

**eva**

**ELEMENTARY VISUAL ARTS**

Park City Education Foundation • Kimball Art Center

LESSON

**8**

**Robert Smithson**

Land Art

Verbal Directions

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Robert Smithson (1938 - 1973) was an American artist famous for his Land Art. Students will learn about the Spiral Jetty's, environmental art, as well as the birds and habitat of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Using a variety of media, students will create their version of Spiral Jetty and a bird that migrates through and/or nests at Great Salt Lake.

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Learn about Environmental Art and Land Art
- Experience cross disciplinary learning with information about the Great Salt Lake, birds and habitats, the Spiral Jetty and its creator Robert Smithson.
- Develop art from nature or based on nature.

### ROBERT SMITHSON



Robert Smithson, (1938-1973) was an American sculptor and writer associated with the Land Art movement. As a young artist he studied painting and drawing in New York City. In 1967 Smithson first began using land materials for his art. He observed dump trucks moving tons of earth and rock around a construction site. This inspired him and he started collecting earth and rocks to put them in the gallery as sculptures. Then he moved his art outside. His most famous work is Spiral Jetty (1970), a 1500 feet long spiral-shaped jetty extending into the Great Salt Lake in Utah constructed from rocks, earth, salt and red algae. Until recently it was entirely submerged by rising lake waters. Some art historians consider the Spiral Jetty to be the most important work by Smithson. [Learn More](#)



### SUPPLIES

- Images of the Sprial Jetty and other Land Art.
- Thick cardstock or poster board paper
- Drawing Paper for sketching
- Cardstock
- White Glue
- Sand
- Toothpicks
- Model Magic or homemade playdough
- Pencils and colored pencils

## LESSON PLAN

1. Introduce students to Robert Smithson and his artwork the Spiral Jetty. Show students pictures of the Spiral Jetty and the Great Salt Lake. Talk about the materials used to make this Land Art and have students imagine the process of creating such a large sculpture. Share with students that the Spiral Jetty was actually constructed twice. After six days Robert Smithson looked at the results and told the crew to change the shape (moving 7,000 tons of basalt rock and taking three more days). Ask students

- Have students heard about or seen the Spiral Jetty? What is a Jetty?
- What is Environmental Art or Land Art?
- Where would you build your own piece of Land Art, and what would it be?

2. Discuss the location Robert Smithson chose for Spiral Jetty. Ask students what they know about the Great Salt Lake, and why they think Smithson chose Utah. Talk about the lake, history, geography, significance etc. Then explain how the Great Salt Lake is a key stop for migrating birds in the western hemisphere.

*About the Great Salt Lake: The water flowing into the lake from the mountains carries mineral salts that have been removed from rocks and soils along the way. After the water enters the lake, there is only one way out - evaporation. As the water evaporates, it leaves behind the salts it brought into the lake. The Great Salt Lake is one of the saltiest bodies of water in the world. The lake, marshes and salt flats contain a wide variety of species ranging from the simple brine shrimp to the great blue heron. Five million birds representing 257 species rely on the lake for resident feeding and sanctuary, breeding, or migratory stopover. The ecology of life at Great Salt Lake is an incredible example of the rich web of relationships between land and water, food, and survival.*

3. Pass out cardstock paper. Looking at images of the Spiral Jetty from different perspectives, have students draw out a spiral and the landscape of the great salt lake in pencil. Students can add color to the background with color pencils. Students can also use natural materials to represent the Spiral Jetty by applying white glue in a spiral on the drawing and then pouring sand or rock overtop.

4. Study the birds that migrate through the Great Salt Lake. Print out images from the web links in the reference section for students to choose from. Pass out cardstock so that students can draw and observe in detail the birds that are an important part of the ecosystem. These can be attached to the drawing of the Spiral Jetty.

EVA +: To take this lesson further, students can sculpt the birds that migrate through Great Salt Lake with air-dry clay or create outside and design a piece of land art collaboratively with natural materials.





### KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS: Based on National Core Arts Standards visual Arts Requirements (Kindergarden).

#### VA:re.7.1.Ka:

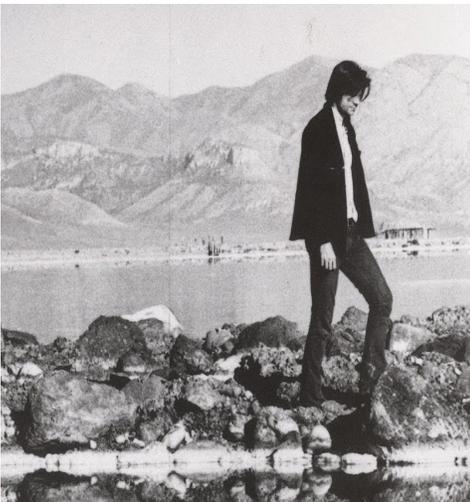
Recognize art in one's own environment.

#### VA:Cr2.3.Ka :

Create art that represents natural and constructed environments.

#### VA:Cr3.1.Ka :

Explain the process of making art while creating.



### STUDIO HABITS OF THE MIND:

Understand (Arts) Community: Learning to interact as an artist with other artists (i.e., in classrooms, in local arts organizations, and across the art field) and within the broader society. Arts is in parenthesis here as it can easily be switched with other disciplines, like science or history.

### ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Click on links to learn more.

- <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-smithson-robert.htm>
- <https://www.theartstory.org/movement-environmental-art.htm>
- <https://www.healing-power-of-art.org/what-is-environmental-art/>
- <https://utah.com/family-friendly/spiral-jetty-golden-spike-itinerary-for-kids>
- <https://artsology.com/smithson-spiral-jetty-game.php>
- <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty>
- <https://wildlife.utah.gov/gsl/waterbirdssurvey/birds.htm>
- <https://www.iheartnaptime.net/play-dough-recipe/>

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