



# Sky Above Clouds IV Project Georgia O'Keeffe

**Volunteer:**

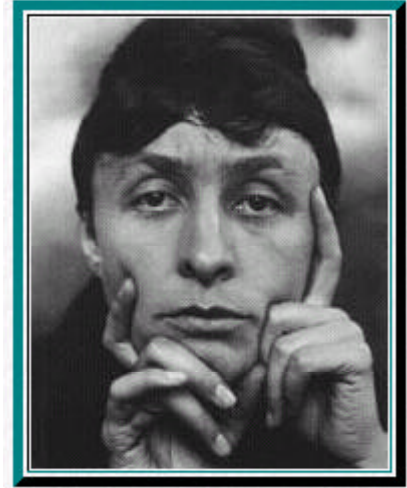
**Date:**

**Grade Level:** 1st Grade

**Artist:** Georgia O'Keeffe

**Print/Sculpture:** Sky Above Clouds IV

**Art Vocabulary:**



## I The Artist: Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe was born in 1887 in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. She grew up on a farm, and had many opportunities to learn about nature. Her mother loved art, and made sure all of the children had art lessons while growing up. Georgia's parents felt that she was very talented, so they let her continue to study art. One of the places that she studied was at the Art Institute of Chicago. She also studied in New York and met her husband, Alfred Stieglitz there. He was a famous photographer and helped Georgia to become a famous painter.

### Show stieglitz portrait of Georgia

When Georgia began her career, it was considered okay for a woman to teach art, but improper for her to be an artist. She became the most distinguished female artist of her time. Today, she is considered among the greatest and most original painters (man/woman) of this century. After her husband died in 1946, Ms. O'Keeffe became a loner and lived alone on her ranch in New Mexico with a servant and two fierce dogs. She had a reputation for being a little strange or even a bit of a witch!



Young Georgia O'Keeffe

### Show photo

She could spend the entire day painting.

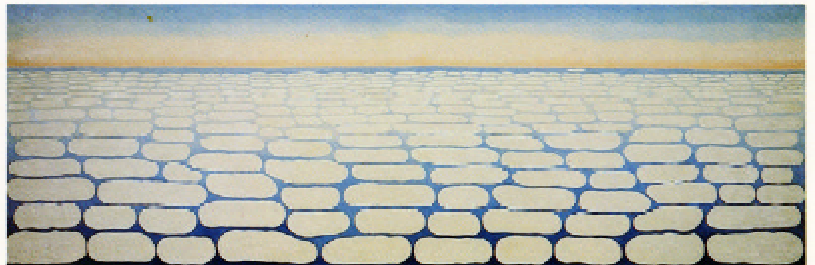
She lived to be 98-years-old and remained very active throughout her life. She went river rafting for the first time in her 70s and loved it. She also loved rock climbing and hiking in the desert. She loved nature. During her walks in the New Mexico desert she would come across cow bones, shells and fossils and pick them up and hold them against the sky. She had a fascination with the sky and the infinite.

**Show pictures of some of her other works:** Notice the oversize effects she created, and the beautiful colors she chose. She sought stark contrasts in many cases (like the whiteness of bleached bones against the celestial blue). Many of her flowers are gigantically enlarged to cover the whole of her canvasses. But more often yet, she posed a natural object against a background of natural immensity (the red hills, the sky). The same thing which fascinated her about the vast expanses of the sky fascinated her about the sandy expanses of the desert. She was overwhelmed by the grandeur and

beauty of nature and the smallness of human beings in the universe. Notice that of all the pictures we look at, not a single one has a human being in it.

## II The Painting:

The name of the painting is **Sky Above Clouds IV**. Georgia O'Keeffe painted it when she was 77-years-old. The original is a huge painting. It is 24'x8' (measure out how big with a tape measure so children can see). She painted it in her garage on her ranch in New Mexico. She climbed a ladder to reach the top of the canvas and worked on the bottom by lying on the ground. The original hangs in the Art Institute.



**Sky Over Clouds IV**

## III Composition of Artwork

What does the painting represent?

What title would you give it? Many children thought the painting represented a brick wall or a brick road, or marshmallows floating in water. Critics of Georgia O'Keeffe have seen icebergs in icy water in the picture, and one of her former students who was a pilot was simply puzzled and certainly did not recognize clouds in the picture. The painting is intended to be a place view of the clouds. We the spectators are floating or flying over the clouds.

Compare the picture with a photograph of clouds seen from a plane.

What kinds of feelings does the painting create in you? Peacefulness, calm, serenity, quietude, orderliness; this is a very "quiet" picture.

The original hangs in the Art Institute downtown Chicago. It is HUGE: 288" x 96" (24'x8'). With a yardstick measure 8 yards along the classroom wall so that the children will realize how very big the original painting is.

Why do you think it might be important for Mrs. O'Keeffe to paint a sky that is so huge? Georgia O'Keeffe wanted to give us a feel for the immensity of the sky, the infinitude of space. Also, she wanted to make sure people would notice her paintings. She drew flowers that were so huge that even people in a hurry could not help noticing them. For an old lady, it was quite a challenge to paint this huge sky. She was 77 years old when she started painting this work. See Laurie Lisle's account of how Mrs. O'Keeffe painted *Sky Above Clouds*, in *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe*, pp. 321-322. (See "More information" link from Georgia O'Keeffe page.)

Georgia O'Keeffe was fascinated by the sky and space: "I suppose I could live in a jail as long as I had a little patch of blue sky to look at," she once said.

**Compare the 3 different cloud pictures we have in the folder:**

**Sky Above Clouds II (1963): Save Our Air.** (25" x 36"): This is an airplane view of the clouds again, but we get the impression that the plane from which we watch the scene is banking. The clouds on the right side of the picture are slipping downwards. There is a feeling of motion here, of something disturbing pre-established order, something disquieting. It is as if man were pushing the clouds aside to

make room for himself. Man is an invader in the immensity and absolute beauty of the universe. Notice that the clouds have irregular shapes, some of them even overlap; irregular also is the space between the clouds with more, darker blue in the front of the picture than in the background. Way in the distance, regularity and orderliness seem to prevail again.

**Sky Above Clouds III (1965):** (48"x84")

The shapes of the clouds are more regular; there is no sense of motion here at all, and little blue space between the clouds note that the blue in the foreground is much darker than in the background. The dark blue serves to outline or define the white clouds more clearly. As the blues become less dark, the clouds seem to recede farther away. The colors are the same as in the other painting: blues, icy white, pale pink. There is something very cool, even cold about those colors. The pink in the background of the picture suggests the radiance of the sunlight beautifully.

**Sky Above Clouds IV (1963):** The clouds are very regular. We get an impression of infinity. Discuss perspective, horizon line, and vanishing point. (See **"More information"** link from Georgia O'Keeffe page.) The clouds look closer in the background, smaller and less distinct.

The picture from the Art Institute looks like a stylization of clouds. No real clouds here. Indeed, the white shapes in the painting resemble stepping stones across the sky. It is as if Georgia O'Keeffe had drawn a path into infinity, into eternity. She has transformed a natural object into a spiritual object.



Cat. 118, Sky Above Clouds III, 1963  
*Private Collection*

#### IV Artist's Materials or Techniques

#### V Students' Self-Expression: Guided Activity

1. Souvenir postcard. Look carefully at the work of art and imagine that is a postcard of your journey. Tell a friend or family member all about your trip! How long was your journey? What did you see? What did you do? Write about it on the back of the postcard and recreate the scene on the front. When you are finished:

- ◆ cut out the front and back of the postcard
- ◆ glue or tape them together
- ◆ stock a postcard stamp on it
- ◆ address it
- ◆ mail it!

2. Make a mural with flowers and skulls or bones. Give the children stencils of bones and flower parts and large pieces of construction paper. For the bones, pastels (black and grey) can be used to shade in holes and indicate depth. For the flowers, use construction paper, pipe cleaners, toothpicks, ribbons, shreds of paper, etc. Tell the children to create something big, monumental, so that people will feel grabbed by the flowers, they will not be able to ignore them.

**3.** The skull of a cow was brought in and arranged with flowers, etc. Each child was given a large piece of paper and paints, and painted this still life. They were instructed to fill the page with their painting, as Ms. O’Keeffe did.

The children seemed to enjoy learning about the artist as well as the activity. The painting was done in the multipurpose room and was quite messy (lots of spills and splashes.) Be sure to allow plenty of time for set-up prior to the presentation as well as for clean-up. It took the kids a while to get their painting smocks and move to their multipurpose room. So this particular lesson took nearly 2 hours.

**4.** Create a Riverside Village Landscape with Cloud Overlay.

Materials: Magazine and newspaper images of various sizes; Images to create a scene: Trees, roads, river, homes, people, animals, etc.; Clouds: Student-made or laminated.

Procedure: After discussion of perspective and horizon line, create the horizon line on an oversized paper. Have students glue or tape images in place using knowledge of perspective. Overlay clouds according to perspective.

In advance: Picture person should cut out the various images due to time element.

Additional bibliographical material includes:

Anita Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O’Keeffe*, Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 1988.

Laurie Lisle, *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe*, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1986.

Georgia O’Keeffe videotape included in cultural arts folder

Mike Venezia, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, Children’s Press, Danbury, Connecticut 1993



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

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