

Visual Literacy – do you see what I see?

This is a beginning lesson that will lead to more lessons that help students recognize and ultimately begin to emulate the difference between fact and inference in both what they read and what they write. To begin, start with this lesson that exemplifies the difficulty in separating what we see from what we infer from what we see. This is an oral and drawing activity – a pre-writing activity.

Audience: Grades 5-9 – can be modified up or down

Objectives:

SWBAT observe visuals and articulate what they see

SWBAT collect information from visual artifacts

SWBAT identify strengths and weaknesses in transferring visual information to writing

Anticipatory Set: Read the following to students:

“[they] lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, [farmers]. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon for many miles. There were four walls, a floor and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. [The man and wife] had a big bed in one corner and [the girl] a little bed in another corner. There was no garret at all, and no cellar – except a small hole, dug in the ground....It was reached by a trap-door in the middle of the floor, from which a ladder led down into a small dark hole.

When [the girl] stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the ploughed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else.

When [the woman] came to live there she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and the wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled, now.”

Have piles of the three graphic organizers that follow (inside, outside, woman) set out at student tables. When students arrive, read the following passage. Ask students to select ONE of the graphic organizers on the table and attempt to draw a picture based on what they heard.

Following 2 minutes of drawing time, share with students that the passage was the opening pages of L. Frank Baum's The Wizard of Oz. He wrote a description so vibrant that we could see it. Today we are going to try to do the opposite – that is, take what we see and convert it into words. If we do a good job, it will be as easy to draw a picture from our words as it was from Mr. Baum's.

Materials:

Picturing America prints (or any other set of art prints you may have)
Graphic Organizers (attached)

Standards: Subject area 1: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

- 1.4 Types of Writing
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening
- 1.7 Characteristics and Functions of the English Language

Procedure:

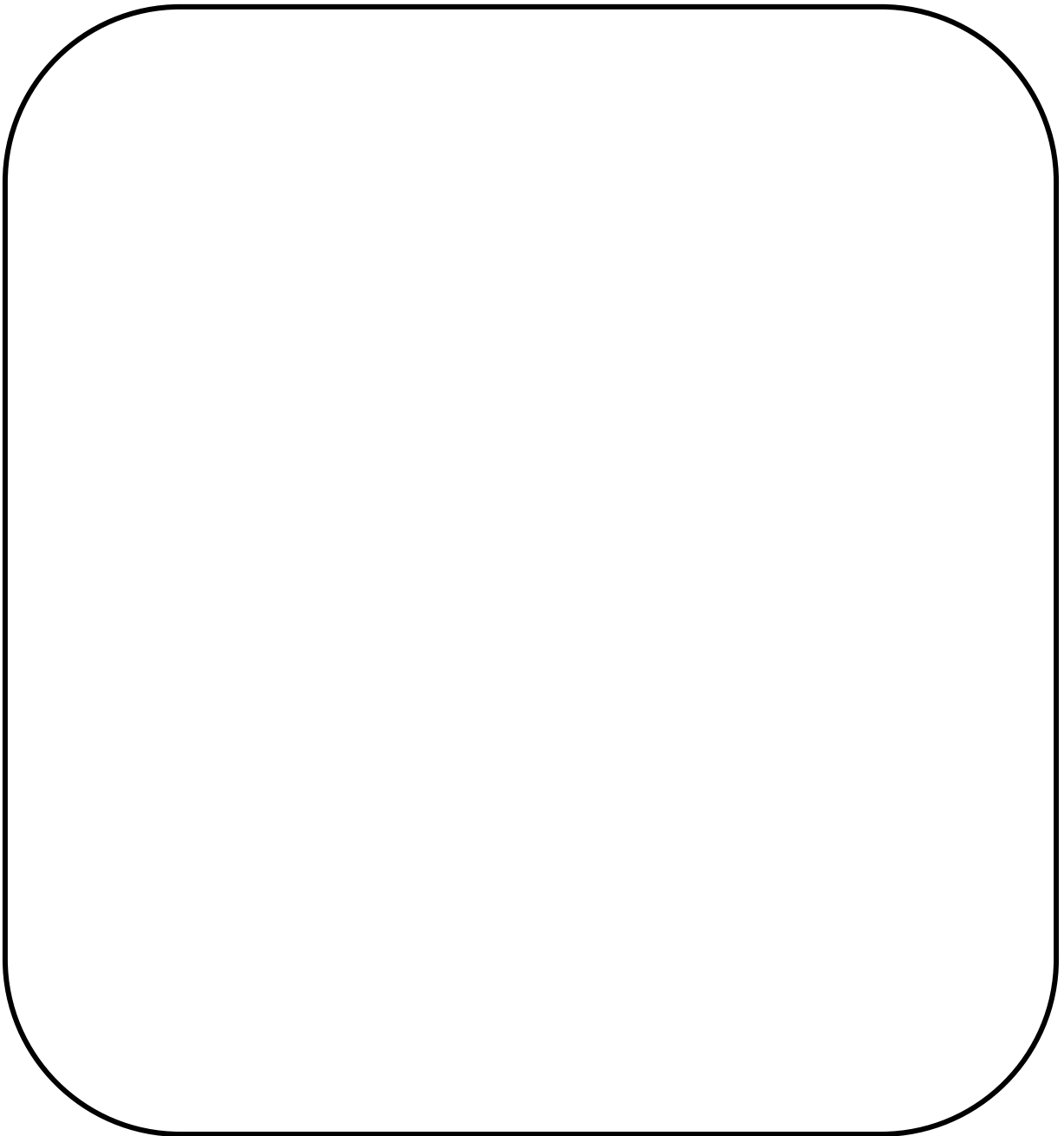
- Hold up a picture and describe what you see to the students. Be specific and use directional and descriptive words to model for them what you expect. Consider using the Audubon *Flamingo* print as the scientific nature of Audubon prints lends itself to factual description.
- Hold up a second print - consider using the Jacob Lawrence print from *The Migration* series as there is lots of room for differences of opinion – and ask for student input on what they see. Watch out for words like *obviously* or any other definitive statements. Encourage phrasing like *It seems to me*, etc. The objective is to differentiate between factual information and inference.
- Distribute a print to each table group of 4-6 students. Ask students to work with picture at table and describe to one another in the group what they see. Monitor conversation and provide guidance as necessary.
- Distribute clipboard with two graphic organizers to each pair of students.
- Have students pair up and sit with one facing forward, one facing back. Odd number will be single group of three where two students draw first and then both will take description role as third student draws.
- Hold up an image for all forward (describing) students to see.
- Student 1 describes to student 2 what s/he sees and student 2 (who cannot see the picture) draws what s/he hears
- After two minutes, stop for gallery walk
 - All drawing students line up and hold drawings facing outward as all describing students walk down row to see drawings. Teacher holds up actual print for drawing students to see.
 - Give students 1-2 minutes for conversation about what worked.
- Change positions (drawing students now describe and describing students now draw) and try with a second image.

Closure:

- Have students complete two minute write of what was easy and what was difficult about this challenge. What might they change if they were to try this again? Rotate partners clockwise and share writing with new partner and then select several to class share.

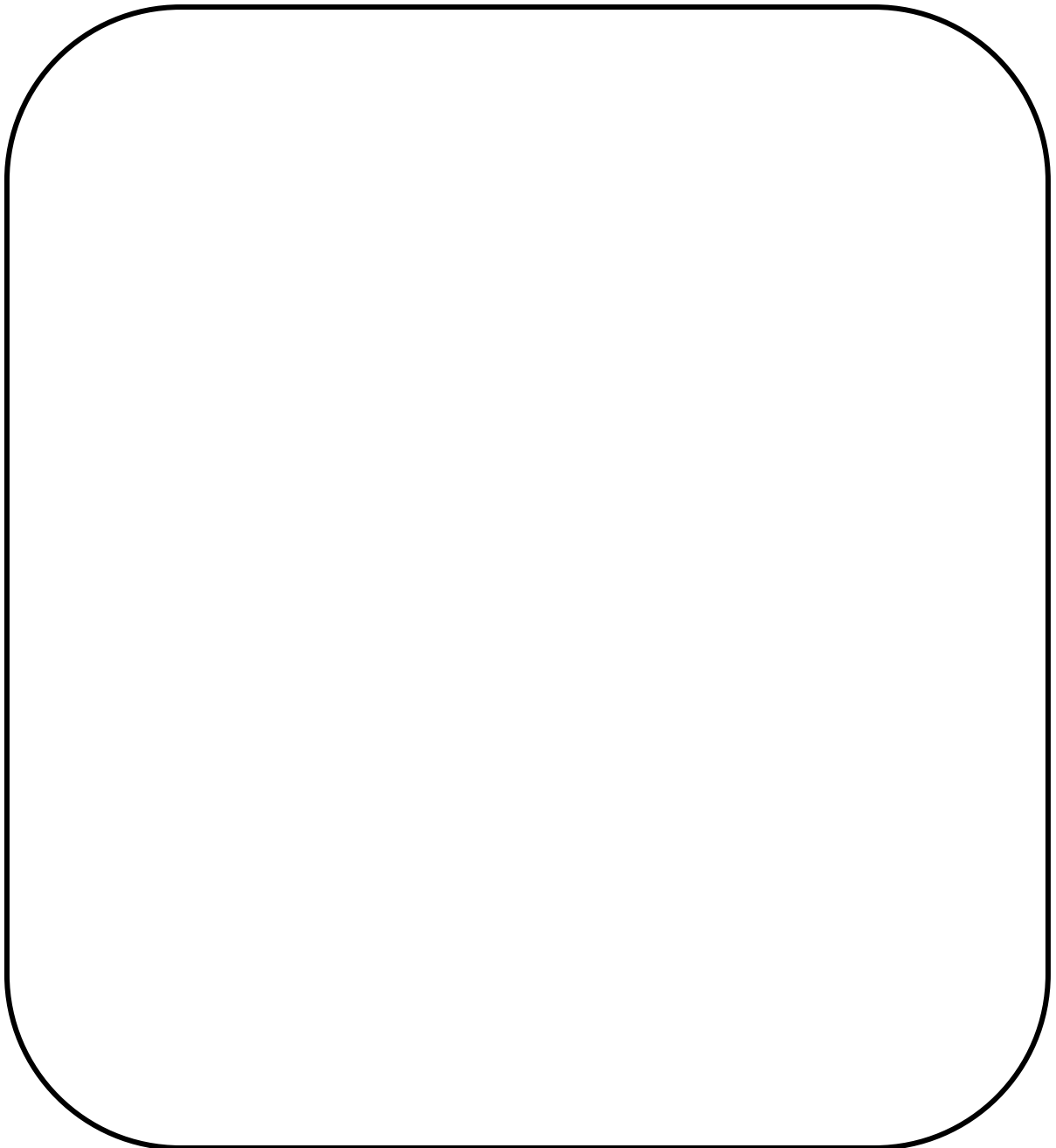
Draw the inside of the house below:

“[they] lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, [farmers]. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon for many miles. There were four walls, a floor and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. [The man and wife] had a big bed in one corner and [the girl] a little bed in another corner. There was no garret at all, and no cellar – except a small hole, dug in the ground....It was reached by a trap-door in the middle of the floor, from which a ladder led down into a small dark hole.



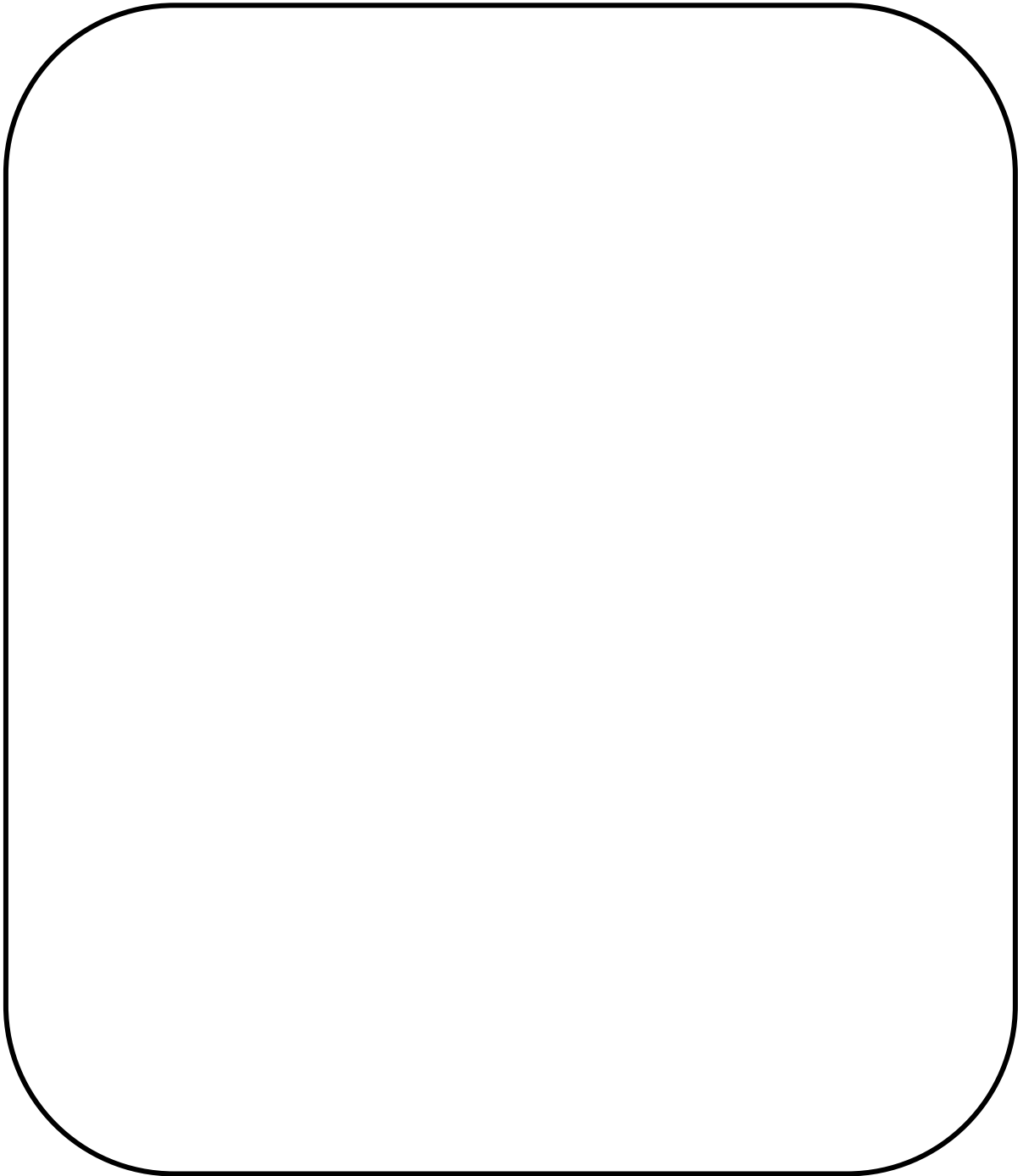
Draw the outside of the house with surrounding landscape:

When [the girl] stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the ploughed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else.



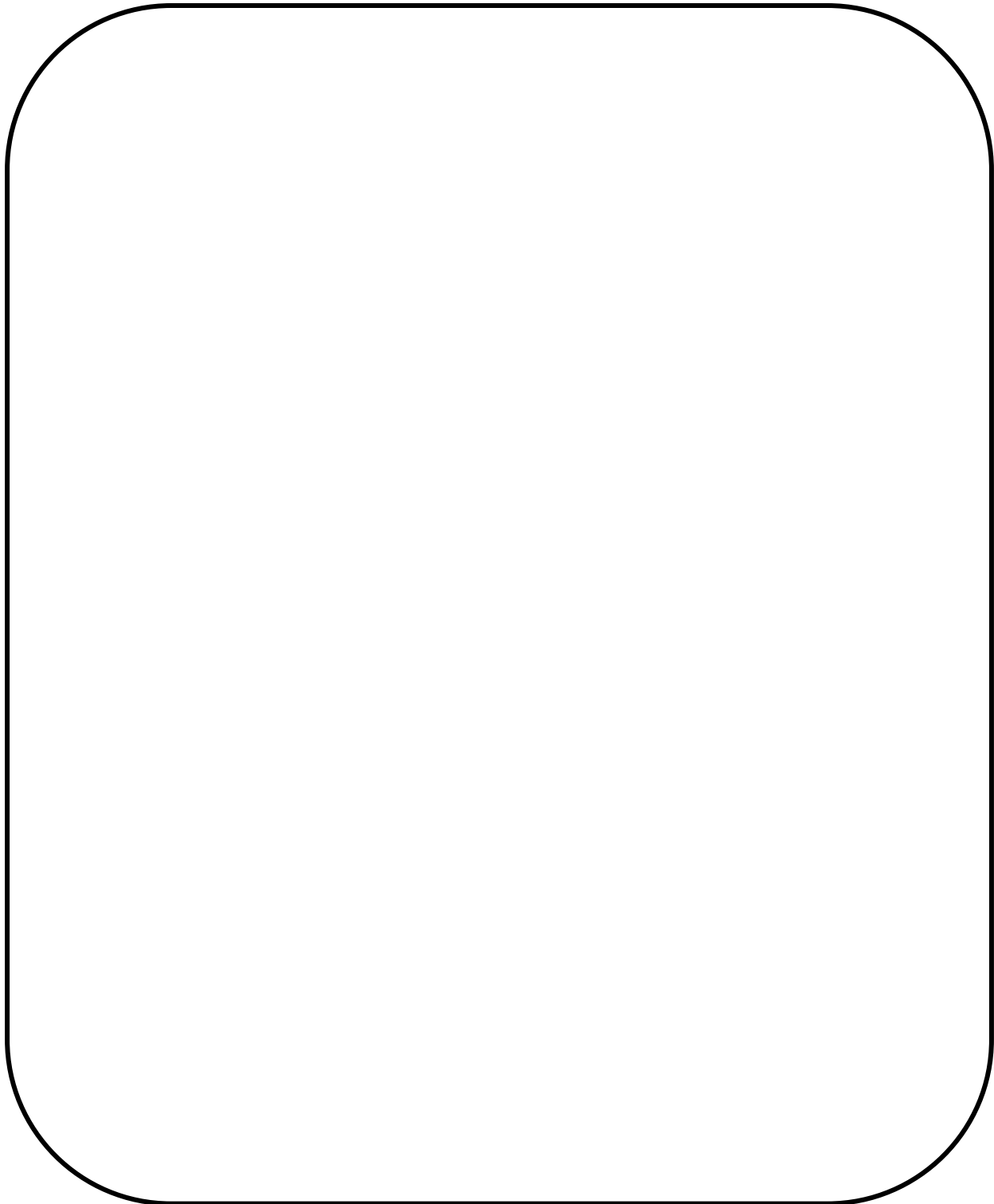
Draw the woman:

When [the woman] came to live there she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and the wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled, now."



Name _____

Listening to your partner, draw what you hear:

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a black border, intended for drawing. It occupies the majority of the lower half of the page.

[illegible][illegible]

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Works Cited

Audubon, John James. *American Flamingo*. 1838. Hand-colored engraving and aquatint on Whatman paper. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wizard of Oz*. New York: Konecky & Knoecky, 1900. Print.

Lawrence, Jacob. *The Migration of the Negro Panel no. 57*. 1941. Casein tempera on hardboard. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

National Endowment for the Humanities. *Picturing America*. EDSITEment, Fall 2007. Web. 17 July 2011. <<http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/index.php?sec=home>>.