



2 Color Simplicity

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/173-2-Color-Simplicity>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to this exciting chapter on Color Simplicity, where we explore the art of capturing the essence of any subject through the use of simple light and shadow shapes. As painters, our task is to distill the complexity of the world into something uniquely our own, and this chapter will guide you in deciding just how much to simplify what you see. Building on the foundation of Mastering Color 1, which many of you have already found beneficial, this course delves deeper into the nuances of color. Over the past decade, I've gained new insights into color theory and application, and I'm eager to share these with you. Throughout this chapter, you'll encounter fresh ideas, techniques, and tools designed to spark those 'aha' moments, revealing aspects of color you might not have realized you were missing. Each chapter concludes with a playtime project, allowing you to apply your newfound knowledge and solidify these skills. Remember to download the lesson notes, engage with the community by sharing your progress, and enjoy the journey of making each painting truly your own.



"2 Color Simplicity" by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 4

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Click to Download Course Notes (29mb PDF)
- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas.
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette Knife
- Paper Towels
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

1 Course Materials and Participation



Download Lesson Notes

Download and save the lesson notes document to your computer. This document covers all the material from the video and includes extra tips and tools. Use it as a reference while watching the video.

Share Your Projects

Take a photo of each playtime project you complete. Upload these photos to the website to share your progress. Sharing your work can be encouraging and is a great way to engage with the painting community.

PRO TIP

Download the lesson notes for additional tips and tools to enhance your learning experience.

2 Two-Color Simplicity Concept



Embrace Simplicity

As a painter, focus on simplifying what you see. Avoid the complexity of capturing every detail exactly as it is. Instead, aim to convey the essence of the scene in your own style.

Simplify Colors

Simplify the colors you use by dividing each object into two colors: shadow and light. This approach helps create depth and conveys the quality of light on the objects.

Practice with an Apple

Paint an apple using one color for the shadow side and another for the light side. Ensure the relationship between these two colors is correct to capture the essence of the apple.

Expand to Other Objects

Apply the same technique to other objects like an orange, mandarin, or banana. Notice how each new item enhances the sense of light in your painting.

PRO TIP

Divide objects into just two colors, shadow and light, to create depth and convey light quality.

3 Identifying Shadow and Light Shapes



Identify Shadow and Light Shapes

Determine where the shadow and light shapes are in your image. Decide how you will divide these areas to create a clear distinction between light and shade.

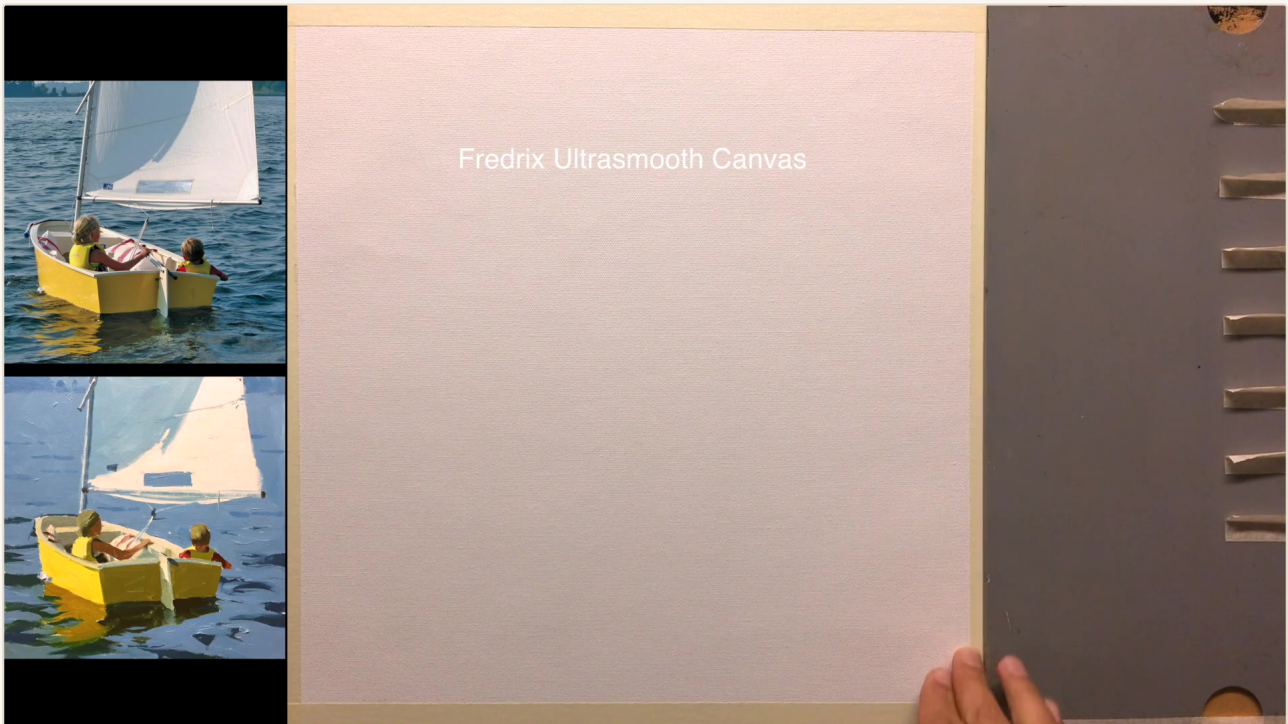
Use Tools for Clarity

Use a digital drawing program on your tablet to mark shadow areas, or print the image and use a black marker to block in the shadows. This exercise helps you see the image in terms of simple light and dark shapes.

PRO TIP

Practicing with old magazine images by marking shadow and light areas can enhance your ability to see like a painter.

4 Preparing the Canvas and Drawing



Prepare Your Canvas

Tape a 14-inch square canvas onto a board to keep it secure. Ensure your plastic palette is ready, using tape to prevent paint from dripping.

Transfer the Drawing

Print your reference image to the desired size on paper. Cover the back of the printed image with graphite using a 6B pencil. Secure the paper onto the canvas and trace over the drawing firmly to transfer it onto the canvas.

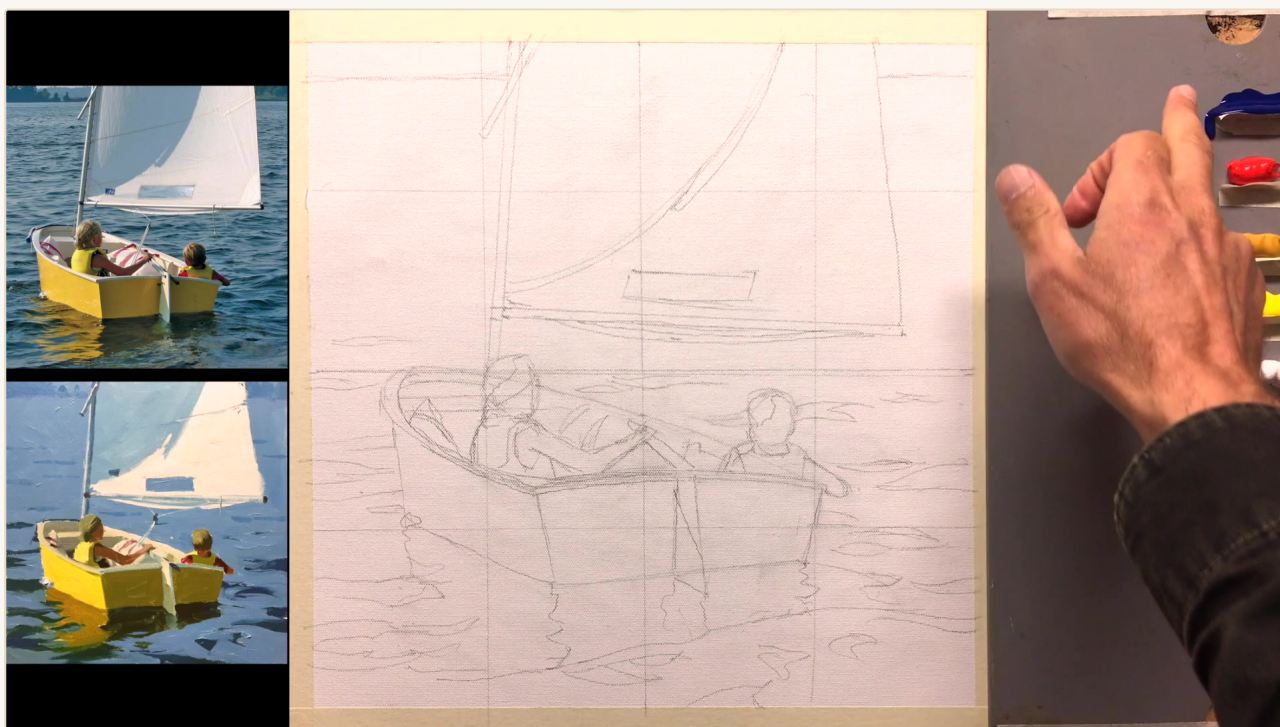
Use the Grid Method

Create a grid over your reference image using an app on a tablet. Replicate the same grid on your canvas and transfer the lines from the image into the corresponding grid squares on the canvas.

PRO TIP

Use a 6B pencil to cover the back of your printed image with graphite for easy transfer.

5 Mixing and Applying Shadow and Light Colors



Prepare Your Palette

Set up your palette with phthalo blue, cad red light, yellow ochre, cad yellow light, and titanium white. Keep a spray bottle with water handy to keep the paints wet.

Select Brushes

Choose synthetic brushes, including a large one for big areas, two filberts of the same size, a smaller brush, and a rig brush for detail work.

Mix Shadow Color

For the shadow color of the boat, find a middle yellow between the darker, bluer and lighter, warmer areas. Start with yellow ochre, then cool it down with a little bright yellow and a touch of phthalo blue. Adjust until you achieve a slightly cooler and darker tone.

Apply Shadow Color

Apply the mixed shadow color thickly. If you have excess paint, wipe it off. Look for other areas in the painting where this color might be used, like the jackets, and adjust with more bright yellow if needed.

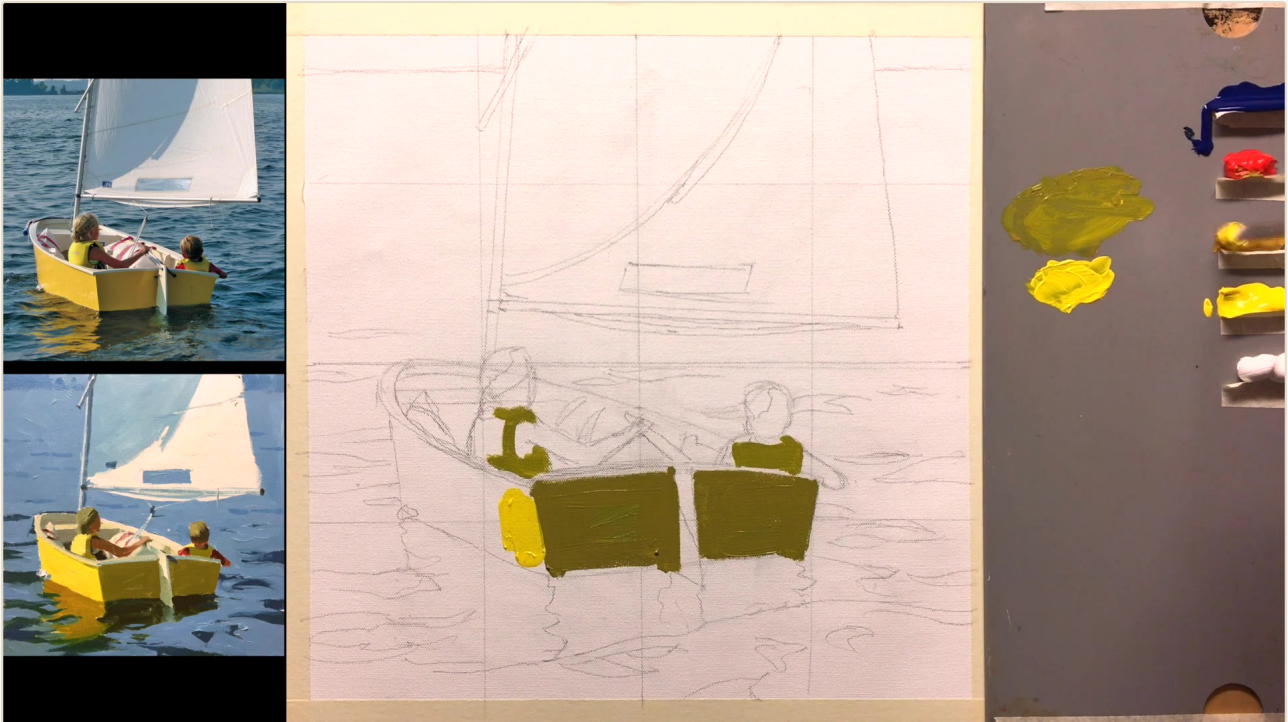
Mix Light Color

Wash your brush and mix the light color. Use bright yellow as the base, as it is the closest tube color. Adjust with a bit more orange if necessary to get the correct relationship between the shadow and light colors.

PRO TIP

Mix a generous amount of paint to avoid remixing and apply it thickly for better coverage.

6 Adjusting Color Relationships



Adjust the Orange Hue

Use either red or yellow ochre to push the color towards orange on the color wheel. Add a touch of white to keep the value light. Ensure the color looks balanced and harmonious.

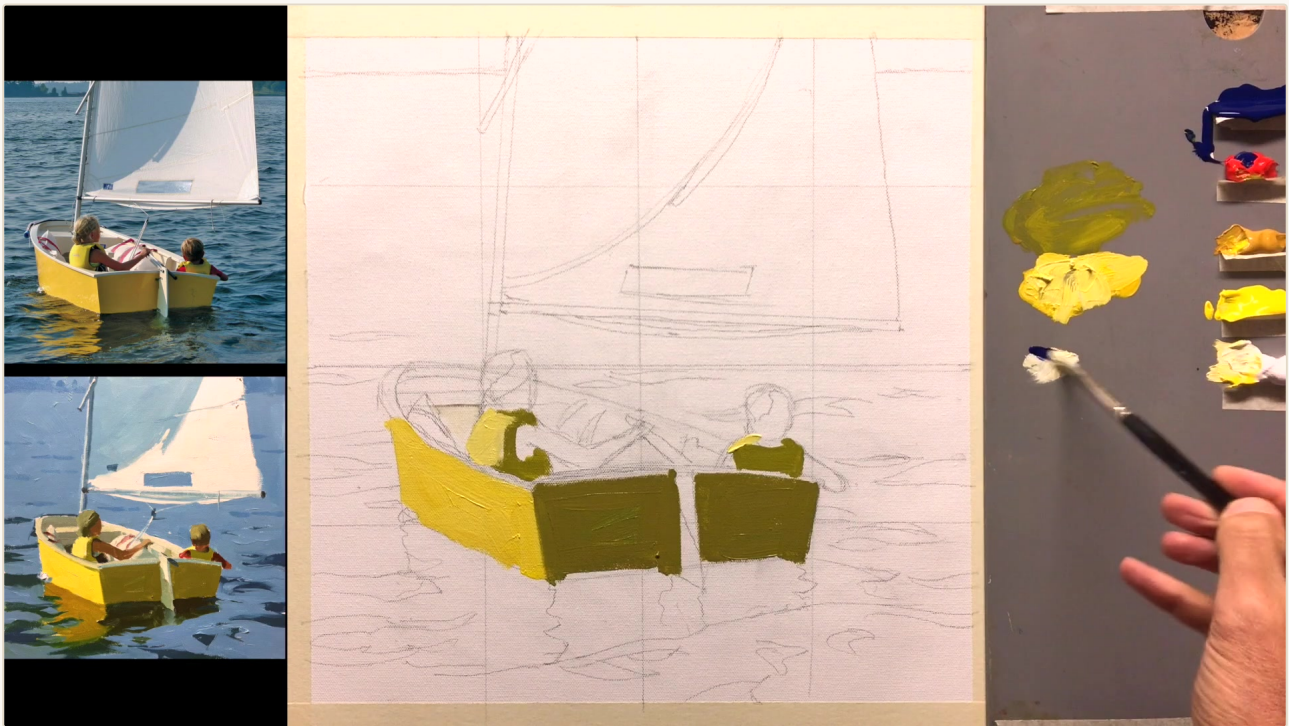
Mix a Neutral Grey

For the shadow areas inside the boat, mix a neutral grey with the correct value. Place it in the painting to determine if it needs to be cooler or warmer. The surrounding colors will help you decide the final tone.

PRO TIP

Mix a neutral grey first, then adjust its temperature based on surrounding colors.

7 Mixing Grays and Skin Tones



Mix a Neutral Gray

Combine white with small amounts of all your other colors to create a neutral gray. Adjust the balance between these colors to achieve the desired neutrality. Use a neutral-colored palette to help judge when you've reached the right gray tone.

Adjust Shadow Colors

Compare the shadow colors in your painting. Notice differences such as the shadow on the inflatable bag being slightly bluer and lighter. Adjust your mixture accordingly to match these subtle variations.

Create Light Colors

Mix a lighter and warmer color for the light areas, aiming for a cream-like tone. Simplify the colors by ignoring subtle differences in the lights on the boat, focusing on the overall effect.

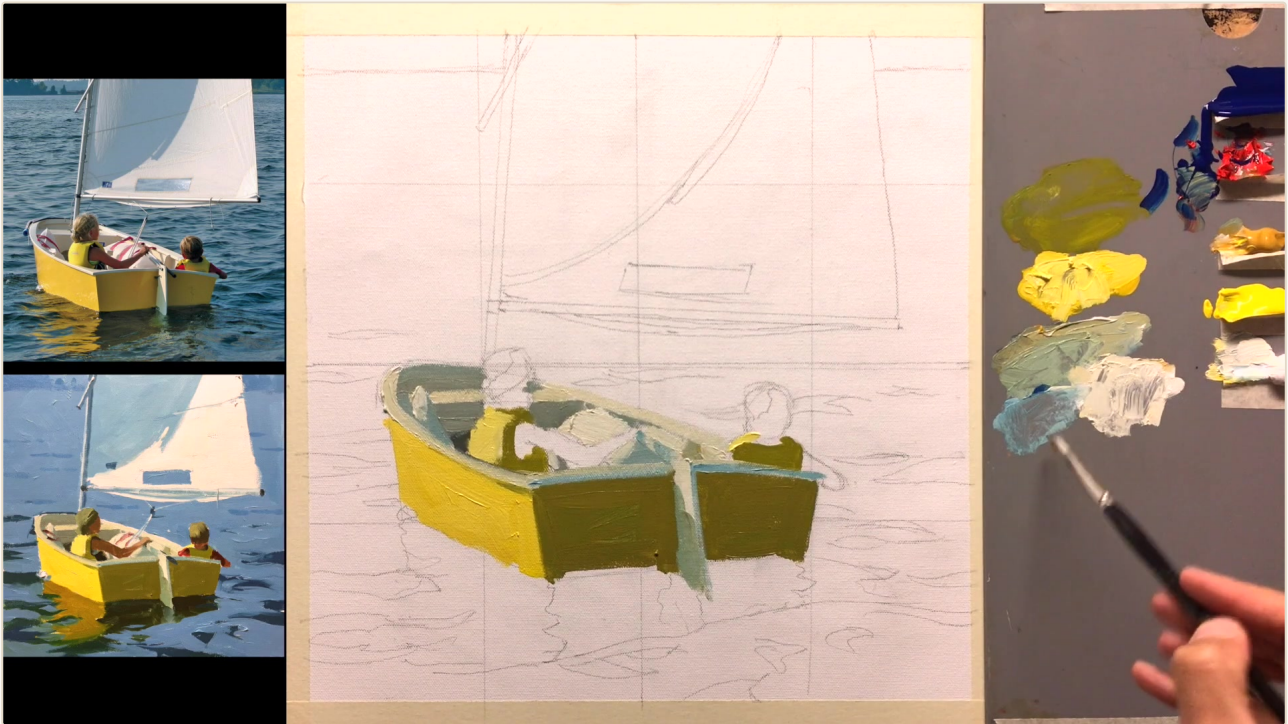
Control Intense Blues

If phthalo blue becomes overpowering in your mix, remove it from your palette. Opt for ultramarine blue instead, as it offers more control and is less intense.

PRO TIP

Use ultramarine blue instead of phthalo blue for more control over your color mixtures.

8 Painting the Sail and Brushwork Tips



Mix the Sail Color

Combine a little bit of blue with white to create the color for the sail. This mixture will give you a soft, light blue that is perfect for the sail's surface.

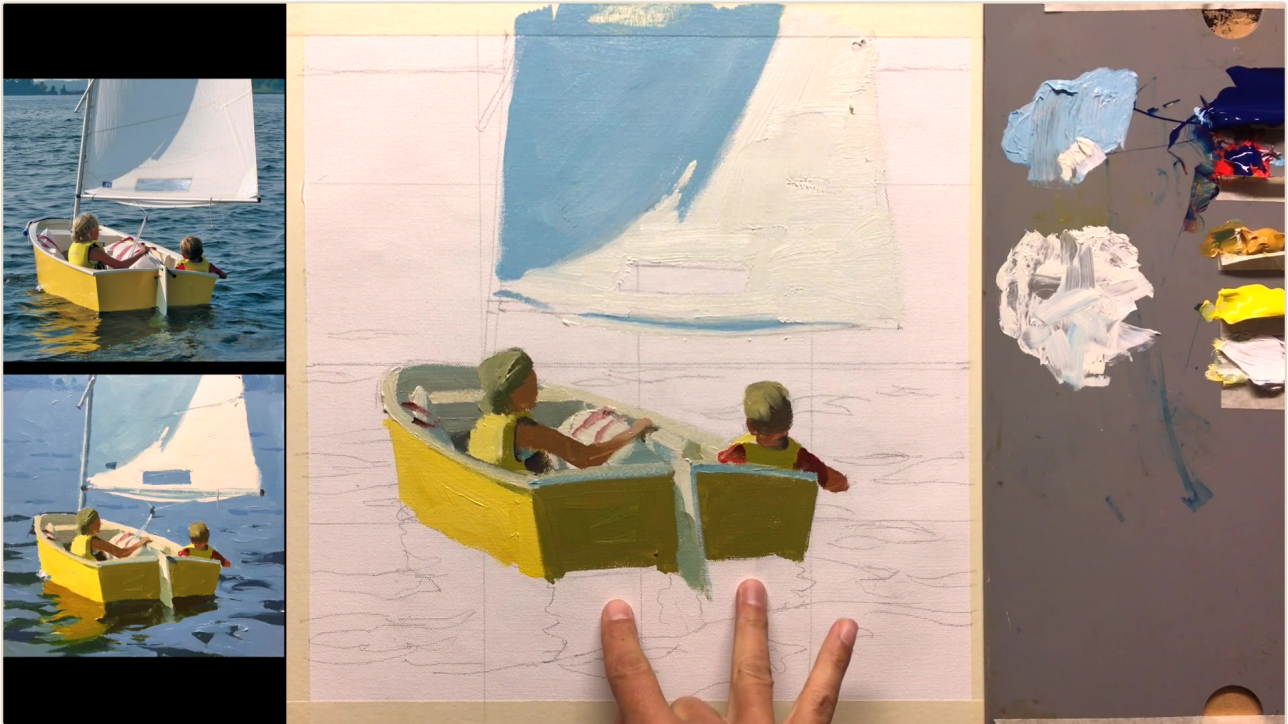
Paint the Sail

Use a big brush to apply the sail color. Focus on creating broad, expressive strokes to give the sail a painterly and artistic appearance. Enjoy the process and let your brushwork convey movement and texture.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush to create expressive, painterly strokes for the sail.

9 Painting Water and Reflections



Paint Dark Reflections

Begin by painting the dark reflections in the water. Notice that the reflection is slightly darker and more orange than the actual object being reflected. Simplify the reflection into one interesting shape with a consistent color.

Use Thick Paint

Apply nice thick paint for the reflections. This technique adds interest and texture to the painting, making it more visually appealing.

Create Big Fluid Shapes

Focus on painting big, fluid shapes for the waves. Avoid getting too detailed, as this can detract from the painting's liveliness. Try twisting your brush to achieve more dynamic and interesting shapes.

Mix Light Water Color

Mix a large amount of light color for the water. Experiment with mixing colors yourself to understand the relationship between shade and light. Aim to get closer to the desired color rather than achieving a perfect match.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint to add interest and texture to your reflections.

10 Final Thoughts and Encouragement



Evaluate Your Painting

Examine your canvas to ensure all the big shapes relate well to each other. Appreciate the simplicity and blockiness as this forms the core of painting. Recognize that getting the drawing and big color shapes right is essential.

Prepare for Next Steps

Understand that the next phase involves varying colors within the big shapes and adjusting the edges. This builds on the foundational cube studies, adding complexity and more relationships to manage.

Capture Your Progress

Take a photo of your painting at this stage to document its simplicity. This allows you to reflect on your progress and learn from the process, whether you improve it or not.

Embrace Imperfection

Acknowledge that perfection isn't the goal; improvement is. Focus on training your brain to see subtle differences and mix colors effectively. Enjoy the exercise and take your time.

PRO TIP

Capture a photo of your painting at its current stage to track your progress and learning.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by embracing the concept of color simplicity. Start by downloading the lesson notes to guide you through the process and engage with the community by sharing your progress. As you begin, focus on simplifying your scene by dividing objects into two colors: shadow and light. This approach will help you convey the essence of your subject and create depth in your painting.

As you progress, identify the shadow and light shapes in your reference image. Use tools like digital drawing programs or printed images with markers to practice seeing these shapes clearly. Prepare your canvas with a secure setup and transfer your reference image using a grid system to ensure accuracy. Mix your colors thoughtfully, starting with shadows and moving to light areas, maintaining the correct relationships between them.

In the final stages, refine your painting by adjusting color relationships and adding expressive brushwork. Focus on the big shapes and their interactions, capturing the simplicity and blockiness that form the painting's foundation. Remember, the goal is not perfection but improvement and learning. Document your progress with photos, allowing you to reflect on your journey and celebrate your growth as a painter.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Download lesson notes for additional tips and tools.
- Divide objects into two colors: shadow and light.
- Practice identifying shadow and light shapes in images.
- Use a 6B pencil for easy image transfer onto the canvas.
- Mix a generous amount of paint and apply it thickly.
- Adjust color relationships by considering surrounding colors.
- Use ultramarine blue for more control over color mixtures.
- Create expressive, painterly strokes with a big brush.



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Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

Sailing Away by Fay Thomson 12" x 12" Oils on Canvas



Sailing Away by Fay Thomson 12" x 12" Oils on Canvas

Nice painting Fay, colours and values are working well. Don't be afraid to be more bold with your brushwork, make every brush mark have purpose and intent. Great job.

Friends Boating by Barbara Haviland



Friends Boating by Barbara Haviland

Good work Barbara, love the clean colours which are creating harmony within the painting.

Keep in mind some of those values in your painting, you may wish to darken the colour of the stern of the boat, also I would add more yellow into the boat's reflection in the water and break it up a little with a ripple or two. The dark accent of the sail's 'pulley?' seems to draw all the attention so I'd be inclined to subdue that by lightening it. Other than that, great job.

Orange overtaking grey, 18x24 oil on panel by Silke Sauritz



Orange overtaking grey, 18x24 oil on panel by Silke Sauritz

Wow, great painting, I love the composition and you've nailed the colours and values. Love the complex detail in the water too. Fantastic!

"Gone Sailing" Acrylic on linen, 24x32 cm by Genevieve Reinke



"Gone Sailing" Acrylic on linen, 24x32 cm by Genevieve Reinke

Good work Genevieve, I like the subtle change to the composition by making the boat a little smaller within the painting which gives it a sense of space.

Your use of colour is good, but pay attention to your values (how light or dark your colours are), for example the shadows at the back of the boat could be darker in value as well as the shadows of the people within the boat. If you are unsure of how light or dark your values are within the subject you are painting you can either switch the reference photo to black and white, or squint your eyes when you look at the photo. The figures heads need enlarging. Other than that you are doing well, great job!