

Masterpiece Society 🎨 **Leonardo da Vinci**



Art Appreciation & Enrichment

Masterpiece Society Art Appreciation:

Leonardo da Vinci

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FIGURE 1 - MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS, FRANCE

“We cannot measure the influence that one or another artist has upon the child’s sense of beauty, upon his power of seeing, as in a picture, the common sights of life; he is enriched more than we know in having really looked at a single picture.”

– Charlotte Mason

“Being an ‘agent of civilization’ is one of the many roles ascribed to teachers. If we are to have any expectations of producing a well-educated, well-prepared generation of deep-thinking, resourceful leaders, then it is essential to give students an opportunity to review, respond to, and ultimately revere the power of the human imagination—past and present. There may be no better way to promote this than to study, understand, and exult in masterpieces.”

– Joseph Matthew Piro

Table of Contents

About Masterpiece Society Art Appreciation.....	5
How to Use This Curriculum	7
Observation & Evaluation Questions.....	11
Leonardo da Vinci Biography.....	13
The Renaissance Era	16
Fun Facts About Leonardo da Vinci	19
Leonardo da Vinci Quotes for Copywork.....	20
Masterpiece #1: Mona Lisa	22
Mona Lisa Enrichment Activity	28
Masterpiece #2: The Last Supper	31
The Last Supper Enrichment Activity.....	38
Masterpiece #3: The Female Head.....	41
Female Head Enrichment Activity	47
Art Terms to Remember	49
Recommended for Further Study.....	51

About *Masterpiece Society* Art Appreciation

Masterpiece Society Art Appreciation is an “open-up & go” art enrichment curriculum created with the busy mom in mind. Although the lessons coordinate with my online art courses, you do ***not*** need to purchase the art course to get a well-rounded knowledge of:

- the master artist
- several of the artist’s famous works
- his or her artistic techniques
- the art movement in which he or she created

However, if you’d like to delve even further, the art lessons will be the “icing on the *artsy* cake” and will help your kids and teens form an invaluable relationship with the artist, as well as giving them a deeper understanding of the methods they used.¹

This eBook will be all you need for this study because I include:

- internet links to virtual museums, galleries and artwork
- internet links to other helpful websites†
- printable templates (which can also be used as coloring sheets for younger students)
- additional enrichment materials
- recommended books for further study†
- recommended videos/movies for further study†

†**Please Note:** *Although we love many of the works of the master artists, we may or may not agree with how they lived their lives. Some of the recommended videos, books, or webpages touch on certain facets of their lives that may be unsuitable for children. Please use your own discretion as a parent.*

My desire for this art appreciation curriculum is threefold:

- to ignite a love, even passion, for the old masters and their works
- to encourage kids and teens to actively engage in the art process and have FUN doing so
- to inspire them to utilize and further develop their own God-given creativity

¹ If you are interested in purchasing the art lessons to coordinate with this art appreciation curriculum, click [here](#). The lessons allow your student(s) to go much deeper than your typical artist study. Students will create three unique works of art per artist that will help them explore their creative talents.

How to Use This Curriculum

These lessons are written for elementary through middle school students, although they can be adapted for younger children and even teens. (See below.)

Use these lessons as:

- a stand-alone art appreciation curriculum – *great for morning time / morning basket or afternoon teatime!*
- a supplement to your family's Charlotte Mason art and artist study
- a "no mess" art course – simply use the templates as coloring pages for preschoolers and kindergarteners to "create" alongside older siblings (older students can use templates to transfer patterns for painting projects, or they may prefer to color in with pastels or colored pencils)
- part of a unit study
- part of your history studies
- as an accompaniment to [*Mixing with the Masters*](#) art course

General Art Appreciation Tips & Suggestions:

When studying an artist, it is important to look at several of their works in order to define his or her particular "style." Each volume of the ***Masterpiece Society Art Appreciation*** studies three different works of the artist with internet links to even more of his or her pieces.

Feel free to print out a copy of each work of art (included) and place it inside a page protector in a three-ring binder. This will become your "Art Appreciation" notebook. Various notebooking pages are also provided throughout each volume.

Let your student observe each work of art without you saying much (if anything). This allows the art to speak on its own. Simply encourage them to look closely and observe each piece. Does the work have a story to tell? You can encourage them to describe what they see, what they like or dislike. For a more in-depth study, please see below.

Move as slowly or as quickly as you feel is necessary for your student to form a connection with each artist and his or her work. This curriculum is yours to adapt and adjust as you see fit. Adjust it to your education style. Modify it to your student's specific needs or tastes. Make it fun!

The most important thing isn't to learn dull, dry facts about art and artists, but rather to instill and cultivate a love of beauty while helping to develop your student's ability to "see."

If you want to study one artist over the course of a few weeks, there is plenty more information under the "Recommended for Further Study" links at the end of the lessons.

As you study more and more artists and their bodies of work, it is important to allow your student(s) to compare and contrast their styles and pieces. What are their similarities? What are their differences?

This will ensure a "review" of each artist and their works, and will help your student form relationships with each one while providing a more comprehensive knowledge and appreciation of art.

Additionally, find ways to expose them to the great art masterpieces on a regular basis whether it's via coffee table books, wall calendars, posters or prints. If possible, visit local art museums, and at the very least, visit the official websites of famous art museums (several museum links are included at the end of lessons).

Our goal is simply to ignite a love for beautiful art in each student, and that will happen over the process of time.

Adapting for Different Ages:

The ***Masterpiece Society Art Appreciation*** curriculum is geared towards upper elementary and middle school students. But is easily adapted for all students. Below are a few suggestions:

Preschool/Early Elementary

- When studying the artist's works, simply let them observe the painting (you can tell them the name of the piece and the artist who painted it if you wish) and have them tell you what they see, what they like or dislike.
- Encourage them to create their own version of the piece (drawing, coloring, finger-painting, watercolor, etc.).
- Print out an art template (included) and let them color it while their older siblings are learning.

Upper Elementary/Middle School

- Have them read an age-appropriate biography of the artist's life.
- Encourage them to study each piece included in this volume, learning its name, the period in which it was painted, the mediums and techniques with which it was painted, etc.
- Print out copies of each piece, any notebooking pages (and fill in), any other relevant information to their study and place it in their "Art Appreciation" binder.
- Have them answer a few of the "Observation & Evaluation Questions" (pp. 11-12) about each piece.
- Print out the art template (included) and color in with pastels or colored pencils or use template to transfer a pattern to a canvas to paint.
- For students who would like more in-depth art lessons, purchase the corresponding [*Mixing with the Masters*](#) art course.

Older Teens/High School

- Assign an age-appropriate biography for them to read about the artist.
- Have them research each work of art to find out more interesting facts about it.
- Encourage them to compare and contrast the artist's various other works, as well as comparing and contrasting them with the works of other artists.
- Let them create their own "Art Appreciation" notebook, decorating and "curating" it as they desire.

- Have them answer several of the “Observation & Evaluation Questions” (pp. 11-12) about each piece.
- Print out the art template (included) and color in with pastels or colored pencils or use template to transfer a pattern to a canvas to paint.
- For students who would like more in-depth art lessons, purchase the corresponding [Mixing with the Masters](#) art course.


A Note about Viewing Art Pieces Online

I have endeavored to link artwork from the museums in which they are housed or Wikimedia Commons, which only uses public domain works when possible.

Whenever you click on a hyperlink within this curriculum and are taken to the artwork, remember to hover the cursor over the painting. If the cursor shows a plus symbol (+) on it, click again and the painting will be magnified so that you can view it in greater detail.

A Note about Pronunciations

After testing several different websites and videos for native pronunciation of proper nouns, I decided to go with “Google Translate.” This site is streamlined and easy to use, and doesn’t have unwanted pop-ups. Additionally, the pronunciations are made by native speakers from the countries of origin.

Whenever you see ([pronunciation](#)) after a name or place throughout this curriculum, simply click on the hyperlink and it will open up to Google Translate. Then click the “Listen” icon  in the lower left hand corner of the left box to hear the correct pronunciation.

A Note about the Lives of Artists

It bears repeating: Although we love many of the works of the master artists, we may or may not agree with how they lived their lives. Some of the recommended videos, books, or webpages touch on certain facets of their lives that may be unsuitable for children. Please use your own discretion as a parent.

Observation & Evaluation Questions

Teaching your child or teen to “see” sometimes requires a bit of prompting and/ or probing. Use this list of questions if you want to take each lesson even further. (Pick and choose a few questions. Don’t feel compelled to inundate your kids with the entire list.)

If you are utilizing this curriculum with multiple students, these questions will help create some rich discussions of art.

Observe:

1. Look at this work of art. Describe what you see. What else do you see?
2. What is the mood of this painting? How does it make you feel?
3. How would you describe the lines? Shapes? Colors?
4. What stands out most to you in this painting? Why?
5. What interests you most about this work of art?
6. How would you describe the people/place/things depicted in this piece?
7. How is this picture different from real life?
8. Is there anything this painting reminds you of?
9. Tell me about the colors in this piece. Which color is most prominent?
10. Which part of this painting do you think is the most important part?
11. How do you think the artist created this piece?
12. If you could meet the artist, what questions would you ask him/her about this painting?

Understand:

1. What do you think is happening in this painting?
2. Does this painting tell a story? What do you think that story is?
3. If you were inside this painting what would it feel like? What sounds would you hear? What fragrances (or odors) would you smell?
4. What do you think it would be like to live at the time of this painting?

5. What do you think the artist is trying to convey or communicate in this painting?
6. What do you think the artist's mood was when he/she created this piece? Why?
7. What do you think this painting is about? Why?
8. If you were able to name this painting what would you call it?
9. What interests you most about this piece?

Compare:

1. How is this painting like/different than others by this artist?
2. How is this painting like/different than paintings of other artists?
3. Is this painting like/different than real life? How?

Evaluate:

1. What do you think is good about this painting?
2. What do you think is bad about this painting?
3. Would you consider this a "great" work of art? Why or why not?
4. Does this piece inspire you? Why or why not?
5. What do you think is worth remembering about this piece?
6. Do you think this piece would inspire someone else?

Leonardo da Vinci Biography



Leonardo da Vinci ([pronunciation](#)) was born on April 15, 1452 in the village of Vinci, just outside of Florence in the region of Tuscany, Italy.

From an early age, he proved to be quite the artist and at the age of 14, he was apprenticed to the master painter, Andrea del Verrochio ([pronunciation](#)). It is said that Leonardo soon surpassed his master and Verrochio became so ashamed of his own talents that he swore never to paint again.

Despite his training as a painter, Da Vinci was also a sculptor, a musician, a writer, an architect, a scientist, a botanist, a mathematician, an engineer, and an inventor.

In fact, he invented earlier versions of many items we have today, such as the armored tank, the hang glider, scissors, the life preserver, diving equipment, the catapult, a movable bridge, a robot, the machine gun, a submarine, the parachute, the helicopter, and much, much more! He is considered the epitome of the *Renaissance Man*, because he possessed an “unquenchable curiosity” and a “feverishly inventive imagination.”

He researched the workings of the human body by spending time among corpses, studying them and sketching out anatomical details.

He studied birds and flight, and even invented a flying machine. And being fascinated to the point of obsession, he even tried countless ways to fly himself. Although as far as we know, he never quite achieved it.

Leonardo left thousands of notes illustrated with his sketches in what have now been put into notebooks, or codices.

But out of all his drawings, paintings, experiments, and inventions, his most famous work is the *Mona Lisa*.

Did you know that out all the paintings Da Vinci began, he only finished 6 of them? Because he was an absolute genius and incredibly inquisitive about the world around him, he had a very short attention span and was easily distracted. So unfortunately, he found it difficult to finish an art project before turning his attention elsewhere. This got him in trouble more than once.

Unlike many other artists, Da Vinci actually achieved fame and success while he was still alive. But he has become world famous since his death in 1519.

Giorgio Vasari said of him, “Leonardo da Vinci was a man of regal spirit and tremendous breadth of mind; and his name became so famous that not only was he esteemed during his lifetime, but his reputation endured and became even greater after his death.”

How true this is! In fact, over 500 years after he lived, he is still considered a genius and one of the most gifted men to have ever lived.



Leonardo da Vinci
(1452 – 1519)

The Renaissance Era



Leonardo da Vinci painted and created during the period known as the “Renaissance Era.” The Renaissance ([pronunciation](#)) began in Florence, Italy during the 14th century and spread throughout Europe, ending in the 17th century.

The word *renaissance* means “rebirth,” and was an age in history which marked a transitional period between medieval and modern times.

Some of the greatest artists of all time lived during the Renaissance: Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Botticelli, Van Eyck, Dürer, and many more.

Not only was this a time of rebirth for art, but it was also a time of cultural growth, intellectual achievement, scientific breakthrough, architec-

tural advancement, and much, much more.

In other parts of Europe, a reawakening was taking place simultaneously with the Italian Renaissance. This is known as the *Northern Renaissance* and occurred north of the Alps in countries such as Germany, Belgium, France, England, Netherlands, and Poland.

New Methods in Art

New art techniques that began in the Renaissance Era were:

1. Painting with oil paints on stretched canvas (as opposed to tempera on wooden panels).
2. Creating depth and dimension by using a technique known as “perspective” and “foreshortening.”

3. *Chiaroscuro* ([pronunciation](#)), or “light and dark” which was the use of light and shadows in paintings, producing rounded, sculpted-looking figures.
4. *Sfumato* ([pronunciation](#)), or “fume, smoke” which softened or blurred sharp lines to give the illusion of depth and dimension, particularly on faces.
5. The use of “proportion” to create a more realistic presentation of art.

Comparison Between Medieval and Renaissance Art

Compared to the formal, religious art of the Middle Ages, Renaissance art was much more personal and realistic, including scenes and images from everyday life, paintings of the Italian countryside, and more life-like people.

Many paintings also begin to reveal a sense of mystery and beauty.

Light and shadow, perspective, and abundant colors contributed to brighter works of art with an abundance of emotion.

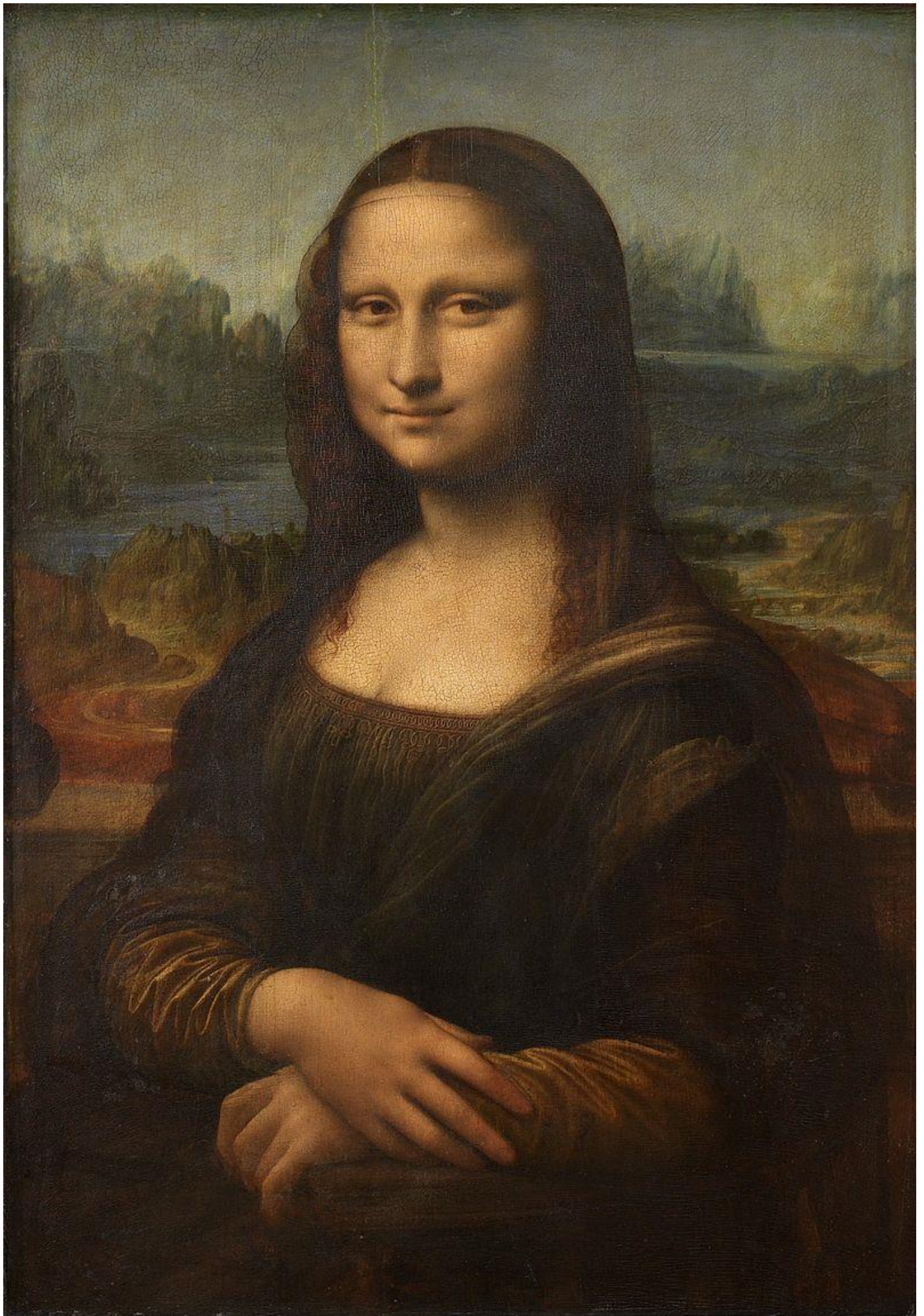
During the Renaissance, art came alive!

Fun Facts About Leonardo da Vinci

- Leonardo da Vinci was quite quick at learning, and showed an interest in it at an early age. He could sing well, play the lyre, and draw pictures of animals and plants. He was also very good at mathematics.
- When he was first presented at court in Milan, it was as a musician, not an artist or inventor.
- He was left-handed (possibly dyslexic) and wrote many of his notes using “mirror writing,” in which he would draw forward with one hand while writing backwards with the other. Perhaps this was to keep his thoughts secret and make it difficult for others to dig through his notes and steal his ideas.
- Leonardo was the first to explain why the sky is blue – because of the way the molecules in air scatters light.
- It is said that Leonardo dug into graveyards at night to steal corpses and study human anatomy. He established modern techniques of scientific illustration with highly accurate renderings.
- He invented the bicycle 300 years before it appeared on the road.
- Leonardo drew the plans for the first armored car in 1485!
- He was a notorious procrastinator and perfectionist who was easily distracted, leaving many of his paintings unfinished.
- Leonardo was a vegetarian.
- He is considered the “father of modern science” by many.

Leonardo da Vinci Quotes for Copywork

- “Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.”
- “The artist sees what others only catch a glimpse of.”
- “I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. ‘Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death.”
- “It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.”
- “Where the spirit does not work with the hand, there is no art.”
- “Art is never finished, only abandoned.”
- “The poet ranks far below the painter in the representation of visible things, and far below the musician in that of invisible things.”
- “I have offended God and mankind because my work didn't reach the quality it should have.”
- “The noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding.”
- “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”
- “Learning never exhausts the mind.”



Masterpiece #1: Mona Lisa

Introduction

The *Mona Lisa* is hands-down the most widely recognized work of art in the world and subsequently, the most parodied (or imitated) work of art. Over 5 centuries old, “she” is shrouded in mystery and intrigue. Da Vinci carried the portrait with him everywhere he went, believing he had never finished it. Upon his death, the *Mona Lisa* was inherited by his assistant, Salai ([pronunciation](#)), and was later sold it to the King of France, Francois (or Francis) I.

Napoleon Bonaparte even hung the painting in his bedroom in the Tuileries Palace after the French Revolution.

If you were to visit the Louvre Museum in Paris, you would only be allowed approximately 17 seconds to look at this famous painting as you are herded through with the crowds of people who want to see her. But fortunately, you can view an extreme close-up of the *Mona Lisa*, by clicking this link: [Musee du Louvre](#). Give it a moment to load, then you’ll be able to enlarge it even more to see the intricate detailing that Da Vinci painted.

Look closely at the painting (*NOTE: The Louvre link is preferable to the image on the previous page*). Observe all the intricacies of her face, her dress, the background.

Do you see the amazing details that Da Vinci used in capturing this mysterious beauty?

Background

Da Vinci began painting the *Mona Lisa* in 1503, and she is believed to be a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, a wealthy Florentine silk merchant.

“Mona” is short for *Mia Donna* or *Madonna*, which translates to “My Lady” in English. We might say, “Madam” or “Ma’am” today.

Read what Italian painter and historian, Giorgio Vasari, wrote about this painting in 1550, in [*The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*](#):

“Leonardo da Vinci undertook to paint for Francesco del Giocondo the portrait of Mona Lisa, his wife. And having worked on it for four years, left it unfinished. The work is now at Fontainebleau in the possession of Francois, King of France. Anyone wishing to see the degree to which art can imitate nature could easily perceive it in this head, as within it was reproduced every subtle detail that could possibly be painted.

The eyes were moist and shining, as they always are in life. And around them were the lashes and all the rosy, pearly tints that require the utmost delicacy of execution. The eyebrows were natural in the extreme as he showed how the hairs spring from the flesh, growing thickly in one place, more sparsely in another, and curving according to the pores of the skin.

The nose with its rosy, delicate nostrils, seemed that of a living person. The fine mouth, whose corners were blended by the red of the lips with the fresh tints of the face, appeared to be of living flesh and not of paint. Anyone looking closely would see the pulse beating in the hollow of the throat.

One might truly say that the artistry of this work would cause fear and trembling in any valiant artist. And as Mona Lisa was very beautiful, he used a special means to keep her merry while portraying her. He employed singers, musicians and jesters to dispel the melancholy that often arises when portraits are painted. And this portrait by Leonardo contained a smile so pleasing that it seemed divine, rather than human. And the work was considered a marvel since the reality itself was no different.”

In Italy, this painting is known as *La Gioconda* ([pronunciation](#)), in France as *La Jaconde* ([pronunciation](#)), which means “happy one.” Does she look happy to you? (Maybe she’s stifling a giggle at the jesters!)

In the above account by Vasari, we read that the *Mona Lisa* was so realistic – particularly the eyes and eyebrows. But today, we don’t see any evidence of eyebrows or lashes.

What do you think happened to them? Over the years, people have speculated that plucking out the eyebrows was the fashion in early 16th century Italy. Some believe that women would pluck them out to make their foreheads more pronounced so they'd look more intelligent. Or perhaps the paint simply faded in those areas over time?

Mediums and Techniques

Leonardo da Vinci was a ground-breaking portrait painter. Previous portraits had been painted in profile (from the side) or straight on. However, he used a new style called “three-quarter portraits” in which the sitter’s body faces one direction and turns his or her head in another. The *Mona Lisa* is painted in this manner, as well as other portraits he painted: *Ginevra de’ Benci* ([click here to view](#)) and *Lady with an Ermine* ([click here to view](#)).

How do these paintings compare to the *Mona Lisa*? How do they differ?

The *Mona Lisa* was painted with oils on a poplar wood panel. Da Vinci used an innovative painting technique called, *sfumato* ([pronunciation](#)), which comes from the Italian word *fumo*, meaning “smoke” or “fume.” In painting, *sfumato* softens, blurs or shades. The effect is created by blending layers of translucent colors and tones to blur or obscure lines and boundaries. This process leaves no visible brush strokes and adds depth, volume and form.

Notice the softness around *Mona Lisa*’s eyes and the corners of her mouth. These are prominent areas in which the *sfumato* technique was used. In the painting of *Ginevra de’ Benci*, you can even [see Leonardo’s fingerprints](#) where he used his fingers to blend, soften and create delicate edges.

Another technique Leonardo used to create depth is called *chiaroscuro* ([pronunciation](#)), which is a compound of the Italian words, *chiaro*, meaning “light,” and *scuro*, meaning “dark.” Notice how most of the painting is dark, but her face and hands, the folds in her clothing, and portions of the background are full of light. This technique masterfully creates the illusion of depth on a flat surface.

Why is the *Mona Lisa* so Famous?

Out of all the paintings in the world, why is the *Mona Lisa* one of the most famous? Even artist and historian, Giorgio Vasari, wrote that artists came from far and wide to Da Vinci's studio to study the life-like painting:

"This work is executed in a manner well calculated to astonish all who behold her."

Raphael was so fascinated with her that he created a series of portraits after the manner of *Mona Lisa*, though none of them could compare to Leonardo's masterpiece.

But it wasn't until 1911 that this painting became a worldwide phenom. Because it was in that year that the painting was stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris.

The media coverage of the day (via newspaper) drew international attention to the theft of the painting. In fact, it was the biggest news of the day! The Louvre was closed for nine days, as well as the French border while trains and ships were searched. When the Louvre reopened, people lined up to see the empty space on the wall where the *Mona Lisa* had hung. So in all actuality, it was the *theft* that made the *Mona Lisa* known worldwide.

Many wealthy Americans were blamed and considered suspects. And even artist, Pablo Picasso, was a suspect and brought in for questioning. One reason for this was his friendship with another artist, Guillaume Apollinaire, who, in his quest for "modern art" had once said that the Louvre should be burned to the ground.

Apollinaire was also behind another theft at the Louvre of Iberian statuettes. Picasso was in possession of these statuettes at the time, having unwittingly purchased the stolen pieces from Apollinaire. Fortunately for Picasso, Apollinaire confessed to the theft of the statuettes, was arrested, and served eight days in jail. Picasso was declared innocent of the theft of the *Mona Lisa* and was released.

Two years after the *Mona Lisa* was stolen, the real thief, Vincenzo Peruggia, was caught. He was an Italian carpenter who had worked in the Louvre. While there, he discovered drawings showing Napoleon bringing many art masterpieces from Italy to France. Peruggia came to the conclusion that Napoleon had stolen the *Mona Lisa* from Italy (even though King Francois I actually purchased it).

Peruggia studied the Louvre exits and escape routes, and one night after the museum had closed, he walked right out with the painting under his coat. Hiding out for two years, he finally tried to sell it to an art dealer in Italy, but fortunately, the art dealer turned Peruggia over to the police. And the *Mona Lisa* was restored to her place of honor in the Louvre.

Mona Lisa's X-rays

X-rays of the *Mona Lisa* have revealed three earlier versions beneath the top layer. In one, she's even said to be wearing a bonnet!

Want to see her in X-ray, ultraviolet and infrared? [Click here](#).

The Isleworth Mona Lisa

A recent discovery and thorough testing claims the existence of a second “Mona Lisa” which is actually purported to be the first (approximately ten years older than the one we know today).

For over 500 years there have been rumors of another *Mona Lisa*. The Isleworth Mona Lisa was discovered in nobleman's home in Somerset, England shortly before World War I (then hidden in a Swiss vault for 40 years). It is said to have been that family for over 150 years, but it didn't get much attention until 2012.

Check out [this video](#) and decide for yourself if it's a real Da Vinci or a masterful fake.

More Fun Facts

Would you like to find out even more delicious facts about the *Mona Lisa*? Check out the video recommendations under “Recommended for Further Study” at the end of these lessons.



Mona Lisa

Mona Lisa Enrichment Activity

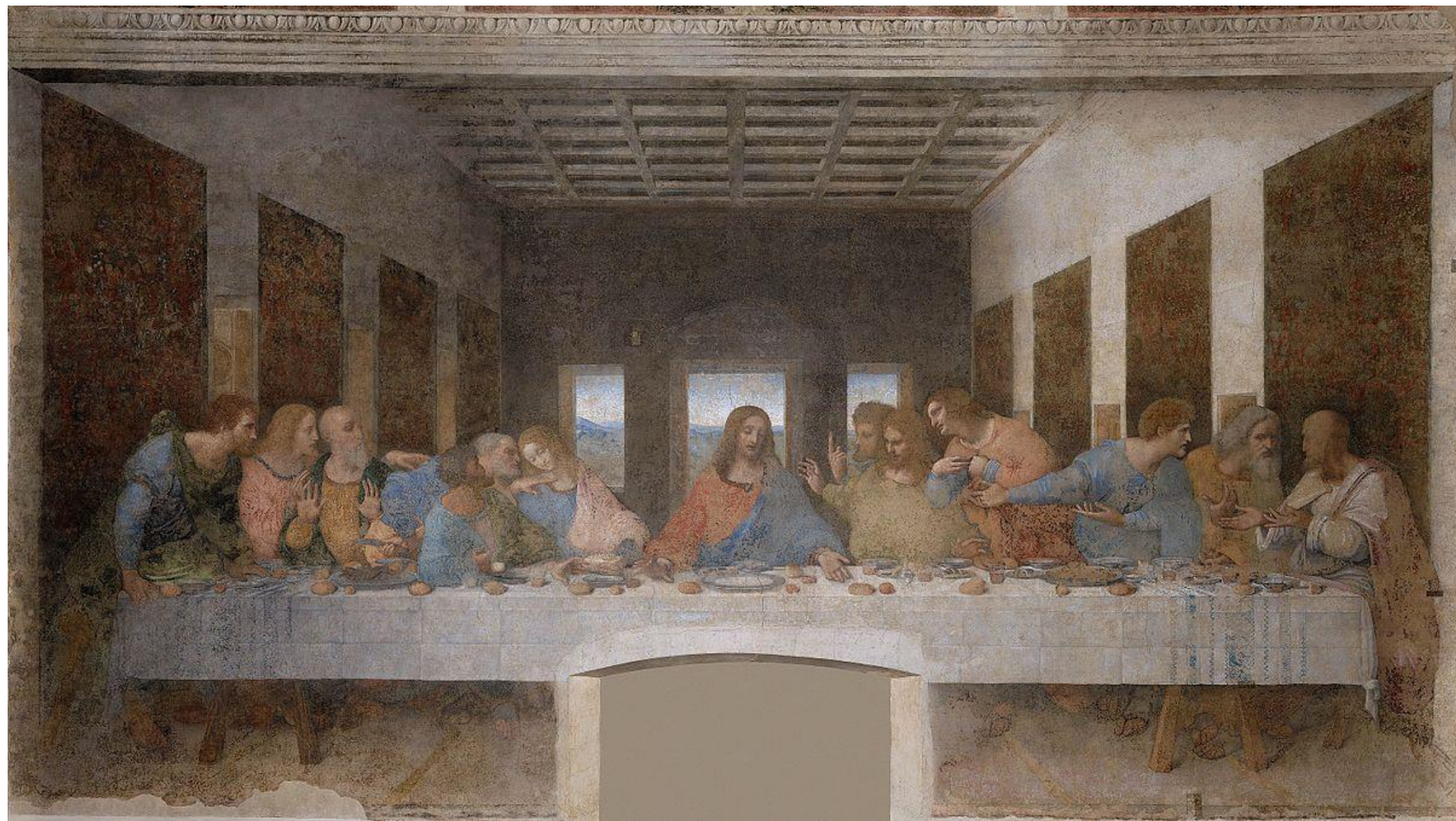
If you would like to enrich your study of the *Mona Lisa* with a “no fuss” art activity, simply print out the template on the following page.

Older students can use it as transfer pattern for painting projects, or they may prefer to color in with pastels, charcoals, or colored pencils.

Younger students can use it as a coloring page to “create” alongside older siblings.

For in-depth art lessons on each of the masterpieces we study in this volume, check out my [*Mixing with the Masters*](#) art course.





Masterpiece #2: The Last Supper

Introduction:

The Last Supper is not a work of art that can be moved about from place to place or stolen like the *Mona Lisa* was. That is because it is a mural painted inside a monastery (now a convent) in Milan called Santa Maria Della Grazie.

Sadly, this great piece, which was begun around 1495 and completed in 1498, is in poor condition today. In the late 16th century, Giovan Paulo Lomazzo wrote “*the painting is all ruined.*”

Over the last five centuries, the painting’s condition has severely deteriorated due to the technique and materials Da Vinci used, inadequate restoration efforts, environmental factors such as humidity, dust, and air pollution, and even its location.

In fact, during the second world war, the monastery was hit by a bomb which destroyed a large section of the refectory (dining hall) which houses the painting. Thankfully, the wall on which Da Vinci painted *the Last Supper*, remained standing.

Background:

Being incredibly inquisitive about the world around him, Leonardo had a very short attention span and was easily distracted. So unfortunately, he found it difficult to finish an art project before turning his attention elsewhere. In fact, he was notorious for not meeting his commission deadlines. He would start a piece, work on it for a while, then he would get bored and move on to something else. Or he would take on another commission before he’d finish the one he’d been working on.

In 1483 he was commissioned by monks at the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception to create the painting known as *The Virgin of the Rocks* ([click here to view the one that hangs in the Louvre](#)). But he went far beyond the deadline of the contract he had signed, to the point that the monks sued him for breach of contract.

But Leonardo never handed over the painting to them, keeping ownership himself. The legal dispute went on for years. Finally in 1506, the lawsuit was resolved and he was commissioned again to paint a second *Virgin of the Rocks* ([click here to view the one that hangs in the National Gallery, London](#)). This time, they only paid him half the price of the first and they received it twenty-five years after they commissioned the very first one.

It was while this legal dispute was still going on that Leonardo was commissioned by the monks of the Santa Maria Della Grazie in Milan to paint *The Last Supper* fresco.

Mediums and Techniques

In those days, a mural painting was done in the *buon fresco* ([pronunciation](#)) style in which the artist would paint on wet plaster, working quickly in small sections before the plaster dried. This technique helped the paint colors to “set in” and remain vibrant.

Obviously, Leonardo knew he wouldn’t be able to work fast enough for the *buon fresco* (wet plaster) technique, so he developed his own process of painting on dry plaster called, *fresco secco* ([pronunciation](#)). He primed the dry plaster with white lead that he hoped would accept the tempera paints more readily and protect the painting from moisture. Leonardo intended to create a grander “luminosity” than the *buon fresco* process allowed for. Regrettably, it wasn’t quite the success he’d imagined, and the paint pigment began flaking off the wall within twenty years after it was finished.

And once again, Leonardo’s slow and erratic work habits greatly distressed the monks. He would work and obsess over the painting for days without taking a break, then abruptly leave and not be seen for a very long time. Sometimes he would just sit and stare at the painting for hours, finally make one or two tiny brush strokes, then leave.

Leonardo would go into the streets of Milan looking for just the right people to be models for Jesus and the apostles. He specifically wanted someone with an evil looking face to use as the model for Judas Iscariot. It’s been said that when the

Prior of the monastery complained about his work ethic, Leonardo threatened to use the Prior's face as the model.

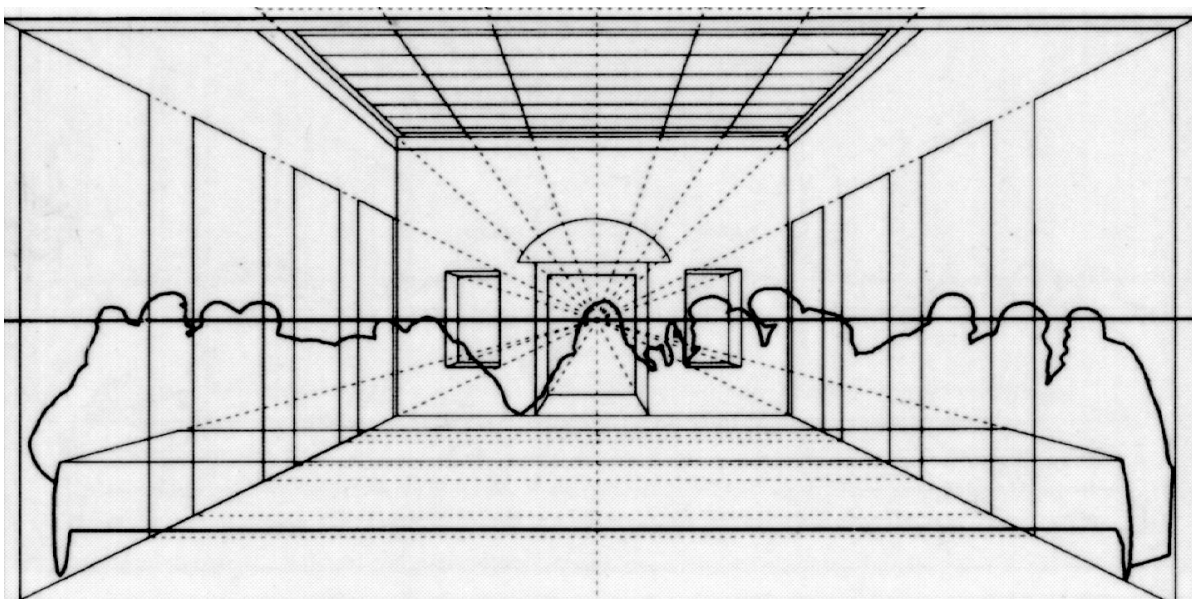
A Bit of Perspective

Leonardo used a technique called “one-point perspective” when painting *The Last Supper*. Perspective is a method used when drawing or painting on a flat surface that makes objects appear smaller the further away they get, converging on a single “vanishing point” on the horizon line. This makes the picture look three-dimensional (adding depth to height and width) and much more realistic.

Notice in this painting how it feels like you could just walk into the room and sit down at the table to eat with Jesus and the disciples. That's because the horizon line goes through the center of the picture and all the other lines connect to it at one vanishing point (which is Jesus's head).

In fact, when beginning the painting, Leonardo put a nail in the center of the piece where Jesus' head would be, then used strings attached to other nails around the wall so he could paint all his lines perfectly in perspective.

Check out the following diagram to get a better idea. Notice how all the lines in the image – from top to bottom and from left to right – converge into the vanishing point in the center of the painting.



What Exactly is the Last Supper?

The “last supper” is taken from several passages in the Bible (Matthew 26:20-29; Mark 14:16-25; Luke 22: 7-23; John 13) in which Jesus eats His last meal before His death on the cross. At this supper, He tells the disciples that one of them will betray Him.

The moment Leonardo was trying to capture was just after Jesus says this. He wanted to portray the emotions of shock, anger, even rage that the disciples felt upon hearing this.

[Click here to see an enlarged version of the painting.](#) Once the link opens up, click the plus symbol (+) on the magnifying glass/cursor to enlarge it even further. Use the scroll bars at the right and bottom to navigate around the painting. Study the faces, postures and position of each of the disciples. Do you sense the shock, dismay and confusion?

Let’s identify each of the disciples, then we will understand their reactions a little better.

From left to right, we have: Bartholomew and James (son of Alphaeus) who have looks of utter disbelief on their faces, and Andrew, who throws his hands up in the air as if in shock.

Next is Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Jesus. Notice how he is the only disciple in “shadow.” He is also clutching a bag of money (he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver) in one hand and with the other he’s reaching for the sop at the same time as Jesus (John 13:25-26).

Behind him are Peter and John. Peter looks ready to fight as he grips a dagger in one of his hands. While John looks as if he’s about to faint. Jesus sits in the middle.

The next three disciples are: Thomas, James (the Greater, John’s brother), and Philip. Thomas is holding his index finger in the air. This is perhaps in reference to the passage of scripture in John 20:24-29, in which Thomas doubted that Jesus had actually risen from the dead and said, “Unless I put my finger into the nail prints...I will not believe.” James is stunned as he throws his arms out. And Philip looks as if he is asking, “How could one of us betray You?”

Finally, we have Matthew, Jude Thaddeus, and Simon the Zealot. The three of them are huddled together in their own discussion. Perhaps they're trying to figure out who the traitor is.

Just for Fun

Below is one of Leonardo's sketches, "Study for the Last Supper" from his journals. [Click here to see a larger version.](#)

In what ways does the sketch differ from the actual painting?

Can you read the names of the disciples? (Hint: First, you'll first need to be able to read in Italian. And second, you'll have to read Italian *backwards* in Leonardo's "mirror writing" style.)



A Closer Look

Look again at *The Last Supper* painting. Is there anything that looks odd to you? In the time of Jesus, it was customary to eat meals around a low table. He and His disciples probably sat or reclined on the floor on cushions, carpets or mats.

However, Leonardo painted a table with linens and dishes in Renaissance style with more of a “Western culture” feel. He did this on purpose. Since the piece was actually painted in the monks’ dining hall, he designed it to match their tableware and linens, giving the impression that they were actually sitting there eating with Jesus and the disciples.

The Number 3

Recall the fact that Leonardo was not just an artist. He was an inventor, a scientist, a mathematician, and much more. Do you notice the use of the number three throughout the painting? There are three windows, the disciples are painted in groups of three, and Jesus is painted in the shape of an isosceles triangle.

Other “Last Supper” Paintings

Take a look at these paintings of the Last Supper by other Renaissance artists. How does Da Vinci’s painting compare to them? How does it contrast?

- [Communion of the Apostles, by Fra Angelico](#), painted between 1440-1441
- [The Last Supper fresco by Andrea del Castagno](#), painted between 1445-1450
- [The Last Supper fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio](#), painted in 1480
- [The Last Supper fresco by Pietro Perugino](#), painted between 1493-1496

More Fun Facts

Would you like to find out even more fun facts about *The Last Supper*? Check out the video recommendation under “Recommended for Further Study” at the end of these lessons.



The Last Supper

[illegible]

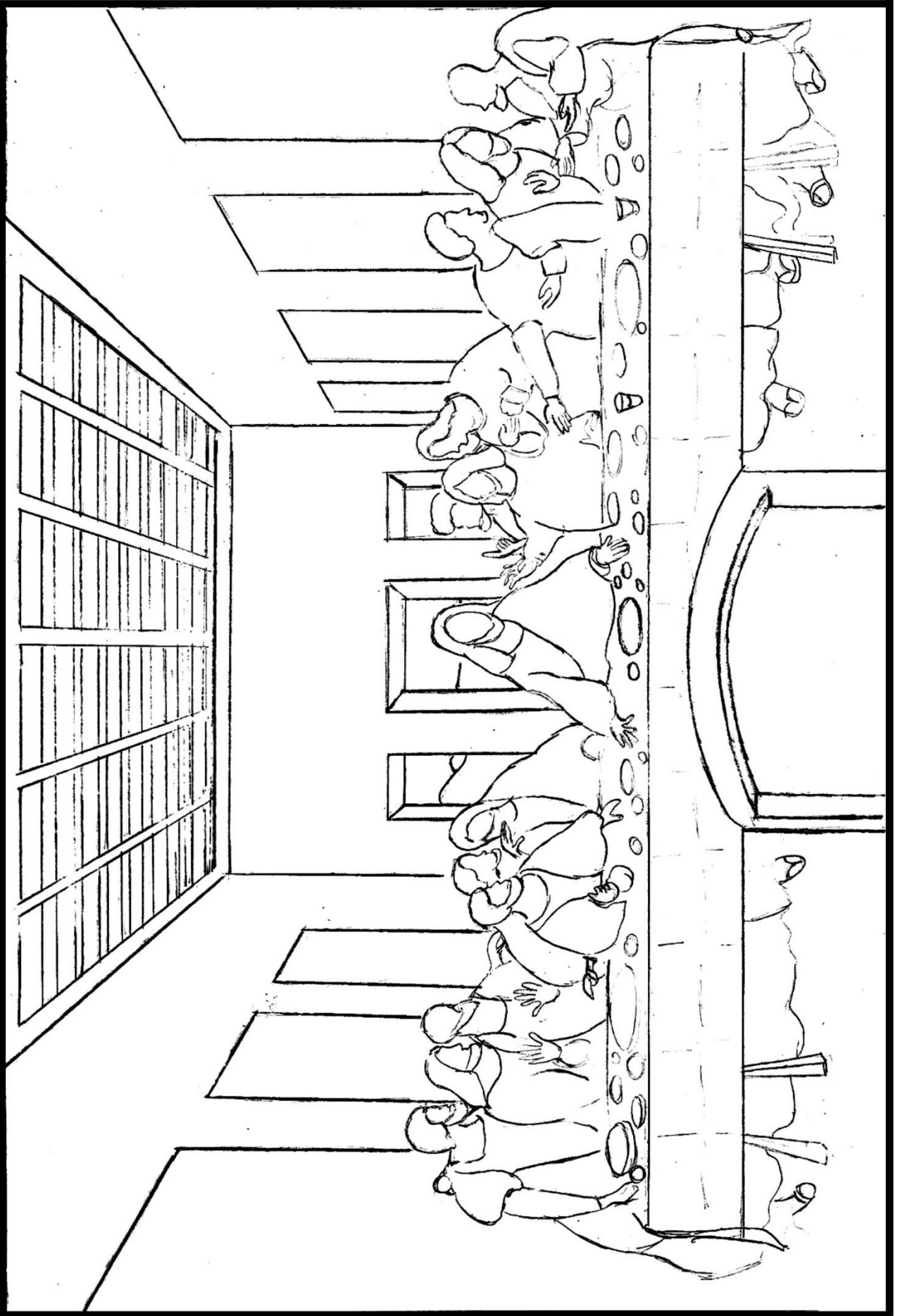
The Last Supper Enrichment Activity

If you would like to enrich your study of *The Last Supper* with a “no fuss” art activity, simply print out the template on the following page.

Older students can use it as transfer pattern for painting projects, or they may prefer to color in with pastels, charcoals, or colored pencils.

Younger students can use it as a coloring page to “create” alongside older siblings.

For in-depth art lessons on each of the masterpieces we study in this volume, check out my [Mixing with the Masters](#) art course.





Masterpiece #3: The Female Head

Introduction

Although Leonardo da Vinci is most famous for the *Mona Lisa*, the *Last Supper*, and other paintings, he also left thousands of notes illustrated with his sketches in what have now been put into notebooks, or *codices*.

Codices ([pronunciation](#)) is the plural form of the word “codex,” which is simply a manuscript or collection of old, antiquated works.

Because of these codices, we have learned so much of Leonardo’s genius in the fields of science, technology, engineering, architecture, music, mathematics, and more. (*How’s that for Renaissance STEM education?*)

But these notebooks also functioned as his art journals, in which he could sketch out plans for upcoming pieces or refine his drawing skills. Sketching, practicing, outlining, and continually developing one’s abilities is crucial to the growth and progress of any artist.

So, I believe it is vitally important to include his sketches in any art appreciation program.

Background

Over 7000 pages of Da Vinci’s studies, ideas, inventions and drawings still survive today. These pages have been gathered into several codices. Through them, he established modern techniques of scientific illustration with highly accurate renderings. However, being left-handed (and possibly dyslexic) he wrote in “mirror writing,” making it hard for others to decipher.


The following is a list of a few of the codices. Click on the links below to view explore each one.

This one is housed in the British Library:

- [Codex Arundel](#) (263 folios)

The Hammer (or Leicester) Codex was bought by Bill Gates in 1994 for \$30 million. You can see it here:

- [Codex Hammer](#) (72 folios)

The following codices can be seen via slideshow on Wikimedia. After clicking on each link, click again on the *green icon*  on the right side of the page to open up the “Category Slideshow”:

- [Codex Atlanticus](#) (41 folios)
- [Codex Flight of the Birds](#) (9 folios)
- [Codex Forster](#) (9 folios)
- [Codex Madrid](#) (22 folios)
- [Codex Windsor](#) (63 folios)

Mediums and Techniques

Leonardo sketched quickly on toned (brown) paper, usually in pen and ink, and sometimes added white chalk for highlights. However, he also drew with sanguine (reddish-brown) and black chalks. And on occasion added brush and ink to his sketches.

He told his fellow artists,

“Keep a sharp lookout, for figures in movement, in the streets, in the squares, in the countryside, and note down the main lines quickly: that is to say, putting an O for the head and straight or bent lines for the arms and the same for legs and trunk; then when you get home, look back at your sketches and give them finished form.”

Serge Bramly, in his book, [Leonardo, The Artist and the Man](#), wrote:

“Observing and drawing (and imagining or reflecting) were operations that very soon for Leonardo became much the same thing. Hand, eye, and brain


became coordinated through determined training. He gradually turned himself into a sort of living, thinking, and inventive camera (he wrote of “becoming like a mirror” – an intelligent and critical mirror). Drawing seems to have been almost second nature to him. He saw to perfection, then judged and reproduced the subject, seemingly without an intermediary between retina and paper: his thought was formed in the movement of his hand as his hand interpreted his vision. He could work so fast that one sometimes feels one is looking at a form of shorthand.”

Drawings of Women

After browsing through some of Leonardo’s sketches in his codices, which ones are your favorites? Which ones intrigue you the most? Are you more drawn to the engineering or technological sketches? The anatomical illustrations? The drawings of galloping horses? The wings and flight designs?

Out of all his sketches that I’ve seen, his studies of the “female head” are my absolute favorites. As a portrait artist, Leonardo would have had to make many studies of the head in various positions. But a lot of his female head studies were for painting the Madonna (the Virgin Mary) or saints.

Take a look at this collection below. Notice how many of the women look so peaceful, serene, gracious, and tender.

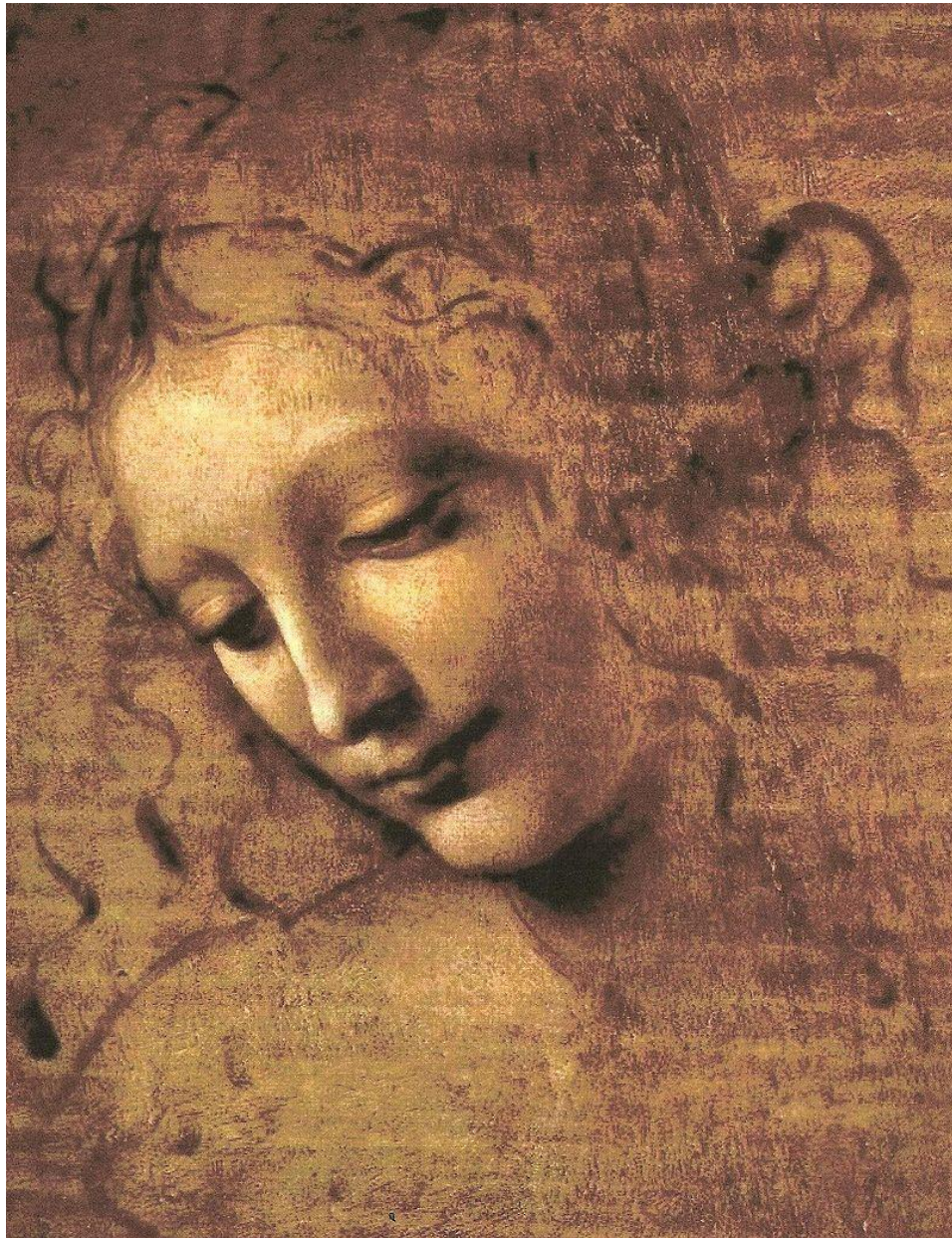
- [Drawings of Women by Da Vinci](#) (Once again, after the link opens up, click on the *green icon* on  the right side of the page to open up the “Category Slideshow”.)

A Unique Perspective of Renaissance Women

As we have already discussed, Leonardo created during the Renaissance era, a period in history in which women – even those in the upper classes – didn’t have the rights that women do today. They didn’t have much power politically or socially. And they were discouraged from participating in the arts and sciences. Perhaps they were even looked down upon intellectually by their male counterparts.

But look at the Leonardo's drawings again. Can you see the beauty and grace with which he sketched women? Do you notice how he captured their dignity, their thoughtful intellect, and glimpses into their sensitive or imaginative personalities? In his creative genius, he reveals to us multi-layered, multi-faceted women capable of thinking deep thoughts and having fascinating ideas.

The following oil painting is called, *La Scapigliata* ([pronunciation](#)), which translates, "the lady with disheveled hair."



In the book, [*The Moment of Caravaggio*](#), Alexander Nagel wrote about this piece:

“The eyes...see through the filter of an inner state, rather than receive immediate impressions from the outside world. It is the attitude of being suspended in a state of mind beyond specific thought—unaware, even, of its own body...here an inner life is suggested...”

She is contemplative and pensive. What is it that she’s considering? Why does the *Mona Lisa* have that “knowing smile” or smirk on her face? What are these other women in Leonardo’s sketches thinking about?

Leonardo da Vinci added dimension and complexity to his female portraits that many artists have never been able to capture.

More Information

Would you like to find out more information about Leonardo’s Codices? Check out the video recommendations under “Recommended for Further Study” at the end of these lessons.



Female Head

Female Head Enrichment Activity

If you would like to enrich your study of the *Female Head* with a “no fuss” art activity, simply print out the template on the following page.

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Art Terms to Remember

Below is a list of terms and definitions that we discussed in this study of Da Vinci:

1. **buon fresco** – process of painting on wet plaster with tempera paints, working quickly in small sections before the plaster dries
2. **chiaroscuro** - art technique meaning “light and dark” which is the use of light and shadows in paintings to produce rounded, sculpted-looking figures
3. **codex** - a manuscript or collection of old, antiquated works; **codices** is the plural form
4. **foreshortening** - art technique used in perspective to create the illusion of an object receding into the background
5. **fresco secco** - process of painting on dry plaster developed by Da Vinci in which he primed the dry plaster with white lead in hopes it would accept the tempera paints (this process was basically a failure)
6. **horizon line** - the line in a drawing or painting at eye-level where the sky meets the land or water below
7. **mirror-writing** - technique used by Da Vinci in which he wrote left-handed, from right to left and backwards, so that one would have to hold it up to a mirror to read it
8. **Mona/Madonna** - “My Lady”
9. **one-point perspective** - a method used when drawing or painting on a flat surface that makes objects appear smaller the further away they get, converging on a single “vanishing point” on the horizon line

10. ***proportion*** - refers to the way one part of an object relates to the whole of an object in size
11. ***Renaissance*** - rebirth; a period in history which marked a transition between medieval and modern times and brought about rebirth in art, cultural growth, intellectual achievement, scientific breakthrough, architectural advancement, and more
12. ***sanguine*** - reddish brown chalk used in sketches
13. ***sfumato*** - art technique meaning “fume or smoke” which softens or blurs sharp lines to give the illusion of depth and dimension, particularly on faces
14. ***three-quarter portrait*** - painting style in which the sitter’s body faces one direction and turns his or her head in another
15. ***vanishing point*** - used in perspective, a point on the image plane where the drawings of lines intersect and disappear

Recommended for Further Study

Want even more enrichment materials to complement your Leonardo da Vinci study? Here is a list of resources:

(Please Note: Although we love many of the works of the master artists, we may or may not agree with how they lived their lives. Some of the recommended videos, books, or web pages touch on certain facets of their lives that may be unsuitable for children. Please use your own discretion as a parent.)

Recommended Videos:

Mona Lisa:

- [Biography.com's Leonardo da Vinci](#)
- [PBS Secrets of the Dead: The Mona Lisa Mystery](#)
- [The Many Layers of the Mona Lisa](#) (Smithsonian Channel)

The Last Supper:

- [The Last Supper](#) (Khan Academy)

The Codices:

- [The Codex: Leonardo da Vinci Meets Bill Gates](#)
- [Da Vinci's Codex on the Flight of Birds](#) (Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum)

Recommended Books: *(Check your local library for these titles.)*

- **Leonardo: Beautiful Dreamer**, by Robert Byrd
- **Leonardo da Vinci**, by Diane Stanley
- **Who Was Leonardo da Vinci?** by Roberta Edwards
- **Leonardo da Vinci for Kids: His Life & Ideas**, by Janis Herbert

- **Twenty-Four Leonardo da Vinci Paintings (Collection for Kids)**, by Stanley Cesar
- **Leonardo's Anatomical Drawings**, by Dover Art Library
- **Journal of Inventions: Leonardo da Vinci**, by Jasper Bark
- **Leonardo da Vinci**, by Brendan January

Recommended Websites:

- [Leonardo da Vinci Museum in Florence](#)
- [Museo Leonardiano in Vinci](#)
- [Leonardo da Vinci](#)
- [List of Works by Leonardo da Vinci](#) (Wikipedia)
- [Timeline of Leonardo da Vinci's Life & the Mona Lisa](#) (PBS)
- [The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci](#)
- [Complete Works of Leonardo da Vinci](#)
- [The Mona Lisa Foundation](#) (dedicated to the Isleworth Mona Lisa)
- [25 Secrets of the Mona Lisa Revealed](#)

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- Mary Cassatt
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