



# Maya Lin

## FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### CLASSROOM CONNECTION

- » Maya Lin's art is often inspired by satellite images of landscape. Have your students Google Earth familiar locations (ie. home, school, stores, etc.). Using the image they select, they can discuss important landmarks that cannot be viewed on the satellite image.
- » Maya Lin has used wood boards to construct sculptures that mimic topographical features. Instruct the students to create hills and valleys using books and/or other dimensional materials in your classroom.

Maya Lin gained national recognition in 1981 when her design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was selected from a national competition. At the time, she was a 21-year-old architecture student at Yale University.

Lin was born in 1959 in Athens, Ohio, to parents who immigrated from China in 1958<sup>i</sup>. Her mother and father were both professors at Ohio university. Her mother taught English and her father taught art. Lin was a good student who thrived on making good grades. She took college courses while attending high school and spent her time creating at the University's foundry before being accepted into Yale. Lin says of her childhood: "We were a very insular little family. I really didn't socialize that much. I loved school. I studied like crazy. I was a Class A nerd. My dad was Dean of Fine Arts at the university, and when I wasn't in school studying, I was taking a lot of independent courses at the university. And if I wasn't doing that, I was casting bronzes in the school foundry. I was basically using the university as a playground."<sup>ii</sup>



Lin entered Yale with the intention of pursuing studies in field zoology, but found the zoology program to be unsuitable for her interests. She then determined to pursue studies in architecture. "I loved logic, math, computer programming," she explained. "I loved systems and logic approaches. And so I just figured architecture is this perfect combination. Then it takes me seven years of architecture school to realize that I think like an artist. And even though I build buildings and I pursue my architecture, I pursue it as an artist."<sup>iii</sup>

"I'm interested in keeping the balance between the art and the architecture. And I think that is the goal, to keep it up, to build, make more works, see where I go with it, not lose one to the other."<sup>iv</sup>

Lin's work often focuses on humanity's interaction with nature. "A strong respect and love for the land exists throughout my work," she said. "I cannot remember a time when I was not concerned with environmental issues or when I did not feel humbled by the beauty of the natural world."<sup>v</sup>

In the sculpture *Silver Upper White River*, Lin uses recycled silver to create the topographical lines of Arkansas' famed White River. One may find familiar locales such as Beaver Lake on the far left of the sculpture, as well as Lake Taneycomo, Bull Shoals Lake, and Table Rock Lake. The White River traverses a 722-mile journey from the Boston Mountains in Northwest Arkansas, flowing northward into Missouri, before descending into the Mississippi Delta region of Arkansas. The river was an important waterway for nineteenth-century settlers who depended on it for transportation.<sup>vi</sup>

Lin chooses to use recycled silver for her river series because when Europeans originally arrived in the Americas, there were so many fish in the streams that the reflections off of their backs gave rise to the term "running silver."



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Maya Lin, *Silver Upper White River*, 2015,  
recycled silver, 131 in. x 20ft. x 3/8 in.

<sup>i</sup> [nytimes.com/2006/11/05/nyregion/thecity/05maya.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/05/nyregion/thecity/05maya.html)

<sup>ii</sup> [achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1](https://www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1)

<sup>iii</sup> [achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1](https://www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1)

<sup>iv</sup> [achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1](https://www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/lin0int-1)

<sup>v</sup> Lin, M. (2000). *Boundaries*. New York, New York: Simon and Schuster.

<sup>vi</sup> [encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2310](https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2310)