"The Box and the Bones" (Handout)

Once you have your painting concept/intentions figured out, it's time to decide on

"the box"—

format, or size and dimensions of the paper, and

"the bones"—

composition, design, main value and color pattern. This is the skeleton that you'll use to make sure your painting hangs together in a unified whole and emphasizes the right things to support your concept/intentions.

remind yourself:

What am I trying to express with this painting? What effect do I want it to have on the viewer?

choose "characters" or "picture elements" and roles/purpose

- In light of your intentions, what "characters"/picture elements do I want to include? (Don't forget things like "the sky" or "some weeds in the foreground".)
- In light of your intentions, which "characters" or elements play what roles? (star of the show/focal point/area of interest, supporting cast (to showcase, enhance, contrast with the "star"/main interest), "extras"/"chorus line" (to create a sense of the environment, location, backstory, etc.), scenes and set dressing (to add visual

interest, add depth to the mood, help establish a sense of place, weather, time of day, etc. when these aren't the main focus)

choose format and composition

In light of your intentions, what sort of formats/compositions might work best?

choose dominant value

- Most watercolors work best if much of the painting is midtones.
- In light of your intentions, would it be best to have
  *   a few darks and much light and midtones, or
  *   a few lights and much dark and midtones

decide value plan

- focal area should have highest amount of contrast, overall (but not necessarily lightest lights and darkest darks)
- most small shapes (expect textural); start there and work outward)
- do your value planning with opaque white so you don't have to worry about reserving lights and can easily change your mind (or use a digital app)
- make note of where you preferred to add light on top—those are you're reserved lights

decide color scheme

if you get the values right, you can get away with almost any color scheme, but again, focal area should be where there is highest concentration of contrasts (muted/bright, complementary colors, etc.)

- color ways or color schemes
    * monochrome
    * analogous
    * complementary
    * split complementary
- swatching
- again, use opaques to make your planning easier (if you layered opaques, those are your reserved areas of light/bright color)

create eye paths

- usually, just the main path is determined at this stage
- as you work and refine, weave "attention-getters" through to create alternate interesting "journeys" through the painting and avoid creating a "bulls-eye" effect (at least, not too obvious a bulls-eye)

decide painting sequence

In any given area (or the whole painting) think

- 1-2-3 wash (ideally, leave some of the previous wash showing! not 50-50)
- light before dark
- soft to hard edges
- background to foreground

except reserved lights and brights

think "big shape with small shapes inside" or "big shape divided later into smaller shapes" where possible