

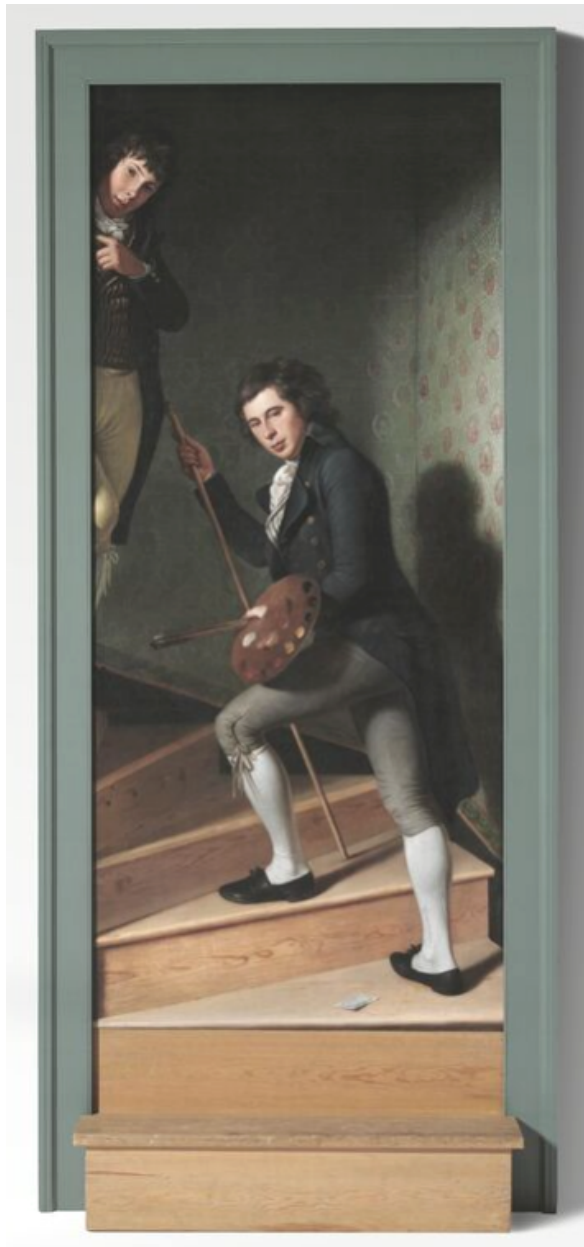
## Art/Western Cultural History essays

Essay #8: Compare and contrast another painting from this time period to Peale'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.

Charles Willson Peale, *The Staircase Group*, 1795  
American Neoclassicism



Compare this work to another similar Neoclassical 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 Neoclassical artists to research for comparing to Peale:

American:

- John Trumbull
- John Singleton Copley
- Benjamin West
- Gilbert Stuart

European Neoclassical artists:

- Jacques-Louis David
- Angelica Kauffmann
- Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

Charles Willson Peale:

Peale is best remembered for his portrait paintings of leading figures of the American Revolution, and for establishing one of the first museums in the United States. He painted portraits of George Washington and other Revolutionary War–era figures. He served with Washington for three years in the Continental army during the American Revolutionary War, and then settled in Philadelphia, where he founded the nation’s first museum, which later became the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Married three times, Peale sired seventeen children, five of whom—Franklin, Raphaele, Rembrandt, Rubens, and Titian Ramsey—became noted artists.

During and after the Revolution Peale combined his artistic career with Whig politics. He served with the Pennsylvania militia in battles against the British, carrying his miniature case to paint portraits of fellow officers. Peale was a friend of many intellectual and political leaders and eventually painted images of many of the heroes of the war and the new republic, including Washington, Thomas Jefferson, David Rittenhouse, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Benjamin Franklin. These paintings were traditional compositions with serious countenances. He was committed to views of the Enlightenment (science and reason above emotion and religion). Peale was also very connected politically. He painted the social, political, and economic elite of his day: these sitters included scientists, presidents, and prominent merchants.

### The Staircase Group:

This illusionistic portrait showcases Peale's artistic skills. At the same time, he wished to represent the roles played by two of his sons at Peale's Museum, the first American museum created to educate and entertain the public. Titian Ramsay Peale gestures at the top of the stairs as his older brother, Raphaelle, an artist with his palette in hand, strides upward just above a real step attached to the base of the canvas. The life-size portrait is known to have startled and delighted visitors, reputedly even George Washington.

Even into the 19th century, full-length portraits were typically reserved for depictions of the aristocracy, religious figures, and occasionally war heroes. It would have been unusual to see a full-length portrait of lesser status.

The painting has subdued colors. Peale painted with extreme realism called *trompe l'oeil*, French for to "trick or fool the eye." To add to the realism and sense of space, Peale added an actual wooden step at the bottom of the painting. The figures are dressed in the fashionable attire of the day. This tall painting has an asymmetrical composition. The main figure is centered, but the other figure is on the left side of the composition, putting more visual weight on the left side. The viewer's eye moves from the bottom right corner of the composition up to the upper left corner.



A paper note seems to have fallen from one of the son's pockets onto the staircase. While the device emphasizes the realism of the scene (the urge is to reach out and pick it up), a closer look reveals that it is an entrance ticket to Peale's Museum (though the ticket is hard to make out, viewers in 1795 would have recognized it at the original showing).

Believing that education was the backbone of a healthy democracy, Peale had established his own museum at Philosophical Hall, in a building next to the Pennsylvania State House (today known as Independence Hall).

### American Neoclassicism:

The American Revolution and newly created republic inspired appreciation for the classical style. This new government was similar to the republic of ancient Rome, so ancient Rome was seen as an ideal and was a model for both government and art. The art of this time reflected the style and characteristics of the classical period. There is a sense of seriousness, natural modeling and shading, and even a glorification of leadership. Art of this time was usually symmetrical and balanced, reserved, and reflected the spirit of the age which was logic and reason above emotions.

## 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: Charles Willson Peale  Title: <i>The Staircase Group</i>	Artwork #2 Artist:  Title:
Describe the composition of each work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tall, skinny composition</li> <li>- Asymmetrical composition</li> </ul>	
Describe the use of color in each piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- naturalistic, subdued colors</li> </ul>	
Describe the use of values, light, and shadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clear light source that creates highlights and shadows on the figures</li> <li>- the dark shadows could be an influence from the Baroque era</li> <li>- both chiaroscuro and tenebrism (looks these up and explain)</li> </ul>	
Describe the use of space. Is it flat or more three-dimensional and realistic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- very realistic illusion of three-dimensional space</li> <li>- trompe l'oeil</li> <li>- perspective</li> <li>- adding the wooden step to the bottom enhanced the illusion of space</li> </ul>	
What is the story, meaning, mood, emotions, etc.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- serious, but inviting (the way they look at the viewer)</li> </ul>	
What/who is depicted?  What is happening in the image?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- two of his sons, one is an artist</li> <li>- ticket to the museum on stairs</li> <li>- walking up the stairs</li> <li>- turned to look at the viewer</li> </ul>	

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"> <li>- American Revolution</li> <li>- French Revolution</li> <li>- Enlightenment</li> </ul> (Research these 3 things to add context. Also, read pages 90-97 in <i>Marvelous to Behold</i> )	
What was the worldview or prevailing philosophy at the time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enlightenment</li> <li>- Christianity</li> <li>- Second Great Awakening</li> </ul>	
Is there any symbolism used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The ticket on the stairs- to Peale's museum</li> <li>- The boy holds a palette and brush to show that he is an artist</li> </ul>	
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"> <li>- active during the American Revolution</li> <li>- Whig politics – active politically</li> <li>- painted portraits for many important figures</li> <li>- Enlightenment beliefs</li> </ul>	
Is there a focal point in each?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the viewer's eyes go right to one of Peale's sons, Raphaelle, and then to his brother, Titian</li> </ul>	
Did a previous art style influence this artwork?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He studied with the leading American painter, Benjamin West</li> <li>- John Singleton Copley</li> </ul>	
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:

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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?