

Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, 1440-1445, fresco painting  
Renaissance painting



**Key Facts:**

**Artist:** Fra Angelico, meaning “angelic brother,” was originally named Guido di Pietro. He lived from 1400-1455 in Italy, working mostly in Florence. He was a Dominican Friar (monk).

**Art period/style:** Early Renaissance (1400-1500), Florence, Italy

**Key characteristics of that period:** Artists started to break away from traditions of the Gothic and Byzantine styles (flat, elongated figures). Early Renaissance art had more naturalistic and life-like figures. The figures also started to have a sense of psyche or emotion. The word “Renaissance” means rebirth. This era was centered on a rebirth of Classical ideas and styles from ancient Greece and Rome. Artwork of the Renaissance was balanced, calm, harmonious, and had a sense of naturalism. The compositions were generally balanced and had limited emotion, and there was a focus on studying anatomy. Linear perspective was also invented during the Renaissance and added to the realistic sense of space in art.

**Techniques:** *Buon fresco*, or true fresco. Painting. This involves mixing up plaster, spreading it on the wall or ceiling, and then painting with pigment directly onto the wet plaster. Then, as the plaster dries, the paintings become part of the wall. In these paintings, he began to use the Renaissance technique of *chiaroscuro*. Chiaroscuro is the modeling of light and dark. This can be seen in the highlights and shadows on Adam’s body. This technique makes his body look muscular, realistic, and even three-dimensional. He also continued to use gold leaf in his paintings, an element of Gothic painting that was carried over into some early Renaissance art.

## Some Background:

Fra Angelico was one of the greatest 15th-century Italian painters. His work has a serene religious style with strong Classical influences. He painted many altarpieces and frescoes for the church of San Marco in Florence.

Two strands were interwoven in Angelico's life at Fiesole: the pious life of a friar and continuous activity as a painter. Vasari described him as "saintly and excellent," and, not long after his death, he was called *angelico* ("angelic") because of his moral virtues.

His figures often had halos around their heads to show their virtue and inner goodness radiating out. He used gold leaf to make these halos.

## The Five Core Habits:

Practice the *Five Core Habits of Grammar* with art - NAMES (found on pgs. 18-19 in the Foundation Guide). Part of teaching is learning to ask a student good questions. This is a great activity for looking at art! Plus, you get to sneak in a little art history and technique along with.

# 5 CORE HABITS



### NAMING

1. What do you call this?
2. Where does this name come from?
3. Are there any other names for this?



### ATTENDING

1. What are the parts of this?
2. Where do you usually see this?
3. What makes this special?



### MEMORIZING

1. What would help you memorize this? An acronym, a song, a chant, a picture, etc.
2. What did you already know about this?



### EXPRESSING

1. Could you draw a picture of this or write a song about it? Could you act it out?
2. How does this make you feel?



### STORYTELLING

1. Can you tell me a story about this?
2. Can I tell you a story about this?

N names (name things specifically)

A attending (look and listen carefully. Also- taste, smell, touch. Compare things.)

M memorizing (soak up facts and ideas. Memorize facts and relations of things to recall, connect, and expand new ideas to older ones from past memorizations.)

E expressing (express ideas creatively- reciting, drawing, singing, dancing)

S storytelling (hear and tell stories)

This helps us grasp the basic elements, vocabulary, and rules of any subject, and helps us progress more quickly toward comprehension and creativity in future studies.

Using the image on the first page, go through these questions:

## N – Names:

- Name the artist, era/art style, and technique
- What can you find? Name the things you see
- Who are the two people? What are they doing?
- What colors are used?
- What kind of textures do you see? (marble, leaves, hair, skin, grass, feathers, wood, etc.)
- Where are they?
- What is on their heads?



## A – Attending

- What do you see?
- What do the people in the painting see?
- What do they hear? Smell? Taste?
- What might they feel/touch?
- What emotions might Mary be feeling?
- What things can you compare?
- What do you notice about the sun?
- What other things do you see? (plants, fruit, animals, people, etc.)

Attending to details... Here is a detail from the painting. What else can you notice now?



## M – Memorize

Memorize the artist, time period, and facts about the artwork/technique.

## E – Express

Express your thoughts and ideas about the art.

You can also express by trying the technique on your own. Finding a fresco project to do would be one option. You could also do a chalk pastel drawing in his style – focusing on the soft blending and naturalism. Having a calm, peaceful feeling is the goal. You could use gold leaf, aluminum foil, a metallic paper, or a metallic paint to create halos on the figures. You could even find gold metallic cupcake papers to use.



Link for pastel resist project:

<http://www.thatartistwoman.org/2008/12/pastel-resist-madonna-art-project.html>

## **S – Story telling**

Tell the story about this work of art. Fra Angelico's, *The Annunciation*

Refer to image on first page

- This fresco painting was painted on a wall inside of the monastery of San Marco in Florence, Italy. These paintings inside of the monastery were created to help the monks focus on prayer.
- Mary is on the right, and the angel Gabriel is on the left. Both figures have halos.
- A common subject in Christian art, this painting depicts the moment when Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear the son of God.
- On the left, there is a fenced off garden. This is symbolic for Mary's virginity.
- If you look at the columns, you can notice a light source. The left side of the columns are bright with highlight, and the right side of the columns have shadow. This adds to the sense of naturalism that Renaissance artists loved. His sense of naturalism is also seen in the folds of the clothing, the texture of the hair, and their soft skin.
- There is a contrast between the figures. The angel is of the divine, entering the earthly realm. He has gold embroidered clothing and very colorful wings; while Mary, dressed humbly, sits humbly on a wooden stool.
- Space doesn't make sense. Fra Angelico did not use linear perspective in this painting. The figures are also too large for the space they are in.
- The architectural setting reflects Renaissance architecture of the time with columns and round arches.