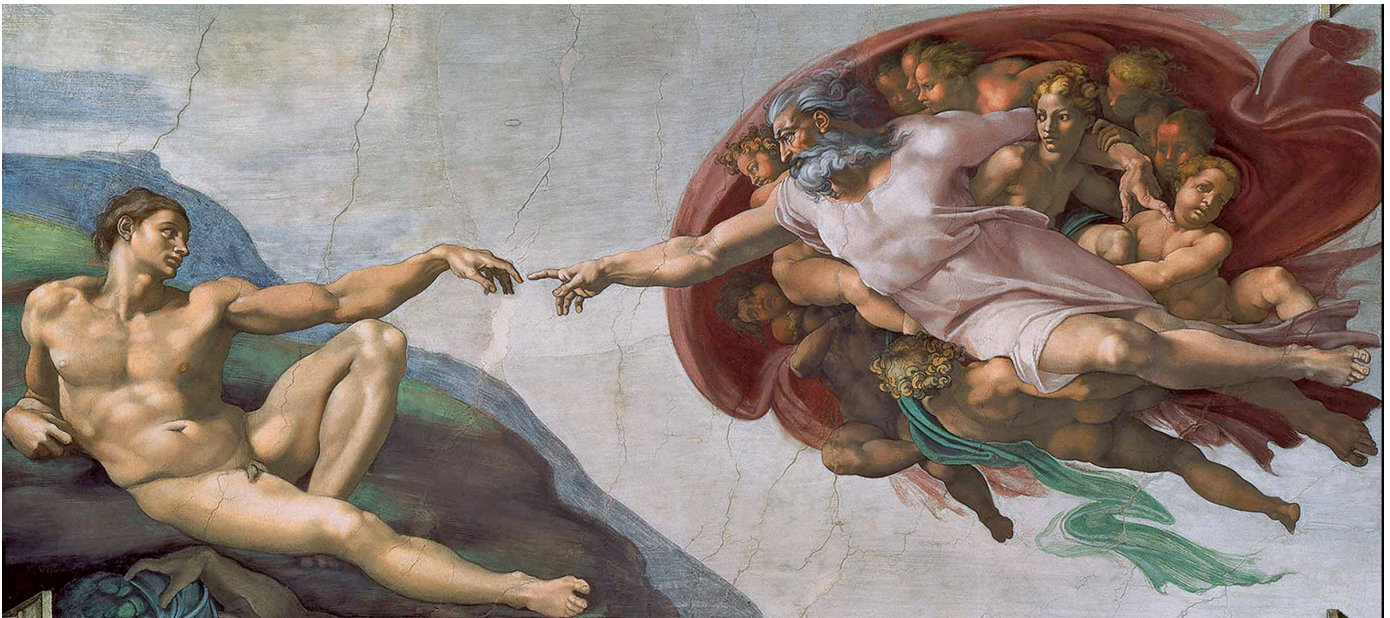


Michelangelo. *The Creation of Adam*, 1508–12  
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Italy



**Key Facts:**

**Artist:** Michelangelo (full name: Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni), lived 1475-1564, Italian. A sculptor, painter and architect, Michelangelo was one of the leading Renaissance artists from Italy. He is famous for his marble sculptures and also his fresco paintings in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome, Italy.

**Art period/style:** Renaissance (specifically High Renaissance style - 1490s – 1520s), centered in Rome, Italy

**Key characteristics of that period:** 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. The invention of the printing press during the Renaissance changed the world and also brought new art techniques for artists to work with such as woodcut and engraving.

**Techniques:** Michelangelo’s paintings in the Sistine Chapel were done in a technique called *buon fresco*, or true fresco. 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 used 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.

**Some Background:**

Painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was a job that he was not excited about. Pope Julius II commissioned him to paint the ceiling, and he reluctantly accepted. I mean, who can say no to the pope? So, for four years, he was on his back on scaffolding, painting 68 feet above the floor.

He had to address the issues of: the ceiling's dimensions (5,800 square feet), its height (70 feet), and the complicated perspective problems of the vault's height and curve. He also was inexperienced with the fresco technique.

With over 300 figures, the entire fresco depicts the creation, fall, and redemption of humanity (a theme picked by pope Julius II with input from Michelangelo). The narrative presents a chronology of Christian history, and the Renaissance ideas about Christian history: such as the conflict between good and evil and between the energy of youth and wisdom of age.

Michelangelo painted with a sculptor's eye for how light and shadow communicate volume and surface. Many of the figures look like relief sculptures or freestanding statues even though they are two-dimensional.

### 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 is happening?
- What story is being depicted?
- What colors are used? What kind of textures do you see?

**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 do you feel?
- What things can you compare?
- How did he make the bodies look so three-dimensional?
- Why are there cracks in the painting?

**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 of painting on your own. Fresco painting can be a tricky technique to try on your own... However, here are a few fun ideas.

Here is a fun project for trying fresco painting at home:

<https://www.mypiccoloitalliano.com/post/italian-renaissance-fresco-painting-for-children>

Or this one:

<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/fresco-painting>

If this seems too messy, complicated, or intimidating, another idea is to put a large sheet of paper on the ceiling or even tape it to the bottom of a table and have the kids draw/paint upside down, just as Michelangelo did when working on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.



Finally, another fun project could be to have them draw the hands and color or paint them. This famous image is seen reproduced on many items around the world. Have them blend to create highlights and shadows as they draw or paint, using the chiaroscuro technique of Michelangelo.



### **S – Story telling**

Tell the story about this work of art.

First, some context for this painting inside the Sistine Chapel: Here you can see part of the fresco paintings on the ceiling, and also the *Last Judgement* painting on the back wall.



Here you can see all of the panels on the ceiling.

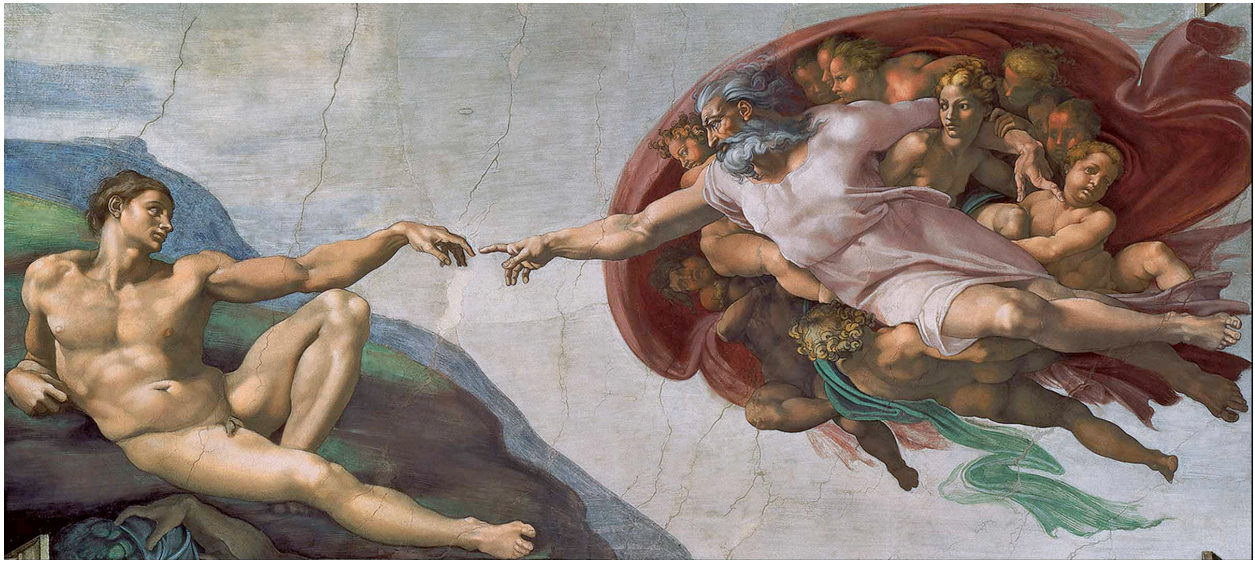
The main strip down the middle of the ceiling shows 9 scenes from the book of Genesis.



This map shows what is depicted in each image:



And now the story:



- *The Creation of Adam* is one of the most famous images from these fresco paintings.
- The focal point and most dramatic part of the painting is where the two hands almost touch.
- God and Adam confront each other. Life leaps to Adam like a spark from the extended hand of God, which recalls the communication between the gods and heroes in the classical myths that Renaissance humanists admired so much.
- Under God's left arm is a female figure. It was traditionally believed that she represented Eve. Now, many think that she is the Virgin Mary, with the Christ child. This would suggest that Michelangelo incorporated one of the essential tenets of Christian faith into his painting – the belief that Adam's Original Sin eventually led to the sacrifice of Christ, which made possible the redemption of all humankind.
- The viewer's eye moves from God's hand on the right to Adam's on the left, and then Adam's arms leads the eye back to the right, along God's right arm, shoulder, and left arm, to his finger pointing at the baby Christ.
- Over time, the plaster walls have cracked, which is why you might notice cracks in the painting.
- Michelangelo painted in a way that made his figures look muscular and three-dimensional, as if they were sculptures. He did this through a common technique of the Renaissance called *chiaroscuro*. This is a blending technique in drawing or painting, where the tones gradually shift from light to dark, creating a three-dimensional looking image... just like how you would notice light as it affects a surface- giving highlights and shadows.