

Image Credit: Scott Stephens, Riverbend, 2008, Cyanotype, 2011.03

# Design a Habitat

## OVERVIEW

This lesson will focus on student's learned knowledge of successful habitats. From this knowledge, they will design and illustrate a habitat for an organism of their choosing.

## STANDARDS

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we illustrate a landscape that is the perfect habitat for a specific organism?

### STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students Will:

- Understand how habitats affect organisms
- Identify and study Alabama rivers
- Create a unique habitat to host specific organisms
- Demonstrate knowledge of the food chain within their designed habitat

### STANDARDS: SECOND AND THIRD GRADE | ART AND SCIENCE

2nd Grade | VISUAL ARTS 1, 3, 5 | SCIENCE 7

3rd Grade | VISUAL ARTS 5 | SCIENCE 11

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## ART DISCUSSION

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What do you see within the work? Is it realistic or abstract?
- Where do you think this landscape is located?
- What organisms would you find living in this habitat?
- Are there any aspects of nature that would inspire you to create an entire series of art like Scott Stephens?
- Look under "Curriculum Content". There you will find a map showing the rivers found in Alabama. Are there any rivers near you? How far away are you from the Sipsey River?
- Look under "Curriculum Content". The photograph by Ryan Castillo is similar to the landscape Scott Stephens created. Compare and contrast the actual landscape to the work of art.

Scott Stephens' interest as an artist is in understanding how nature is used and recreated by man to become our concept of Nature. This landscape is found near Nauvoo, Alabama in the Sipsey River watershed, which is a nature preserve.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Scott Stephens is Professor of Art and Chair of the Department of Art. He earned his MFA degree from the University

of Alabama and the BFA from Washington University in St. Louis.

His studio practice is in large-format printmaking and historic photographic processes. He directs the printmaking concentration and assists with instruction in the photography program. Stephens' prints have been seen in over 100 exhibitions and are held in regional public collections as well as private and corporate collections nationally.

He resides in Birmingham with his wife Suzanne, their daughters Hannah and Lillie, and a dog of uncertain heritage named Percy.

## CURRICULUM CONTENT

### LEARN ABOUT THE SIPSEY RIVER

The Sipsey River, or "Sipsey River Swamp" as it is sometimes known, is one of the most fascinating and unique rivers in the State. The Sipsey River is one of the last wild, free flowing swamp streams in Alabama, and it is considered one of "Alabama's Ten Natural Wonders" due to its unique and valuable aquatic resources. The rich diversity of its forests, mollusks, fish, waterfowl and wildlife have qualified this watershed to be named as one of Alabama's 10 natural wonders.

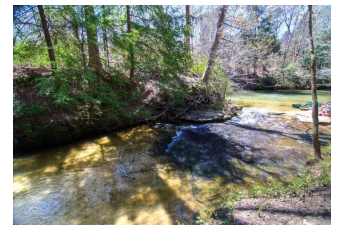
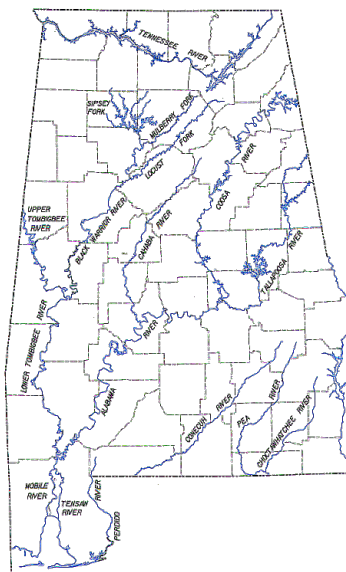
Wandering through Fayette, Tuscaloosa, Pickens and Greene counties, this 92-mile long river is estimated to contain approximately 50,000 acres of bottomland wetlands and swamps, which ranks it as one of the State's largest wetland regions. The vegetation and trees are diverse and varied, ranging from bald cypress swamps to tupelo gum trees, swamp cottonwood, southern red oak, American elm, sweet-gum, yellow poplar and American beech.

The Sipsey River is home to many types of mussels, a total of 37 species has been reported from the drainage. Freshwater mussels thrive in free-flowing riverine habitats with clean water and gravel bottoms. These conditions remain on the Sipsey River because there are no major dams. Also, many areas of the Sipsey retain their swampy bottomland forest floodplains. Such areas help remove silt and pollutants from runoff during rain events and maintain good water quality in the river. Besides the diverse mussel population, the Sipsey River provides refuge and habitat for about 102 species of freshwater fishes which include darters, gars, shad, shiners, and suckers. Several rare fish and creatures of the Sipsey River may eventually qualify for special conservation status, the southern walleye, American eel, and the flattened musk turtle. Popular sportfish species include largemouth bass, spotted bass, catfish, crappie, pickerel, and various sunfish (bream).

Below is a side-by-side view of the Sipsey River and River-bend. The photograph is from Ryan Castillo taken on the trails. While it is not an exact duplicate for the location Scott Stephens' used for inspiration, the viewer is able to see how he was influenced by the environment.



RIVERS OF ALABAMA





# Design a Habitat

## ART INSTRUCTION

### MATERIALS

8.5" x 11" cardstock paper, watercolors, brushes, cup of water, crayons, sharpie

### INSTRUCTIONS

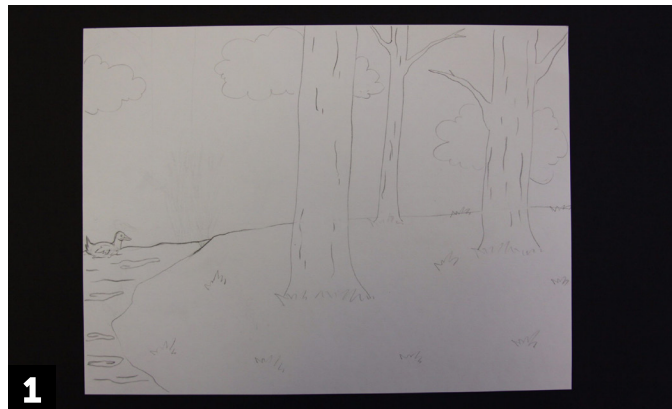
**1** With a pencil, lightly draw your habitat. The habitat should fill up the paper with many details. For example, a forest would have tall trees filling the paper with grass, flowers, and other small details to add to the drawing. Drawing landscapes focus on the layers of the composition. The bottom of the paper is the foreground, the middle of the paper is the middle ground and the top of the paper is the background and is the farthest away from the viewer. Sometimes, depending on the age group, you can incorporate color into the layers as well.

- Add different wildlife that would live in the habitat
- Show the water moving by adding swirling or waving lines
- The lines on the branches, trees to grass, and water to duck will be erased before outlining
- To make the trees realistic, add some bumpy, wavy lines to represent the bark

**2** Once the drawing is complete, begin outlining with a crayon or sharpie. When a pencil line is painted it becomes hard to see and lines are no longer defined. Outlining the work before hand ensures that even if the painting is a bit messy the original drawing is still there.

**3** Begin painting. Watercolor works best with lots of water. Dip the brush in the water, circle the brush on the color palette, then paint. Once the brush becomes dry and the paint does not spread easily, dip the brush in the water and circle the brush on the palette. Clean your brush in between colors to keep your painting neat and beautiful. Color most of the paper! There should be very little white left on the paper.

**4** Go back over the painting with a second layer of watercolors. Each layer should be added with thin, watery coats of paint. Add shadows and details to the whole painting. The sky and the lake are both blue. To have the lake stand out, mix green + blue. Another option is to change the time of day: sunrise, sunset, or nighttime would allow for different colors in the sky so the lake could stay blue.



## TERMS

**CYANOTYPE** - a liquid of two chemicals is painted on a piece of paper that once exposed to light changes from a muddy green to a bright blue. Imagine combining a dark room photograph with a blueprint! Click [here](#) to watch the process from start to finish.

**REALISTIC** - art work that attempts a photographic likeness of the subject matter; sometimes refers to the choice of subject that is commonplace as opposed to courtly and idealized.

**ABSTRACT** - artwork where objects have been changed or modified so they no longer look realistic. An abstract work of art does, however, use a recognizable object or thing as its reference or origin.

**LANDSCAPE** - a work of art showing nature and the land such as the ocean, mountains, trees, and sky.

**ORGANISM** - an individual animal, plant, or single-celled life form.

**HABITAT** - the natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism that provides food, water and shelter.

**WATERSHED** - an area or ridge of land that separates waters flowing to different rivers, basins, or seas.

**NATURE PRESERVE** - a tract of land managed so as to preserve its flora, fauna, and physical features.

**SWAMP** - an area of low-lying, uncultivated ground where water collects; a bog or marsh.

**WETLANDS** - land consisting of marshes or swamps; saturated land.

**COMPOSITION** - the arrangement of the elements of art and the principles of design within a given work of art.

**FOREGROUND** - the part of a picture which appears closest to the viewer and often is at the bottom of the picture.

**MIDDLE GROUND** - Objects in the middle ground appear to be behind objects in the foreground

**BACKGROUND** - The background is the part of the painting farthest from the viewer. Objects in the background are usually smaller and less distinct than other objects in the work.

## YOUTUBE

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## RESOURCES

[1] "Sipsey River." Outdoor Alabama. Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 13 Aug. 2014. Web. <<http://www.outdooralabama.com/sipsey-river>>.

[2] Castillo, Ryan. Sipsey River in Alabama. Digital image. Trail Mob. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://trailmob.com/trail/sipsey-river-trail>>.

[3] Darr, Doug. "Rivers of Alabama." Outdoor Alabama. Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, n.d. Web. <<http://www.outdooralabama.com/sites/default/files//fishing/images/rivers.gif>>.