

# America the Beautiful

*America the Beautiful* is a well-known song about this country. But did you know that it was originally a poem written in 1893 and the title didn't even have "America" in it? Katharine Lee Bates was an English Professor at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, and in 1893, Bates took a train to Colorado Springs, Colorado. Bates wrote a poem about many of the beautiful sights she saw on her journey and titled it *Pikes Peak*, after the mountain summit west of Colorado Springs. The poem was published two years after her travels in a religious periodical, *The Congregationalist*, as a commemoration to the Fourth of July under the new title, *America*. It quickly caught popularity for its patriotic words and soon was set to music. Today, we sing the 1911 version known as *America the Beautiful* that is published in religious hymnals and known by many Americans.

Let's consider some of the iconic lyrics in *America the Beautiful* as they relate to three works of art in the Becoming America exhibit.

## "O beautiful for spacious skies"

First, find this painting by Nat Leeb titled *Arizona*. This interpretation of the Arizona desert shows Leeb's love of colorful abstraction. Having studied under Claude Monet early in his career, Leeb accurately captures the effects of sunlight—ever important to the Impressionists—on a popular Southwestern landscape without referencing the real-world details of a specific place. What this master colorist painter does reveal about the place depicted is an intense heat and an expansive sky.

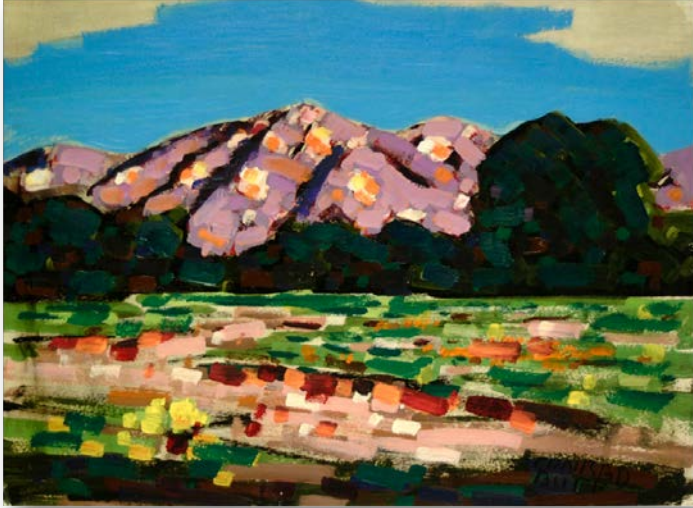
**What colors does Leeb use to paint the desert landscape?**

**How does the sky in this painting look "spacious"?**



Nat Leeb, *Arizona*, No date, Oil on canvas

# "For purple mountain majesties"



Conrad Buff, *Purple Mountain*, No date, Oil on masonite

Next, find *Purple Mountain* by Conrad Buff. Buff was influenced by California Impressionists and created bright, colorful landscapes with thick brushstrokes. Like an impressionistic painter, Buff tried to capture the colors of light that play on the land around him.

## ***But why do the mountains look purple?***

This is called atmospheric perspective. When objects, like mountains, are further away from the viewer, they appear less detailed and purplish.

## ***Have you ever noticed the affect of atmospheric perspective while out in nature?***

Try taking pictures of the mountains at different times of day, then compare them to see how atmospheric perspective can change the colors of the mountains.

# "And crown thy good with brotherhood"

Finally, find *Navajo Land* by Carl Oscar Borg. Brotherhood in the song refers to the people of America coming together and being unified. America is beautiful not only because of its landscapes, but on account of its many diverse people! Borg found a home among the Navajo people and was able to paint numerous meaningful and intimate scenes depicting their culture. Borg's *Navajo Land* blends the beauty of the land with the people who call it home.



Carl Oscar Borg, *Navajo Land*, c. 1932, Oil on canvas

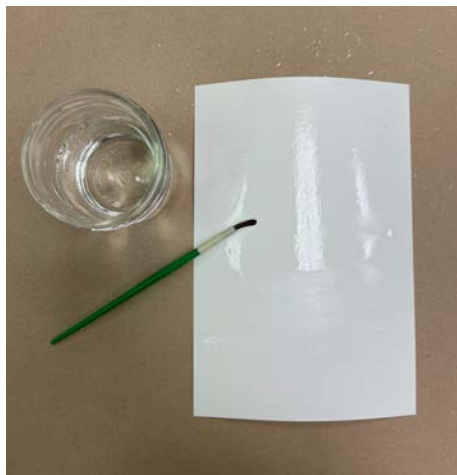
***Think about where you live and where you consider "home" to be. Is it a particular place? Who are the people who make where you live "home"?***

**Now stop by the front desk to get your take home art kit!**

# America the Beautiful Landscape Artwork

## Materials you need:

- watercolor paper
- watercolors
- paintbrush
- purple paper
- scissors
- glue



Start by brushing water over your watercolor paper to wet the entire surface. This will make it easier to blend colors together.



Now paint a sunset, sunrise, bright blue sky, or even a clear night sky. Try using red, orange, and yellow to create a **spacious sky** sunset!



While you wait for the watercolor sky to dry, cut mountains out of the purple paper. Create different sized mountains and arrange them into a **purple mountain range**.



Once your watercolor sky is dry, glue your mountains into place.

Do you remember our conversation about atmospheric perspective? Layer your mountain ranges with the darker mountains in the front and the lighter ones in the back for a realistic look.



Be creative and add details to your sky and mountains!

Use whatever materials. Here are some examples for inspiration!



Now that your *America the Beautiful* landscape artwork is finished, give it away to show **brotherly love** to someone!