

Michelangelo and Raphael

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The works of artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael are notable and defining artistic pieces from the Renaissance. The characteristics, composition, and stylistic elements in these works are unique.

This lesson covers:



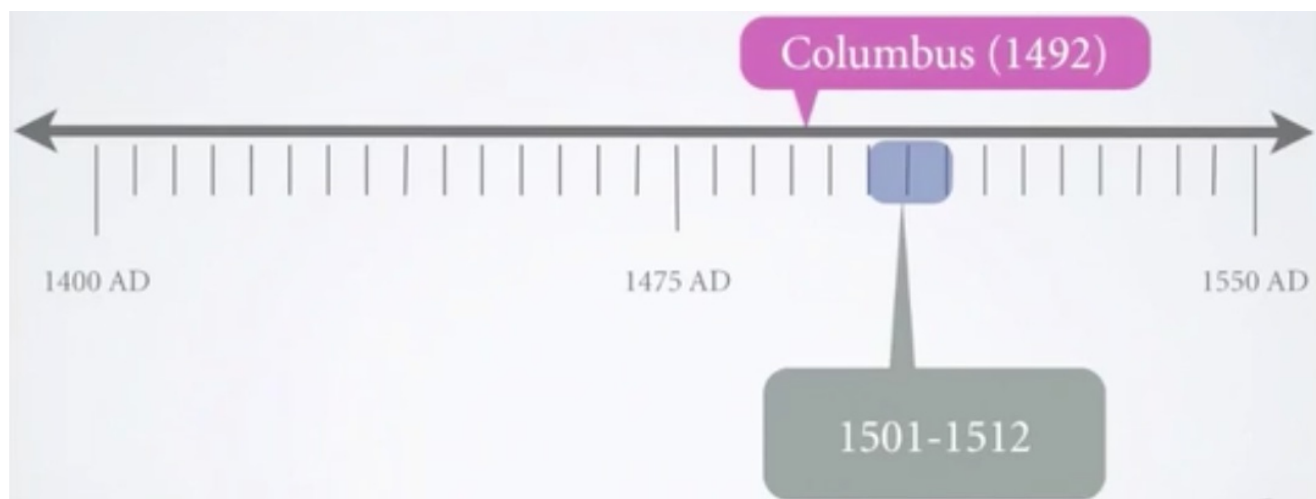
BIG IDEA

The High Renaissance in Italy is defined by the works of artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael.

1. Period and Location: Michelangelo and the “David”

This lesson covers the years 1501 to 1512 in Florence, Italy.

The timeline below highlights the period covered in this lesson. The well-known voyage by Columbus to the New World in 1492 is also highlighted as a reference point.



2. Michelangelo and the “David”

The first artist explored in this lesson is the famous Michelangelo. Michelangelo was born in 1475 and died in 1564. Although known for his artistic genius as both a sculptor and painter, he considered himself a sculptor.

His approach to sculpture was that the artist is a genius, who, like God, first imagines the creation, then creates it. He also believed that the process should occur naturally and organically, rather than relying on rigid mathematical proportions. Michelangelo's "David" is considered one of the quintessential works of art from the Renaissance. This work of art is inspired by the classical Greek sculptures of male athletes, heroes, and nudes.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Take a look at this image of Michelangelo's "David."



David by Michelangelo

1501-1504

Marble

The sculpture itself is almost 17 feet tall, and it depicts the biblical hero in the moments leading up to his fight with Goliath. The **contrapposto** stance suggests David at ease upon first look, but the beautifully rendered details create a sense of tension as well as anticipation for what's about to happen.



DID YOU KNOW

Michelangelo depicts David immediately before the confrontation. This contrasts with other statues of David, including Donatello's famous sculpture, which show David in the moments immediately after the battle.

David's large hands in this sculpture, one of which holds the stone that kills Goliath, convey power and strength. They also serve as a visual adjustment, similar to his slightly enlarged head, which compensates for the lower viewpoint of the observer.



THINK ABOUT IT

This type of visual adjustment and consideration for the vantage point of the observer was also a characteristic of Donatello's statue of Saint Mark in Florence, which is a work of art that Michelangelo would've been familiar with.

The sensation of impending action is a hallmark of Michelangelo's style and is clearly rendered in the details of David's face. His gaze extends beyond the immediate area and serves to pull in the character of Goliath. While Goliath is beyond the view of the observer, he is well within David's line of sight.



TERM TO KNOW

Contrapposto

A naturalistic pose in which the figure stands, resting most of the weight on one foot and creating a slight tilt in the pelvis.

3. The Sistine Chapel

The Sistine Chapel is part of the Vatican complex in Rome, which is the center of Christendom. The project to paint the interior was commissioned by Pope Julius II about two years after the groundbreaking on the new church of St. Peter's in the Vatican. Michelangelo was selected, and though hesitant at first, he eventually accepted.

The scope of the project was enormous. It presented a number of challenges, such as the height. However, this problem was eventually solved by the creation of a scaffolding system by Michelangelo. The brightly colored ceiling was actually painted by Michelangelo while he was on his back. These bright colors made it easily viewable from the ground.

The biblical scenes depicted narratives detailing such events as:

- The creation of man
- The fall of man
- The Last Judgment
- Details from the life of Christ

The mural painting process was known as **buon fresco**, which is a type of fresco in which the plaster is still wet so artists would work in periods. The more recent conservation done on the ceiling to remove centuries of dirt and grime was controversial in how it removed many of the details of the original images, such as shadows, eyes, and contour lines. It did, however, reveal hidden details about the creation process, such as the lines that outline where the **giornata** was laid out and procedures involved with transferring images to the ceilings and walls.



DID YOU KNOW

The process of a preparatory drawing that was then transferred to the wall or ceiling in order to paint was rather ingenious. First, the outlines of the image, or **cartoon**, were perforated by tiny holes. The image was then held against the surface, and powdered charcoal was tapped through the holes to transfer the image. The result was a dotted outline, which served as a guide for the artist as they painted.

The most famous image for the Sistine Chapel, and one of the most famous paintings from the Renaissance, is

the image of “The Creation of Adam.”

➞ EXAMPLE Below is an image of “The Creation of Adam.”



The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo

1508-1512

Fresco

In this work of art, Michelangelo diverted from the biblical representation and chose a noticeably more mythical depiction of the event. Michelangelo's touch is unmistakable, and in true Renaissance style, he shows the moment just before the action takes place. This depicts the point in time just before Adam is given life, as God reaches out this finger, nearly touching Adam in order to waken him with the spark of life.



TERMS TO KNOW

The Platonic Academy

Founded by Plato in 387 BC in Athens, it promoted the philosophical systems of Plato, including the notions of form and existence of abstract objects.

Buon Fresco

A type of fresco in which the plaster is still wet and the paint bonds with the plaster.

Giornata

The quantity of wet plaster that an artist could paint into in a period of one day before it dried.

Cartoon

A preparatory drawing for a mural that contains a number of small holes, allowing the drawing to be transferred to the wall using powdered charcoal tapped through the holes.

4. Raphael and “The School of Athens”

Another Renaissance painter, Raphael made an enormous impact in his short career. His work and life take place almost entirely within the time known as the High Renaissance. While he died at the young age of 37, he had great success as an artist. Raphael was commissioned by Pope Julius II to create several frescoes in the papal apartments at the palace, the Vatican.

➞ EXAMPLE Take a look below at this fresco, more commonly called “The School of Athens.”



The School of Athens by Raphael

1510-1511

Fresco

This work of art is directly across from another fresco, which is not pictured in the apartment, called “Theology.” It stands as one of the most important works of art in the High Renaissance and exudes the mastery of classical form and composition for which Raphael was known. The whole composition is placed within an ancient architectural setting. It is wonderfully balanced and clearly defined, creating an area of substantial breadth and depth.

The subject of the mural is the **Platonic Academy**, which is the place in Athens where Plato would teach philosophy to his students. The mural is a very stable-feeling composition, with very little movement conveyed, giving the viewer ample time to move around the work of art, and observe every one of the little idealized

figures. It is also a visually rich composition.

➤ EXAMPLE Below is a section of the painting from the lower left-hand corner.



This section depicts Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras, shown writing in a book, surrounded by people. The individual sitting alone, resting his head on his hand, is believed to be a portrait of Raphael's contemporary, the artist Michelangelo. The rest of the left side of the image is composed of other ancient philosophers that flank one of the central figures.

➤ EXAMPLE In the image below, some of the other philosophers flank the central figure of Plato.



In the above image, Plato, shown in red, holds one of his books and gestures towards the heavens and the mysteries of the universe, which he and other metaphysical philosophers contemplated. The other figure, in blue, is Aristotle. On his side of the image are the philosophers and scientists concerned with understanding nature.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The upper right-hand portion of the image, shown below, depicts the astronomers Zoroaster and Ptolemy, holding globes.



➔ **EXAMPLE** Finally, the artist Raphael is shown, and just below him are students surrounding the famous Greek mathematician, Euclid. Euclid is best remembered for his contributions to our understanding of geometry.



TERM TO KNOW

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the notions of form and existence of abstract objects.



SUMMARY

Michelangelo and Raphael were both defining artists from the Renaissance. Their works are truly unique in their characteristics, composition, and stylistic elements. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of Michelangelo and the “David”**. Michelangelo’s “David” is considered one of the quintessential works of art from the Renaissance. This work of art is inspired by the classical Greek sculptures of male athletes, heroes, and nudes.

Next, you explored the **Sistine Chapel**, which is part of the Vatican complex in Rome, and the project to paint the interior that was given to Michelangelo.

Finally, you learned about **Raphael and “The School of Athens”**. Raphael was commissioned by Pope Julius II to create several frescoes in the papal apartments at the palace, the Vatican.

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR IAN MCCONNELL.



TERMS TO KNOW

Buon Fresco

A type of fresco in which the plaster is still wet and the paint bonds with the plaster.

Cartoon

A preparatory drawing for a mural that contains a number of small holes, allowing the drawing to be transferred to the wall using powdered charcoal tapped through the holes.

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