WATER AND REFLECTIONS

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Drawing water is a perceived difficulty. When you break down the tonal values into shapes, a lot of the mystique is taken out of the task. The techniques that apply to creating a drawing of a boat with its reflection will be revealed, as will the secrets that make water appear, well watery!

Skills presented include: creating a value map of shadow and light; creating realistic reflections using light and contrast, graduated shading, toning large areas evenly using pencil pressure and graphite layers, use of erasers as ‘drawing’ tools.

This lesson is divided into three parts:

❖ **ANATOMY OF WATER:**

❖ **PLANNING AND SKETCHING:**

❖ **SHADING WATER:**

❖ Suggested drawing supplies include good quality white drawing paper, (Bristol Smooth was used for this drawing) HB, 2B and 4B graphite or mechanical pencils, kneaded and vinyl erasers, tissues, tortillon, scrap paper.

Recommended for artists from age 12 to adult with basic drawing skills, as well as fine art educators in home school, academic and recreational environments.
ANATOMY OF WATER

Water makes up two thirds of the planet’s surface in the form of oceans, lakes, ponds and rivers. Water is transparent and reflective of the environment around it. It will reflect a clear blue sky or deepen in colour on a cloudy day. A still surface will mirror a boat or a person near its edge. Wind across the surface will distort reflections and break them into pieces of colour. A stormy sea will throw huge waves into the air and crash them down with the strength to move boulders.

Waves are simply the tidal movement of water and are also affected by storms and currents. The water’s surface on a perfect, windless day is calm and reflective. A wave reflects too but its movement breaks up the reflection of the environment and sky and allows you to see into the water creating deeper shadows where water is deep or allows you to see what is on the bottom if the water is shallow. ‘Wave triangles’ are the small sections of water than are deeper in tone and reflect the movement of the water of the ocean.

When you next see a body of water, look for signs of movement on the surface and note the
changes in tone that indicates movement. In reflections in water, the tonal value of the reflection will always be slightly darker than the object that it is reflecting. Any movement of the water surface will interrupt the reflection and causes distortion. The reflection will be a reversed image of the object being reflected.

The same principles that apply to drawing still, reflective bodies of water apply to drawing ocean waves. Observational skills that recognize areas of light and shade are important to accurately create realism in marine or seascape scenes. Drawing water is similar to drawing metal or glass. It is composed of varying shapes that make up light or dark. By capturing those shapes in your initial drawing and knowing their value in tone, drawing water or a similar surface becomes much easier.

Drawing water effectively is not a fast process. You must be methodical and patient. I promise you will be rewarded.
PLANNING AND SKETCHING

Using an HB pencil and light pressure, sketch in the basic shapes of your scene, paying careful attention to the shapes of any reflections and how water movement changes the shape of your reflected image. The reflection won’t be a complete mirror image unless there is absolutely no water movement, which is very rare!

Illustration 1

Reflections should be coming straight at you, not at an angle. Sketch the shapes of tonal changes on the surface of the water and note any subtle changes in tone in areas of still water.

Illustration 2

Still using your HB pencil and with your basic shapes in place, begin to refine your drawing, adding detail to the boat, its planks and the lines that reflect the light and shadows from the water onto the hull of the boat and its reflection. Add details in a value map of tonal shapes in the water and on the boat and reflection. Drawing water and reflections is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. All the pieces have a place and the whole picture won’t look correct unless you have them in the right place.
SHADING WATER AND REFLECTIONS

**TIP** Use your sketch paper as the draft drawing where you make changes and erase. Erasing and overdrawing will sometimes change the surface of your paper, so transferring the image to your new paper gives you a clean, fresh surface to work on.

When you are satisfied with your completed line drawing, you can transfer the drawing to a new piece of paper. You can do this with a light box or more commonly used, tape your drawing to a window on a bright day, tape your new piece of paper over the drawing and trace the lines that will be visible.

You can also try rubbing graphite or pastel over the back of the sheet then tracing over the lines onto a new piece of paper. Make sure that you don’t press too hard when you trace the lines or you will indent your paper.

What you are trying to achieve is a light grey ‘ground’ – a base tone for the water that you will then add to with darker tones or lighten with your kneaded eraser to reflect the tones and shadows of the water.

Reflections in water are made up of areas of light and dark in contrast. The darkness or lightness of the contrast is what makes the reflection believable. If you want to show an area of light then you must put an area of intense dark next to it and vice versa. The colour or tone of the reflection should be darker than the actual object that is being reflected.

Using powdered graphite or an HB pencil and very light pressure, cover the surface of the water in your drawing then blend it with a tissue or tortillon. A tissue is better for large areas such as the water in this drawing.

Some variances in the overall tone are acceptable at this point as you will continue to model the forms as your drawing progresses and the water itself has areas of subtle light changes. Just make sure that you have covered the water area with a blended layer of graphite.
Once your ground is complete, then go back over the tone you have just made with your HB pencil just barely stroking the paper to add an even layer of graphite. There should be no discernable lines from your pencil, just an even tone. To do this, the end of your pencil should resemble a chisel, with one side flattened. This will give you a wider coverage of the paper and leaves a sharp edge on the other side for detail work. When you sharpen your pencil, either use a scrap piece of paper to flatten your end or if you use mechanical pencils, simple continue to use just one side of the lead. With mechanical pencils, you can purchase a wider lead such as a .07 or .09mm that will lay down graphite more quickly.

![Illustration 4](image-url)

**TIP** You can cover a large area with a basic tone by applying graphite powder to the area with a brush, tissue or piece of chamois.

You can create your own graphite powder by rubbing a woodless graphite pencil over fine sandpaper, then use the resulting powder or simply draw a big spot of graphite with a soft pencil – 8B is good - on a scrap piece of paper and then rub a tissue in it. The graphite sticks to the tissue and all you have to do is rub it on your drawing.

Continue to model the tones of the water surface. The dark tones are areas of moving water which do not reflect the light. Use your 2B pencil to create the dark values. Do not outline the shape but use the chisel end of your pencil to make the shape against the contrasting lighter tone become the boundary. Your drawing will not look very appealing right now, but keep going, it will improve!
Using the same technique that you used on the water, begin to add tones to the boat.

Use light pressure and HB pencil to put down the base tone, then start to add deeper tones in light layers, leaving the white of the paper in the strips of light slanting diagonally across the hull of the boat.

The shapes that make up the shadow, light lines and planks of the boat need careful observation and gradual shading to achieve a realistic appearance.
Note the slight shifts in tonal value in the water in front of the boat. This is achieved by gradual building of layers of graphite. Stroke your pencil gently over the area to be darkened, making sure that you blend into the surrounding area and don’t leave distinct lines.

The bow (front) of the boat is lighter as that is facing the direction of the light and the shading deepens the further back you go on the boat. Shading is deepest just under the top edge and where the boat meets the water and the reflection starts. Use your 2B to deepen tones and a 4B or 6B for very dark accents, if required.

**TIP** Do not use heavy pressure when adding layers of graphite, especially to a smooth paper. You will rapidly fill the tooth of the paper and be unable to add more graphite to reach the dark values that you want.

A light spray of workable fixative can help you add a little more graphite, but once you’ve applied it to your drawing you won’t be able to erase anything previously done!
Slowly build layers of graphite in the boat and its reflections. Notice that the lighter lines of light in the reflection are not bright white or clearly defined. Soften edges of these lines by gradual shading. The reflection is quite dark in comparison to the boat itself and indicates the depth of the water that it sits on.

Use your 2B and 4B pencils to develop the shading on the water. The darker areas have lighter sections within them and need careful blending to achieve that image. Keep adding light layers of graphite to deepen tones. Your pencil should be barely touching the paper with little pressure, otherwise you will lose the tooth on your paper.

For the brightest highlights of the lines of light on the boat and touches of light on the ropes and in the water, use your kneaded eraser to lift out graphite. You can mold your erase to a thin point to do this or you can cut a vinyl eraser into shapes that will allow you to take out sharp lines. Once you’ve done that, go back in and blend the lines carefully so they don’t have defined edges.

Add detail to the ropes holding the boat. The rope stretching over the bow of the boat is taut, knotted and frayed. Add the roughness to the rope and the frayed strings hanging into the boat with your 2B and 4B pencils.
Indicate the second rope to the bow with its hook and eye and the ends of the rope hanging into the water. The reflections of these ropes in the water are not clearly defined and darker than the rope in the air.

The ropes are also reflected on the bow of the boat and in the reflection too, and are not crisp lines but undulate with the boat and the watery reflection.

Illustration 11

The shapes of the reflection of the hull of the boat are carefully shading, along with the reflected light from the water, varying tone as necessary to create depth and realism. Slowly build your layers and avoid any hard lines. One area should blend seamlessly into the next.

Illustration 12
Go back into your drawing and develop the background water. Add dark shadows and blend them with mid tones and lighter sections, leaving bright highlights as the white of the paper showing through. Blend if you want then go over the area again with a light touch to bring up the tones.

Draw the form of the buoy floating the water on the upper left. It is round and your drawing should show the shading that makes it appear circular. Keep in mind your light source when drawing this object. The reflection of the buoy will be darker with some lighter sections on the right hand side where the light catches that side of the float.

A white squiggly line appears and reflects a line from a distant source that we can’t see. You can create this line with the edge of your kneaded eraser or a sharp edge of a vinyl eraser. A similar line is shown on the far right which is also another reflection of a darker line in the distance. Use your 2B pencil to create this with light pressure. You don’t want a crisp line for this. It should be slightly blurred.

Take your time drawing. Realistic drawing is not a quick exercise and time is needed to build the layers and achieve the tones that you need. Careful observation of the shadows and reflections on the boat, its reflection, and the water are necessary. Changes in tone in this image are subtle at times and need careful blending.
Continue deepening tones and evening out the water surface with tonal changes. Reinforce the darkest points of the edge of the boat and the frayed rope. Use your eraser to lift out the brightest highlights and to lighten some areas of the water as well as the highlights on the water.

Let your drawing sit for a week. Don’t even look at it. Turn it over so you can’t see it. Then go back and see if there are areas that need adjustment. They will be easily seen after a break from your drawing. When you are satisfied and have made your final tweaks, give the drawing a light spray of fixative to prevent smearing, sign it, date it and frame it!

Illustration 14

Now you know how to draw water! The same technique applies to drawing glass and metal.

Break down your object into shapes and note the tonal values of the shapes. Take your time to complete an accurate line drawing then slowly build layers using light pressure.

Find another scene containing water and use the skills you have learned here to make a new drawing.