

Revised Sept. 2011

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)

“Titus, Artist’s Son”, c. 1645-1650

Oil on Canvas, 25 ½” x 22”

Supplies Needed:

- * 8 ½ x 11” sheets of white drawing paper from supply box
- * Charcoal sticks for each student from supply box
- * Hand out on face drawing for each student (in supply box)
- * Table lamp with light bulb from supply box and extension cord
- * Black construction paper to matte completed works
- * Laminated prints from supply box (8 total)
- * Handi-wipes for clean-up from supply box
- * **First Impressions: Rembrandt**, by Schwartz book in supply box for reference

Reference Books:

- * Rembrandt EL Raboff 709 RAB
- * Harmensz van Rijn Rembrandt EL Raboff 709 RAB
- * Rembrandt M. Venezia B REM

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE:

You will need to make enough copies of the “face drawing” handout from the master in the supply box. Also, please make copies of the master note “Famous Artist Series” to handout to the students. Please use the copy machine in the teachers’ workroom.

Rembrandt was born in Holland in 1606. His full name was Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn. There are only a few people in history that are so famous that they’re known by their first names and Rembrandt is one of them! Unlike many painters of his time, he did not come from a family of artists; his father was a miller. When Rembrandt was fourteen years old he dropped out of school and spent the next three years training with a painter in his town. By the time he was twenty-three years old Rembrandt’s fame had spread beyond his hometown and he was the proud master of his own studio. Many young artists wanted to be his apprentice. The students’ parents had to pay a large amount of money for the privilege of becoming one of Rembrandt’s pupils.

Rembrandt was famous for painting portraits. He made pictures of himself and everyone in his family. People paid him to paint their pictures. Photography had not been invented yet, so hiring an artist was the only way to get your “picture taken”.

Even though people paid Rembrandt a lot of money for his paintings, he never seemed to have any money. This was because he bought a big, expensive house and collected all kinds of things. He paid lots of money for other artists' work, jewelry, antiques, armor, gold helmets, statues, and a collection of costumes. He used these things in his paintings.

Rembrandt liked strong contrast of light and dark. He used them in his paintings all his life, letting darkness hide unnecessary details while using light to bring figures and objects out from the shadows. The high contrast of light against dark changed an ordinary picture into a dramatic one. The Italian word for this use of light and dark is "Chiaroscuro" (pronounced char o scur o). Chiaro means light, and scuro means dark. ***(Show laminate #1 "Young Girl Leaning on a Windowsill" as an example of Chiaroscuro). You may also ask the class to recall the book and movie, The Tale of Devereaux and the little rat named Roscuro who lives in the dark and becomes fascinated by the light.***

Rembrandt painted his pictures in a surprising way. He started with the background (sky or outdoor scenes) or the back wall in an interior room, and he finished with the foreground people. ***(Refer to one of his paintings to show what would have been painted first and last).***

(Present laminate #1 "Portrait of Maerten Soolmans")

This picture is a marriage portrait and had a matching portrait of the bride, which is now in a private collection in Paris. Full-length and life-size, with intricate detail in the lace and shoe buckles, they show what a masterful painter Rembrandt had become. He only used two colors in the painting (black and white) but the man's outfit is still distinguishable from the background.

(Present laminate #2 "Portrait of Jan Six")

This is a portrait of a wealthy businessman in Amsterdam. What color is strongest in the painting? Rembrandt painted with dark muted colors, using only white or red for contrast.

When Rembrandt was twenty-eight years old he married Saskia van Uylenburgh. She quickly became Rembrandt's favorite model. This is the happiest period in his life, and he worked very hard.

(Present laminate #2 "Flora")

This is thought to be Saskia, painted in an extravagant costume as Flora, the ancient Roman goddess of flowers, gardens, and Spring. Rembrandt's deep love for her can be seen in the beautiful details of her portrait and the crown of flowers she wore on her head.

(Present laminate #3 "Rembrandt and Saskia")

This is a painting of Rembrandt and Saskia. Does it look like they are having a good time? Do you suppose their lavish clothes came from his collection of costumes? It looks as if Rembrandt is also wearing a wig! They had a son named Titus ***(show the framed print of Titus)*** In 1642, Saskia died after a long illness. When she died, a lady named Hendrickje moved into Rembrandt's house to take care of Titus. Soon they fell in love, and Rembrandt painted many pictures of her. They had a baby girl named Cornelia.

(Present laminate #4 "The Night Watch")

This is one of his most well known paintings. It is almost 11' x 16'. A group of soldiers asked Rembrandt if he would paint a portrait of them in their military uniforms. They assumed Rembrandt would paint all of them, lined up stiffly, each one given equal attention. All of the men had paid Rembrandt for the portrait, so you can imagine their outrage when they saw the finished portrait. Rembrandt wanted the painting to look more natural, so he placed everybody standing around getting ready to go for a march. He included some common people (who had not paid to be in the painting) including a girl and a dog. The soldiers were particularly upset that the "girl" was one of the main focal points of the painting.

(Present laminates #5, 6, 7 - examples of Rembrandt's self portraits.)

Rembrandt made almost one hundred self-portraits during his lifetime. Looking at these four self-portraits, you can see how his painting style changed throughout the years.

Ask the students what differences they see. In his early paintings, - he painted with a smooth brush stroke, but later painted in a "rough manner" showing more brush strokes.

(Present laminate #8 "The Syndics of the Draper's Guild")

This is probably one of Rembrandt's greatest portraits. It is a painting of a group of important men. Their job was to make sure all the cloth woven in Amsterdam was made just right. Rembrandt painted the group of men looking directly at the audience. It's almost as if you walked into their meeting and they stopped to see what you wanted. Few painters have ever made a portrait look so natural and real.

Rembrandt's last year's were filled with disappointment, sadness and financial trouble. Near the end of his life he declared bankruptcy, and was forced to sell his house, and his collection of costumes, books, ancient sculpture, and paintings.

All his remaining paintings were auctioned off to pay his debt. He immediately started painting again to build up a new collection. Although still respected and in demand, Rembrandt's painting style fell out of fashion. He lived to be sixty-three years old and painted right up to the end of his life in 1669.

Project:

Using the table lamp, place the lamp on a table next to a chair. Have the teacher sit in the chair, facing the class, then turn on the light. Close any shades and turn off any classroom lights to intensify the shadow. Point out to the students the "chiaroscuro effect" – you will see the definite darkness on one side of the teacher.

Today, you are going to sketch a portrait of your teacher. I will shine a light on one side of the teacher so that we can see the intense contrast of light and dark light on their face to show "chiaroscuro" like Rembrandt did in his portraits. I will pass out a diagram that will help you draw the face, and we will be using charcoal to draw with instead of a pencil. Although we have charcoal erasers, it is hard to erase, so think about your drawing before you get started. (Feel free to have music playing while the students are drawing).

Please matte completed works on black construction paper.

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

Rembrandt

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of the Dutch artist Rembrandt to your child's class. They learned about Rembrandt's background, as well as made an art project in the style of his work. Ask your child about Rembrandt – what was his favorite subject matter? What does “chiaroscuro” mean?

The Art Institute of Chicago owns two Rembrandt paintings: “Young Woman at an Open Half-Door”, and “Old Man With a Gold Chain”.

In addition, the children's story Anna's Art Adventure by Isadora discusses Rembrandt's work.

Sincerely yours,

Art Volunteer