

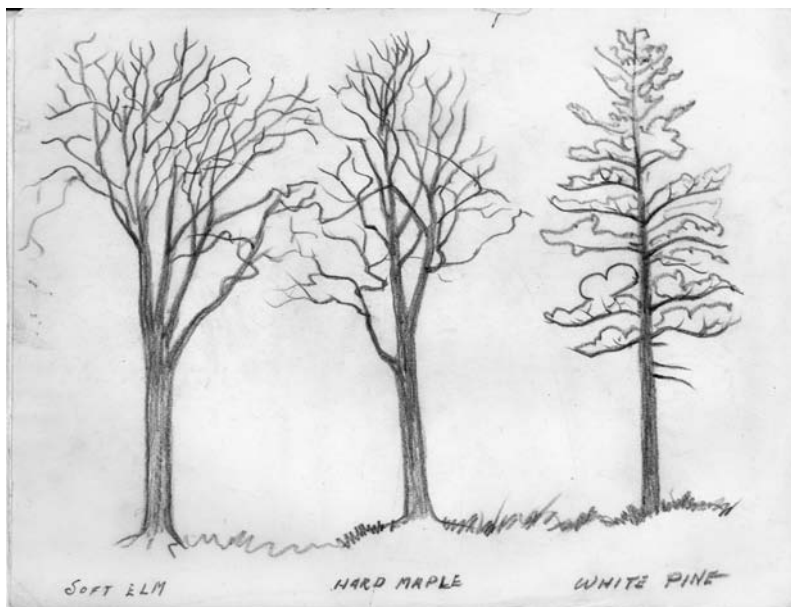
Drawing and Painting Trees

Walter Kuse enjoyed drawing and painting trees. In order to make a realistic painting, he needed to know the shapes of many kinds of trees. He observed, drew and labeled trees that he saw. Knowing the shapes of trees can help people identify the type they see.

Look at the shapes of different kinds of trees in tree identification books. Scientific illustrators need to try to make their drawings look like real trees. How does the shape help you know what kind of tree it is?



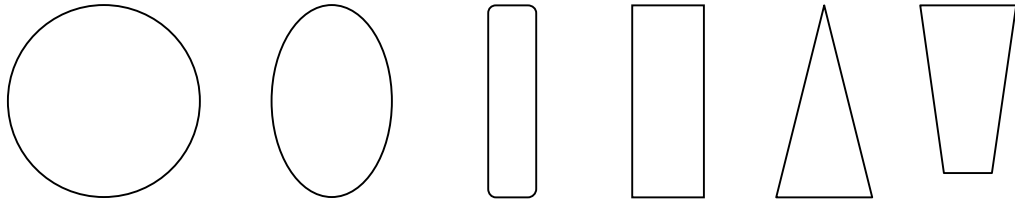
Pencil Sketch by Walter Kuse



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When young artists begin to draw trees, they often resort to using basic shapes, such as circles and triangles. “Lollipop trees” and “Christmas trees” are common in children’s drawings. As they grow older, they notice that different kinds of trees have very different shapes.

Look at trees around you. Can you find trees that have these shapes along or near the trails? Are they shaped like circles, ovals, long thin columns, triangles, or vases? Draw basic shapes you see. Then add the trunk, branches and leaves.



Each type of tree has a different shape.

A good time to see some tree shapes is in fall or winter, when the leaves have fallen. Look at where and how the branches of each different kind of tree grow out from the trunk. Does the tree shape look different when there are leaves on the tree?

What is the basic shape of the basswood tree at Bench Q? Look at a picture of it taken in winter.



Basswood Tree with Many Trunks

Remember that a certain kind of tree may have a different shape if it grows in a deep forest surrounded by many other trees or out in an open space. A young tree will look different from the shape of the same kind of tree when it is very old.

Basswood trees that grow among others in a forest may grow tall and thin. When the main trunk begins to decay or is cut, new sprouts arising at the bottom may create a tree with many trunks.



Tall Old Basswood Tree Surrounded by New Young Trees

Take photographs of trees along the trail or in your yard. Print out pictures of them. Draw a line around the outside edge of the tree in the picture. What shape is the outline?

Light and Shadow and Shapes of Trees

Young artists can be made aware of new ways to observe their environment and enhance their drawings. Looking for the source of light and its effect on trees can make drawings more interesting. Note the light and shadows in the photograph above. Making one side of a tree darker than the other can create realistic looking trees.

Look at trees in photographs or paintings. Can you tell where the light is coming from in the picture? Look at or take a photograph of the same tree at different times on a sunny day. In what ways do light and shadow change the appearance of the tree?

Look at shadows that trees cast on a sunny day or in bright moonlight. How is the shape of the shadow like the shape of the tree? Why might the shadow be long or short? Find pictures of shadows of trees in photographs or paintings.



Shadows Cast on the Snow by Trees in the Kuse Yard



Tree by Walter Kuse

Note how the awareness of light and shadows enhanced this drawing. From which perspective or angle did the artist draw the tree?

Look at pictures of “The Lawrence Tree” painted by Georgia O’Keefe. She painted it from below and looking up into the night sky. What might the Basswood tree look like in a drawing if you viewed it from lying on the bench beneath it? Find other images of trees painted by O’Keefe.



Loretta Kuse took this photo of a Coconut Tree in New Guinea by looking from its base on up the trunk.

Look at trees in paintings or drawings done by other artists. What materials might have helped them to make their pictures look like real trees (Pencil, pen and ink, oil paint, watercolor, charcoal, paper stump shading, crayon etc.)? From what angles or locations did they look at the trees they drew or painted?