

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET

ELEMENTS OF ART

Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world's most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt and Goya. The Museum also features a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh and Cézanne—as well as 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help prepare your students for their tour. These materials include lesson plans and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our [website](#), where you can find information about special exhibitions, podcasts and a collections database with information about individual works of art.

Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*

Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

Form and Texture

Guardian Lion, 12th century
Cambodia: Angkor period, 1100–1199
Sandstone
42 x 21½ x 28 in. (106.7 x 54.6 x 71.1 cm)

A Formidable and Highly Decorative Guardian

Sculptures of lions were frequently placed along the staircases and terraces of large temple complexes such as Angkor Wat, a vast temple complex in Cambodia (formerly the Khmer Empire) built in the 12th century. Although lions are not native to Cambodia, which, in part, explains the **decorative** and unrealistic nature of this sandstone sculpture. Lions were considered symbols of strength and royalty and served as protective guardians.



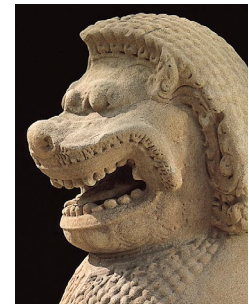
- **Form**—Three-dimensional shapes with depth as well as width and height. Forms project into the viewer's space and more than one side of a form can be seen.
- **Texture**—The surface quality of an object that we sense primarily through touch.

Discussion Questions

- What different surface **textures** do you notice? How do you think the sculpture would feel if you were able to touch it?
- Do you find this sculpture frightening or formidable? Why? What **formal** choices did the sculptor make so that the lion would intimidate intruders (for example, his growling face, his size, his alert posture)?

Activity

- Compare this sculpture to a [photograph of a lion](#). What differences do you see? Notice how the sculpted lion features human characteristics in its face (the teeth, the mustache, the nose) and posture. Its mane is **abstracted** into a decorative, featherlike pattern, with the top hair separated from the hair beneath his chin. The sculpture is also much more **geometric** than a real lion. Perhaps the artist meant to alert temple intruders that this was no ordinary lion.



Vocabulary

- **Abstracted art**: art in which only some of the visual elements resemble subjects taken from the natural world, and artworks that fall only partially, if at all, into what is commonly understood to be representational.
- **Decorative**: elements used to make an artwork more attractive; ornamental.
- **Formal qualities**: design elements such as balance, composition, color, line, scale, shading, texture and volume.
- **Geometric**: based on simple geometric shapes, such as circles and squares.
- **The Khmer Empire**: now known as Cambodia, the Khmer Empire was once the most powerful empire in Southeast Asia. At times it ruled over present-day Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The Angkor period, which lasted from 802 to 1463, is considered the most important era of Khmer history.
- **Sandstone**: a relatively soft sedimentary rock that can be sculpted by the controlled removal of stone, known as carving. It has a matte and somewhat rough appearance, and it is porous rather than polished and smooth.

Space and Movement

The Flight into Egypt, c. 1544–45

Jacopo Bassano (Jacopo da Ponte)

Italian, 1510–1592

Oil on canvas

60 7/8 x 90 in. (154.0 x 228.6 cm)



Flight into Egypt: A Narrative Painting

Jacopo Bassano's *Flight into Egypt* is called a narrative painting because it tells a story.

The painting depicts a biblical story in which an angel appears to Joseph (the bearded figure to the right of the mule), warning him of a decree declaring that all male babies must be killed. Here Joseph leaves his home (seen in the **background**) with his young wife, Mary, and her baby, Jesus, to escape to Egypt to evade the murderous decree. Bassano used several artistic elements to tell this story.

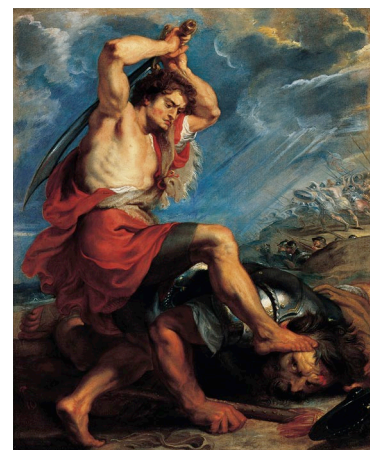
- **Space**—In painting, space is the illusion of depth. This can be achieved using a variety of techniques, including overlapping, **scale**, relative hue (objects that are closer to the picture plane appear brighter and warmer) and **atmospheric perspective**.
- **Movement**—Artists employ many techniques to make their works dynamic. A sense of space and a repetition of elements, such as the extended legs of the figures stepping forward, can indicate movement. Diagonal lines also convey movement; because they are neither vertical nor horizontal, they provide a sense of instability. Artists also often show drapery billowing behind someone, as if the wind is catching his or her clothing as they move.

Discussion Questions

- What clues did the artist provide to tell us what is happening in the painting?
- How can you tell what is closer and what is farther away in the painting?

Activities

- Look at other examples of narrative painting in the Museum (for instance, Rubens's [David Slaying Goliath](#)). Disregarding the title, write a description or story to accompany the painting, identifying which subjects you believe are the principal characters and describing the setting, including time of day, season and place.
- Choose a favorite story (a myth, fairytale or superhero story) and identify a pivotal scene to illustrate using paper and colored pencils. Be careful to include important details and actions that will help viewers recognize the story, incorporating the artistic elements discussed in this lesson.



Vocabulary

- **Atmospheric perspective:** as space recedes into the far distance of a painting, the intensity of the colors fades, and there is less contrast between lights and darks; the farther into the background, the lighter and cooler the colors.
- **Background:** the part of a scene or picture that is farthest from the viewer.
- **Scale:** the size of figures in relation to other figures and objects. For instance, figures in the foreground are larger in scale than figures in the middle ground or background.

PAGE 2:

David Slaying Goliath, c. 1616

Peter Paul Rubens

Flemish, 1577–1640

Oil on canvas

48³/₈ x 39 in. (122.9 x 99.1 cm)

Value, Contrast and Emphasis

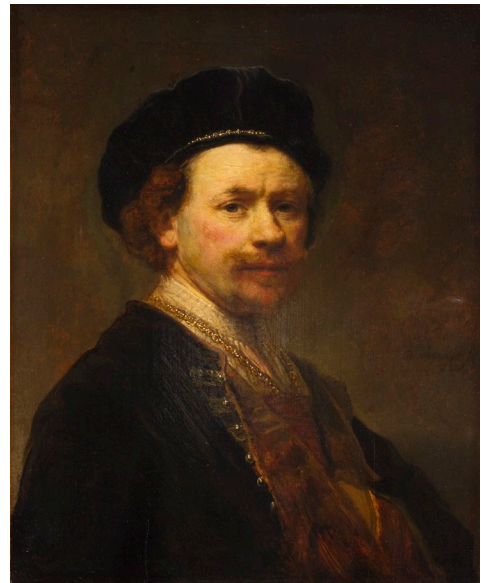
Self-Portrait, c. 1636–38

Rembrandt van Rijn

Dutch, 1606–1669

Oil on panel

24⁷/₈ x 19⁷/₈ in. (63.2 x 50.5 cm)



Spotlighting a Great Artist and His Genius

In this **self-portrait**, done at the peak of his personal and professional success, Rembrandt wears the characteristic beret associated with the artistic milieu. As the only Dutch artist who referred to himself by his first name, he emulated the Italian **Renaissance** masters [Raphael](#) and [Titian](#). These two artists had already taken on legendary status by Rembrandt's time, and it is likely that he made these allusions in the hope of placing himself among their ranks in the history of art.

In this portrait, he wears velvet with gold accents rather than a simple artist's smock, and, using **chiaroscuro**, a strong contrast of light and dark, he puts the **emphasis** on his face—which would have been very recognizable due to his many **unidealized self-portraits**. However, he shrouded part of his face in shadow, especially his eyes, perhaps to maintain the aura of mystery and complexity associated with the **Renaissance** ideal of the creative genius.

- **Value**—The relative use of light and dark colors.
- **Contrast**—The juxtaposition of different design elements—for instance, rough and smooth textures or dark and light values—to highlight their differences and create a focal point.
- **Emphasis**—Special importance given to one part of a work of art (for example, a light area surrounded by darkness) directing the viewer's attention to there. Emphasis can be given using contrast, size, color or placement within a composition.

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the background of the painting? Why do you think he chose to make the background dark, as opposed to light, and ambiguous rather than recognizable?
- How did Rembrandt use value and contrast to direct the viewer's attention within this painting?
- Compare this painting to Jean-Auguste-Pierre-Dominique Ingres's [Baron Joseph-Pierre Violetès de Mortarieu](#). How does Ingres's use of value compare with Rembrandt's?



Activity

- Look at self-portraits by other artists in the Museum, such as [Maurice-Quentin de La Tour](#) and [Marie-Geneviève Bouliar](#). How do they differ from Rembrandt's self-portrait? How does the artists' use of color, value and composition change the emphasis and mood of their self-portraits?



Vocabulary

- **Chiaroscuro** (pronounced *kee-arr-oh-skoo-ro*): the use of strong darks and lights in bold contrast.
- **Idealized**: depicted as perfect or better than reality.
- **Renaissance**: a cultural and artistic movement that revived classical art and literature, and led to the elevation of the artist as a creative genius. It spanned from the 14th through the 17th centuries, beginning in Italy and then spreading to the rest of Europe.
- **Self-portrait**: a representation of an artist painted, drawn or sculpted by that artist.

PAGE 4:

Baron Joseph-Pierre Vialetès de Mortarieu, 1805–1806

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

French, 1780–1867

Oil on canvas

24 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (61.2 x 50.2 cm)

Self-Portrait, 1792

Marie-Geneviève Bouliar

French, 1763–1825

Oil on canvas

21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (55.5 x 46 cm)

PAGE 6:

Three Great Trees in a Mountainous Landscape with a River, c. 1665–70

Jacob van Ruisdael

Dutch, 1628/9–1682

Oil on canvas

54 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 68 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (138.1 x 173.1 cm)

Complementary Colors and Texture

The Mulberry Tree, 1889

Vincent van Gogh

Dutch, 1853–1890

Oil on canvas

21¼ x 25½ in. (54 x 65 cm)



Giving Landscape New Life

In 1889 Vincent van Gogh entered a hospital seeking treatment for psychiatric illness. In between episodes of what may have been epilepsy, he worked constantly, painting the surrounding **landscape**, including this **mulberry** tree. Van Gogh wrote to his family about this particular painting three times, declaring it to be the best of his mulberry tree paintings, rendered with vigorous **brushwork**, striking **impasto** and dazzlingly bright **complementary colors**.

- **Complementary colors**—Complementary colors are directly opposite each other on the **color wheel**, for example, red and green or purple and yellow. These opposing colors create maximum contrast and, when combined in the right proportions, produce a neutral color.
- **Texture**—The surface quality of a painting created by the artist's choice and handling of materials. It can be smooth, rough, matte, etc. Texture can also be implied, for example, when an artist creates the illusion of texture—such as the rough bark of a tree—using paint.

Discussion Questions

- How did Van Gogh use **complementary colors** in this picture? How do the painting's colors and **texture** affect the energy in this painting? Do you think it is still and peaceful or dynamic and lively?
- Is there anything about the colors or **textures** of the tree that you would not normally expect? Compare this painting with another Dutch **landscape** painting with an emphasis on trees, Jacob van Ruisdael's [*Three Great Trees in a Mountainous Landscape*](#). What similarities do you see in the way these two artists chose to depict trees? What differences do you see? How does your emotional reaction change when you look at Van Gogh's painting as opposed to Ruisdael's painting?



Activity

- Paint a **landscape** and experiment with creating **texture** in paint with brushes and palette knives.

Vocabulary

- **Brushwork**: the manner in which a painter applies paint with a brush.
- **Color wheel**: a visual representation of colors arranged according to their chromatic relationships.
- **Impasto**: paint that is thickly applied so that it stands out from the canvas or panel almost like a relief.
- **Landscape**: a genre of painting in which natural scenery, such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers and forests, is portrayed.
- **Mulberry**: a type of tree that produces dark-colored, edible fruit.
- **Relief**: a sculpture in which objects project outward from a flat supporting background.

Shape and Pattern

Still Life with Musical Instruments, 1918

Georges Braque

French, 1882–1963

Oil on canvas

25½ x 36¼ in. (64.8 x 92.1 cm)



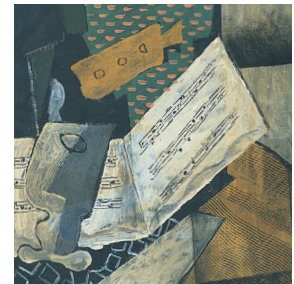
A Cubist Still Life

Together with Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque is credited with developing **Cubism**, one of the most influential visual art styles of the early 20th century. In this **Cubist still life**, Braque broke down objects into simplified shapes. The pictorial space is shallow, and there is very little indication of depth. Rather than creating the illusion of three-dimensional space, Braque chose to focus on other formal elements, such as shape and pattern (polka dots, squares and lines), by tipping the tabletop on its side and simplifying and integrating the objects on its surface. Braque was trained as a classical musician, and he collected musical instruments, which inform the recurring musical references in his artwork.

- **Shape**—An enclosed area with a specific outline that defines a figure or form. Shape is two-dimensional and can be described as geometric (square, triangular, circular, etc.) or organic (irregular and more like what is found in the natural world).
- **Pattern**—The repetition of an element such as color, shape or line.

Discussion Questions

- Do you recognize any objects in the painting? There are several recognizable objects reduced to simplified shapes, including parts of a guitar and lute, pages of a musical score, a cluster of grapes, a tabletop, simulated wood paneling and wallpaper.
- What patterns do you see in the painting?



Activity

- Cut out objects for a **still life** using colored and patterned paper or objects cut from magazines or found online. Next cut up these various components of the **still life** into geometric shapes. Think about breaking down the outlines and boundaries of the objects to integrate them with their surroundings. Then glue the shapes to a colored sheet of paper, creating a **collage** that is a deconstructed **still life** that plays with shape and pattern.

Vocabulary

- **Collage**: a work of art that is made by adhering various materials to a surface.
- **Cubism**: a style of art in which subjects are reduced and fractured into geometric forms and then realigned within a shallow, relief-like space. Cubists also often used multiple or contrasting viewpoints so that several sides of an object can be seen simultaneously.
- **Still life**: the depiction of usually inanimate objects, such as flowers or fruit, by an artist.

Line and Color

Woman with a Book, 1932

Pablo Picasso

Spanish, 1881–1973

Oil on canvas

51 3⁄8 x 38 1⁄2 in. (130.5 x 97.8 cm)

An Exuberant Reinterpretation of a Classic

The pose of Pablo Picasso's *Woman with a Book* is based on a traditional portrait now at the National Gallery in London, [*Madame Moitessier*](#), painted by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres in 1856, and yet there is very little that is conventional about this painting. Using bright, vibrant colors and thick, curving black lines that create **organic shapes**, Picasso reinvented the classic subject and turned it into a dreamy and exuberant portrait of the woman he loved, Marie-Thérèse Walter.



- **Line**—A continuous mark moving through space that can vary in width and length. A line can be straight or curved, thick or thin, and it is often used to define the edges of a form. Lines lead the eye around a composition and can affect the mood of a piece.
- **Color**—Color has three essential characteristics: hue (the name of the color, such as red, blue, yellow, etc.), value (lightness or darkness) and intensity (brightness or dullness). Color can also be described as warm (for instance, red), like fire, or cool (for example, blue), like water.

Discussion Questions

- Unlike Ingres's portrait of Madame Moitessier, this painting does not bear a strong resemblance to its subject, Marie-Thérèse. Why do you think Picasso chose to make this painting abstract rather than **representational**?
- How did Picasso communicate his feelings for Marie-Thérèse in this painting?
- How did Picasso use **line** and **color** to make Marie-Thérèse the center of attention in the painting? (For instance, he framed her curvy figure within the straight angles of the mirror and the window, he used warm colors for the chair to frame the cool colors of her figure and he arranged the composition so that her form nearly fills the canvas.)

Activity

- Notice how Picasso used line to **unify** the painting. There are many shapes and colors in the composition, and yet he tied them all together with thick black lines, creating a **rhythm** throughout the piece. Draw a portrait of the person next to you using only a single line (a **contour drawing**) without looking at your paper. Once you are done, color the picture however you like, disregarding conventions such as your subject's actual hair color in favor of more expressive, imaginative colors that focus the viewer's attention on the sitter and his or her personality.

Vocabulary

- **Contour drawing:** a drawing in which the artist, looking closely at the outline of an object or person, transfers it in one continuous line to paper without looking down to see the outcome of his or her work.
- **Organic shapes:** irregular or asymmetrical forms, more like what you find in nature rather than strictly geometric shapes with straight lines and hard angles.
- **Representational art:** art that depicts subject matter in a realistic manner without simplification, distortion or exaggeration.
- **Rhythm:** the repetition of certain elements of design (such as curved black lines) to create a feeling of organized movement. Rhythm in art creates a pattern of line, color, shape and/or texture similar to a pattern of sound in music.
- **Unity:** harmony among all parts of a work of art that creates a sense of a unified whole, as opposed to a collection of separate parts.