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# Artists create 3D illusions on flat pages

**KS3** Ages 11-14 🕒 3 min read

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## Why Does Art Look Flat?

When you look at a piece of paper or a screen, it's completely flat — it has only **width** and **height**. The real world around you has a third dimension: **depth**. That's why we can walk around things and see them from different angles. But artists want to trick your eyes into seeing depth on something that isn't actually deep. How do they do it?

## Perspective: Making Things Smaller

One of the cleverest tricks is called **perspective**. When you look down a long road or train track, the lines seem to get closer together and disappear into the distance. Artists copy this in their drawings. They make objects that are supposed to be far away **smaller** than objects up close. They also draw lines that seem to meet at a point far away, called the **vanishing point**.

Think of it like looking down a hallway in your school — the far end looks smaller and narrower than the part near you, even though the hallway is the same width all along.

## Shading and Shadow

Real objects have light and shadow on them. The side facing the sun looks bright, while the other side is darker. Artists add **shading** — darker and lighter areas — to make flat shapes look round and solid. If something has smooth gradients from light to dark, your brain thinks it must be curved.

Think of it like a drawing of an orange — if it's just a circle, it looks flat. But if you add light shading on one side and darker shading on the other, it suddenly looks like a real, round orange you could pick up.

## Overlapping and Position

When one object covers part of another, we know the covered object must be **behind** it. Artists use this trick called **overlapping**. They also place things higher or lower on the page — objects further away are often drawn higher up. These simple tricks tell your brain what's in front and what's behind.

## Texture and Detail

Objects closer to you show more **texture** and fine details. Things far away look blurry and smooth. By drawing nearby objects with lots of scratches, bumps, and tiny marks, and distant objects with less detail, artists make distance feel real.

Your brain is amazing at spotting these clues. Even though the paper never actually changes shape, your mind interprets all these tricks and sees a three-dimensional world.