For many landscape drawings, the sky comprises the background of the image. For this reason, we will start with the sky as an element of landscape drawing before we move on to the elements typically found in the middle ground and foreground. Many landscape drawings emphasize the sky as an important element. This is achieved by creating a dramatic sky with intense colors and value changes as well as placing the horizon lower within the picture plane to accent the space above. Mastering the sky in a landscape drawing requires an understanding of cloud structure and light.
After defining the picture plane with masking tape, we will begin to add the colors that are observed from the reference. In this case, we’ll start adding light blue to the top of the picture plane and work downward.

As colors are added to the surface, we’ll work them in by blending them with a finger.

Next, the attention is turned to the light source. In this image, the sun is featured within the picture plane. To create the illusion of a strong light source, we’ll use light yellow, making marks in a circular motion.

Orange is added to create a transition from the light yellow to the blue. Blue is added on top of the orange to smooth the transition further.
Medium tone gray is used to begin defining the shapes of the clouds. Clouds are organic shapes. When drawing cloud shapes let your marks be loose and let the shapes develop organically.

Next, we’ll define a few areas of negative space that exist between the clouds. This is accomplished with a light blue.

To create the illusion of light emitting from the center, we’ll add light yellow and orange and “pull” these colors outward with a finger to mimic light rays.

Next, we’ll intensify the light further by layering white and additional light yellow. With each layer that is added, the colors become more vibrant and stronger.
We’ll continue working down the picture plane, layering cloud shapes with mid tone gray on top of the brighter colors underneath.

We’ll continue adding cloud formations, framing the central light source.

Next, we’ll add color to the clouds by adding a bit of violet. Using a finger, the color can be gently worked into the gray. A lightly applied layer of darker gray is added next defining the core shadow on the clouds.

Highlights are added to the clouds using a light orange and the light itself is intensified further by adding another layer of white.
Next, we’ll pull the “light” outward again using a finger. We’ll try to create a transition from intense light to less intense light.

A darker blue is added to further the illusion of form in the clouds. Blue is an excellent choice since it contrasts nicely with the oranges in the sky.

Again, darker gray is layered on top of the blues in the clouds to lessen the intensity of the color.

A few spots of intense highlights placed in the clouds go a long way in furthering the realism of light.
The horizon is defined with a dark brown. The brown is worked to the bottom of the picture plane and then layered with a dark blue.

Before details are added to the water, the clouds are given one last application of dark gray to further the illusion of form.

Highlights are created on the water using a light orange directly on top of the darker blue.

The result is a dynamic landscape that emphasizes the sky.