

Art/Western Cultural History essays

Essay #3: Compare and contrast another painting from this time period to Michelangelo's

4 paragraphs: an introduction paragraph, a paragraph about the similarities between the two sculptures, a paragraph about the differences between the two sculptures, 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.

Michelangelo, *Pieta*, 1498-1499, marble sculpture
High Renaissance



Compare this work to another similar Renaissance sculpture.

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?)
- How does light affect the sculptures?
- How about symbolism?
- How about details and texture? (skin, fabric, hair, etc.)
- Are there things going on in the world that impacted both artists?
- How about their worldview?
- The meaning and story behind each sculpture?
- Treatment of space (is this sculpture designed for frontal viewing- the viewer only needs to stand in front of the piece; or is it a sculpture that requires or invites the viewer to walk around it to see the entire composition?)

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!

About Michelangelo:

- Michelangelo lived 1475-1564
- One of the leading artists on the High Renaissance in Italy. He was a sculptor, painter, and architect. He was a devout Catholic.
- Perfectibility of the sculpted form was a metaphor for the human ability to strive for perfection in a virtuous life. The sculptor's ability to release artistic form from a stone block was equivalent to the discovering and expressing the moral truth of the soul.

Pieta

- This was Michelangelo's 1st masterpiece, while in his early 20s. Carved with unforgettable emotion, he transformed marble into flesh, hair, clothing... with a sensitivity for texture (not seen before). You can even imagine the different types of fabric/material by how he carved them. (The cloth over Jesus' body is clearly a thinner material than the robe of Mary.)
- He captured the tender sadness of the beautiful and youthful mother Mary. Mary cradling Christ's dead body captures the sadness and beauty of the young Virgin but was controversial because Mary seems younger than her son. Michelangelo explained that Mary's ageless beauty was a vital part of her purity and virginity.
- The Pietà was a popular subject among northern European artists. It means "Pity" or "Compassion," and represents Mary sorrowfully contemplating the dead body of her son which she holds on her lap.
- This sculpture was commissioned by a French Cardinal in Rome.
- Imagine how sculptures like this are made. It was a messy, rather loud process (which is one of the reasons that Leonardo claimed that painting was superior to sculpture!). Just like painters often mixed their own paint, Michelangelo forged many of his own tools, and often participated in the quarrying of his marble — a dangerous job.
- You can sense the weight of Jesus' dead body. Notice how Mary's arm is holding up Jesus' shoulder. As Mary holds Jesus' body, she is almost presenting his body to the viewer as the path to redemption/salvation.

- When we look at the extraordinary representation of the human body here, we remember that Michelangelo, like Leonardo before him, had dissected cadavers to understand how the body worked.
- The sculpture balances the Renaissance ideals of classical beauty with naturalism.
- This sculpture has the stable, symmetrical, triangular/pyramid composition that is typical of the Renaissance.



Ideas for sculptures to compare to Michelangelo's:

Look up sculptures by these Renaissance artists:

- Donatello, Verrocchio, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Giovanni Pisano

OR

You can also look for sculptures by subject:

- Madonna and Child
- the Deposition (when they took Jesus down from the cross)
- other Pietà sculptures, such as the Rottgen Pietà or Vesperbild Pietà



Michelangelo, *Deposition*



Vesperbild Pietà, 1375-1400, German

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: Michelangelo Title: <i>Pieta</i>	Artwork #2 Artist: Title:
Describe the composition of each work	- Symmetrical - triangular composition	
Describe the use of color in each piece	- no color, just the color of the marble	
Describe the use of values, light, and shadow	- the sculpture is evenly lit, no dramatic shadows	
Describe the use of space. Is it flat or more three-dimensional and realistic?	- the sculpture itself is 3-D - realistic space	
What is the story, meaning, mood, emotions, etc.?	- sorrowful mood - Mary holds the dead body of her son, Jesus - the story of the Crucifixion and salvation through Jesus	
What/who is depicted? What is happening in the image?	- Mary & Jesus - Mary holds the dead body of Jesus after he was taken down from the cross - The viewer is to contemplate the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins	

<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"> - A commission for the Catholic Church - thriving arts in Italy during the Renaissance - This was created about 18 years before the Reformation 	
<p>What was the worldview or prevailing philosophy at the time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christian/Catholic church dominated - Humanism 	
<p>Is there any symbolism used?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salvation from sins (see description above) 	
<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"> - The statue was commissioned for the French Cardinal Jean de Bilhères, who was a representative in Rome. It was made for the cardinal's funeral monument. - The cardinals, bishops, and popes who commissioned art often gave input to the artist about the artwork, influencing how it was created (do some research) 	
<p>Is there a focal point in each?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mary & Jesus <p>Jesus is more of a focal point since Mary is looking at him. This directs our attention to him as well</p>	
<p>Did a previous art style influence this artwork?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - classical sculptures from ancient Greece influenced Renaissance art 	
<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?