

A Feast of Myths and Legends Teaching Poster



The Judgment of Paris

Ludovico David

Swiss, 1648-1728?, active in Rome and Venice

Oil on Canvas, about 1690

Museum purchase with funds from The Ringling Museum of Art Investment Trust Fund, 1998
SN 11033

Introduction

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Learn that myths are stories with timeless and universal themes.
2. Learn to look more closely and deeply at works of art for details or visual clues.

The Judgment of Paris teaching poster is designed as a resource for a visit to The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art to experience the art galleries and participate in *A Feast of Myths and Legends* theme tour.

During the Museum tour, students will learn more about the Museum's collection of paintings and sculpture that portray mythological figures. These stories may be used as a springboard for further study of mythology in art, as well as in our lives. As your students become more familiar with stories, they may be inspired to do further research into Greek and Roman history and arts. It is important to remember that the making of myths is a human function, and that



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we, just like our ancestors, make myths to structure perspectives, to develop a system of shared beliefs, and to provide a common basis for understanding.

What is a myth?

Myths are stories from ancient and modern times with bits of information, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religion over millennia.

What is a legend?

A legend is an unverifiable popular story handed down from the past.

Ask students:

- What is a myth?*
- What kind of story is a myth?*
- What are the stories about?*
- Who are they about?*
- Who would have told these stories?*
- Can you name some myths that are retold or are still alive today?*
- Why do you think these stories are told again and again?*
- What kind of qualities do the main characters in myths have?*
- What is a hero? What is a heroine?*
- Name some important characteristics of a hero or a heroine?*

About the Art

In this story from Greek mythology, three goddesses appeared in a contest before the Shepherd Paris in order to win a golden apple inscribed, "To the fairest." Each offered a reward: Minerva (center)-Victory in battle; Juno-(right) land and riches; and Venus (left)- the love of the world's most beautiful woman. Paris chose Venus and was awarded Helen of Troy. The elopement of Paris and Helen set off the Trojan War, which led eventually to the founding of Rome.

The Judgment of Paris was a popular subject in Renaissance art because it both lent itself to the representation of female beauty and demonstrated the problem of moral choice. Moralizing interpretations of myth posed questions of whether it better to choose beauty, wisdom, or wealth. However, David's depiction of the scene is comic. Here, Minerva (the goddess of both wisdom and war) seems anxious to retrieve her armor and speed away to begin the conflict between the Trojans and the Greeks. Although Venus has already won the contest, she seems in no hurry to get dressed. It is up to her son Cupid to protect her modesty so he holds up her drapery while smiling at us. Juno's pride is unruffled by her defeat. She looks out of the painting and seems to offer worldly power to the beholder (presumably the Roman aristocrat who is the patron of this painting.)

Ludovico David was well known as a theoretician of art. He was the first editor of Leonardo da Vinci's manuscripts as well as the author of a treatise in which he attacked the art



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establishment of Rome and the emphasis placed there on life drawing and drapery studies. His theory is now seen as anticipating the Rococo age and Romanticism because it proclaimed the supremacy of the artist's imagination and the free will of genius. The humorous sophistication of the current painting presages later light mythologies painted by 18th century Rococo artists such as Francois Boucher.

Mitchell Merling
Curator of the Art Before 1900
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art



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Looking and Discussing

Initial Observation

Encourage students to describe the painting, the figures, the foreground, the background, and the objects and what they might symbolize.

Open Discussion

Begin an open discussion of the painting by asking students to share their impressions of the work and find visual evidence for their statements.

Use the following visual analysis questions to guide your looking:

Description: What do you see?

- Tell students they must discover as much as they can about the painting through careful looking.
- Tell them to pretend they are detectives trying to find out information about the paintings for an important case.

Ask students:

- Who made it?
- How is it made?
- What is the first thing you notice when you look at the painting?
- Does it tell you about a place or time? List everything that you see that tells us about this.

Analysis:

- How is the work organized?
- This process is very detailed and technical. It is based on observations and facts.
- Pretend you are a scientist trying to find out information based on facts.

Ask students:

- How do two different paintings compare?
- How are they similar and how are they different?
- How is the use of color important?
- What kind of emphasis is used in the painting?

Interpretation:

- What is happening?
- Tell students they have to find out what the artist is trying to communicate. Interpretation appeals mostly to our sense and emotions. Ask students to pretend they are newspaper reporters to find out the answers.

Ask students:

- What is the message of the painting?
- What kind of mood or feeling is expressed in the painting?



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-Make a list of all the words that could be used to express the mood found in the painting.

Judgment:

-What do you think of the work of art?

Express your reaction to the painting. This process of evaluation is subjective based on your knowledge and experiences. Pretend you are an art critic judging the artwork.

Ask students:

-Does the painting communicate its intended message?

-Explain how this is accomplished.

-Do you like the painting? Why or why not?

-Do you think it is effective? Why or why not?



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Activities:

1. Read a myth each day

First and foremost, read myths aloud to the students.

2. I'm a Hero! I'm a God! I'm a Goddess!

This is an idea for an extended project. If you could be any hero or heroine, god or goddess, who would you be? Research and make a list of your strengths, powers, and responsibilities. Describe your personality. To whom are you related? Make a family tree. What are your symbols? Ask the art teacher to collaborate on this project. Make swords, symbols, and costumes. After researching, write about one of your adventures. Be sure to edit/ correct your writing. Illustrate the adventure. Make a book of the completed work.

3. Every Culture Has Its Myths

In your library find African, Egyptian, Celtic, Pacific Island, and American Indian myths that have similar themes and morals or attempt to explain the same natural phenomena. Identify the recurring themes.

4. Take on a Timeless Theme

The underlying subjects of myths reveal timeless and universal themes (contests of wit and brawns, tales of mystery, love, hate, courage, good verses evil). Explore man's inclination to question. Ask students to put themselves in the place of the ancient Greeks. Without the benefit of modern scientific methods and understanding, encourage students to attempt to answer the following questions in the form of a myth:

- Why do plants die in the winter?
- Why does the sun rise in the east and set in the west?
- What is rain?
- Where does the wind come from?
- How did the weeping willow get its name?
- How did the giraffe get such a long neck?

5. Create a Myth

In conjunction with the previous exercise, encourage your students to write their own myths. Certainly they will mention questions from their own world and will probably have some very creative answers for them. This exercise will also help you students become aware of their abilities to be creative and to use their imaginations.

6. Write Your Own Personal Myth

Create a personal version of an ancient myth. First, select an interesting myth or legend. Then, invent your own characters. (You can use modern-day heroes, cartoon characters, animals, plants, etc.) As an art production activity, the students can represent a moment in their story using paint, pencils, or clay.



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7. Make a Favorite Myth Your Own

Certain stories or themes become our favorites because we can personally identify with them in some way. Encourage students to think of these favored stories and revise them on a more personal or individual level.



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A Time Line from 1600 to 1800

A time line is a very useful device for graphically illustrating art history or any other kind of history because it gives students a visual representation of consecutive events.

To use a time line, a student must know how to read dates and understand their meaning. The length of the time line, as well as the span of the intervals, are determined by the subject and the period of history which it illustrates.

Since art can be considered a reflection of its time, it is important to study some of the events that occurred in the time period 1600-1800. Tell the students that they will make a time line. Tell the students that the paintings they will see on a tour of the Museum were painted approximately three hundred or more years ago. Invite your students to help construct a class time line.

1600-1800

The Baroque Era

Art historians have named this time period "Baroque." The Baroque era began in Rome at the dawn of the seventeenth century. It spread rapidly through Spain and her colonies, Flanders, Southern Germany, Austria, and France. Much of Baroque art is characterized by intense naturalism and direct emotional appeal.

1605- 1616

Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

1607

Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement in North America is founded.

1609

Galileo invents telescope

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it for himself.

1609-1619

Johannes Kepler, astronomer and mathematician, establishes planetary system.

In theology we must consider the predominance of authority; in philosophy the predominance of research.

1611

King James Bible translated.

1618-1648

Thirty Years' War.

1620

The Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock.



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1623-1662

Blaise Pascal, French scientist and philosopher.

Man's greatness lies in his powers of thought.

1628

William Harvey describes circulation of the blood.

1632-1677

Spinoza, Dutch philosopher.

To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end in life.

1642

Montreal, Canada founded.

1670

Minute hands first appear on watches.

1685

J.S. Bach and George Frederick Handel, German music composers, born.

1687

Sir Isaac Newton, scientist, develops law of gravity and spectral light theory.

If I have ever made any valuable discoveries, it has been owing more to patient attention than to any other talent.

1690

Steam engine invented.

1706

Benjamin Franklin, American statesman and inventor, born.

1707

United Kingdom formed.

1707-1778

Carolus Linnaeus, Swedish botanist.

1719

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

1720-1790 Rococo

Rococo refers to the art of the early eighteenth century, derived from the French *rocaille* (pebble), referring to the small stones and seashells used to decorate the interiors of grottoes.



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Such shell forms are the principal motifs in Rococo ornament. Rococo is pre-eminently a style of interior design, furniture, and accessories employing the characteristic delicate S-curve line. Paintings are characterized by lighter, pastel colors and delicate brush strokes.

1726

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

1732

George Washington, later first president of the United States of America, born.

1743

Thomas Jefferson, later third president of the United States, born.

1756-1763

Seven Years' War: England and Prussia vs. Austria and France, called French and Indian War in America; French defeated in Battle of Quebec, 1769.

1769

James Watt patents steam engine.

1774

Priestley discovers oxygen.

1775

Antonio Vivaldi, Italian music composer, born.