

Ranchos Church by Georgia O'Keeffe

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1929
- Size: 24 1/8" x 36 1/8"
- Location: Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida
- Period:
- Style: American modernism
- Genre: Landscape
- This painting is a result from the O'Keeffe's summer vacation to Taos, New Mexico.
- This painting is actually of a church founded in 1710. O'Keeffe chose to use a "reductive" approach making the church undistinguishable from its landscape.
- This painting shows a harmony between church and nature.

Artist Facts

- Born 1887 Wisconsin
- Died 1986 Santa Fe, New Mexico (age 98)
- O'Keeffe was born on a dairy farm in Wisconsin.
- She was one of seven children.
- O'Keeffe and her sisters were given art lessons, which was uncommon for girls at that time.
- She decided to become an artist by age 10 (some say 13).
- She was very independent and didn't like to do things other children did. She liked to be different and rebelled against being like anybody else. She spent much of her time alone and said she used her imagination for company.
- As a young woman, she moved first to Chicago and then to New York to study art. In New York, she met photographer and gallery owner, Alfred Stieglitz. She was Stieglitz's model for many photographs. They were married in 1924 and he encouraged her to paint fulltime.
- Her work from this period included many oversized paintings of flowers. O'Keeffe once said that since we often ignore them in life, she decided to make her flowers too large to be ignored. In these paintings, she reduced nature to its simplest, abstract form by using a very close-up view.
- O'Keeffe first went to New Mexico in 1929 and fell in the love with the west.
- Beginning in her 40s, she was drawn to New Mexico, which inspired her later paintings. These often included landscapes of desert and animal bones bleached by the sun.
- Georgia painted over 900 paintings in her life time. She retired in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and painted until her eye sight failed. She died in 1986 at 98 years old.
- O'Keeffe had a technique of magnifying forms and eliminating details.
- O'Keeffe became a well-known artist decades before women were even allowed into art programs at colleges and universities.
- O'Keeffe never painted a painting with a person in it.
- She suffered from blindness in her old age.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Value** is the use of light and dark in an art piece. Higher values are described as being light and lower values are referred to as being dark. In painting, value is often referred to as tint and shade. Tint is light and shade is dark.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Value

- Do you see shadows in this painting? Where?
- Can you tell where the light is coming from?
- Bring in a "church" (could even be made of blocks or legos), and have a student stand above it holding a flashlight. Turn off the lights and help the flashlight student shine the light on the church in the same way that the light source is shining on the church in the painting. Talk about the direction the light is coming from and how things can cast a shadow. Point out the lighter and darker values in the painting and how the artist creates darker shades by adding black and lighter tints by adding white.
- Have the students squint at the painting to help them distinguish the light areas from the dark ones. (Dark areas will fade back when you squint.)

Keywords

- Value, abstract, shape, color, line

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What do you see in the sky in this painting? (nothing) Why do you think that is? (The desert rarely has clouds and O'Keeffe simplified everything in this painting.)
- Do you think this is really what the church looked like? (no, it is simplified to its basic forms)
- Would you say this painting is realistic or abstract? (abstract)
- What shapes do you see in this painting?
- What colors? Would you say there are a lot of colors or not very many?
- Do you see a lot of detail in this painting or not very much?
- What kinds of lines do you see in this painting? Straight or curvy?
- The warm colors of the church and landscape move forward and the cool, blue color of the sky recedes into the background.