



# ART GUIDES FOR EDUCATORS:

MAYA LIN



Lin, Maya, *Pin River. Colorado River.* 2010.385

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## MEET THE ARTIST

Maya Lin was only 21 years old when her proposal was chosen in 1981 for the Vietnam Memorial, in Washington, D.C.

Although, initially a controversial choice for its minimalist approach, the memorial is now regarded as one of the most notable sights in the United States.

Lin was trained as an artist and architect, and her sculptures, parks, monuments, and architectural projects are linked by her ideal of making a place for individuals within the landscape. The artist is passionate about the environment and the power of nature, saying: “Nature is going to reach out whether you notice it or not. It’s going to come out and say hello.”

Lin is fascinated by maps, and undertakes considerable topographical research in her art making. She remarks: “As the child of immigrants, you have that sense of ‘Where are you? Where’s home?’ And trying to make a home.”

The artist was born in 1959, and grew up playing in the woods and streams that surrounded her childhood home, in Athens, Ohio. She is the daughter of Chinese immigrants who settled in Ohio after fleeing Communist China. She graduated from Yale in 1986 with her master’s degree in Architecture, and lives in New York City with her husband, an art dealer, and their two young daughters. Learn more about the artist by visiting her website <http://www.mayalin.com/> or watching the PBS Art21 biography on the artist (available at <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/maya-lin>).

## CONSIDER THE CONTEXT

I try to give people a different way of looking at their surroundings. That’s art to me. – Maya Lin

*Pin River, Colorado River* is part of Maya Lin’s Pin River series, begun in 2006 to document all the major rivers and estuaries of the world. Using thousands of stainless-steel pins and the shadows they cast, she creates wall reliefs suggestive of aerial maps of waterways. Pin Maps is Lin’s effort to distill her understanding of science, climate, and, environmental concerns into deceptively simple forms. She is known worldwide for her beautiful monuments and artwork that use elements, frequently water, as an inspiration. In addition, Lin uses computer-enhanced imaging, satellite and aerial photography, and topographic mapping to create her artwork.



## ABOUT THE COLORADO RIVER

The Colorado River flows from Colorado southwest through the Rocky Mountains and into Mexico. There it drains into the Gulf of California, an arm of the Pacific Ocean. The river’s most famous landmark is the Grand Canyon in Arizona,

Map from <http://kids.britannica.com/elementary/art-88757/Colorado-River>

which was carved by the river millions of years ago.

Interesting facts about the Colorado River:

- The Spanish word Colorado means, “colored red.” The name was given first to the Colorado River, which flows through canyons of red stone.
- The Colorado River is 1450 miles in length and flows through seven U.S. states (Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, California and Nevada) and two Mexican states.
- Its source in La Poudre Pass in Rocky Mountains, and it ends in the Gulf of Mexico, between the Mexican states, Baja California and Sonora.
- The Colorado River supplies water to more than 30 million people, and irrigates 3.5 million acres of farmland.
- The depth of the river varies from 6 feet to 90 feet, with the average being about 20 feet.

## LOOK CLOSELY

### Questions to start a conversation:

- Can you describe the elements of art you see (color, shape, texture, line, etc.)?
- Can you identify what shape the artwork forms?
- Explain that this artwork is a type of a map.
- Can anyone guess what this map might be showing us?
- When did you or your family last use a map? What did you use it for?
- What different kinds of maps can you think of? (road maps, hiking trails, globe, Google map)
- What do maps tell us? What can we understand from a map?
- Have you visited the Colorado River or been to the Grand Canyon? Have you seen photographs of the Colorado River? Describe what you saw when you visited (colors, shapes, textures).
- Is there anything about this art that makes you think of your visit, or pictures you may have seen of the to the Colorado River?
- What materials did the artist use to create Pin River? (you may want to show students a video of the reinstallation of Pin River: Colorado River at Phoenix art Museum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Xke2LWEWPU>).
- What choices might the artist have used to help you more easily recognize that this is a map of the river?
- Why do you think the artist chose to use these materials to represent the river?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### HISTORY/ SOCIAL STUDIES

#### Exploring the Colorado River

1. Discuss: In the 1870s, John Wesley Powell was the first European to lead an exploration of the river. Before this time, few European-Americans knew of the canyon. This changed as Powell brought artists along to document the expeditions.
2. Look up Thomas Moran’s Grand Canyon painting

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Zoroaster Temple at Sunset on Phoenix Art Museum's e-gallery ([http://egallery.phxart.org/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:8654](http://egallery.phxart.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:8654)). Moran was one of the artists who accompanied Powell during his 1873 exploration.

The artist returned to the Grand Canyon many times afterwards to paint the landscape. Moran was captivated by the beauty: "Its tremendous architecture fills one with wonder and admiration, and its color, forms and atmosphere are so ravishingly beautiful."

3. Have students research John Wesley Powell's early explorations of the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon.
4. Using a map of the Colorado River, have students trace Powell's route along the Colorado River.

## SCIENCE

### The Colorado River Watershed

1. Discuss: The Colorado River is the major source of water for people in the driest part of the United States, including Arizona. More than 30 million people in 7 states depend on this river as their primary source of their water. The Colorado River once flowed all the way to Mexico, spreading out in a massive delta, creating vital wetlands that sustained both marine and terrestrial life. However, over the last 60 years, rerouting of water into farmland and orchards stopped this historic flow. In 2013, the Colorado River was listed as the most endangered river in the country, at risk from drought and increased demand for water due to climate change.
2. Ask students to research and map the Colorado River and its dams.
3. Brainstorm reasons a dam might be built, and predict the effects of a dam on an area.
4. Have students label several large cities in the Colorado River watershed: Denver, Colorado; Grand Junction, Colorado; Farmington, New Mexico; Gallup, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; Phoenix, Arizona; Tucson, Arizona; Yuma, Arizona; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; San Diego, California.
5. Have students predict how these communities might depend on the Colorado River (irrigation, drinking water, or electricity).

## MATH

1. Have students track their daily water usage (a worksheet for tracking water usage is available from [http://www.eduplace.com/science/hmxs/es/pdf/5rs\\_3\\_4-4.pdf](http://www.eduplace.com/science/hmxs/es/pdf/5rs_3_4-4.pdf)). Alternatively, have students use an online water footprint calculator to determine their water usage <http://www.watercalculator.org/>.
2. Have students report their usage, and calculate the class daily average.
3. Using this, estimate how much water the class will use over a year.

## ART STARTS

### ABSTRACT MAPS

#### Materials

- A print map of the Colorado River
- 8x10 in. tracing paper
- 9x12 in. cardstock or construction paper
- Pencil
- Black permanent marker
- Oil pastels
- Glue or glue stick

#### Instructions

1. Have students visit *Google Earth's Colorado River Journey* to experience virtual white water rafting down the Colorado River. Have them pay particular attention to the colors, shapes, textures, and lines they see.
2. Pass out maps. If maps are larger than the tracing paper, ask students to identify an interesting area on the map.
3. With the tracing paper over the map, trace some of the main lines and shapes in pencil, creating an abstract design.
4. Go over the pencil lines with black permanent marker.
5. Fill in open spaces with oil pastels, avoiding the black lines. Blend colors to mimic the shades seen in the Google Earth Colorado River experience.
6. Mount the tissue paper onto the cardstock or construction paper.

## LEARN MORE

ASU's Nature, Culture, and History at the Grand Canyon project, a partnership between the university and the Grand Canyon Association <http://grandcanyonhistory.clas.asu.edu/k12education.html>

Colorado River, Google Streetview: <http://www.google.com/maps/about/behind-the-scenes/streetview/treks/colorado-river/>

Maya Lin's artist website: <http://www.mayalin.com/>

PBS Art21 biography of artist Maya Lin <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/maya-lin>

Salt River Project (online lesson plans) <http://www.srpnet.com/education/default.aspx>

"Water – Use it Wisely" (classroom resources) <http://wateruseitwisely.com/kids/lesson-plans>

<http://www.mygrandcanyonpark.com/john-wesley-powell/>

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