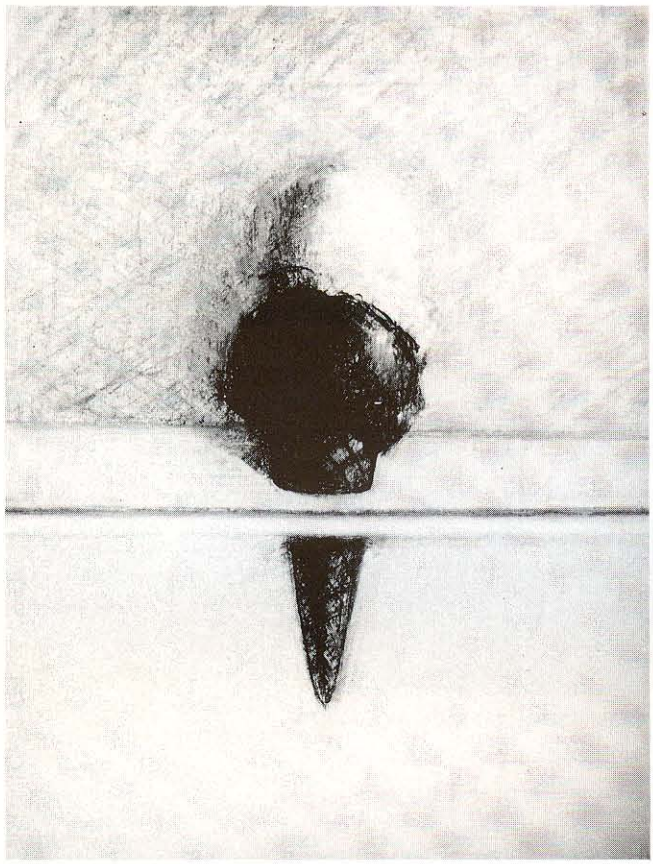
BEHIND THE SCENES

WITH **WAYNE THIEBAUD**

LINE



WAYNE THIEBAUD, *Ice Cream Cone*, 1991. 11 × 15 inches, crayon on paper. Private collection, courtesy Alan Stone Gallery.

Line is the structure that holds the form together like a skeleton of the body.
—Wayne Thiebaud

About the Program

Behind the Scenes with Wayne Thiebaud explores many of the ways artists can use line. It begins with outline, a concept familiar to most children, and then shows how artists often use line in unexpected ways—to create volume and shape, to express movement or feeling, and even simply to create abstract linear patterns. Wayne Thiebaud begins with what seems to be a simple drawing and gradually reveals the surprising linear structure that underlies a color portrait of an ice cream cone.

About the Artist

Wayne Thiebaud was born in Mesa, Arizona, in 1920. Before receiving formal art training, Thiebaud worked as a cartoonist, designer, and advertising art director—all of which influenced his later work. Wayne Thiebaud works in a realistic style, often presenting everyday objects in isolation from their environment, making us ponder the meaning of his art while noting his artistic technique.

Jumping Off Activity

Lines in the Environment (10 minutes)

This activity prepares students to observe lines in ordinary objects from our daily environment.

Ask students to identify lines that they see all the time but may not immediately notice. Encourage them to look in unusual places around the classroom. Tell them to look at an object for a long time so that they notice lines that they might have missed at first. Places to look for lines include wooden floorboards, the legs of a chair, and the dividers between window panes. Have students look through a window to find lines outside—telephone poles and wires, cracks in the sidewalk, the metal work in fences. Ask students to look for lines in nature such as those made by tree trunks, branches, or even small spider webs. Can they find any straight lines? Interestingly, straight lines never occur in nature. Now tell students to search for lines nearer to themselves, perhaps in patterns on their clothing or doodles in the margins of their notebooks.

Place students at various angles and distances from a linear object, such as a radiator, and have them draw it from their own viewpoint, using pencils and paper. Afterwards, ask them if they found that lines only describe the outside of the object. In what unexpected places did they find lines? What happens at places where light and shadow meet? Explore the differences in the students' drawings depending on where they sat and which lines they drew.

Viewing

Before continuing the activities, observe some of the ways artists use line by viewing *Behind the Scenes with Wayne Thiebaud.*

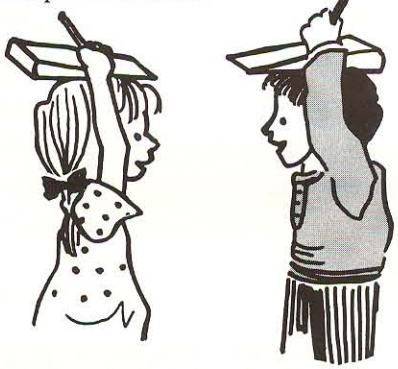
Follow-up Activities

1. Experiments in Outlining
This two-part activity helps students learn how line can describe the shape of an object.

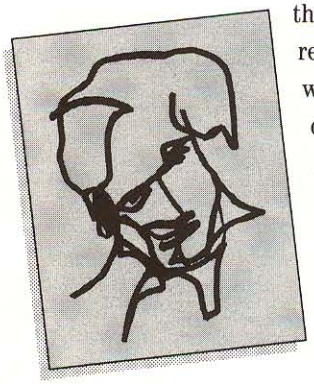
A. "Blind" Contour Portraits (20 minutes)

Ask students to think of a line as a dot that moves. Explain that in a *contour drawing* —a linear image made without lifting the marker from the page—the dot, or line, is like the trail an ant would leave if it walked along the edges of an object.

While you distribute drawing materials and paper, tell students that in this activity they must always keep their eyes on the subject. Ask them to invent ways of making a contour portrait that will ensure that they look only at the person they are drawing. One method is to have students put a sheet of paper over a notebook and hold this steady on top of their heads.



Now place students in pairs, face to face, and remind them always to keep their markers on their paper as they draw each other. Explain that it is not important for their contour drawings to be realistic; rather, they should attempt to capture a sense of what they see. Have students share the humorous results and ask whether it was difficult not to be able to look at their paper while they worked.



B. Still-Life Contour Drawings (20 minutes)

Tell students to find flat objects with interesting shapes, perhaps from their lunch boxes or pockets, and to place them on top of their desks. For this activity, students can work with their paper in front of them, but they should continue to keep their eyes on the still life at all times. As they begin to work with markers or crayons on paper, remind them to think of their contour drawings as the trail of an ant walking along the outer edges of their objects. They will need to look carefully and draw slowly to capture all the details.

Afterwards, have students compare what it was like to complete the two contour drawing activities. Did they draw the portrait at the same speed as they drew the still life? In which project did they feel they had greater control of their line? Why? Display the completed works and ask if they look realistic.

2. Action Lines: Make It Move (40 minutes)
This activity encourages students to use line to suggest movement at different speeds.

Ask students to suggest objects that move quickly, those that move at a moderate pace, and those that barely seem to move. List their examples on the blackboard in three columns. To help get them started, you might ask in which category they would place a flower growing, the sun setting, or a rocket ship blasting off.

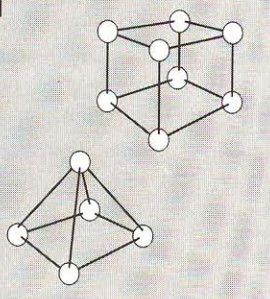
Now distribute drawing materials and ask students to create a picture of one of the objects from each of the three columns, using lines to indicate the speed at which the object is moving. Next, tell them to select a different object, such as a ball rolling down a hill or a leaf falling, and to draw it going faster and faster. Also ask them to explore how lines themselves can have a quality of movement. How would they draw a fast line, a slow line, an excited line, or a lazy line?

Finally, have students describe the different ways they discovered to represent movement with line, and list the methods on the blackboard. Take a moment to discuss if any of their discoveries are similar to the ways cartoonist Matt Groening indicated movement through line in the television program.

Related Curriculum Activities

Language Arts
What's My Line?—Across the top of a long, horizontal sheet of newsprint, draw an interesting line that moves from left to right. Have the class create a story that corresponds to the linear image, asking each student to add a written narrative line consecutively.

Mathematics
Geometric Shapes Made with Lines—Have students experiment in creating three-dimensional shapes using toothpicks and miniature marshmallows or plasticine. Translate the shapes into two dimensions by drawing them on paper.



Science
Linear Graphs—Use lines to graph changes in temperature, migration patterns, or any other scientific process being studied in the curriculum.