

Art/Western Cultural History essays

Essay #7: Compare and contrast another painting from this time period to Vermeer'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.

Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, 1657-1658
Dutch Baroque



Compare this work to another similar Baroque painting.

Talk about similarities and difference in:

- Medium/technique
- Composition (are both arranged similarly? Symmetrical? Asymmetrical? Same size figures? Same number of figures? Same arrangement of figures?)
- Use of colors
- Use of light and shadow
- Do they appeal to the emotions?
- Are objects in the painting the same? Are there different objects?
- How about symbolism?
- Their treatment of space?
- Are there things going on in the world that impacted both artists?
- How about their worldview?
- The meaning and story behind each painting?

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!

Here are some other Baroque artists to research for comparing to Vermeer:

- Frans Hals
- Jan Steen
- Pieter de Hooch
- Judith Leyster
- Gerrit Dou
- Cornelis Jacobsz, *The Housemaid*
- Joachim Anthonisz, *The Kitchen Maid*
- Baroque Genre painting and interior scenes

Genre painting- depicts aspects of everyday life by portraying ordinary people engaged in common activities.

Another direction you could go for a great contrast would be Baroque paintings of the Counter-Reformation. These Baroque paintings often had dramatic and emotional subjects, religious subjects, dramatic lighting (tenebrism), twisting figures, etc.

- Caravaggio
- Peter Paul Rubens
- Artemisia Gentileschi
- Diego Velazquez
- Rembrandt van Rijn

About Vermeer:

Jan Vermeer was the leading Dutch (Netherlands) painter of interior scenes. Vermeer and his contemporaries composed quiet, lavish interiors of Dutch middle-class and upper-class dwellings. These paintings offer the viewer glimpses into their lives, and often have symbolism. Women are the primary occupants of Vermeer's homes, and his paintings are highly idealized depictions of the social values of Dutch citizens. The women in Vermeer's paintings often are unaware of the viewer.

Vermeer was a master of light. He had an eye for how light is reflected on various surfaces. Through the use of perspective and light, he rendered his interior scenes convincingly, creating a realistic sense of space. He realized that shadows are not colorless and dark, that adjoining colors affect each other, and that light is composed of colors.

As an artist of northern Europe, the Reformation had an impact on his art and life. Martin Luther and John Calvin promoted the importance and sanctity of ordinary work. Reformers also protested religious art, so scenes of everyday people and domestic life was common. Vermeer painted ordinary work in a heavenly light.

The Milkmaid

Here, the woman is focused in her work as she pours milk into a bowl, unaware of the viewer. Unlike many other works of art during the Baroque era, Vermeer's paintings have subdued emotion. However, many of his compositions are asymmetrical, which is in line with other Baroque compositions.

The maidservant is working in the kitchen of a wealthy family. She pours milk into a bowl, and is entirely absorbed in her work. Except for the stream of milk, everything else is still. Vermeer took this simple everyday activity and made it the subject of an impressive painting – the woman stands like a statue in the brightly lit room. Vermeer masterfully painted various textures (rough bread, glazed ceramic pots, fabric, etc.). Light from the window floods the room. The sense of light also gives weight to the figure. The focal point is the milk pouring from the pitcher into the bowl.



This is an asymmetrical composition. The objects on the table lead the viewer's eyes to the maid's face. This diagonal line creates the asymmetrical composition. Also, the fact that there are more objects on the left side of the composition, create the asymmetrical composition (the window on the left, table and objects on the left, basket hanging on the wall on the left...).

Other artists who painted housemaids often created the maids to be objects of desire. They would look at the viewer, and engage them with a flirty smile. But Vermeer's maid is focused in her work, unaware of the viewer. This maid represents temperance, purity, and hard work.

Other things to notice:

On the floor behind her is a foot stove. There is a basket of bread on the table. There are cupids on the tiles on the bottom of the wall. There are nails in the wall.

Close up:

Here you can see his skill with creating texture as well as the light and shadows. Being an oil painting, you can also notice the cracked surface.



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: Johannes Vermeer Title: <i>The Milkmaid</i>	Artwork #2 Artist: Title:
Describe the composition of each work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asymmetrical... see description above - Diagonals - More weight on left side - one figure dominates the composition 	
Describe the use of color in each piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bright colors - yellows and rich blues dominate - also, greens and reds - naturalistic colors 	
Describe the use of values, light, and shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brightly lit scene - Great sense of highlights and shadows - Full range of values - He beautifully captured highlights and how light hits the objects 	
Describe the use of space. Is it flat or more three-dimensional and realistic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the highlights and shadows give a sense of weight and depth - use of perspective to create space - realistic scene/room - three-dimensional illusion 	
What is the story, meaning, mood, emotions, etc.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - serene scene, calm - virtues - hard work - everyday life 	
What/who is depicted? What is happening in the image?	<p>A maidservant of a wealthy home in Netherlands. She prepares milk and bread in the kitchen.</p> <p>There are other objects in the composition (see above description)</p>	

Under what conditions was this artwork created? (for example, was a war going on, persecution, were the arts thriving...?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reformation & Counter-Reformation - Dutch Golden Age - Scientific Revolution (research these and how they may have impacted the artwork and artist)	
What was the worldview or prevailing philosophy at the time?	- Reformation in northern Europe - Christianity	
Is there any symbolism used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cupids on tiles - hard work - milk or bread? - the rich blue paint color that was used 	
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?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protestant country - Vermeer had a patron, but he also preferred to make his own paintings and sell them to art dealers 	
Is there a focal point in each?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the milk pouring - also the maid's face 	
Did a previous art style influence this artwork?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influenced by Pieter de Hooch - Due to the fact that Vermeer married a Catholic, he was greatly inspired by Italian masters such as Caravaggio 	
Do these two works of art have a direct relationship to each other?		

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?