OBJECTIVES:

- Students will describe Whitethorne’s use of primary colors in his work.
- Students will identify how Whitethorne’s Navajo background is reflected in his work.
- Students will create a landscape using ink and watercolors that demonstrates personal meaning.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Baje Whitethorne, Sr. is a contemporary Navajo artist who resides in Flagstaff, Arizona. He works in watercolor and acrylic paints. Whitethorne is best known for creating artwork that reflects the land and culture of his early life growing up in a hoogan on the Navajo Reservation in northern Arizona. As a young boy, Whitethorne engaged in the tradition of storytelling with his brothers and grandmother. As an artist, he uses contemporary techniques to tell his stories based on traditional Navajo subject matter. Whitethorne has shared some of his stories through writing and illustrating children’s books, including a book entitled *Father’s Boots*. (This book can be checked out from the Tarwater library.) Baje Whitethorne’s artwork often includes his trademark, a small blue folding chair. “When I was a boy, my parents and grandparents brought home a new card table with six metallic blue chairs. In the summer months, I would put my face against the cool seat of the chairs. Now, I include the chair in my artwork because it reminds me of my boyhood and because it draws people into my artwork when they try to find it.” (Quoted from [www.bajewhitethornesr.com](http://www.bajewhitethornesr.com))

After high school Whitethorne attended Northern Arizona University where he experimented with only the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue). In Navajo tradition, colors are symbolic (North = Black, South = Blue, East = White, West = Gold). These symbolic colors are evident in the painting *Persevering the Long Walk Toward Sovereignty*.

In *Persevering the Long Walk toward Sovereignty*: Whitethorne is depicting his peoples return journey home to Arizona from Bosque Redondo (the desolate tract of land on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico). The painting is based on the actual 300-mile march which took place in 1868; this was 4 years after 8,000 Navajos were rounded up and forced from their homeland.

QUESTIONS AND POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Subject Matter

- What is the subject of this painting? What is uniquely Navajo about the subject? (Discuss their dress, jewelry, hair, etc)
- Look at the background. In what type of environment do the Navajos live?
- Look at the border around the painting. The sides of the border depict how the Navajos came back with cattle and horses. The top of the border depicts the Navajos traveling through Monument Valley. The bottom border depicts the journey back to their homeland.

**Elements of Art and Principles of Design**
- What type of **shapes** do you observe in this painting? (geometric and organic)
- How are the shapes repeated to form a **pattern**? (Border, bushes in the landscape, clothing, jewelry)
- What **colors** are used in the painting? (Whitethorne typically paints with red, blue and yellow only.)
- What do you notice about the **background colors**? Explain to the student’s that the color black represents the north. East is white; south is blue; and west is gold. (Symbolic colors)
- How has the artist created a sense of movement in the **foreground**? (The people appear to be suspended in midair. The diagonal lines for their arms, legs, etc. also indicate movement.)

**Evaluation**
- What questions would you like to ask Baje Whitethorne about his artwork?
- What compliments would you give him about his artwork?

**PROJECT:** The students will create a landscape that is personally meaningful. Ask students to think about an actual outdoor place where they spend time with friends and family - why is it important to them? What are some key features of this place (mountains, river, trees, grass, etc.)? Then, review with the students how Whitethorne created his landscapes, pointing out the simplification of the landscape. You might also want to show the students past projects from this lesson. Whitethorne’s book *Father’s Boots* also has many examples of his simple landscape drawings.

Next, have the students lightly sketch their landscape with pencil, having them concentrate on the basic shapes and outlines of the scene. The landscape does not need to be overly detailed. Once the students are satisfied with their sketch, they need to outline the drawing using a Sharpie marker. These two steps should only take about ten minutes to complete.

Lastly, the students need to paint their landscape with watercolor. Remind students that Whitethorne created many colors from mixing the three primary colors. This technique creates brighter, more vibrant colors. For example, for a sunset sky Whitethorne would paint a blue line on the top of the paper, overlap the blue with red (purple), and overlap the red with yellow (orange). Browns can be achieved by mixing red, blue, and yellow together. All paint mixing can be done on the watercolor lid. Color should be applied lightly to achieve transparency - it might help to remind students to keep their brush wet.

**SUPPLIES:**
- The book *Father’s Boots* by Baje Whitethorne, Sr.
- Watercolor paint sets
- Black Sharpie Markers
- Water cups (You may want to bring your own disposable cups for easy clean-up.)
- 9 x 12 watercolor paper
- Brushes
- Paper towels
- Newspaper for covering desks (Individual art guides provide the newspaper. Please scan the newspaper carefully, and do not use any papers with inappropriate pictures, headlines, etc.)
- Large garbage sack for clean up (This is optional and to be provided by the individual art guides.)