Contours

Grade Level
4-6

Concept
Contour drawings describe outlines and edges of interior shapes of a subject.

Skill
Drawing without looking at the paper.

Resource
Boat by Ted Rose

Materials
Drawing paper; pencils; viewfinder.

Procedure
Show the examples reminding students that contour drawings describe the outlines and significant details of objects.

A simple still life or figure study is a good subject for a contour drawing. Supervise the students as they begin to draw. Have them use a viewfinder to compose the subject, then make a blind contour drawing. Have them draw what they see and not lift the pencil from the paper. By carefully looking at the subject and not the paper, they train their minds to really see details. Then, they should make a contour drawing while looking at the subject and looking once or twice at their drawings when they need to begin new lines. As the drawings are completed, suggest that some areas might be enhanced with hatching and crosshatching with fine lines.

Offer the option of adding color to the drawings with oil pastels or chalk which must be sprayed with fixative.

Now, we will explore contour drawing. Here is a drawing by American artist Ted Rose called Boat. Notice the way he has drawn the outline of the boat and other lines to show shapes or contours of the boat.

Use your viewfinder to compose your subject for your contour drawing.
Contour drawing: an outline drawing that shows only the edge and not the volume or mass of an object.

2. A pair of hiking boots is an ideal subject. Notice the detail in the sole of the boot, the pattern the shoelaces make, and the shape of the boot.

4. By carefully looking at your subject and not looking at your paper, you are training your mind to really see details. Here, we see another student’s contour drawing.

5. Now, try making a contour drawing while looking at your subject. You may look once or twice at your drawing, if you need to begin new lines.

3. Now you will make a blind contour drawing. Contour lines define the outer or inner edges and surfaces of objects or figures. Look at your subject and not at your paper. Draw what you see and don’t lift your pencil from the paper.

6. This is a finished contour drawing of the boots. Contour drawing can show the three-dimensional forms of a subject.