

## MICHELANGELO

### **1. NUDITY**

Encourage students to think about why Michelangelo and many other artists, especially artists of the Renaissance, painted the nude figure. This is a topic that can cause much embarrassment and silliness in students, so it is best to approach it directly at the beginning of any study of this artist. Many answers will come up, depending upon the age group. They may include something as mistaken as “people back then didn’t wear clothes” to the more insightful “the artists thought the human body was beautiful.” During the Renaissance, there was a strong interest in science and the natural world, and this created connections between science and art. Artists wanted to show the accuracy of the muscles and proportions of the human form, and those are best seen on humans without clothing. Renaissance artists were also looking back to classical Greek and Roman sculpture, in which nudity was common. Holding an open discussion, offering some new ideas, and encouraging a “mature attitude” will help students deal with their discomfort.

### **2. HUMAN GESTURES AND ARCHITECTURAL SPACE**

Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling is a work of amazing unity and power. Have students note the variety of poses, and the sense of strength and movement the artist was able to achieve. Michelangelo also skillfully fit these human forms into the architectural geometric spaces of the ceiling. Some of these architectural divides are part of the ceiling structure, and others are painted as “trompe l’oeil” (fool the eye) compositional devices.

Spend a class period doing gesture drawings of each other, with charcoal and large newsprint paper. Have students strike poses for one or two minutes. The students should stand as they draw and look for the main gestures and weight of the poses, rather than details. Next, students can take their best gesture drawings and add some architectural elements, such as pendentives (triangular spaces) and cornices (ornamental moldings) to embellish and complete their compositions.

### **3. DRAPERY**

Michelangelo loved to render the graceful drape of fabric. Set up a simple still life with an emphasis on draped fabric. If possible, have a strong light source. Have students attempt to show the drapery with charcoal, chalk or dark crayon on paper. Another option is to use gray paper with black chalk for the shadows, and white chalk for the highlights.

### **4. FRESCO**

This site offers a fresco “kit” for 10

students: [http://truefresco.com/frescoshoppe/children\\_index.html](http://truefresco.com/frescoshoppe/children_index.html)

### **5. CARVING FOR KIDS**

It is difficult to safely carve with children, but students Grade 4 and older could try a carving project with a product called Balsa Foam. It is non-toxic and carves easily with clay tools. It generates dust, so masks may be worn. Students can make sketches of a front and side view, or just a front view if doing a relief. They can draw this onto the Balsa Foam and begin carving. It will give an appreciation of Michelangelo’s skill in creating forms from carved stone.

## STUDENT DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO

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#### **6. THEN AND NOW, A DISCUSSION**

In the Renaissance, artists became apprentices in the workshops of master artists to learn. Michelangelo and his fellow Renaissance artists had wealthy noblemen like Lorenzo de' Medici and the Popes of Rome to support their work. This is very different from our system today where most artists study in colleges and universities, or learn on their own. Today, instead of wealthy patrons, we have galleries and museums. We do still have wealthy buyers, but they aren't patrons on the scale of a Medici or a Pope. How does this affect art in our time?

#### **7. SIMULATE THE CEILING**

One classic project is to cover the underside of tables with large roll paper and have student draw and/or paint while sitting under the table. The idea is that Michelangelo endured great awkwardness and discomfort while working on a scaffold for years to complete the Sistine Chapel ceiling.