

A Hero's Welcome Teaching Poster



The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek
Peter Paul Rubens and Studio; Flemish, 1577-1640
Oil Canvas, about 1625
Bequest of John Ringling, 1936
SN 212

***Sunshine State Standards**

Language Arts:

Writing (LA.B.1.2, LA.B.2.2)
Listening, Viewing, and Speaking (LA.C.2.2)
Language (LA.D.2.2)
Literature (LA.E.1.2, LA.E.2.2)

Visual Arts:

Skills and Techniques (VA.A.1.2)
Cultural and Historical Connections (VA.C.1.2)

*Standards as of 2005 and subject to change



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Introduction

Objectives

Students will:

1. Recognize that one of the purposes of art is that of telling a story.
2. Learn the characteristics of Baroque art.
3. Write a story based upon a contemporary or ancient hero/heroine.
4. Create a Baroque style "cartoon" of their heroic tale.

The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek teaching poster is designed as a resource for classroom teachers to prepare students for a visit to The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and to gain a better understanding of how works of art can communicate ideas and stories. Learning to look for the story a work of art is communicating can enrich our lives and help us to continue to look for "the story" in all that we see and experience.

This poster will help students understand the important ideas and stories in art from the Baroque period. Students will practice Language Arts writing skills, drafting, revisiting and producing a final story about a hero or heroine. Students will then create their own cartoon, or "visual billboard" to share their stories without words.

About the Art

It is fun to look for the story in a work of art. This takes more than just looking, but really seeing! In order to understand the story an artist wants to tell us, we need to spend a little more time with the work of art, and search for clues that will give meaning to the art.

The story within the painting *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek* comes from an episode in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:17-24). Patriarch Abraham returns victorious from a battle after rescuing his nephew, Lot. Melchizedek, King of Salem and High Priest, offers Abraham bread and wine and blesses him. Abraham in turn offers the High Priest gifts from the spoils of battle.

The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek is a wonderful example of the Baroque style of art. Here are all the elements of a great story, "larger than life" scale, strong emotion, beautiful detail and drama! Below you will find the signature traits of Baroque art. Compare these traits with other art styles. What are the characteristics of the stories in art you discover from other time periods and styles?

Characteristics of the **Baroque** style are:

1. The setting and the people look very natural.
2. The characters seem to be filled with strong emotion.
3. The picture and its characters are filled with exciting movement.
4. The artist uses diagonal lines when creating this painting.
5. The artist uses strong light and dark areas of color in this painting.
6. The painting shows us a theatrical or dramatic moment.



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The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek (175 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 224 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches) is the largest and most magnificent of a series of paintings John Ringling collected for the Museum. This immense painting is actually a cartoon for a tapestry, commissioned as part of the series of tapestries entitled *The Triumph of the Eucharist*. The paintings are so large that the gallery space was specifically designed to accommodate them.

A **cartoon** is a full size preliminary sketch that is copied in a tapestry or fresco. Most cartoons were executed in tempera paint on paper, Rubens chose oil on canvas to give the image permanence.

About the Artist

Peter Paul Rubens was born in 1577 in the German town of Siegen. His formal education took place in Antwerp where he was trained in the classics, Latin and Greek, and became fluent in six languages.

Through extensive travels, Rubens became acquainted with the heads of state and influential people through whom he would gain many important commissions. Rubens was called "A prince of painters and a painter of princes" by an English ambassador of the time.

Rubens became one of the most important artists of the seventeenth century, as well as a skilled diplomat. He traveled easily through the courts of Europe and performed many diplomatic missions on their behalf. He was knighted by both Philip IV of Spain and Charles I of England.

It was through his association with the Spanish monarchs and his patroness, the Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, that he received the commission for *The Triumph of the Eucharist* tapestry series. He was married first to Isabella Brant and then, upon her death, to Helene Fourment. He was the father of eight children. Rubens died in 1640.



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Looking and Discussing

Description: What do you see?

- Tell students to look carefully for clues about the story...there is so much to discover in this painting.
- Describe the people you see. What are they wearing? What are they doing?
- What colors do you see first? Where do you see strong lines? What shapes are repeated?
- What do you see in the background?

Analysis: How is the work organized?

- Where is the action taking place, near or far?
- Who are the two most important figures? How do you know?
- What geometric shape do the two main figures make with their bodies?
- Describe the poses of each figure. Are they mostly still or moving?
- Is this busy or quiet painting?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

- What is special about this meeting between two people?
- Who is standing on a higher level, Abraham or Melchizedek? Why?
- Why did Rubens put Abraham and those on the left side of the painting in Roman battle armor?
- How are Melchizedek and those on the right dressed differently? Why?
- Is there a hero in this story? Who is it? Why?

Judgment: What do you think of the work of art?

- Do you think Rubens did a good job communicating the story of *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek*?
- Do you like this work of art? Why or why not? If you were an art critic, what would you write about this work of art?



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Suggested Classroom Activities

1. Modernize it!

What would be the same or different about a modern heroic cartoon? What would the hero/heroine look like? What would the scenery look like? Would you add modern or space age machines or objects? Write notes, comments and observations about your ideas. Share your ideas with a small group.

2. Who's your hero/heroine?

Artists often create works of art that tell stories about heroes. Some stories are from Bible and others are from mythology or history (such as Saint Paul, Hercules, George Washington).

- Create a short list of who might "star" in your work of art.
- Who would you choose to have as the heroic person in a work of art and why?
- Write a short answer explaining your choice...
- Choose your favorite to be your hero/heroine in a new adventure story.

3. Author, author!

-**Plan** to write an exciting story about your hero/heroine. Will your hero/heroine solve a problem or save someone? Who else will be featured in the story? Where will it take place? Will this be a modern story or a newly discovered ancient tale?

-**Organize your ideas.** Write a first draft for a story that focuses on your hero/heroine. Include an interesting beginning, middle and end and use great descriptive words.

-**Revise and correct your work.**

-**Rewrite your corrected work for a finished story.**

Bravo! You are now the author of an exciting new heroic tale!

-**Read your stories** to one another or to another class or grade level.

4. Brushes please!

-**Discuss** as a class what it would be like to create a very large cartoon like *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek*. Have the class **vote** on the best idea for a painting and who will head the studio of workers as the master artist.

-**Develop the idea** for the cartoon, by creating sketches that tell the story without words.

-Choose the sketch that does the best job of illustrating the story.

-The artist and studio assistant will **sketch the idea** on several large pieces of roll paper.

-The master artist will then assign jobs to **complete the cartoon** in tempera paint (or media of choice)

-**Display the finished art** in a prominent place in your school.

-A variation of the project is to have three or four small groups work on cartoons for a related series.

5. The Reviews Are In!

-**Invite another class or grade level to write** about your cartoon(s).

-**Publish** the reviews in the school newspaper or post near the artwork.



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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.

In the time period between 1600 and 1800, many Baroque artists created works of art:

- to communicate and teach stories or ideas
- to inspire.

Art in this time period would not have been in museums but in churches, palaces, important buildings or homes. These works of art were created to serve a purpose in society.

1577

Peter Paul Rubens is born.

1605

Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, the first modern novel is published.

1607

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

1610

Galileo sees the moons of Jupiter through his telescope.

1614

John Napier discovers the mathematical principle of logarithms.



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1620

The Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, after a three month voyage on the *Mayflower*.

1625

Peter Paul Rubens' *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek* is painted.

1640

Rubens dies.

1643

The Taj Mahal in India is completed.

1667

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, widely recognized as the greatest epic poem in English, is published.

1670

Minute hands first appear on watches.

1681

Pennsylvania is founded by William Penn.

1706

Benjamin Franklin, American statesman and inventor, is born.

1726

Jonathan Swift writes *Gulliver's Travels*.

1732

George Washington, first president of the United States, is born.

1743

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

1769

James Watt patents the steam engine.

1775

The American Revolution begins.