

LEONARDO DA VINCI

1. SKETCHBOOK FROM NATURE (THE WORLD AROUND YOU)

Leonardo's wonderful sketches can be the models for students to begin keeping a sketchbook of their own. Sketchbooks can be purchased, or very simply created in class, even from recycled paper, hole-punched or stapled together. Initially, students may need direction and structure. For example, each week the class could be asked to observe specific things at home and work on sketches of them for a Friday sharing time. A common theme or direction could be given. For example, on one given week, students could be asked to find a small decorative object around the house to draw. Another week they could be asked to draw shoes, their own hands and feet, moving images off the television, sleeping pets, the bathroom sink with toothbrushes, a favorite toy or stuffed animal, family members willing to sit still, houseplants, kitchen utensils, furniture, etc. This sketchbook could be linked to in-class drawing exercises such as contour and gesture drawing. If possible, show some of Leonardo's sketches to emphasize the acts of carefully looking and drawing. Drawings may be done slowly or quickly, but should be well observed.

2. INVENTOR AND ARTIST

In his notebooks, Leonardo imagined and sketched many devices that wouldn't be created for hundreds of years. These included designs that anticipated the bicycle, automobile, airplane, submarine, and helicopter as well as innovations in the designs of musical instruments. What inventions could we use in the world today, which have yet to be invented? Have the class brainstorm needs and inventions that could be useful. Then have each student select one of the ideas to design and sketch. Once again, try to get Leonardo's notebooks from the library so students can look more closely at them. More advanced students can try shading and/or crosshatching techniques to add a feeling of volume to their sketches. Sharing the examples will reveal how individual students imagine the forms of the same inventions very differently. (Note: The forms Leonardo had noticed in nature were often the basis of his inventions as well.)

3. PORTRAIT WITH MYSTERIOUS LANDSCAPE

"Make your portrait at twilight or in clouds or mist. Works painted then have more insight, and every face becomes beautiful." - Leonardo da Vinci

Make Leonardo's great masterpiece The Mona Lisa the model for a study of portraiture. Students can be shown the proportions of the human face, then each take turns working in pairs on pencil sketches of their student partner. Younger students can be asked to look primarily for shapes and sizes of the facial features. Older students may also be able to add textural distinctions and shadows for a 3D illusion. The portrait can be a pencil sketch first, and then crayons or colored pencils could be added.

STUDENT DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO

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Next, have students draw a horizon line behind their portrait, and sketch a fantasy world in the background. It may be useful to have the class brainstorm what elements could be added to this fantasy landscape. (Examples could include such things as: castles, mountains, an amusement park, winding rivers, futuristic cities, crazy-colored canyons, trees of many shapes, an ocean with numerous islands, etc.) Again, students can sketch in pencil first, but to help emphasize Leonardo's soft-focus and mysterious way of working, the colors in the background could be added with colored chalks or washes of watercolor. Leonardo invented this style of painting, where details soften and outlines blur and nearly disappear — it is called *sfumato*. Remind students to draw the background images smaller as they get higher toward the horizon line — the Renaissance use of space would require that the farther objects are supposed to be in the distance, the smaller they would be drawn.

(Alternatively, these two elements (portrait and background) could be worked on as separate works of art, then the portrait could be cut out and glued to the background.)

4. THE STUDY OF ANATOMY

Both as a man of science and as an artist, Leonardo da Vinci was very interested in anatomy — the study of the structure of the human body. He would dissect and draw human and animal corpses to better understand the muscles and bones of the body. Have students do pencil sketches of bones from pictures of the human skeleton or parts of the human skeleton.

5. VISIT THE LOUVRE

Visit The Mona Lisa at home...go online to the Louvre Museum website, which offers information on selected works and virtual tours.