

Foundations of Watercolor Painting

Week 1: The Language of Water

Understanding Behavior Before Beauty

“Watercolor isn’t about control.
It’s about understanding how water behaves.”

Kimberly Sullivan Studio

What Makes Watercolor Different

- Transparent, not opaque
- Light comes from the paper
- Water determines everything
- We paint light → to dark

“This is our brightest white. Protect it.”

Materials Matter

Keep clean and visual.

Paper

- 140 lb cold press
- Texture holds water

Brush

- Round brush = most versatile
- Point + belly

Paint-Today we are using a pan palette

- Limited palette
- **Transparency is key**



Paper matters more than paint quality.

The Brush: Your Primary Tool

- Tip = detail
- Belly = wash
- Pressure changes stroke
- Lift to finish clean

Quick live demo:

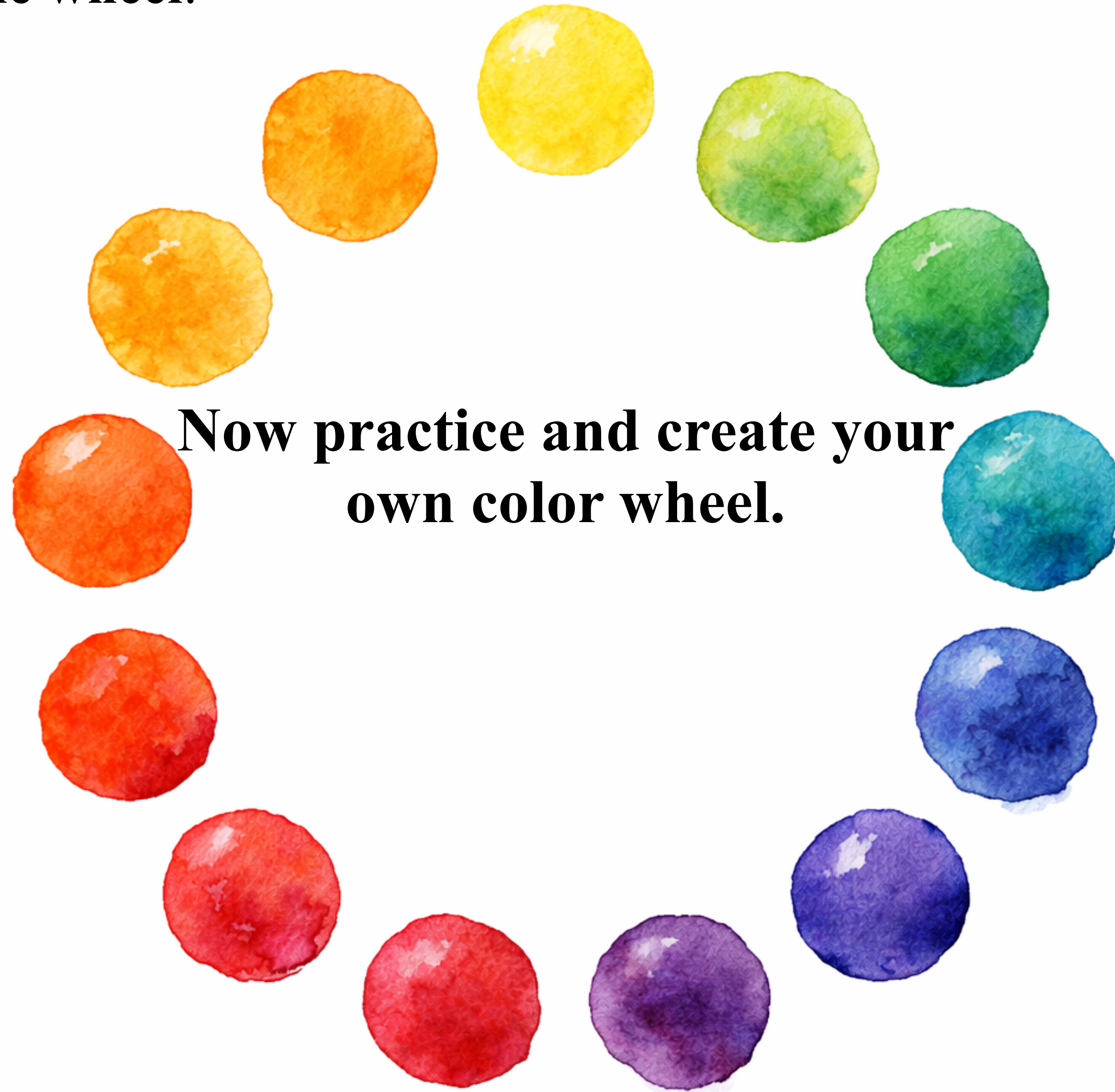
Thin line → press → lift... Let's PAINT!

Create lines that illustrate use of both the tip and belly of your brush



Example order around the wheel:

- **Yellow**
- Yellow-Orange
- Orange
- Red-Orange
- **Red**
- Red-Violet
- Violet
- Blue-Violet
- **Blue**
- Blue-Green
- Green
- Yellow-Green



Primaries

- Red
- Yellow
- Blue

Secondaries (mix two primaries)

- Orange
- Green
- Violet

Tertiaries (mix a primary + secondary)

- Red-Orange
- Yellow-Orange
- Yellow-Green
- Blue-Green
- Blue-Violet
- Red-Violet

Warm vs Cool

- Warm: reds, oranges, yellows
- Cool: blues, greens, violets

Surface Technique Study

1. Light → Dark Wash
2. Wet-on-Wet Blend
3. Salt Texture
4. Blotting / Lifting
5. Dry Brush
6. Water Bloom

Water-to-Pigment Ratios

Controlling Value Through Water



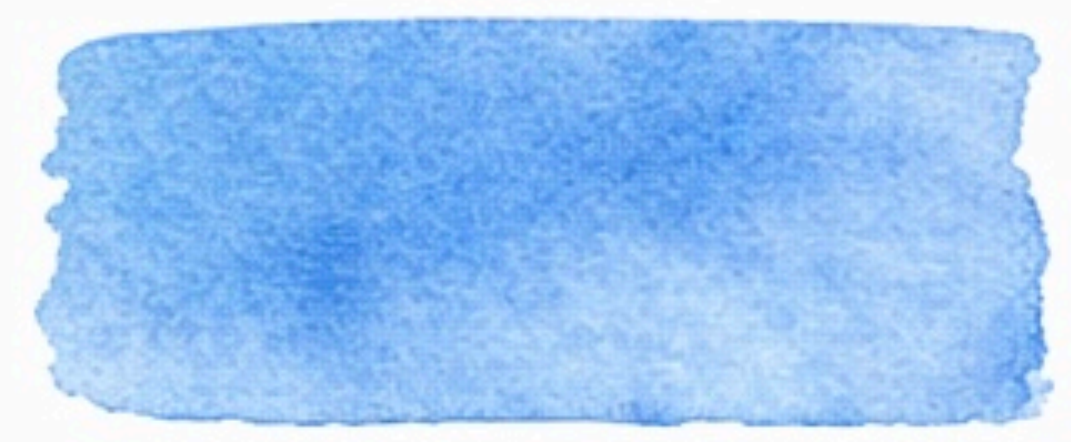
Tea



Milk



Cream



Butter

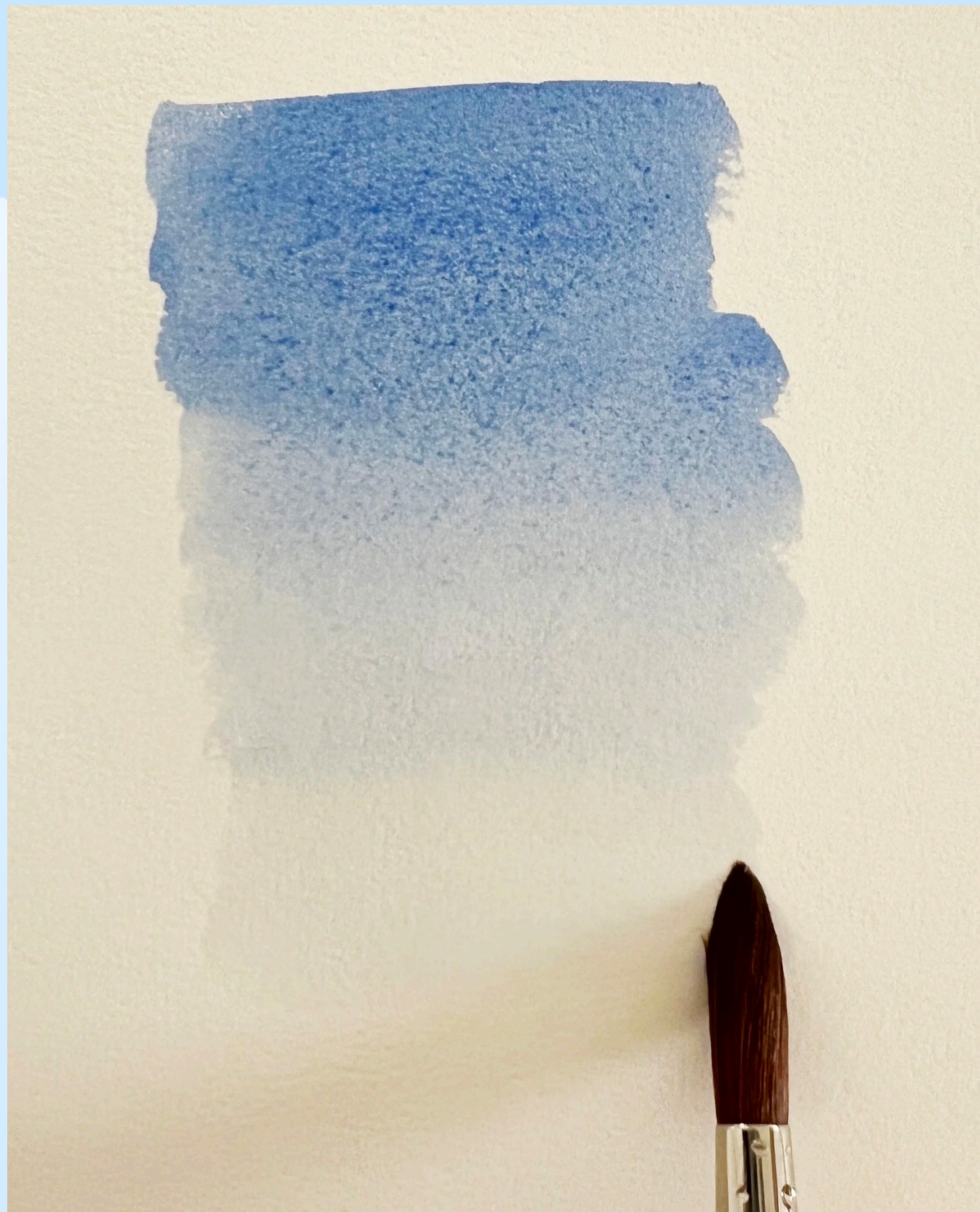
- Tea (very diluted)
- Milk
- Cream
- Butter (almost dry brush)

Light → Dark Wash (Value Control)

1. Wet the square lightly.
2. Start with diluted pigment at the top.
3. Gradually add stronger pigment as they move down.

What it teaches

- Water vs pigment ratio
- Smooth brush movement
- Value control



Salt Texture

1. Paint a wet wash.
2. Sprinkle table salt.
3. Let dry completely.
4. Brush off salt.

What it teaches

- Texture creation
- Timing (paint must still be wet)



Blotting / Lifting Pigment

1. Paint a wet wash.
2. Press tissue or paper towel lightly.
3. Lift to reveal pattern.

What it teaches

- Removing pigment
- Creating clouds, foliage, textures



Wet-on-Wet vs Wet-on-Dry



Left: Wet paper → soft edges → diffusion Right: Dry paper → controlled edge → definition

“When would you want softness? When would you want control?”

LET’S PAINT using the two techniques above...

Wet-on-Wet Blending

1. Wet the square with clean water.
2. Drop in two colors.
3. Watch them flow and blend

What it teaches

- Water movement
- Soft edges
- Natural blending

Goal: Show how pigment moves on wet paper.



Dry Brush Texture

1. Load brush with thicker pigment.
2. Drag lightly across dry paper.

What it teaches

- Paper texture interaction
- Creating grass, bark, weathered surfaces

Goal: Demonstrate texture using very little water.



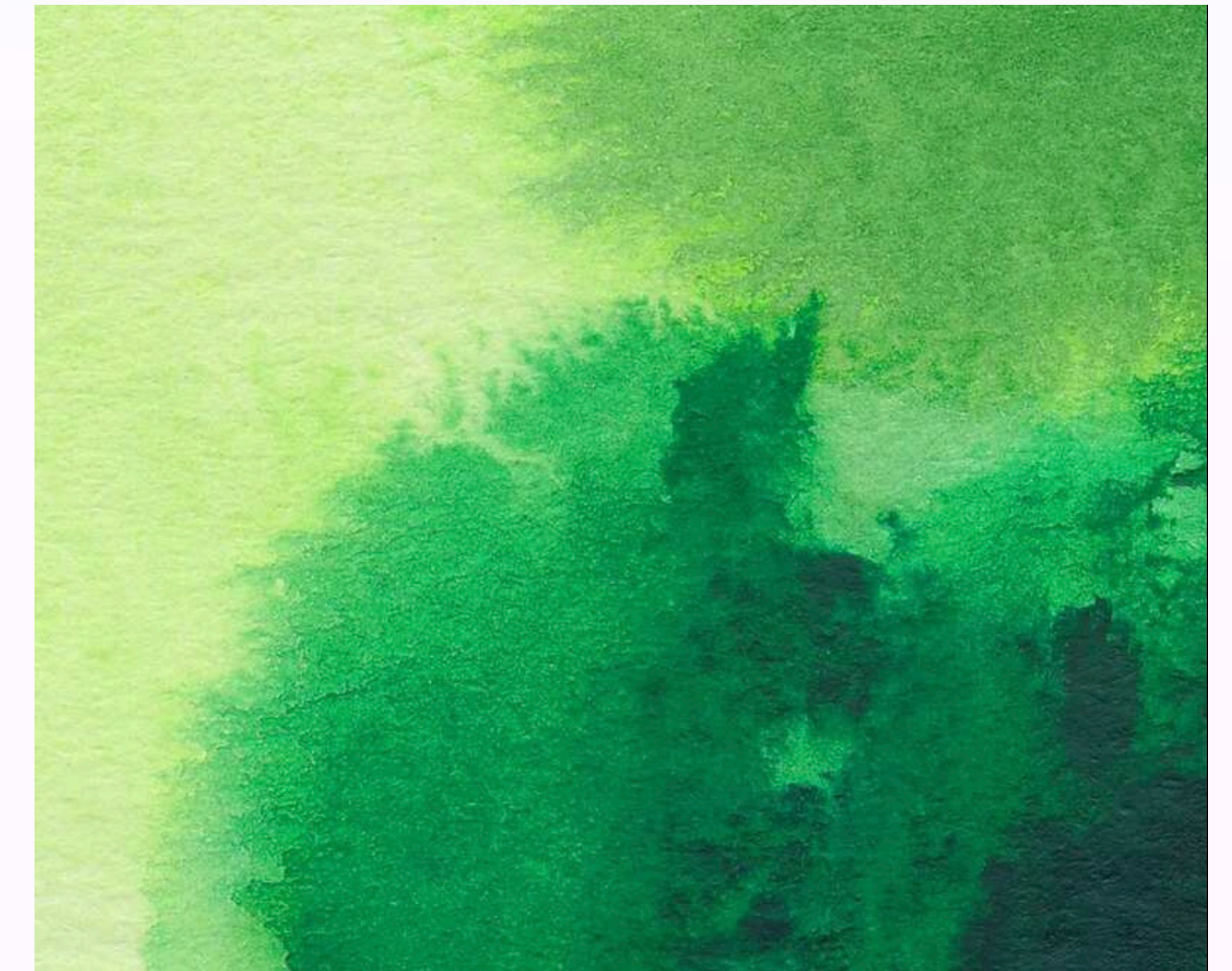
Water Drop / Bloom Effect

1. Paint a wash.
2. Drop clean water into the wet area.
3. Watch the pigment move away.

What it teaches

- Water control
- Backruns (blooms)

Goal: Show how extra water pushes pigment outward.



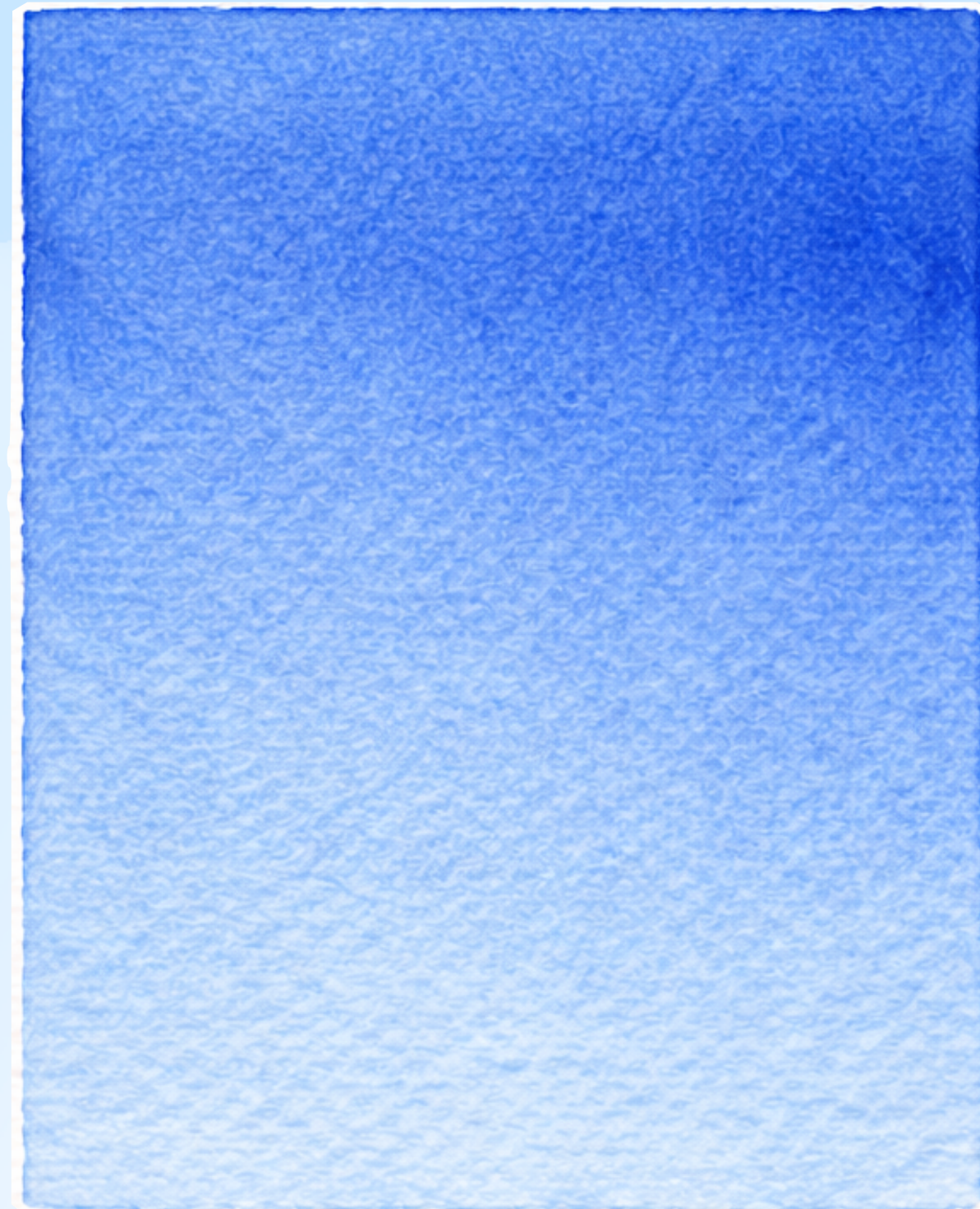
The Flat Wash

Even Color, Even Water

- Load brush fully
- Work quickly
- Keep bead of water moving
- Don't overwork

Tilt slightly to move water.

Experiment



The Graded Wash

Transitioning Light to Dark

- Start darker
- Add water gradually
- Soften bottom edge

This will be the foundation of skies, water, backgrounds.



Reflections

What Did the Water Teach You?

Questions:

- Where did you lose control?
- Where did you gain it?
- What surprised you?

*“Mastering watercolor begins
with mastering water.”*