

Art/Western Cultural History essays

Essay #2: Compare and contrast another painting from this time period to van Eyck's

4 paragraphs: an introduction paragraph, a paragraph about the similarities between the two paintings, a paragraph about the differences between the two paintings, and a conclusion paragraph.

Use the handouts (in your art binder) about the art elements, art study with the 5 common topics, and the art terminology for analyzing art. These handouts will help guide your thoughts.

Van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434, oil painting on wood panel, Netherlands



This close up shows the artist's presence in this scene, both in the text above the mirror ("Van Eyck was here, 1434") and in the reflection in the mirror itself.



About Van Eyck:

Van Eyck was one of the leading artists in northern Europe during the Early Renaissance. He painted many religious paintings and portraits.

Jan van Eyck is credited with originating a style of painting characterized by realistic depictions of surface effects and natural light. This was made possible by using an oil medium, which allowed the building up of paint in translucent layers, or glazes.

Van Eyck used oil paint with meticulous attention to record exact surface appearances, which became the hallmark of Flemish painting in the 15th c.

Oil Paint

- allowed for exact detail & building up transparent layers
- allowed for richer colors and gave paintings an intense tonality, the illusion of glowing light, and enamel-like surfaces. This differed from the high-keyed color, sharp light, and matte/dull surface of tempera paintings.

(Notice how much richer this painting is than the Berlinghiero painting from 200 years before.)

The heart of the Renaissance was Florence, Italy. But Flemish artists were considered among the best in Europe. Flanders was the commercial center of Northern Europe, rivaling Italian city-states of Florence and Venice. Flemish paintings were known for their detail, color, and textures. There was a growing interest in secular art in Northern Europe.

Leading figures of the first generation of Northern Renaissance/Flemish painters:

Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, & Rogier van der Weyden

Arnolfini Portrait

- a secular painting with religious overtones/secular setting with sacred meaning
- depicts a wealthy cloth merchant
- there are luxury objects (lavish bed hangings, extravagant clothing, fur, oriental rug, the chandelier)
- "Jan van Eyck has been here 1434" on back wall
- Almost every object in the scene conveys the sanctity of the event, specifically the holiness of matrimony. The painting's purpose seems to have been to record and sanctify this marriage.
 - o Crystal prayer beads next to the mirror – imply the couple's piety
 - o The mirror is a symbol of the all-seeing eye of God
 - o The mirror is framed with a circular cycle of scenes from the Passion of Christ, and represent God's promise of salvation for the figures reflected in the mirror.
 - o Giovanni's cast aside shoes indicate that this event is taking place on holy ground.
 - o The dog symbolizes fidelity (and its ornamental breed expresses wealth)
 - o The bedpost has a tiny statue of Saint Margaret, patron saint of childbirth. This implies the desire for a healthy family.
 - o The woman appears pregnant, but probably is not. The fashionable voluminous costume of the time makes her look so; she also seems to be holding her dress up. This could be a hint of fertility, along with the oranges on the windowsill that refer to fertility.
 - o The whiskbroom is symbolic of domestic care.

- The single candle burning symbolizes the presence of God
- The placement of the figures may suggest conventional gender roles: the woman stands near the bed and well into the room, the man stands near the open window, symbolic of the outside world. Two additional figures are reflected in the mirror, one was the artist himself.
- It was thought that this was a marriage portrait painted to secure the early transfer of dowry from the woman's father to the future husband. Now, it is believed to depict the Italian merchant Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini and his significant other (Costanza Trenta or Jeanne de Cename) in their home in the Flemish city of Bruges.
- We see the pair holding hands in the center of the image: at least, the man holds his wife's limp hand. The person's elevated hand, suggesting he is swearing an oath, and the female's orchestrated robe add to the pose's formality.

Close-up: here you can see the scenes of the passion of Christ around the mirror, with the crucifixion at the top.





Compare this work to another similar early northern European Renaissance painting.

Talk about similarities and difference in:

- Medium/technique
- Composition (are both arranged similarly? Symmetrical? Same size figures? Same number of figures? Same arrangement of figures?)
- Use of colors
- Are objects in the painting the same? Are there different objects?
- How about symbolism?
- Their treatment of space?
- How about details and texture?
- Are there things going on in the world that impacted both artists?
- How about their worldview?

Hint: Include the two images in your paper (two additional pages). And give the information for each painting under each image. When writing about art, visuals are helpful!

Below are some ideas for paintings to compare to van Eyck's. These are just ideas or suggestions. You could find many other artworks to compare to van Eyck.

The leading figures of the first generation of Northern Renaissance/Flemish painters were van Eyck, Robert Campin, and Rogier van der Weyden. So, finding a piece by Campin or van der Weyden would be perfect. Petrus Christus is another artist to look into for your comparison. There are quite a few amazing early Renaissance Italian artists listed below to look into as well.

Robert Campin, *Mérode Altarpiece (Triptych of the Annunciation)*, c. 1425–1428.
center 25 1/4" x 24 7/8", each wing approx. 25 3/8" x 10 7/8"



Robert Campin, *Werl Altarpiece*, 1438



Rogier van der Weyden, *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin*, c. 1435-40



Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in His Shop*, 1449, oil on wood, approx. 3' 3" X 2' 10"



Piero della Francesca, *The Duke and Duchess of Urbino*, c. 1465-1472
Tempera paint on wood
(This was an Italian artist, which contrasts the Flemish artists above)



Other early Renaissance painters to consider:

Hugo van der Goes

Hans Memling

Sandro Botticelli

Piero del Pollaiuolo

Fra Angelico

Filippo Lippi

Art comparison chart

These are just a few questions to get you thinking about how to compare the works of art. All of these questions may not apply, and there might be additional questions that are relevant; this is not a complete list. The information above, your own observations, and with additional research you can complete this chart to help with your essay. I have *started* the chart to help get you going. Spend some time truly observing each work and fill in the chart.

	Artwork #1 Artist: Jan van Eyck Title: <i>Arnolfini Portrait</i>	Artwork #2 Artist: Title:
Describe the composition of each work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symmetrical composition with a figure on each side of the composition - painted inside a Flemish home 	
Describe the use of color in each piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rich red and greens - warm browns and earth tones 	
Describe the use of values, light, and shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - daylight illuminates the interior, coming in the window - natural highlights and shadows - full range of values 	
Describe the use of space. Is it flat or more three-dimensional and realistic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - realistic sense of space in the room - objects get smaller as they recede in space - the window, bed, and floor planks are painted with perspective... they appear to go back to a vanishing point 	
What is the story, meaning, mood, emotions, etc.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - serious mood, not high emotion, calm - wedding portrait, tons of symbolism (see description above) 	
What/who is depicted? What is happening in the image?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is unknown but assumed to be Giovanni Arnolfini and Costanza Trenta or Jeanne de Cename - marriage vows? An oath? (see details above) 	

<p>Under what conditions was this artwork created? (for example, was a war going on, persecution, were the arts thriving...?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renaissance in northern Europe - growing interest in secular art - still strong influence of the church in culture - The arts were thriving under various patrons (wealthy or the church) 	
<p>What was the worldview or prevailing philosophy at the time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Catholic/Christianity - Humanism 	
<p>Is there any symbolism used?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tons! (see above description) 	
<p>Is there anything about the artist that influenced their decisions making? For example, were they a Christian? Were they commissioned by someone and told what to create?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 	
<p>Is there a focal point in each?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 	
<p>Did a previous art style influence this artwork?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 	
<p>Do these two works of art have a direct relationship to each other?</p>		

Essay Outline

After completing the chart, you will have it to refer to for writing your essay.

Think of your thesis. Was one artist more of a master? Did one artist impact the world more? Or did one of the artworks have more of an impact on you? Why? Or are both artists great examples of a certain style or technique? Did an event in the world or certain politics play a major role in how the artwork was made?

Thesis:

Introduction paragraph:

Do some research. Introduce each artist. Where are they from? What time period?

Some ideas to consider including: How were they trained? Did both artists work in the same style? Did they have similar artistic goals, styles, patrons, etc.? Was there something going on in the world that affected both artists? Briefly introduce each painting. What is depicted in each? What is the technique in each? What is the style for each?

Similarities paragraph:

Use the questions on page 2 and the comparison chart to put the similarities together.

Differences paragraph:

Use the questions on page 2 and the comparison chart to put the differences together.

Conclusion paragraph:

Wrap it up. Restate thesis. Back it up. Give context/circumstances to each artist and artwork (what was going on in the world, what were the artists beliefs, etc.). How did this relate to the artwork and artist? Did it impact their artwork? Did it dictate what they painted and why? Did a previous art style or artist influence these artists? Or did either of these artists influence the art world?