

W A T E R

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GALLERY



Delivering water and power®

A Guide for
Understanding
the Exhibition



GALLERY

The Gallery at
Tempe Center for the Arts
700 W. Rio Salado Parkway
Tempe, AZ 85281



Water is on a lot of people's minds these days, from concerns about conservation to plans for summer recreation. This exhibition explores water as seen and interpreted through the eyes of artists. The

artworks and displays reflect a wide range of water-themed topics including sustainability, mythology, history, science and beauty. The exhibition also includes interactive activities, live artist demonstrations and multiple workshop opportunities for all ages.

For Educators: The Gallery at TCA offers a wide variety of FREE educational resources including admission, tours, artist workshops and online curriculum. Learn more at: tempecenterforthearts.com/TCAGallery

Dear Reader:

We hope this guide will provide you with some easy-to-use tools to enhance your experiences with visual art. Over the years, we've noticed that people can be both attracted to and intimidated by art at the same time. We've found that asking questions that start "informal conversations" is one of the best ways to put people at ease.

Sure, some art is beautiful and easy to approach, while other art can be challenging and not so easy to digest. Just like a book, visual art can be appealing, serious and yes, even ugly. Some art confirms, celebrates and expands how we understand ourselves. Other art opens pathways through which we can explore other viewpoints. You as a viewer (reader) also bring a variety of thoughts and personal preferences into the experience. With practice and some new tools on your belt, you'll find that those seemingly complicated layers of meaning and context can be peeled back and explored. It's just knowing where to look and why.

We would also like to thank the Water artists for letting us utilize some of their artworks for this guide.

Sincerely,

Mary Erickson, Ph.D. (TCA Docent) & Michelle Nichols Dock (Visual Arts Curator)

Inquiry Strategy with Tactical Questions

The following 4-question strategy is an easy to use tool for investigating the layers of context and meaning in visual art.

What Can I See? Facts about the artwork.

- Subject Matter
- Design Elements & Principles
- Technical Features
- Function
- Reproduction versus Original
- Care/Condition



What Else Can I Learn? Contextual facts.

Contextual facts.

- Artists' Lives
- Physical Environments
- Cultural Context
- Artworlds (Art Experience)



What Does It Mean? Conclusions about meanings.

Conclusions about meanings.

- Personal & Cultural Viewpoints
- Artists' Intentions
- Art Specialists' Understandings



How Does It Compare? Conclusions about connections among artworks.

Conclusions about connections among artworks.

- Style
- Art Influence (From Other Art)
- Themes



Hints for Asking Good Questions

Hints for a well-rounded conversation: You'll often learn more from open-ended questions than close-ended questions.

A **closed-ended question** is answered with a one-word response such as yes or no or another single word. *Example:* Is this an oil or acrylic painting?

Closed-ended questions start with verbs like “Is? Do? and Can?”

An **open-ended question** requires more explanation.

Example: How is painting in oil different from painting with acrylics?

Open-ended questions start with “Why? and How?”

Some words can be used for **both types of questions** such as:

What?

Who?

Where?

When?

Both open and close-ended questions are valuable. The construction and phrasing of a question shapes the kind of information you can expect to receive.

For Practice: Write down 3 open-ended questions. Pretend you are meeting someone for the first time. You need to ask questions to get to know that person better.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I See?

Tips for looking carefully at an Artwork



Subject Matter: Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is shown in an artwork (such as people, places and things).

Elements of Design: Traditional elements in Western art include: (“D” represents “dimensional.”)

2D Elements

line
shape
value (light and dark)
color

3D Elements

form or mass
space
texture

4D Elements/Time

sequence
duration

Design Principles: Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions. Some Traditional Principles include:

Balance	Variation	Focal Point	Pattern
Harmony	Repetition	Movement	Transition
Emphasis/Focal Point	Rhythm	Direction	Proportion
Contrast			

Technical Features: Careful viewing of an artwork usually reveals evidence of how it was made. (Indicators might include art making tools, materials and processes.)

Function: Artists make artworks that serve a great many functions such as:

Capturing the beauty of nature	Memorializing an important event
Celebrating or criticizing a person, event or group	Exploring visual possibilities
Sharing a vision	Promoting a belief or cause
Celebrating the artist's heritage	Making the ordinary extraordinary
Stimulating action	Many more

What Can I See?

Practice looking carefully at an Artwork



Reproduction Vs Original: Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

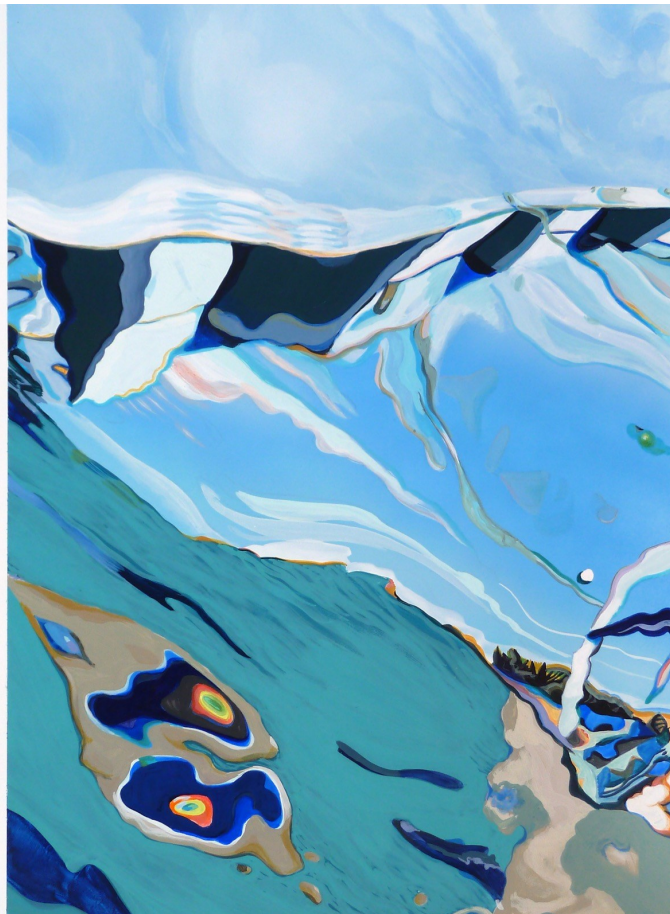
Size	Colors	Surface Texture	Luminosity
Angle of View	Lighting	Other	

Care/Condition: The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

Perishable or fragile materials
Matting, mounting, or framing
Accidents

Damage in storage
Temperature and humidity
Vandalism

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what you see.”



1. This painting shows reflections in water. What can you see reflected in the water? [SUBJECT MATTER]
2. Where can you see how Messmer mixed paint to create gradual color changes? Where did she carefully apply colors next to each other without mixing them? [TECHNIQUE]
3. Focus on diagonal blue shapes crossing the painting. What sort of movement is suggested by these shapes? [DESIGN]
4. Turn back to the bottom of page 5. What function/s does this artwork serve? Explain. [FUNCTION]

Abbey Messmer, *A detour to your new life*, gouache and acrylic on panel

Now You Try! *What Can I See?*



Abbey Messmer
Somewhere between the beginning and end
gouache and acrylic on panel

Look at this next piece by Messmer. List 3 quick descriptions about what you see:

(Example: “large sculpture, depicts a woman and is made of bronze.”)

a _____

b _____

c _____

Now, based on your observations, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a _____

b _____

c _____

What Can I Learn?

Tips for investigating an Artist's Background



Artist's Life: The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

Family

Work

Education

Travel

Personal life experiences

Other

Physical Environment: The physical world, both natural and human made) can inspire their work:

Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)

Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

Culture: Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

Values and beliefs

Hobbies and entertainment

Politics

Economic situation

Language

Heritage and/or ethnicity

Other

Art Experience (Artworld): Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

Art education/Apprenticeships

Insights from specialists in the art form (ceramics , painting, etc.)

Representation by art galleries

Contact with art patrons and collectors

Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, grants, commissions.

Art included in museum collections

What Can I Learn?

Practice investigating an Artist's Background



Brandi Lee Cooper is a 4th generation Arizona native. She writes "I come from an Arizona pioneer ranching family where animals, the land, and water are at the heart of our lives and livelihoods. Due to my heritage, I always had a reverence for the sacredness of water." [As part of her BS Zoology from Northern Arizona University] *"I studied water quality in Oak Creek Canyon and Marine Biology at Kames Cook University [in Australia], where I conducted research on the Great Barrier Reef. Shortly after graduating, I spent a summer in the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River studying and working to protect the native fish population. For years, I worked as a naturalist on the Verde River educating the public about the importance of this life-giving water."*



Cooper studied ceramics at the University of Kansas and recently completed her MFA in ceramics at Arizona State University. She writes *"My ceramic work is greatly informed by my research of aquatic ecosystems and their inhabitants and deep commitment to their protection."* In her artist statement, Cooper states *"I am continually amazed at the resilience of nature. In this volatile time on earth, we have a responsibility to each other to build connections that will promote new ways of thriving and perishing ...thoughtfully. I make sculptures and installations out of castoff materials. Discarded objects speak volumes about culture and discovering the aesthetic potential of waste drives my process. Layer upon layer and branch-by-branch I build complex webs of interactivity or connection points, akin to a natural system. They become a physical record of our transgressions, reminding us of our connection and responsibility to every other living being."*

Brandi Lee Cooper, *Bleached (detail)*, Ceramic

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about "what I can learn."

1. How did Brandi Lee Cooper's childhood experience and pioneer family heritage introduce her to the interconnectedness of the natural world? [ARTIST'S LIFE AND CULTURE]
2. In what aquatic ecosystems has Cooper worked or conducted research? [ENVIRONMENT]
3. How have Cooper's graduate studies and exhibitions in ceramics drawn upon her undergraduate studies and research experience in Zoology and Marine Biology? [ART EXPERIENCE]

Now You Try! **What Else I Can Learn?**



Brainstorm and list 5 interesting facts about Brandi Lee Coopers background.

**You may want to consult pg. 9 and/or a media article and/or Internet references about the artist.)*

a _____

b _____

c _____

d _____

e _____



Now, based on your research, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork/artist.

a _____

b _____

c _____

Brandi Lee Cooper, *Reoccupied*
Ceramic

What Does It Mean?

Tips for interpreting an Artwork



Artist's Intention: Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

Personal or private	Traditional	Practical	Boundary breaking
Unconventional	Evolving	Emotional	Spontaneous
Experimental	Deliberate		
Focused on collector, patron, funder or other viewer			Other

Art Specialists' Understandings: The considered opinions of art specialists (experts) direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists may include:

Artists	Art Teachers	Museum Curators	Art Critics
Art Historians	Master Craftspeople	Ceremonial Leaders	Guild Members
Tribal elders	Others		

Cultural Understandings: A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture. Unexamined expectations might include:

High price	Obvious meaning	Difficult to make	Easily recognizable
Familiar	Other		

Your Own Viewpoint: Your responses to artworks are affected by:

conscious thoughts	unconscious reactions	personal preferences
careful viewing	thoughtful reflection	relevant information
free association	previous art experience	and more

What Does It Mean?

Practice interpreting an Artwork



Laura Spalding Best, *Breach IV*, oil on found object

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what it means.”

1. What do you think Laura Spalding Best was trying to do by carefully extending melting lines beyond her landscape painting into the rim of the metal platter? [ARTIST'S INTENTION]
2. How does the newspaper reviewer's description of Best's work affect your perception of *Breach IV*? [ART SPECIALIST'S UNDERSTANDING]
3. How do you suppose viewers from cities in other regions of the country, such as Boston, Miami, Chicago, or Seattle, might interpret Best's work differently from viewers from the Valley of the Sun? [CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING]

Laura Spalding Best received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from Arizona State University in 2003. She has been studying and painting the urban landscape of the southwest for many years. She works with oil paint on metal and found objects. Best describes herself as *"a painter of the urban desert landscape [whose] paintings often depict bodies of water, the promise of water, or the illusion of water. I often utilize the mirage on a hot desert road and its shiny reflective qualities as a visual metaphor.... What seems to be a promise of water on the horizon is really just refracted light and hot air. From this melting point the oil paint itself seems to slip off its surface and warp the imagery of the landscape so it becomes unclear what is liquid and what is solid. I also like to confuse the line between the idea of oasis and mirage. One might be a tantalizing promise on the horizon while the other is a paradise we may always pursue but actually never reach."*

On August 1, 2018, Lynn Trimble writing in the *New Times*, describes Best's work in a her solo "Vanity" exhibition as *"painted with her characteristic take on urban landscapes - infused with dreamy blues, melting imagery, and utility poles."*

Now You Try! What Does It Mean?



Look at this work by Laura Spalding Best. Brainstorm and list 5 ideas about what the artwork is about.

a _____

b _____

c _____

d _____

e _____

Laura Spalding Best
Tributary II
oil on found objects

Now, based on your interpretation, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a _____

b _____

c _____

How Do They Compare?

Tips for gathering insights by comparing Artworks



Style: Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork. Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

Artist's style

Style of art movement or period

Cultural style

Art Influence: Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called "outsider artists," work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Art influences can include:

Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists

Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments

Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend or break away from

Theme: Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

People and nature

Cultural pride

Conquest

Overcoming obstacles

Strength of family

Love

Fantasy

Social order

Harmony

Chaos

Revisiting history

Heroic adventure

Religious devotion

Status

Many more

How Do They Compare?

Practice gathering insights by comparing prints by Jerry Jacobson



Jerry Jacobson, *Untitled 3-1-18 ink & rust on paper*



Jacobson attended North Texas State University (now UNT) where he received a BFA with a focus in painting and printmaking. Jacobson has maintained a studio-residence in Tempe, Arizona since 1994. Jacobson explains that the "transformative nature of water has been an element of my work for many years. In the mid 1990's I began to filled glass jars with metal objects, salt and water as a means of breeding rust for use as pigment in paintings and drawing. My *Sweepwalk Drawings* came from my practice of collecting metal brush bristles that fall from municipal street cleaners while on daily Tempe neighborhood walks. [This series adapts the Rust Farm process] by limiting the objects to street cleaner bristles and relying largely on chance composition."

Writing about his most recent Ink & Rust series on paper, Jacobson explains that he introduced often saturated color inks. "In these drawings metal objects are dropped or placed on wet paper, inks applied, placed under pressure and allowed to dry slowly on wet paper and unseen. This process allows for a wide degree of unknown variables and reactions between elements."

Jerry Jacobson, *Untitled 7-1-18, ink & rust on paper*



Perhaps the most direct influence for Jacobson's Rust Farm series were drawings he saw at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art by Scottish artist, Andy Goldsworthy. Goldsworthy put dirty snowballs on large sheets of paper and allowed them to melt untouched, depositing the sediment in beautiful and often unexpected ways. Jacobson also admires earlier artists, like Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg, who, like Jacobson, embraced the unknown.

*Scan QR code to see Andy Goldsworthy's artwork.



Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about "how they compare."

1. What visual characteristics (colors, lines, changes of light and darks, repetition, movement, etc.) do you see in both of Jacobson's artworks? How would you describe his style. [STYLE]
2. What do you see in Jacobson's work that you think might have been influenced by earlier artists who "embraced the unknown"? [ART INFLUENCE]
3. How do Jacobson's artworks reflect the theme of the Water exhibition? [THEME]

Now You Try! How Do They Compare?



Jerry Jacobson
Untitled 8-04-18
ink rust on paper

Jerry Jacobson
Untitled 1-13-18
ink rust on paper

List 3 highlights (your favorite visual features and/or information) about the prints above.

Now, compare these two prints.
List 2 similarities among the artworks:

List 2 differences among the artworks:

Now, based on your comparisons, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about these rust prints.

a

b

c

Follow Up Activity: *Reflections on Water*

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to collaborate to create a series of photographs.

(VA.CR.1.6a: Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.)

Students will be able to collaborate to plan a display of their photographs.

(VA.PR.5.6: Individually or collaboratively, develop a visual plan for displaying works of art)

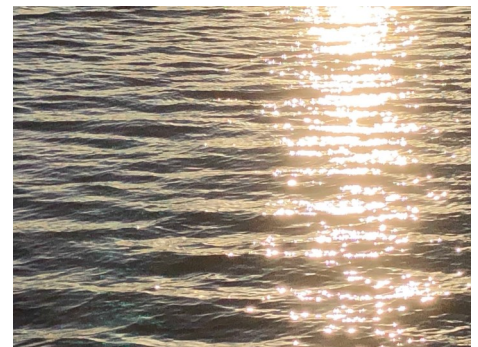
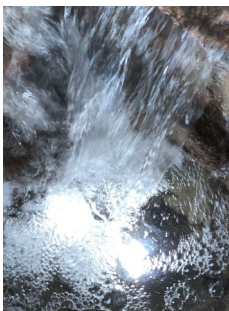
PHOTOGRAPHY ACTIVITY

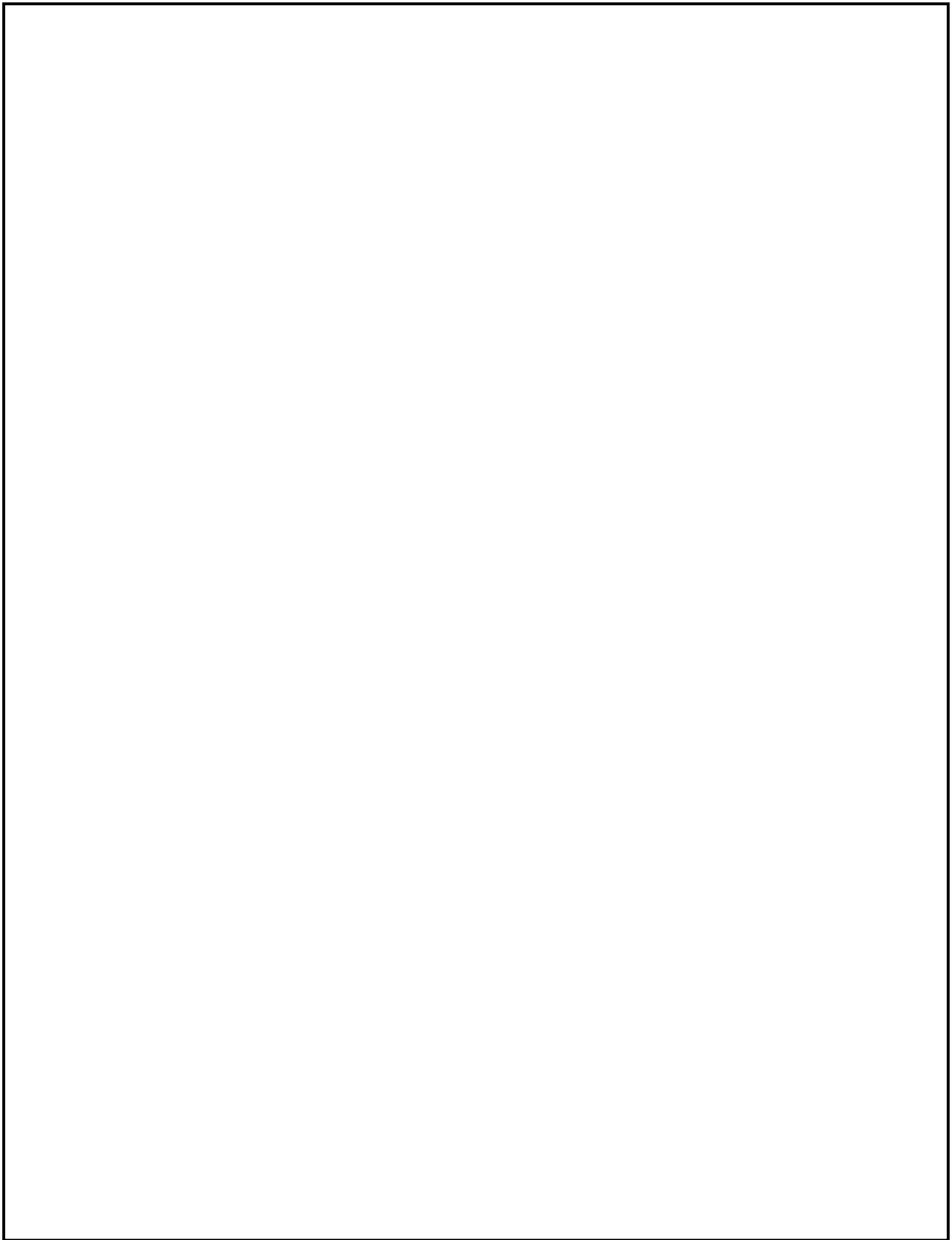
Ask students to generate a list of ways they experience water in their everyday lives (shower, kitchen faucet, lawn sprayers, swimming pool, canals, car wash, fountains, lakes, rivers, etc.) and any dramatic examples they may have experienced on special occasions or outings (water parks, white water rafting, ocean waves, monsoon rain, water falls, etc.). Ask students to categorize their experiences into natural and human controlled situations. Next, lead a discussion of how and why the water looks different in different situations (still, free flowing, contained, murky, clear, rushing, etc.)

Divide your students into groups in which a least one student has a smart phone. Ask groups to brainstorm places and situations where they might photograph water in the classroom, school, neighborhood, home. Ask students to shoot a series of photographs of water. They should work as a team locating water, setting up shots, editing photographs, viewing, and selecting photos for display. Their displays should include a list of students and a title for the exhibition, perhaps with an explanatory or descriptive paragraph.

Choose an appropriate venue for displaying groups' water photographs. If color printing is a possibility, ask groups to organize and glue prints on a large sheet of paper for display with text on a bulletin board. Another alternative is to ask each group to design a slide in a PowerPoint presentation.

*Sketch an plan for your display on the back of this page.





Title: _____

Photography Team: _____