



The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew by Caravaggio

Painted in 1599-1600, this piece uses strong contrasts of light and dark, chiaroscuro, to provide drama, as well as the hugely exaggerated positions and emotions of the people. Caravaggio was the first of the counter-Reformation artists and set the tone for the rest. He paints ornately and emotionally, but he also uses realism and moves away from the ideal perfection of Michelangelo's figures.

This piece shows the apostle Matthew, who according to legend, was killed at a church altar on the orders of the king of Ethiopia who was lusting after his own niece. Matthew apparently had stood in his way. It shows Matthew reaching for the angel's hand instead of quaking in terror. The style of this very painting, in departure from earlier styles, created the Baroque movement and ensured Caravaggio's fame.



The Elevation of the Cross by Peter Paul Rubens

This was painted as the center panel of a triptych for the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp, Belgium, where the painting still is displayed. It was completed in 1611.

The overly muscular men seen raising the cross struggle and strain under the weight of the Christ. The cross is angled diagonally across the painting and the figures lifting it are foreshortened so that some of them look as though they may fall right out into our laps at any moment. The figures are idealized with their muscular figures and perfect physiques, but also human and real when you look at their faces.



Education of the Princess

by Peter Paul Rubens

Marie de Medici, Queen of France commissioned this painting as part of a series of twenty-four that tell of the life of Marie. This was painted in 1622-25 and shows the queen as a young girl, studying her lessons. The gods Apollo, Athena, and Hermes attend her studies as well as the three Graces, bestowing art, wisdom, eloquence, and grace. Their presence also implies that Marie will someday rule France as chosen by the gods. When she did indeed rule France as regent for her young son, she was challenged by the nobility because she was a woman and because she was reluctant to give power back to her son when he came of age. This series of paintings was her way of celebrating and validating her life and reign.



Bouquet

by Jan Bruegel the Elder

This is one of many flower paintings this Flemish painter completed. Jan Bruegel became known as a painter of flowers and landscapes and often collaborated with other artists like Rubens, who painted the figures while Bruegel painted the flowers.

Still lifes, including paintings of flowers, were still a relatively new subject matter for artists. This one was painted in 1603.



Charles I at the Hunt

by Anthony Van Dyke

Van Dyke was from Antwerp, in the Spanish Netherlands, but became court painter for the English kings. This was painted in 1635 in oil on canvas.

The painting has a much more relaxed and natural atmosphere than previous royal portraits, but Charles I's pose and clothing are still definitely ruling class. Charles stands out to the viewer against the light colored sky, his dark hat framing his face. The servants and horse are in the shadows under a tree on the right and, at first, are overlooked. Charles looks directly at the viewer with royal confidence. Inscribed on a rock are the words "Charles I King of Great Britain" in Latin, a political statement as Great Britain did not legally and officially yet exist though Charles' father James had united the countries of Scotland and England 32 years earlier.



Allegory of Spring

by Jerzy Eleuter Szymonowicz Siemiginowski

This was painted in the 1680s for Wilanow Palace in Warsaw, Poland, the artists home country. Siemiginowski was court painter to the kings of Poland.

This painting is one of a series of four featuring the seasons. It is painted on the ceiling of the palace along with the others. The people on the ground are celebrating the return of spring and are surrounded by newly bloomed flowers. Birds in the center of the painting lead the eye upward to the personification of spring, who hovers in the air, spreading blossoms and banishing the dark clouds of winter with the help of the putti, or cherubs.



St. Ignatius of Loyola

Peter Paul Rubens

St. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Catholic Jesuit organization and a major leader of the Catholic counter-reformation. In this painting, Rubens makes him appear blessed by God with a nimbus of light surrounding his head, halo like, and light streaming down from heaven in approval. The painting also uses chiaroscuro to great effect, making the light that much more blessed in the surrounding darkness.



Las Meninas

by Diego Velasquez

Velasquez was court painter to Phillip IV of Spain. Painted in 1656, this is a scene from Velasquez's studio in the palace with the Infanta Margarita Theresa surrounded by her entourage and the artist himself working on a large canvas. A reflection of the king and queen appears on the wall behind the group as though the royal couple are standing in the position of the viewer. It is they the painter studies as he too looks at the viewer. We are seeing the scene from the point of view of those being painted. On the walls of the room hang paintings in their positions as they actually hung at the time. A masterful use of vanishing point, shadow and light, and layering of shapes adds depth to the painting, drawing the eye back to the man in the doorway at the back. This is one of the most famous paintings in the world.



Infanta Margarita Theresa in a Blue Dress

by Diego Velasquez

This was painted in 1659 when the subject of the painting, the Princess of Spain, was eight years old and the artist was only a year from his death. It is considered Velasquez's finest portrait.

The brush strokes are loosely applied so that the viewer must step back to see the colors resolve into coherence. Later the Impressionists will take this style, first tried here, to an extreme.

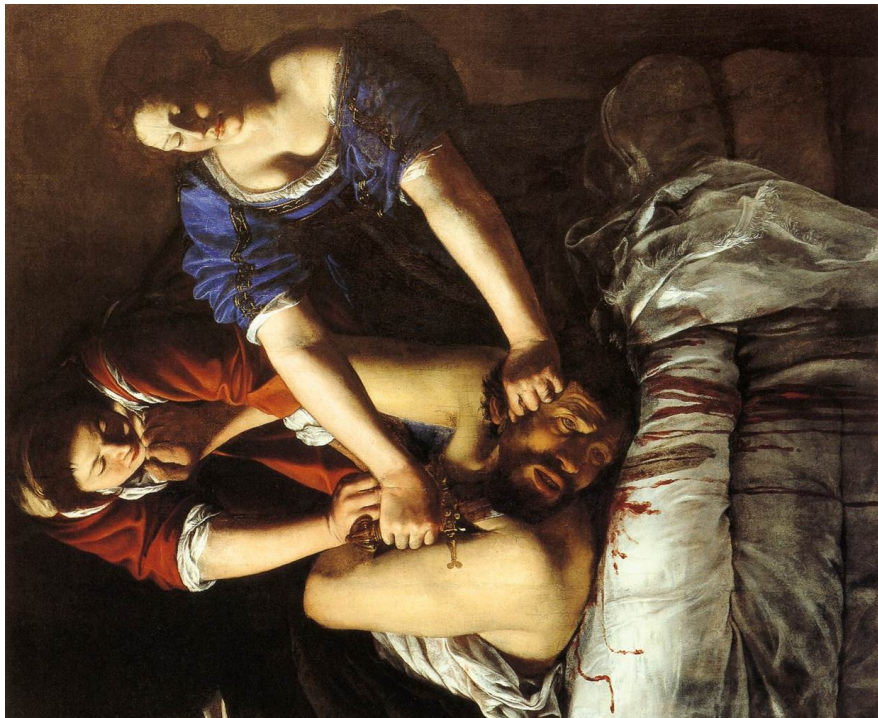


The Milkmaid

by Johannes Vermeer

This genre painting was finished in about 1658 and is an oil on canvas. In spite of the title, the young woman pouring the milk into an earthenware pot is a house maid, not the one who milks the cow. The young woman concentrates as she goes about her tasks. She is exemplifying the Dutch virtues of hard work and carefulness. Behind the maid, forming a baseboard against the wall, are Dutch blue delft tiles, one depicting Cupid, perhaps suggesting the young woman is thinking about a young man as she works. The light from the window softly washes over the whole scene creating a vivid color scheme.

Vermeer was a Dutch painter and the style was less dramatic and ornate than the art produced in other parts of Europe.



Judith Slaying Holofernes

by Artemisia Gentileschi

This was painted in about 1611 in oil on canvas. It depicts the Apocryphal story from the Book of Judith where Israel is saved from the Assyrian general Holofernes when Judith and her maid decapitate him while he is passed out drunk. It was a scene often painted by Baroque artists.

"Judith" is a self-portrait of the artist herself and the man being beheaded is one who had been her art teacher and who had raped her years earlier when she was a teenager.

Unlike most depictions, this piece shows how difficult and gory the act must have been for these women as they struggle with the strength of the big man and the task of severing through flesh and sinew.



Flight Into Egypt

by Annibale Carracci

Carracci was a contemporary of Caravaggio and painted in Italy at the same time. He too was very influential in the forming of the Baroque style. Here, in this painting done in 1604, we see an early example of landscape taking over the importance of the scene, rather than the people or history of the moment. The landscape is nature at its best because of the presence of man, as shown by the large castle. This style, of which this painting is one of the first, would be copied frequently through the Baroque period.

The flight into Egypt is a biblical story of Jesus' parents fleeing from the wrath of Herod the King and saving their child from death at his hands by seeking asylum in Egypt.

Baroque Art Cards

The Baroque art period lasted from 1600 until about 1725. It is known for its ornate style and emotionality with exaggerated poses and sharp contrasts of light and dark. In the Baroque period the Reformation art styles are coupled with the Renaissance to make a newly realistic style. Paintings of everyday scenes become common as well as religious and mythological paintings.

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the paintings in order of date. Which were painted first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title of the painting. After these are mastered, use the image cards to memorize the titles and artists together. Finally master the titles, artists, and a little information about the painting.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?