



# **Arthur Okamura**

## **(1932-2009)**

**Teacher Packet**

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## Biography: Arthur Okamura

Known for his screen printing and abstract expressionist paintings, **Arthur Okamura (1932-2009)** was a Japanese American artist who rose to prominence in the 1960s as a book illustrator and member of an artist community based in Bolinas, California.

Born in Long Beach, Okamura grew up in Southern California with his family. During World War II, he and his family were detained at the Santa Anita Assembly Center and later transferred to the Granada War Relocation Center in Colorado, where they were incarcerated for three years. Okamura was 10 years old when he entered the “internment camps.”

After the war, his family was released and moved to Chicago. There, Okamura began his art career at a silkscreen poster studio at age fifteen. After graduating high school, he attended the Art Institute of Chicago, Yale School of Art, and University of Chicago. He held his solo first exhibition at the Frank Ryan Gallery in Chicago and was later awarded a fellowship to study painting in Mallorca.

In 1956, Okamura moved from Chicago back to California. While he initially lived in San Francisco, he eventually settled in Bolinas. Once established in the artist community there, Okamura illustrated multiple books of poetry by friends. In 1971, he created the pastel drawings for the television movie, *The People*. In addition to working as an artist, Okamura taught at the California College of the Arts in Oakland for 31 years, retiring in 1997 as professor emeritus. During his retirement, he wrote and illustrated magic trick books, including *Paper Propeller, the Jumping Frog, the Spinning Quarter: And 38 Other Amazing Tricks You Can Do With Stuff Lying Around the House*. Today, his work can be found in multiple prominent art museums and at the New School at Commonweal in Bolinas, CA, where he served on the board of directors.



*Bolinas, 1964-65.*



*Bolinas Ridge, 1962.*

# Lesson 1: “Relocation”–Understanding Location and Place



**Objective:** Students will 1) learn the difference between location and place; 2) identify the location and place characteristics of different cities; and 3) reflect on the effects of a sudden change in location and place on the Japanese Americans when they were forced to evacuate and incarcerated.

**Introduction:** After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. Signed on February 19, 1942, the order gave the military broad powers to ban and evacuate any citizen on the West Coast, including California. While Executive Order 9066 applied to “any or all persons,” the newly established War Relocation Authority (WRA) began deporting Japanese immigrants (Issei) and incarcerating approximately 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent (Nisei). The WRA imprisoned them in ten “internment camps” built in deserts and swamplands, including in Amache, Colorado. The Executive Order uprooted entire communities, as Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes and jobs.

During World War II, Arthur Okamura and his family were involuntarily relocated from their home in Compton, CA, detained at the Santa Anita Assembly Center, and later transferred to the Granada War Relocation Center in Amache, Colorado, where they were incarcerated for three years. Okamura was 10 years old when he entered the “internment camps.”

In this lesson, students will 1) learn the difference between location and place; 2) identify the location and place characteristics of different cities; and 3) reflect on the effects of a sudden change in location and place on the Japanese Americans when they were incarcerated.

## **Content Standards (California):**

History and Social Science (Grade 1):

HSS 1.4: Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places, and things change over time while others stay the same.

HSS 1.4.1: Examine the structure of schools and communities in the past.

HSS 1.2: Students compare and contrast the absolute and relative locations of places and people and describe the physical and/or human characteristics of places.

HSS 1.2.4: Describe how location, weather, and physical environment affect the way people live, including the effects on their food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and recreation.

**Materials:** *National Geographic*, "[Location and Place: A Geographic Perspective](#)"; Internet access; *The New York Times*, "[How to Make an Illustrated Map in 8 Steps](#)".

**Vocabulary:**

Place: (*noun*) a way to understand a topic or area using spatial features and relationships.

Location: (*noun*) position of a particular point on the surface of the Earth.

Geographic Perspective: (*noun*) area having unique physical and human characteristics.

Incarceration: (*noun*) the state of being confined in prison; imprisonment.

Relocation: (*noun*) the action of moving to a new place.

Executive Order 9066: issued on December 7, 1941, the order gave the military broad powers to ban and evacuate any citizen on the West Coast.

**Procedure:**

1. Visit *National Geographic* website and complete the lesson, "[Location and Place: A Geographic Perspective](#)".
2. Introduce Executive Order 9066, the relocation of Japanese Americans, and Arthur Okamura.
3. Explain: Students will use Arthur Okamura's relocation as a case study to understand the difference in location and place between Compton, California and Amache, Colorado.
4. Research: Divide students into four groups to research the following:
  - a. Compton, California, in terms of location  
(where it is, such as the city, state, or country)
  - b. Amache, Colorado, in terms of location  
(where it is, such as the city, state, or country)
  - c. Compton, California, in terms of place  
(what it is like, such as hot, cold, urban, or country)
  - d. Amache, Colorado, in terms of place  
(what it is like, such as hot, cold, urban, or country)
1. Discuss: Have the class share their findings on the two cities.
2. Reflect: Ask students to imagine that they grew up in Compton, CA and, suddenly without warning, had to move to Amache, CO.  
What would you have access to? What would you lose access to? What kind of clothes would you need to pack? What would you be able to do in your new location? What would be more difficult to do? What kind of thoughts would you have about the sudden forced removal?
3. Conclusion: Draw from students' comments to make connections with the fears and concerns of Japanese Americans when they were incarcerated in 1942.

*Extension:*

4. Read the instructions from "[How to Make an Illustrated Map in 8 Steps](#)" on the New York Times website.
5. Based on their findings, have students create illustrated maps of Compton and Amache.

## Lesson 2: Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival



**Objective:** Inspired by Okamura and the Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival, students will learn about California’s water distribution and drought through the integration of science, math, and art.

**Introduction:** Not only part of the visual arts community, Arthur Okamura was also friends with many Bay Area poets and even illustrated some of their books.

One of the biggest contributions Okamura made to the Bay Area community was his artwork for the [Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival](#). The Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival was born from the collaboration of poets and ecologists to discuss “Nature and the American Imagination.” In 1997, Okamura was commissioned to paint large silk banners as background sets at Golden Gate Park for the first Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival, held in San Francisco. Today, Watershed has moved its annual festival to Berkeley, CA, and continues to explore the connections between environmental awareness and the American literary imagination with ecological, cultural, and literary groups, artists, dancers, and musicians.

In this lesson, you will learn about California’s water use and drought with a PBS Interactive Lesson. Based on what you learn, you will then reflect upon your own relationship with water through illustration and poetry.

### **Common Core Content Standards (California):**

Mathematics (Grade 6 and 7):

6.RP.1: Understand the concept of a ratio and use ratio language to describe a ratio relationship between two quantities.

6.RP.3.C: Find a percent of a quantity as a rate per 100 (e.g., 30% of a quantity means 30/100 times the quantity); solve problems involving finding the whole, given a part and the percent.

7.RP.3: Use proportional relationships to solve multistep ratio and percent problems.

**Content Standards (California):**

CS.3: Students use a variety of maps and documents to identify physical and cultural features of neighborhoods, cities, states, and countries and to explain the historical migration of people, expansion and disintegration of empires, and the growth of economic systems.

Writing Standards (Grade 6 and 7) (*if haiku poem is included in lesson plan*):

W.6-7.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.6-7.3.b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

W.6-7.3.d: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

**Materials:** PBS Learning Media, "[The Lowdown | How California Distributes Its Water in Dry Times: Percent and Proportions](#)"; Paper; Markers and/or crayons.

**Procedure:***In the Classroom*

1. Visit "[The Lowdown | How California Distributes Its Water in Dry Times: Percent and Proportions](#)".
2. Distribute support materials.
3. Complete the interactive lesson.
4. Introduce Arthur Okamura and the Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival as examples of artists engaging in environmental issues.

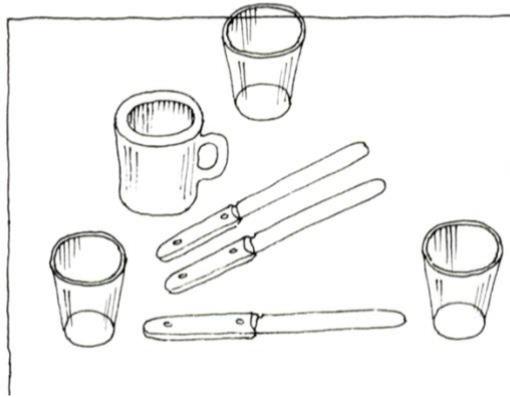
*Homework*

5. Ask students to imagine themselves as these artists and observe how their families use water at home.
6. Based on their findings, students should illustrate their findings, their relationship to water, and/or actions to cut their water usage.
7. *Challenge:* On a separate sheet of paper, write a haiku about the picture and try to incorporate at least three of the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste). A haiku poem is three lines: The first line is 5 syllables. The second line is 7 syllables. The third line is 5 syllables.

## Lesson 3: Okamura's Extended Cup Platform

Inspired by Arthur Okamura's "The Extended Knife Platform."

### The Extended Knife Platform



“There was a time when kids (and even grown-ups) were able to spend hours using simple items, found in any household, making objects that were silly and fun. Things didn't need batteries and they were not based on TV characters; they were just things you did together on a kitchen table, or a back porch, but the best part was that there was a bit of mystery in them - they were tricks, and they were wonderful!”

- Arthur Okamura, *Paper Propeller, the Jumping Frog, the Spinning Quarter: And 38 Other Amazing Tricks You Can Do With Stuff Lying Around the House*

**Introduction:** As a magician, Arthur Okamura wrote and illustrated his own magic trick books, including *Paper Propeller, the Jumping Frog, the Spinning Quarter: And 38 Other Amazing Tricks You Can Do With Stuff Lying Around the House*. In this activity, you will complete one of his physical balance tricks and suspend one cup above or at the same height of three other cups.

**Objectives:** You will:

1. Observe gravitational force exerted by Earth and properties of objects' center of weight;
2. Form a hypothesis about how to balance a cup above or at the same height of the other three cups;
3. Design an experiment to test your hypothesis;
4. Collect and analyze data;
5. Draw conclusions based on your analysis.

**Content Standards (California):**

Writing Standards (Grade 4 and 5):

W.5.7: Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. (5-PS1-2),(5-PS1-3),(5-PS1-4)

Science Standards (Grade 4 and 5):

3–5-ETS1-1: Define a simple design problem reflecting a need or a want that includes specified criteria for success and constraints on materials, time, or cost.

3–5-ETS1-2: Generate and compare multiple possible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem.

3–5-ETS1-3: Plan and carry out fair tests in which variables are controlled and failure points are considered to identify aspects of a model or prototype that can be improved.

5-PS2-1 Support an argument that the gravitational force exerted by Earth on objects is directed down.

**Materials:** Four cups of the same height; Three knives (dull or plastic) or wooden popsicle sticks; Observation Table (Appendix A); Worksheet (Appendix A); and Other materials to build the final device if desired.

**Safety Precautions:**

- Frequently observe the placement of materials to avoid falls or injuries.
- Use durable objects, as they will fall from a height and have the potential of breaking.
- Adult supervision is advised.

**Vocabulary:**

Hypothesis: (*noun*) an educated prediction or explanation that can be tested in an experiment.

Objective: (*noun*) a goal or end of action.

Evidence: (*noun*) that which tends to prove or disprove something; ground for belief; proof.

Observation: (*noun*) the act of gathering information of the outside world through the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste), or recording information using scientific tools and instruments.

**Procedures:**

1. Based on the objective, write the steps on how you are going to successfully suspend one cup above or at the same height of the other three cups using three knives or wooden popsicle sticks. Make sure that your procedures are clear enough so that someone else, like your classmate or sibling, can replicate your experiment.  
*(Note: The one cup suspended in the air cannot touch the other three cups. While possible without, you may include other objects to build your device.)*
2. Draw how you imagine the successful final product will look like. Give it a name.
3. Make a hypothesis on whether or not your device will work and explain your rationale.
4. Follow your procedures. Write and draw your observations in the Observation Table (Appendix A) while you conduct your experiment.
5. After the first attempt, adjust procedures to improve your device. Repeat steps 2-4.
6. After the second attempt, adjust procedures again to improve your device. Repeat steps 2-4.
7. Write your results with your observations as supportive evidence.  
Was your device able to balance a cup suspended in the air? Why or why not? What were the adjustments you made to your procedures, and why did you decide to make those changes? How did you decide the placements of the three cups and three knives or wooden popsicle sticks? What were possible errors in this experiment?

# Resources

## General Resources

artnet. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/arthur-okamura/>

Kossmann, Harriet. "Arthur Okamura: His Bolinas Life." *Bolinas Museum*. April 23 - June 5, 2011. <https://bolinasmuseum.org/exhibitions/arthur-okamura-his-bolinas-life/>.

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## Cover Page and Biography

*Image Credit:*

*Bolinas*, 1964-65. By Arthur Okamura. Oil on canvas. Mutual Art. <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Bolinas/211957AC2CE63B54>.

*Bolinas Ridge*, 1962. By Arthur Okamura. Oil on canvas. Mutual Art. <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Bolinas-Ridge/75D80CD0A6A18195>.

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## Lesson 1: Relocation

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## Lesson 2: Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival

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"Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival." *Poetry Flash*. 2020. <http://poetryflash.org/programs/?p=watershed>.

*Image Credit:*

Berkeley City College. "20th Annual Watershed Environmental Poetry Festival." January 21, 2015. <https://www.berkeleycitycollege.edu/wp/milviastreet/2015/09/21/milvia-street-table-at-20th-annual-watershed-environmental-poetry-festival-on-sat-sept-26-noon-430-pm-civic-center-park/>.

## Lesson 3: Okamura's Extended Cup Platform

Okamura, Arthur. "The Extended Knife Platform." *Paper Propeller, the Jumping Frog, the Spinning Quarter: And 38 Other Amazing Tricks You Can Do With Stuff Lying Around the House*. p.3. Shelter Publications. December 30, 2000.

# Appendix A (Lesson 3)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity: Okamura's Extended Cup Platform – Worksheet**

Name of Device:

Hypothesis:

**Trial 1**

Procedures:

Drawing of Device:

## Trial 2

Procedures:

Drawing of Device:

## **Trial 3**

Procedures:

Drawing of Device:

### **Written Results**

*Was your device able to balance a cup suspended in the air? Why or why not? What were the adjustments you made to your procedures, and why did you decide to make those changes? How did you decide the placements of the three cups and three knives or wooden popsicle sticks? What were possible errors in this experiment?*

**Observation Table (Activity: Okamura's Extended Cup Platform)**

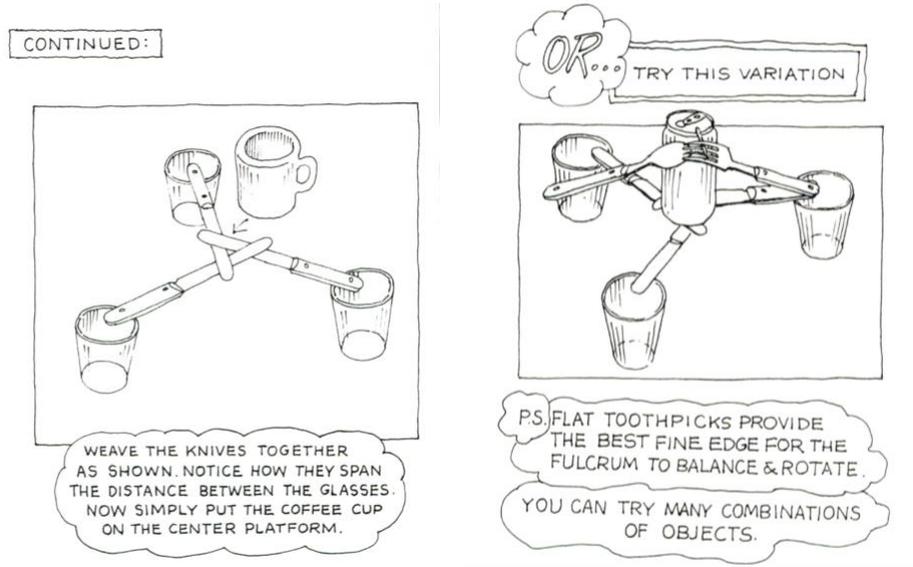
Trial 1: Written Observations	Trial 1: Illustrated Observations

Trial 2: Written Observations	Trial 2: Illustrated Observations

Trial 3: Written Observations	Trial 3: Illustrated Observations

## ANSWER KEY: Okamura's Extended Cup Platform

### Possible Solutions:



### What's Going On?

The center of weight\* for any given object is the point at which an object can balance when gravity pulls down on the object. This means the weight of the object is the same on either side of the center. The center of weight, however, may not be the same as the center of distance. When trying to balance a cup on top of three knives or popsicle sticks, you need to consider the cup's weight as now part of the knives' or sticks' weight. That is, with the addition of the cup, the center of weight for the three knives or sticks has shifted, and the activity challenges you to find the new center of weight.

You will have to consider the weight of the cup in relationship to the weight of the three knives or sticks, as the weight of the cup can't weigh more than the three knives.

\*Boundary: At grade 5, mass and weight are not distinguished. (5-PS1-3)