x 13 in.)

Photography Gallery Fund, 1961.943

Swiss-born Robert Frank captures in this striking photograph the segregated world that southern African Americans hoped to leave behind during the Great Migration. Like Ellison, Frank found evidence of such segregation powerfully expressed in another mode of transportation -- the trolley. Although electric trolleys, or streetcars, were introduced in the United States in the 1880s, trolleys reached their peak usage around World War I (1914-1918). By the time Frank snapped this photo in 1955, they had been largely replaced by buses. Here, Frank has isolated through his camera lens one of these trolleys still operating in New Orleans, one that -- in his words -- is "seen simply, as through the eyes of the man in the street," who then walks away. And what is seen in that brief instant is a compelling depiction of the Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation in the South. Cut off or cropped at mid-section, the trolley itself seems hardly a vehicle of motion, of movement forward. Rather the disembodied, wheelless streetcar fills almost the entire picture. Immobilized, frozen in time and space, the symmetry of its regularly spaced windows frame the riders like bars in a prison.
Likewise balanced -- and revealing -- is the placement of gender and age. Two white children are the photo’s centerpiece. The little boy looks straight out at us, his gaze direct and uncomplicated, while the little girl frets beside him. At the front of the bus sits a white man, his face obscured by the window’s glare. But the white woman behind him is fully visible, her expression a combination of impatience and disdain. In contrast is the plaintive, almost beseeching face of the black man while behind him, at the rear of the trolley, an amiable-looking woman smiles and looks away.

Armed with a small 35 millimeter Leica camera and a second-hand car, Frank took this picture during a two-year photographic odyssey, funded by a Guggenheim Foundation grant. He crisscrossed the United States where he rendered visible, as he said, “the people you don’t see” -- the unnoticed and overlooked. As a Jewish boy growing up in Nazi Europe, Frank was no stranger to racism or the fear of persecution, and his images of his adopted country bear the ironic distance of an outsider. From some twenty thousand negatives, Frank then selected eighty-three photographs of Americana -- the segregated trolley seen here, flags on the Fourth of July, luncheonettes, and jukeboxes -- into a carefully orchestrated sequence of images. These intensely personal and not always pleasing pictures of -- and behind -- the prosperity of post-World War II America drew such national criticism that Frank, in 1958, could find a publisher only in France. One year later, Frank’s controversial vision, entitled The Americans and now considered a classic, was published in the United States. As the beat poet Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) declared in his introduction to Frank’s landmark book: “With that little camera that he
raises and snaps with one hand he sucks a sad poem right out of America onto film."

Classroom Suggestions

1. Have students explore the composition of *Trolley, New Orleans*. What aspects of the photograph suggest that Frank captured an ordinary moment in time? Given its candid quality, what aspects seem formal and planned? How do the informal and formal elements work together to produce an effective photograph?

2. In Frank’s photograph, the trolley is a literal and figurative vehicle of the segregation of the Jim Crow laws. Have students discuss how modes of transportation today can separate people by class (e.g. public vs. personal transportation, first class vs. economy flying, luxury automobiles vs. economical cars).

3. Frank’s *Trolley, New Orleans* and Monet’s *Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare* both capture people and transportation. The differences between the two works of art, however, are many. Have students compare the photograph and the painting, answering the following questions: where was each artist standing when he made his work of art? what was each artist trying to capture or convey? how is each composition different? how is each artist’s technique different?
FLIGHT

Slide 6

Georgia O’Keeffe (American, 1887-1986)

*Sky Above Clouds IV*, 1965

Oil on canvas (8 x 24 ft.)

Restricted gift of the Paul and Gabriella Rosenbaum Foundation; gift of Georgia O’Keeffe, 1983. 821

This vast work -- Georgia O’Keeffe’s most monumental painting -- grew out of the artist’s first experiences with flight during the 1950s. Then in her sixties and recently widowed from the influential photographer Albert Stieglitz (1864-1946), she dared to fly all over the world, always returning to her home in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where she would live and work almost until her death in 1986 at the age of 98. “I am afraid to fly,” admitted this pioneer of American *modernism* once, “but after the plane takes off I enjoy what I see from the air and forget the hazards.”

*Sky Above Clouds, IV* was the culminating painting based on what amazed her as she soared above the earth. Beginning around 1963, she began to depict the endless stretch of clouds spied through the plane’s porthole-shaped window. Starting with a relatively realistic rendering of small white clouds on a three-by-four foot canvas, O’Keeffe progressed to more stylized renderings of the *motif* on larger canvases until she stretched a
canvas eight feet high and twenty-four feet long, filling the entire width of her garage which she used as a studio.

It took the balancing act of a gymnast to work on the enormous canvas. “First I stood on tables. Then I sat on a chair on the tables. After that I sat on the tables. Then I moved the tables and stood on a plank on the floor and after that I sat on the floor to reach the bottom.” Then she added: “And every time I sat down on the floor I was afraid that the rattlesnakes would come in behind me as I worked.”

O’Keeffe worked from huge vats of paint -- large enough to paint the entire canvas with one color at a time. And she worked furiously. “I was up every morning at six and at work immediately -- and I didn’t have my brushes washed until about nine in the evening.... I had no visitors and went nowhere. I just worked because I had to be finished before cold weather -- there was no heat in the garage.”

The artist met her goal in time to feature the painting as the climax of a traveling retrospective of her work in 1966. Later, the painting was part of a 1970 exhibition that traveled to three museums, including the Art Institute. But hanging the massive work was always a problem. As the artist recalled: “When the show arrived at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York], we couldn’t get the “Clouds” upstairs. It had to be on the ground floor and the rest of the show was on the floor above. If we had taken it to San Francisco [Museum of Art] it couldn’t have gotten through any door -- so it still hangs in Chicago [at the Art Institute, the exhibit’s third venue].”
Too big to move, *Sky Above Clouds, IV* stayed on loan at the Art Institute for more than a decade until it entered the museum’s permanent collection in 1983. Just as the artist approached all of her subjects -- whether buildings or flowers, landscapes or bones -- O’Keeffe here intuitively magnifies shapes and simplifies details to underscore their essential beauty. She paints the clouds just as she saw them looking out of her airplane window. “The sky below,” she declared, “was completely full of little oval white clouds, all more or less alike.” Like lilypads, they float on a flat blue expanse of sky, vast and brilliant, that gradually recedes to the pink-tinted horizon. In a sense, the painting is the epitome of O’Keeffe’s sparse emblematic style, gleaned from the twentieth-century miracle of man’s mechanical flight in endless, ethereal space.

**Classroom Suggestions**

1. How did Georgia O’Keeffe create a sense of depth in *Sky Above Clouds IV*? How do the foreground, middleground, and background differ? Have each student make a picture of a scene that they have witnessed from the window of a car, train, bus, or plane, creating the illusion of a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface with the same artistic techniques that O’Keeffe used (such as changes in size, color, and placement of objects in space).
2. In many of O'Keeffe's paintings, a small natural object such as a flower or leaf is magnified and simplified to underscore its essential beauty. Have each student select a small object from nature and create a large-scale painting that emphasizes the object's basic shape, colors, and elegance.

3. In this teacher packet, four works of art explore the theme of flight: O'Keeffe's *Sky Above Clouds IV*; Brancusi's *Golden Bird*; Hayden's *Sky's the Limit*; and Cornell's *Untitled (Homage to Blériot)*. Have students compare and contrast the ways that each artist conveys a sense of space and movement. Consider materials, composition, and scale.
Constantin Brancusi (French, b. Romania; 1876-1957)

*Golden Bird*, 1916; pedestal c. 1922

Bronze, stone, and wood (h. 37 1/4 in.; 95. 9 cm)

Partial gift of the Arts Club of Chicago; restricted gift of various donors; through prior bequest of Arthur Rubloff; through prior restricted gift of William Hartmann; through prior gifts of Mr. And Mrs. Carter H. Harrison, Mr. And Mrs. Arnold H. Maremont through the Kate Maremont Foundation, Woodruff J. Parker, Mrs. Clive Runnells, Mr. And Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson, and various donors, 1990.88.

“All my life, I have sought to render the essence of flight. Flight -- what bliss!” declared Constantin Brancusi. Settling in Paris in 1904 after walking across Europe from his native Romania, the sculptor was particularly affected by the Paris Air Show of 1912. As two friends recalled: “While visiting the Paris Air Show ... he noticed a propeller. ‘Now that’s what I call sculpture!’ he exclaimed wonderstruck. ‘From now on sculpture must be nothing less than that.’”

So preoccupied with the theme of flight was Brancusi that he produced a series of almost thirty “Bird” sculptures throughout his career. He began the first in 1910, and completed the last in the 1940s. “The bird has me in its charms and will not let me go,” he exclaimed. Here, in this gleaming bronze sculpture, Brancusi strips shape to its essence to convey the sense of lifting off, of soaring up into space. Details such as feet, tail, and
upturned crowing beak of the golden bird are only suggested in the elegant streamlined silhouette. The reflective bronze surface -- Brancusi's signature contribution to modern art -- aerates the dynamic vertical form, enhancing the sense of upward motion.

As was his custom, Brancusi designed and made the base of the sculpture. He perched this refined, shining shape first on a section of truncated, stacked stone pyramids, then on a rough-hewn, rigorously geometric wooden pedestal, contrasting the bird's buoyant light-reflective surface with a solid, earth-bound mass. He cut the pedestal's central polyhedron from the middle of a tree trunk, and its circles, indicating the tree's age, rotate like a sun, as if radiating light over the elegantly flying bird. In Brancusi's original design, the base actually rotated, so that the bird was seen in motion.

In *Golden Bird*, Brancusi has brought into extraordinary equilibrium many materials -- bronze, stone, and wood -- and a range of forms, from the geometric base to the smoothly gliding curves of the bird. "Beauty is absolute balance," the sculptor once declared, and here -- from the bottom of the base to the top of the bird's open beak, up surges the bird, in an exquisitely calibrated rhythm, a quickening pace, to a height of about seven feet -- and then beyond.
Classroom Suggestions


2. Throughout his career, Brancusi explored the essence of a bird’s form and movement. Have each student select an animal and think about its most prominent characteristic (e.g. a swan’s gracefulness or a leopard’s speed). By drawing or shaping with clay, have each student communicate the animal’s characteristic -- or essence -- with a minimum of lines and details. Have students display work and guess their classmates’ animals.

3. In the 1920s, a well-known photographer bought from Brancusi a bird sculpture very similar to *Golden Bird*. When the photographer brought the work through customs at the airport in the United States, he was fined the customary amount for bringing a piece of industrial metal into the country. No one believed the photographer when he said that the piece was a work of art and that art is allowed to enter the country without a fee. The disagreement actually resulted in a trial in 1926 in the U.S. Customs Court, New York.

Divide your students into two groups: the plaintiff (representing Brancusi) and the defendant (United States Customs). The plaintiff must present an argument on why *Golden Bird* is a work of art, while the defendant must
argue why it is not. Issues students may want to address in preparing their arguments include: subject matter, design, the artist's intentions, materials and techniques, personal reactions, etc. Upon hearing the two presentations, determine which argument was most convincing.
Michael Hayden (Canadian, b. 1943)

*Sky’s the Limit*, 1987

Hand-painted glass tubing, computers, speakers (c. 52 x 800 ft)
O’Hare International Airport, Chicago

Buried beneath O’Hare International Airport is the *apotheosis* of ART ON THE MOVE -- an eight-hundred-foot underground tunnel that links the B and C Concourses of the United Terminal, designed by the architectural firm of Murphy/ Jahn in 1987. Combining art, architecture, lighting, and music, this dynamic netherworld mirrors the movement, the very sense of motion of the nation’s busiest airport.

Passengers rushing to catch or meet planes descend from the brightness of day into a high-tech wonderland filled with waves of motion, sound, and light. Moving sidewalks hasten travelers’ paces. To their sides are undulating translucent glass walls and ceiling, backlit by a palette of the color spectrum that progresses along the path of the moving walkways. Supporting these colorful walls at regular intervals are white tubular “trees” whose “branches” fan out to the ceiling. Continuing this theme of nature, the wall’s flowing curves recall currents of moving water. Indeed, two black “rivers” winding down the ceiling reinforce this effect. Emitted from speakers concealed in these ceiling bands is electronic music specially composed to coordinate with the tunnel’s most dazzling effect -- the *site-
specific public sculpture created especially for the terminal’s underground linkage by the Canadian light-sculptor Michael Hayden.

 Appropriately entitled *Sky's the Limit*, the dynamic light sculpture contains more than one mile of hand-blown, hand-painted glass tubing that winds and weaves down the ceiling's center. Cooler colors pulse at either end of the tunnel to ease the entry underground, while brighter colors flash off and on toward the middle of the tunnel. "[People] are literally going through a three-dimension color spectrum," declared the artist. Controlling this color symphony are three computers programmed so that the pattern of light never repeats itself. Concealed behind the curving glass walls, each computer stands more than six feet tall and weighs over three hundred pounds. The mirrored ceiling above the light sculpture doubles this radiant effect, and, more importantly, includes the passengers' flow through the moving work of art.

To create this fantastical five-minute underground journey through sound and light took Hayden, who now lives in California, over two years, with the assistance of fifty-four people, including nineteen electricians. Although his light sculptures have appeared in museums and collections throughout North America and in Europe, he prefers sites like the United Terminal -- places "where people gather," he said. These include pieces for BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) in Colma, California and the Yorkdale subway station, for the Toronto Transit Commission in Canada.
Classroom Suggestions

1. *Sky's the Limit* is a site-specific public sculpture, meaning that it was made for and installed in a particular place. As a work of art, how does it express or reflect the nature of an airport and an airport’s activities? Have students investigate other site-specific public sculptures in their town. What is each sculpture’s relationship to its environment?

2. *Sky's the Limit* is a five-minute underground journey through sound and light. Based upon the information provided, have students write a creative description of this journey, noting the visual and auditory experiences. One suggested format is the following four-line poem:

   line 1= a *word* that comes to mind when looking at the work of art
   line 2= an *action phrase* based upon something you see or sense in
          the work of art
   line 3= a *comparison*, using like or as, between something in the
          work of art (a color, mood, etc.) and something else in the
          world
   line 4= another *word* that comes to mind when looking at the work
          of art

3. The works of art in this teacher packet vary tremendously in materials and techniques. Have students make a list of the materials and technology that Hayden used to create *Sky's the Limit*. Have them compare their findings with lists that they compile for at least two other works of art in the packet. What can each list reveal about the work’s function? the time in which it was made? the abilities and interests of the artist?
Joseph Cornell (American, 1903-1972)

*Untitled (Homage to Blériot)*, 1956

Painted glazed wooden box with paper backing for a kinetic construction of wood, metal, paint, clock spring, and nails (18 1/2 x 11 5/16 x 4 13/16 in.; 47 x 30.4 x 12.1 cm)

Lindy and Edwin Bergman Joseph Cornell Collection, 1982.1853

Just as flight -- that mode of transportation appropriated by twentieth-century man -- impacted the art of Georgia O’Keeffe, Constantin Brancusi, and Michael Hayden, so too did flying infiltrate the wondrous miniature worlds created by the self-taught American artist Joseph Cornell. A poetic melange of found objects and materials, his enigmatic glassed-in box constructions combine childhood fascinations -- seashells, stamps, butterflies -- with his obsessions as an adult, such as ballet, skycharts, empty cages -- and (by implication) flight.

French aviator and inventor Louis Blériot (1872-1936) was the first person to fly across the English Channel, the narrow waterway between southern England and northern France, accomplishing the feat in 1909. Using the most minimal of means, Cornell alludes to that groundbreaking journey here. Balanced on a metal clock spring are thin white pieces of wood whose configuration suggests wings and a propeller, reminiscent in their flimsiness of the monoplane flown by Blériot across the Channel. Like so many of Cornell’s *kinetic* constructions, the box could be set in motion by
handling. Thus, the plane-like shape bounces freely on the coil -- a reference perhaps to Blériot's soul as well as the propeller. And with the stained blue backing, whose wood grain recalls the swells of the ocean, the plane-like construction seems either poised for flight or en route to its final descent in France.

Although Cornell exhibited with Surrealist-affiliated Julian Lévy Gallery in New York beginning in the early 1930s, he never belonged to the avant-garde European movement. Instead, for almost thirty years, the solitary and shy artist made deeply personal and elusive glassed-in box constructions like this in relative obscurity in his family home in suburban New York. He never went away to college, nor did he travel. His major journeys consisted of forays into Manhattan, going to the ballet and theater and, most importantly, visiting small shops around Times Square where he found objects and material for his boxes.

But Cornell did not really need to travel, because whenever he set foot into the cramped and cluttered basement that served as his official studio, he embarked upon -- in his words -- "ecstatic 'voyaging' through endless encounters with old engravings, photographs, books, Baedekers, varia, etc." He then recreated these imaginary journeys within the mysterious and dreamlike world of his glassed-in boxes. Like the other artists included in this teaching packet, Cornell used the theme of travel or motion to generate his art. But in Cornell's case, his forays to faraway, often long ago, people, places, and scenes all occurred within the safe confines of his tiny basement studio on Utopia Parkway in the Queens, New York.
Classroom Suggestions

1. Have students make a list of the materials and objects that Cornell used to symbolize or evoke flight. Have each student select another mode of transportation addressed in this teacher packet (walking, boat, train, or trolley) and collect imaginative materials that suggest it. Have students present their objects to one another and see if classmates can guess their mode of transportation.

2. Cornell's boxes were exhibited in Surrealist galleries where the art was based on dreams, fantasies, and the subconscious. Have students pretend that Untitled (Homage to Blériot) is a dream they had while sleeping; have them write a tale beginning with the phrase "Last night I had the strangest dream..." Encourage students to include what they saw, heard, touched, smelled, and experienced in their dream, looking to the box for clues.

3. Works of art with moveable parts are called kinetic constructions. Have students create their own kinetic box constructions, choosing a theme or subject and collecting various moveable objects (e.g. springs, rubber bands, balls) to include. Stationery boxes with clear lids work well; if not available, plastic wrap can be stretched across an open box and secured to serve as a cover.
GLOSSARY

Aerates: Makes airy, lighter.

Apotheosis: The perfect example.

Avant Garde: Seeming advanced or ahead of its time.


Beat: Term used to define a generation of young, unconventional people in the 1950s.

Biplane: The earliest airplane, with two wings or main supporting structures; used by the Wright brothers in their first flight.

Calibrated: Divided into distinct parts.

Color Woodblock Print: A time-consuming and elaborate print medium involving many carved wooden blocks, each inked with a different color, to produce a single image. Initially, simple woodblock prints had been used since the eighth century in Japan mainly to mass-produce Buddhist texts and icons, but by the mid-seventeenth century, the medium was used to render visions of the world of pleasure and leisure, called *ukiyo-e*.

Cropped: Cut or fragmented, resulting in an altered image.

Great Depression: Severe economic crisis following the stock market crash of 1929. At the depths of the depression in 1932-33, between one-quarter to one-third of the labor force was unemployed. Business did not recover until the 1940s.

Great Migration: The massive resettlement of over six million African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North in search of jobs and freedom that spanned the decades of 1910 to 1970.

Hub: Center of activity from which other routes fan out.

Impressionism: Avant-garde movement originating in France in the latter part of the nineteenth century regarded as the culmination of Realism that sought to capture, as if seen in an instant, the rapidly changing modern world, as well as the fleeting moods of nature. To do this, Impressionist painters analyzed natural effects and relied on optical blending to capture the impression of light at a given moment.

Industrial age: Social and economic changes which took place roughly from 1750 to 1850 as a result of inventions and technological innovations. It marked the transition
form an agricultural and commercial society to an urban and industrial one that relied on complex machinery rather than simple tools.

Jim Crow: A practice or policy of segregating or discriminating against blacks; Jim Crow laws were enacted in the southern states beginning in the 1860s that legalized segregation. "Jim Crow" is believed to belong to a character in a popular minstrel show, a form of stage entertainment by white performers made up as blacks. Not until the 1960s were the laws declared illegal.

Kinetic: Of or relating to motion.

Modernism: A general term for the succession of avant-garde styles in art and architecture during the twentieth century.

Monograph: A book about a specific subject or artist.

Monoplane: Airplane with only one wing, like a modern airplane.

Motif: Major idea or subject in a composition.

Mummification: The process of embalming, or drying out a corpse, for preservation.

Perspective: Scientific method used by artists since the Renaissance to represent three-dimensional objects on two-dimensional (flat) surfaces, so that space seems to appear as in nature.

Polyhedron: Many-side object.

Portage: Route used to transfer boats and goods overland, from one body of water to another; from the French word porter, meaning to carry.

Public sculpture: Sculpture installed in public spaces, such as plazas, parks, or transportation terminals.

Retrospective: A comprehensive exhibition featuring the work of an artist over a span of years.

Scumbled: Thin layers of opaque (not transparent) paint layered over one another, producing a soft, veiled effect.

Segregation: The separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by separate education, restricted social intercourse, and other methods of discrimination.

Shogun: Ruling military leader in Japan. During the Edo period, a succession of shoguns from the Tokugawa family ruled the nation.
Site-specific: Sculpture made for and installed in a specific place.

Staffage: Small figures used to help establish scale and/or perspective or to animate a landscape or architectural composition.

Surrealist: Relating to the movement, founded by French poet André Breton (1896-1966) in 1924, of writers and artists who championed spontaneous creation and the art of the unexpected. Surrealists used as sources the world of dreams, fantasies, and the subconscious to produce, in some instances, bizarre, organic forms or, in other cases, ordinary objects presented in strange, unexpected ways.

Trolley: A small, self-propelled railroad car, or streetcar, that runs on tracks and is powered by electricity supplied by an underground third rail or an overhead wire.

Ukiyo-e: The "floating world" from the Buddhist sense of transience or evanescent. Refers to the world of everyday life, especially of pleasure that was captured in Japanese color woodblock prints.

Vantage Point: The position or place from which an artist views a particular scene.

Varia: A literary miscellany.

Venue: The place or locale where an event, such as an exhibition, occurs.