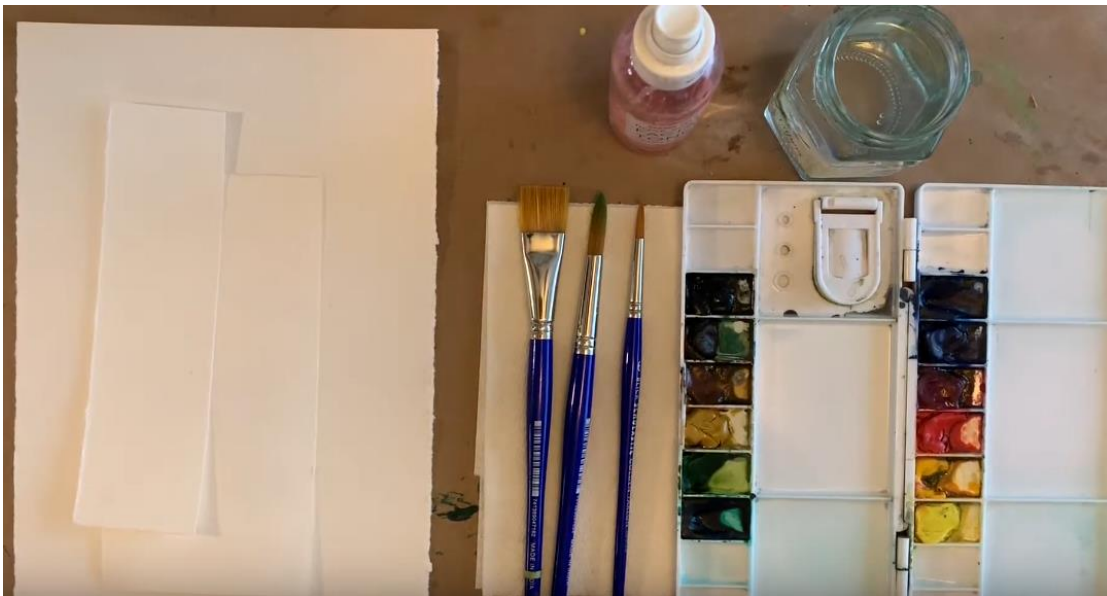# Yosemite Watercolor Series: Value

This is the first lesson of a four-part watercolor series. The other lessons in the series cover color-mixing, techniques, and a step-by-step guide to painting Yosemite Falls.

What is value?

In art, *value* refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. When working with some paints, such as acrylic and oil, you can add white to create a lighter value, or shade, of a color. With watercolor, you can control the value using water: Adding more water to the paint will create a lighter value; adding less water will give you a darker value.
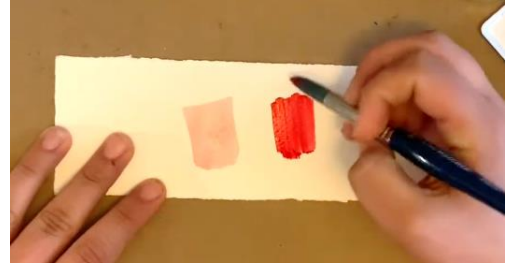

Materials

- Watercolor paints (pans or tubes)
- Watercolor brushes
- Watercolor paper (to prevent buckling, use paper with a weight of at least 140 lb.)
- Water
- Spray bottle
- Paper towels or a rag
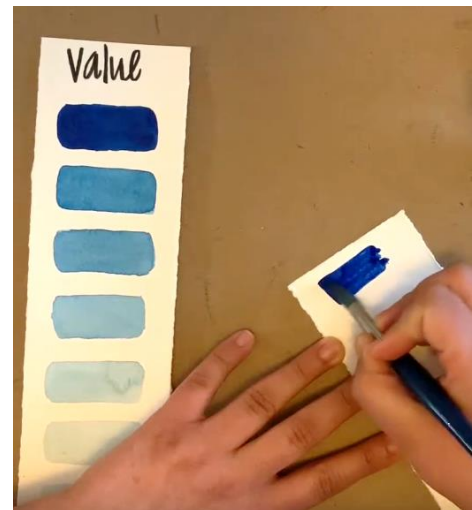
1. Activate your paint.

Practice adding paint to your brush and applying it to paper. If you dip your brush in water, quickly dab it in the paint, you'll end up with a very light color. If you take time to "activate" the paint by mixing the water and paint together thoroughly before you apply your brush to the paper, you'll get a much richer, more vibrant color.

2. Play with value.

Choose a color and slowly add more water to it. Observe how the value gets lighter and lighter, until the color is almost clear.

For additional practice, try creating a *value scale*. Paint a series of lines using one color, carefully adding more water to the paint to make each line slightly lighter than the one before. Repeat with other colors in your palette to create a visual reference of all the values you can make and use.

3. Paint a scene.

Use values to paint a watercolor forest! (We'll be painting more trees later in the series.)

To start, test out different brush strokes, such as stippling (tiny dots), downward strokes and upward strokes, to create a variety of trees. No matter which brush stroke you use, make the branches narrower at the top of tree and wider at the base.

Use different brushstrokes to create trees: stippling (left), downward strokes (middle) and upward strokes (right).

Next, using your brush stroke(s) of choice, paint a row of trees across the upper portion of the paper using a light value.

Let the paint dry, then use a slightly darker value to paint another row of trees below, and slightly overlapping, the first one.

Repeat until the whole paper is filled with trees.

Hang your finished watercolor forest on the fridge or wall — or use it as a postcard to send a note to a friend!

Thanks for making art with us! Follow us online (@yosemiteconservancy) for more fun ideas and learn more about Yosemite Conservancy at yosemite.org.