

The Watercolour

Explorer's Guide



A journey through the High Weald landscape in watercolour

## Things you'll need:

Watercolour paper, wide brushes, long thin brushes, watercolour paints, strips of sponge, masking tape, scissors, water bowls, plastic sheets, cotton balls, landscape images in colour



## Get prepared!

You might want to protect your tables - if so, a small piece of plastic per pupil is ideal (plastic place mats or binding covers are great and can be re-used). Lay out a piece of plastic, a sheet of watercolour paper, a pair of scissors, a strip of sponge, a wide brush and a thin brush per pupil. Each table will need some watercolour paints, a water bowl, masking tape and pictures of landscapes. Have some cotton balls to hand...

## What is the High Weald and what does it have to do with Watercolour?

The High Weald is an area of protected countryside (you could show them on a map). People have lived and worked in the High Weald for thousands of years, using resources found naturally in the area. The High Weald is a beautiful place (it is known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and many painters including Turner (who became very famous for his), have recreated these landscapes.

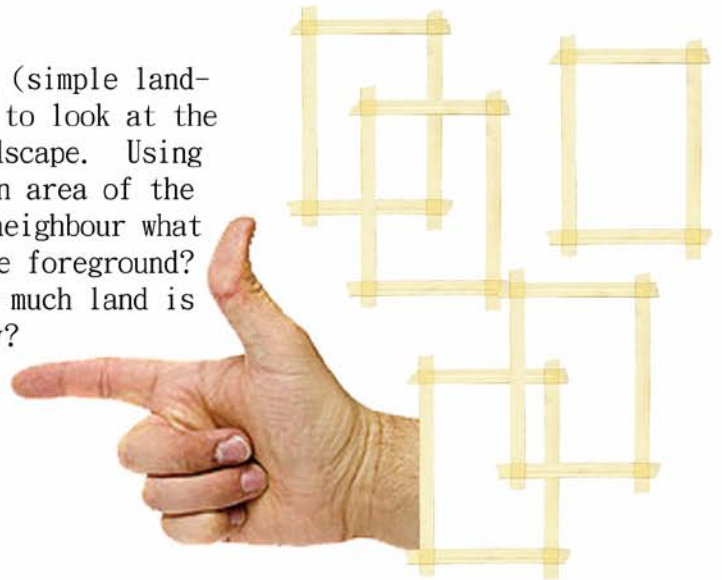
Some of the views you might find in the High Weald are rolling green hills, ancient woodlands full of bluebells, or a colourful wildflower grassland. These views make great subjects for watercolour and will be our inspiration for this exercise.

## Get your Artists started...



Using masking tape, make a thin border around the paper by sticking it to the plastic. This will give a crisp border to the painting, making it look more professional in an instant! The easiest way to manage the tape is to pull out a length, stick the end to the table edge, and then cut off with scissors. Try and get the border straight and even all the way round and make sure it is firmly pressed down (If you are working with year 1 or 2, you can skip this, or prepare in advance)

Use the pictures you have chosen (simple landscapes without too much detail) to look at the different components of the landscape. Using fingers as viewfinders select an area of the landscape and describe to your neighbour what colours you see. What is in the foreground? What is in the background? How much land is there? How much sky?



## Pick your palette

Select a *MAXIMUM* of 4 colours from the watercolour palette - you need *SKY* and *LAND* colours (ideally 2 of each). You all need to be able to reach your chosen colours easily, so if you need to move seats, do it now.



## Where's the white?

Looking at the resources again, let's find the *WHITE*... NOT the off white, not the nearly white, just the *REALLY WHITE*. This determines the direction of the *LIGHT* and makes your picture come alive. When you have spotted it, identify what shape it is. Using the tape stuck on the table again, cut pieces of tape in the shape of the white and stick them on as they appear in the picture. Don't worry about tiddly bits, just the main shapes of white. You can do this using masking fluid but save it for older pupils or all the paintings will look like the Arctic!

At the start, let's just be clear..... There will be no drawing, no rubbing out and no second piece of paper! This painting will be made up of 2 layers - a wash and a detail layer. With watercolour, *LESS* is best, so if you are unsure, best to *STOP* not to add more!

## Wishy Washy Wet eek!

Using the strip of sponge wet the whole piece of paper - that was *WET* it not *DROWN* it! If you are not using any masking tape or fluid, you can leave some areas dry at this point (where the white would be). Find the *LIGHTEST* of the sky (background) colours you chose. Using the wide brush, dip in the water and then onto the paint. Brush across the area of sky that is the lightest to create your first wash.

Now find the *LIGHTEST* of the land (foreground) colours that you chose. Is the paper still wet where the land is? If not use the sponge to dot on a bit more water. Then brush on your first land colour where it is lightest.

Now find the darker land colour you chose and wash the relevant areas with that. Take no notice of any fine detail at this stage. If there is a small lake appearing on the plastic around the painting, use a cotton ball to gently mop it up.



Hopefully your sky has now mostly dried. Re-wet the parts you haven't yet painted. Using the long skinny brush with your darker sky colour drag the paint from the wet area towards the dry area. Where the brush goes onto the dry area it will pick up the texture of the paper and give a cloud effect (this works well for water in the foreground too). Some strokes can be more watery than others to vary the effect.

Phew, tricky stuff eh? Well we're doing the lightweight version - one popular (but probably untrue) story about Turner states that he had himself "tied to the mast of a ship in order to experience the drama" of the elements during a storm at sea. What is true is that he spent hours, days and even weeks looking at the landscape and trying to capture the light as it changed throughout the day.

## Dashing detail

With the thin brush you can now paint in some detail using a less watery mix for stronger effect. Look for the most defined areas of colour - dark shadows, hedges, trees etc. You need to work on dry areas when painting detail, so if some parts of your painting are a bit waterlogged, work in another area and come back to those bits later.

**NOW STOP!** Before it becomes a mud picture. It's very unlikely you won't have done enough, and almost certain that if you do more it will be **TOO MUCH!**

**RESIST** the temptation to pick it up until you have mopped any excess water off the plastic (puddles will run down your picture and induce instant distress!).

**RESIST** the urge to peel off the masking tape until the painting is completely dry (or the paint will bleed, and the tape can rip off the surface of the paper, ruining your professional effect).

## Whip up wicked watercolours

Thinking all these art materials are a bit expensive?  
Did you know you can make your own watercolour paints?

### Things you'll need:

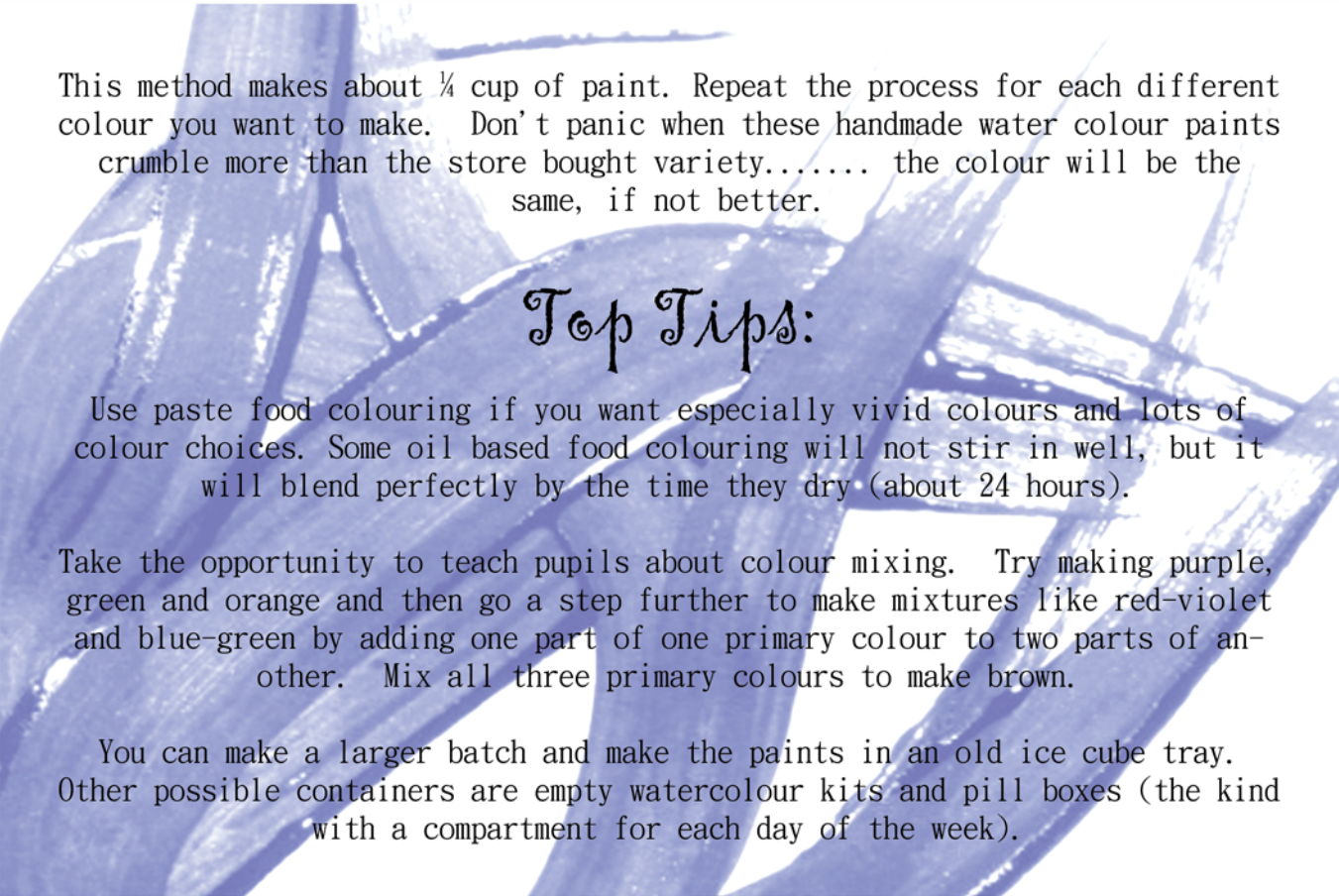
Small bowls, 2 tbsp baking soda, 1 tbsp vinegar,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp glycerine, 1 tbsp corn flour, food colouring, 1 tsp water, bottle caps or very small containers

**Step 1.** Combine the baking soda and vinegar in a small bowl or container.

**Step 2.** Wait until the baking soda and vinegar have stopped foaming and bubbling. Then add the glycerine and corn flour and mix until thoroughly combined.

**Step 3.** Add food colouring to the mixture to get your desired colour and mix well. Add drop of water if mixture is too stiff.

**Step 4.** Scoop the mixture into a bottle cap or very small container and let dry overnight before use.



This method makes about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of paint. Repeat the process for each different colour you want to make. Don't panic when these handmade water colour paints crumble more than the store bought variety..... the colour will be the same, if not better.

## Top Tips:

Use paste food colouring if you want especially vivid colours and lots of colour choices. Some oil based food colouring will not stir in well, but it will blend perfectly by the time they dry (about 24 hours).

Take the opportunity to teach pupils about colour mixing. Try making purple, green and orange and then go a step further to make mixtures like red-violet and blue-green by adding one part of one primary colour to two parts of another. Mix all three primary colours to make brown.

You can make a larger batch and make the paints in an old ice cube tray. Other possible containers are empty watercolour kits and pill boxes (the kind with a compartment for each day of the week).



## Paper Stretching

We use watercolour paper as it is good quality, thick and textured. This helps to create the effects we have tried and it doesn't buckle too much if used straight from the pack. Ideally we would use this stretching technique on watercolour paper but if you need a cheaper alternative, try the following using the best quality, thickest paper you have:

**Step 1.** Cut four strips of gummed brown tape, one for each side of the piece of paper. Cut these slightly longer than the sides. Put them aside for the moment.

**Step 2.** Soak your paper in cold water for a couple of minutes. This allows the fibres in the paper to expand.

**Step 3.** Lift the sheet of paper and gently shake off the excess water. Place it on a board, which must be lying flat.

*Step 4.* Smooth the paper out with a clean sponge (preferably) or your fingers. If the paper not perfectly smooth at this stage, it won't dry smooth.

*Step 5.* Moisten a strip of gummed tape and stick it down firmly along one side so that one third of the tape is on the paper and two-thirds on the board. This will stop the paper pulling off the board when it dries. Tape down the other sides of the sheet of paper in the same way.



*Step 6.* Leave to dry for several hours, away from direct heat. As the water evaporates, the fibres in the paper contract, leaving the sheet of paper flat.

Keep the board flat while the paper dries, otherwise the water will drain to one edge and the paper will dry unevenly. Once dry, paint onto the paper while still attached to the board.

## Top Tips:

If you can't fully submerge your paper in your sink, use a mist sprayer or sponge to wet both sides.

Don't use hot water to soak your paper as this could remove the sizing from the paper, and don't soak it for too long for the same reason. Sizing is added to paper to reduce its absorbency.

Experiment! If the paper is not soaked long enough, it will continue to expand after you have fastened it to the stretching board, causing undulations or buckling in the surface when it has dried. If the paper is soaked too long, the resulting high tension may even tear the paper where it is fastened or rip the





You can test the paper's wetness by gently bending a corner toward the centre of the sheet. If it springs back to flat, the sheet is probably not wet enough. If it bends back to flat very slowly or remains where you flexed it, it probably has the right amount of moisture. If the corner remains folded or flops over under its own weight, then the sheet is probably too wet.

Use different colour sponges for smoothing your paper and moistening gummed tape so you never run the risk of getting gum on your paper.

If you don't have gummed brown tape, you can staple the paper down onto the board instead.

When you paint on the paper, you don't need to soak the whole page with a sponge as we did in our workshop - you just wet the area you want to work on.

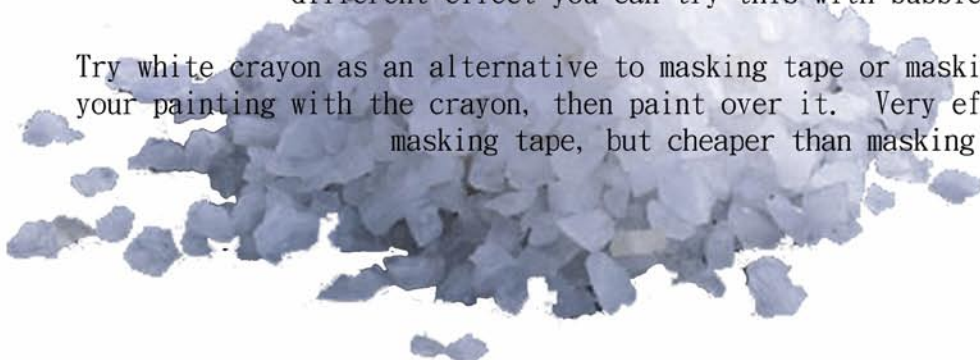
You may be able to peel off some of the tape when your painting is finished, but be careful not to tear the paper. Just trim off the edges or hide them under a mount.

## and some Watercolour experiments...

Just add salt! It creates a speckly, star-burst pattern when it dries. Paint only the areas you want to salt. While the paint is still wet, sprinkle salt on top... Then set the paper aside to dry. Then brush the dried salt away and paint the rest of the picture

Cling film magic! Create patterned paper for background effects... While the paint is still wet, crumple a sheet of cling film and smush it down onto the wet paint. Don't move the plastic around... just press it flat onto the paint. Set it aside to dry for an hour. Then pull off the plastic to reveal the patterns in the dry paint beneath. For a different effect you can try this with bubble wrap too...

Try white crayon as an alternative to masking tape or masking fluid. Draw the white in your painting with the crayon, then paint over it. Very effective, harder to see than masking tape, but cheaper than masking fluid!



## Resources

Watercolour paper - any good art shop, but cheapest found on ebay

Watercolour paints - Kent County Supplies, 0845 270 8811 (most schools have accounts)

Brushes - Kent County Supplies, 0845 270 8811

Masking tape - [www.tapes-direct.co.uk](http://www.tapes-direct.co.uk) (low tack or it will tear the paper)

Plastic sheets - [www.viking.co.uk](http://www.viking.co.uk) (binding covers) or [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com) (cheap place mats)

Watercolour paint ingredients - any good supermarket

Gummed paper - Kent County Supplies, 0845 270 8811

Created by Bec Britain and Sharon Mee for the High Weald Heroes Programme  
Art Resources for Primary School Teachers ©

