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## Art Masterpiece: *Copper*, by Philip Latimer Dike

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**Keywords:** Perspective and vantage point, emboss vs. deboss

**Grade(s):** 4<sup>th</sup>

**Activity:** Arizona landscape on copper foil



### About the Artist:

- Born in California in 1906, Phil Dike grew up in a home with paintings done by his grandmother hanging on the walls. He liked art and his high school art teacher encouraged him to enter a contest. He won and received a scholarship to Los Angeles's Chouinard Art Institute.
- After four years there, he went on to the Art Students' League in New York. While in New York, he became friends with Ted Geisel, who went on to become the famous writer and illustrator, Dr. Seuss.
- Dike then studied and traveled in Europe and North Africa and returned to California in 1931 to teach at Chouinard and work in the Fine Art Department at Walt Disney Studios.
- Walt Disney had Dike teach advanced drawing and composition to his artists.
- Dike worked on the movies *Snow White* and *Fantasia*.

### About the Artwork:

Copper is the oldest metal used by man. It was used for farming tools and weapons more than 10,000 years ago. Today, copper and its alloys (for example, brass and bronze) are used in electrical systems and electronics, computers, home appliances and fixtures, plumbing, keys, coins, and many other products.

The early formation of planet Earth left copper deposits deep below what is now Arizona. In the 1800's, mining companies were established in areas where copper-rich ore (metal-bearing rock) appeared on or close to the ground's surface. Copper mining soon became one of Arizona's most important industries.

In the early 1930's, Dike traveled to Arizona, which like the rest of the country, was feeling the effects of the Great Depression. As the demand for consumer goods decreased, so did the need for copper. After seeing the effect of the Depression on the Arizona mining industry, Dike was inspired to create *Copper*.

The artist combined elements of two towns—Jerome, north of Phoenix, and Miami, east of the city—to make reference to the two types of mining in Arizona. Underground mines are found in rocky, mountainous areas like Jerome, where the desired material lies deep under the surface. Open-pit mines, like the one in Miami, are more common if the material is closer to the surface.

In *Copper*, Dike uses lines formed by roads, buildings and natural formations to lead our eyes to the copper plant. The light-colored pit and factory, an ominous sky surrounded by darkened houses, and dramatically lit rocky cliffs further indicate the importance of this central area of the painting.

Of *Copper* and its sister painting, *Inspiration Copper*, Dike said: "These pictures represent a culmination of feelings and experiences in the copper mining towns of Arizona prior [to] and during the Depression, of that period which influenced me greatly."

### **Possible Questions:**

Encourage students to describe the work of art (What do you see in this painting?).

1. What colors do you see? How do the colors make you feel?
2. Think of the colors of some objects that contain copper: pennies, the Statue of Liberty, the dome of the old Arizona state capital, or brass instruments. Which of these colors did Dike use in *Copper*? (all).
3. What mood do the colors create? How does that help us understand what life was like in the Depression in an Arizona mining town?
4. Is there light in the painting?
5. Which direction is it coming from? How can you tell?
6. What kind of day or weather does the light suggest?

7. Describe the weather conditions in *Copper*. What kind of feeling does this weather give to the painting? If the weather showing in the painting went on for ten more minutes, what might it look like?
8. Some children may notice the different types of geometrical shapes in the painting. Have them point them out if you have time.

**Discuss:**

Perspective: Dike uses lines and overlapping shapes to make you feel distance; as if you are seeing into the painting. The vantage point that the artist chose is slightly above the town. Ask the students where might the artist have worked — on another mountain, in a hot-air balloon or an airplane, in a house further up the hill?

*Copper* is an oil-on-canvas painting. For our art project today, we will be creating a landscape on a sheet of actual copper. Explain to the students two types of metal work - embossing and debossing. These are techniques used to create an image on a sheet of metal.

Embossing is when you raise an image *up from* the surface to create a 3D graphic. This is done by pressing down (with the stylus tool, or a metal stamp/die, or with a hammer) on the back of the metal, so the front will have the raised image.

Debossing is when you create an *indent* in the metal. This is done by pressing down (with the stylus tool, or a metal stamp/die, or with a hammer) on the front of the metal sheet.

**Activity:** Arizona Landscape on Copper Foil

**Materials Needed:**

- 5" Copper foil squares, one per student\*
- Stylus sticks, or very blunted pencils, one per student
- 5" squares of white paper for rough drafts, one per student
- 6" square piece of black paper to mount artwork, one per student (optional)

- Double-sided foam tape – OR – stapler and staples, for mounting artwork (optional)
- Pennies (optional)

\*these can be purchased online and are available from [www.enasco.com](http://www.enasco.com), product # 7400149, or from [www.dickblick.com](http://www.dickblick.com), item #60513-1040 They may be available at other sites or local stores as well.

### **Process:**

1. Brainstorm different types of Arizona landscape scenes with students. (The desert with cactus and a coyote. Desert hills with a lake and sailboat, ranches, citrus groves, old west town etc.)
2. Pass out the 5" squares of white paper.
3. Students should plan and sketch their scene on the paper. Each scene should include a background and a couple images in the foreground. Remind students to keep it simple.
4. Pass out one copper foil square and stylus to each student. Explain that the copper sheets are expensive so you won't be able to give them a second sheet of copper if they "mess up." (This is why they practice on the paper first.)
5. Handout the 6" squares of black paper.
6. Students will use the stylus stick to deboss (impress) the planned scene onto the copper foil sheet. For Best Results: Have student place the black paper under foil sheet as they work. This will make a "softer" surface and allow the debossing (impressions) to be pressed deeper into the foil.
7. Remind students to write their names in the bottom corner of the copper square.
8. If mounting the artwork for display, use four squares of the double-sided foam tape to adhere the copper foil to the square of black construction paper. Alternately, you can staple the every edge of the four corners of the copper foil to the construction paper. *Glue won't work, not even hot glue from a glue gun!*

ADDITIONAL IDEA – \*\* If time permits\*\*

Pass out a copper penny to each student. Have them place the penny under the copper sheet and with the stylus gently rub over the penny to emboss the design into the copper. Flip penny over and repeat to show the design on each side. This element can be incorporated into their landscape or added to the corners.

## Examples:





**Parent Note:**

Philip L. Dike (1906 – 1990) was an American artist with Arizona history. In the early 1930's, Dike traveled to Arizona. After seeing the effect of the Depression on the Arizona mining industry, Dike was inspired to create *Copper*, an oil-on-canvas painting.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students used copper foil to deboss an Arizona landscape.



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