

The Art of the Sistine Chapel

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Visual Arts

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Student Objectives

- Review important facts about the Vatican, its art and architecture, the pope, and the selection of saints.
- Learn about the Sistine Chapel, and take an online tour.
- Explore one of nine main scenes, and present it to the class.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: European Tour: History and Tradition*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Inside the Vatican
- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about the Sistine Chapel ceiling
- Color printer
- Paper, pencils, markers

Procedures

1. Before you begin this lesson, visit the Web site below to review the nine main panels of the Sistine Chapel ceiling and to determine their appropriateness for your students. To print these color images, click on the name of each scene, then select the small image for a larger version to print. You may want to label each scene on the back.

Sistine Chapel Frescoes: Scenes from Genesis

<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/tours/sistina/index3.html>

2. After watching the "Inside the Vatican" segment, review some of the facts presented about the Vatican, the role of the pope, and the declaration of saints. Ask students: What is the Vatican? (the religious and administrative center of the Roman Catholic Church, where the pope lives)

Where is the Vatican? (in Vatican City, in Rome) Is it part of the city of Rome? (No, it is its own city-state, with its own laws, stamps, currency, and security.) Who is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church? (the pope) Who holds this position today? (At the time of this printing, it's John Paul II.) How long has the institution of the Vatican been in existence? (2,000 years) One important role of the pope is the declaration of saints. Who are saints? (People who have led a holy life and performed a miracle or sacrificed their life for religious beliefs.) In the program, who was being considered for sainthood? (Mother Theresa)

3. Ask students to talk about the Vatican's architecture and interior details. What did they notice in the program? (Answers will vary, but students may say that the main dome of St. Peter's Basilica is grand and ornate and the interior details are lavish and detailed.) Next, ask them to describe the Vatican artwork. What do all the pieces have in common? (Based on religious themes, they are created by many famous artists.) Ask students to name one artist whose work is found at the Vatican. (Artists mentioned include Raphael, Michelangelo, and Van Gogh.) In what chapel were the frescoes recently restored? (Sistine Chapel)
4. Tell students they will study the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Provide students with this background information:
 - The Sistine Chapel is one of several chapels at the Vatican. It was completed in 1483. In 1508, Pope Julius II commissioned a young artist named Michelangelo to repaint the ceiling. Michelangelo initially resisted because he thought of himself more as a sculptor than a painter, but he finally agreed. Michelangelo's first challenge was to build enormous scaffolding to reach the long, curved ceiling, 60-feet high. Over the next four years, he painted the ceiling while lying on his back.
 - Another challenge was the ceiling's size. At 40-feet wide and 130-feet long, it covers more than 5,000 square feet. Michelangelo's work included more than 300 figures, but nine main scenes dominate, depicting stories about the creation, fall, and rebirth of mankind. These stories are from the Book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible.
5. Now show students the following Virtual Tours of the Sistine Chapel:
http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/xPano/CSN/
6. Tell students they will break into teams to learn about one of the nine main paintings, present their research, and create their own version of the Sistine Chapel ceiling on a bulletin board. Divide the class into nine teams, and assign each team one of the following images:
 - Separation of Light from Darkness
 - Creation of the Sun, Moon, and Planets
 - Separation of the Earth from the Waters
 - Creation of Adam
 - Creation of Eve
 - The Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
 - Sacrifice of Noah
 - The Deluge

- Drunkenness of Noah
7. Give each team its color printout. Ask students to discuss the painting as a group and answer these questions:
- Who do you think this painting shows?
 - What are the most striking images?
 - What emotions are shown in this painting?
 - What symbols are used?
 - What do you think the symbols represent?
 - How would you describe the colors, style, and techniques?
 - How does this painting make you feel?
8. Next, have students use online and print resources to research the paintings. They should describe the painting and answer the following questions:
- What event is shown in this painting?
 - Who are the different people or figures shown?
 - What symbols are used, and what do they represent?
 - Why do you think this painting is important?
 - What message does it send?
 - What images and techniques did Michelangelo use to express the meaning of the painting?

The best place for teams to start is the first Web site below. After reading the overview, they can find links to detailed images and additional comments by clicking the “Previous Page” icon. The other sites are also useful.

- Sistine Chapel Frescoes: Scenes from Genesis
<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/tours/sistina/index3.html>
 - Sistine Chapel Ceiling: Central Stories (not all scenes discussed)
http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/CSN/CSN_Volta_StCentr.html
 - Sistine Chapel Ceiling: General Information
http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/CSN/CSN_Storia.html
9. Give students at least one full class period to research and gather information about their painting. Each team should write a brief summary, including their initial impressions and findings from their research.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students recalled several key details about the Vatican, the pope, and Vatican art and architecture; participated actively in class discussions; showed thorough research of their assigned painting; presented a comprehensive report with several details.
- **2 points:** Students recalled some key details about the Vatican, the pope, and Vatican art and architecture; participated somewhat in class discussions; showed satisfactory research of their assigned painting; presented a satisfactory report with some details.
- **1 point:** Students recalled few or no key details about the Vatican, the pope, and Vatican art and architecture; did not participate in class discussions; showed little research of their assigned painting; presented a report with few or no details.

Vocabulary

fresco

Definition: A painting on a plaster wall or ceiling created with watercolors

Context: Many of the historic frescoes at the Vatican are being restored to their original beauty.

pope

Definition: The leader of the Roman Catholic Church

Context: Of all the popes in history, Pope John Paul II has traveled the most.

Vatican

Definition: The palace within Vatican City, the independent city-state in Rome

Context: The pope lives in the Vatican, which has a treasure of artwork.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography – Places and Regions: Understands the physical and human characteristics of place, Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standard:

- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>