

**RENAISSANCE
FLORENCE:
VERROCCHIO:
LEONARDO DA VINCI'S
MASTER AND TEACHER**



RENAISSANCE FLORENCE: VERROCCHIO: LEONARDO DA VINCI'S MASTER AND TEACHER

Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society, both in terms of the importance of his own artistic creations, especially his statue of David, and his link to and possible influence on his students, in particular a young inquisitive apprentice from Vinci named Leonardo.

Subjects

Art
European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Uffizi Museum, Florence
- Basilica of San Lorenzo, Florence
- Orsanmichele, Florence
- Bargello Museum, Florence
- Colleoni Statue, Venice

Essential Questions

- Who was Andrea del Verrocchio?
- What was Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florence?
- How might have Verrocchio influenced Leonardo da Vinci?
- Why is Verrocchio's famous bronze sculpture David important to understanding the development of Renaissance art in Florence? Who might have been the model for the sculpture?

Academic Summary

ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO, a Florentine, was in his day a goldsmith, a master of perspective, a sculptor, a wood-carver, a painter, and a musician; but in the arts of sculpture and painting, to tell the truth, he had a manner somewhat hard and crude, as one who acquired it rather by infinite study than by the facility of a natural gift. Even if he had been as poor in this facility as he was rich in the study and diligence that exalted him, he would have been most excellent in those arts, which, for their highest perfection, require a union of study and natural power. If either of these is wanting, a man rarely attains to the first rank; but study will do a great deal, and thus Andrea, who had it in greater abundance than any other craftsman whatsoever, is counted among the rare and excellent masters of our arts. There were wanting at this time in Rome some of those large figures of the Apostles which generally stood on the altar of the Chapel of the Pope, as well as certain other works in silver that had been destroyed; wherefore Pope Sixtus sent for Andrea and with great favor commissioned him to do all that was necessary in this matter, and he brought the whole to perfection with much diligence and judgment. Meanwhile, perceiving that the many antique statues and other things that were being found in Rome were held in very great esteem, insomuch that the famous bronze horse was set up by the Pope at S. Giovanni Laterano, and that even the fragments--not to speak of complete works--which were being discovered every day, were prized, Andrea determined to devote himself to sculpture. NOW THE FAME of Andrea could not go further or grow greater in that profession, and he, as a man who was not content with being excellent in one thing only, but desired to become the same in others as well by means of study, turned his mind to painting, and so made the cartoons for a battle of nude figures, very well drawn with the pen, to be afterwards painted in colors on a wall. He also made the cartoons for some historical pictures, and afterwards began to put them in execution in colors; but for some reason, whatever it may have been, they remained unfinished. There are some drawings by his hand in our book, made with much patience and very great judgment, among which are certain heads of women, beautiful in expression and in the adornment of the hair, which Leonardo da Vinci was ever imitating for their beauty. In our book, also, are two horses with the due measures and protractors for reproducing them on a larger scale from a smaller, so that there may be no errors in the proportions; and there is in my possession a horse's head of terracotta in relief, copied from the antique, which is a rare work. The Very Reverend Don Vincenzio Borghini has some of his drawings in his book, of which we have spoken above; among others, a design for a tomb made by him in Venice for a Doge, a scene of the Adoration of Christ by the Magi, and the head of a woman painted on paper with the utmost delicacy. He also made for Lorenzo de'Medici, for the fountain of his Villa at Careggi, a boy of bronze squeezing a fish, which the Lord Duke Cosimo has caused to be placed, as may be seen at the present day, on the fountain that is in the courtyard of his Palace; which boy is truly marvelous. Afterwards, the building of the Cupola of S. Maria del Fiore having been finished, it was resolved, after much discussion, that there should be made the copper ball which, according to the instructions left by Filippo

Brunelleschi, was to be placed on the summit of that edifice. Whereupon the task was given to Andrea, who made the ball four braccia high, and, placing it on a knob secured it in such a manner that afterwards the cross could be safely erected upon it; and the whole work, when finished, was put into position with very great rejoicing and delight among the people. Truly great were the ingenuity and diligence that had to be used in making it, to the end that it might be possible, as it is, to enter it from below, and also in securing it with good fastenings, lest the winds do it damage.

(Lesson Note: the original ball was struck by lightning, fell down and was replaced in 1600.)

Disciples of the same Andrea were Pietro Perugino and Leonardo da Vinci, of whom we will speak in the proper place, and Francesco di Simone of Florence, who made a tomb of marble in the Church of S. Domenico in Bologna, with many little figures, which appear from the manner to be by the hand of Andrea, for Messer Alessandro Tartaglia, a doctor of Imola, and another in S. Pancrazio at Florence, facing the sacristy and one of the chapels of the church, for the Chevalier Messer Pietro Minerbetti. Another pupil of Andrea was Agnolo di Polo, who worked with great mastery in clay, filling the city with works by his hand; and if he had deigned to apply himself properly to his art, he would have made very beautiful things. But the one whom he loved more than all the others was Lorenzo di Credi...

Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 16th century

Florence, Italy was the center of Renaissance art, architecture and humanist thought during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Walking through the city today is like visiting a living museum, where around every corner visitors can see priceless works of art. The Museums like the Uffizi and the Academia are filled with priceless paintings and sculptures that are the envy of places around the world. The Piazza della Signoria, Florence's central square and the political hub of the city since the days of the Medici family, contains priceless statues such as the Rape of the Sabine Women by Giambologna and Cellini's masterpiece Perseus with the Head of Medusa, which have stood open to the public since their creation in the 16th century. Even the buildings themselves, many of them constructed during Florence's golden age, were designed to be expressions of artistic beauty. People around the world learn the names of artists, architects and writers associated with Renaissance Florentine society: Michelangelo, Donatello, Giotto, Raphael, Machiavelli and Brunelleschi. Florence is even associated with the ultimate so-called "Renaissance Man" himself: Leonardo da Vinci.

One name not widely known outside the academic world, however, is that of Leonardo's master and teacher: Andrea del Verrocchio.

Born Andrea di Michele di Francesco de Cioni, Verrocchio was a master painter and sculptor in his own right. At the height of Medici power and prestige, during the reigns of Piero de Medici and his son Lorenzo de Medici (the Magnificent), Verrocchio ran a famous art school in Florence, where for 10 years he apprenticed, among others, an inquisitive and highly talented young man named Leonardo. Verrocchio's workshop, seen even at the time as one of the greatest in Florence, produced works that grace the city's museums today. The problem with such art is that historians aren't sure exactly who created them. It is thought that the master collaborated with his students on a number of paintings and sculptures, including the Baptism of Christ, which now hangs in the Uffizi museum (believed to be the result of a collaboration between Verrocchio and Leonardo). There are a few pieces of art attributed to the master alone, the most famous of which is a bronze statue of the biblical David from the mid-

1460s (in the Bargello Museum today). Not to be confused with Michelangelo's much more famous later marble statue of the same name, Verrocchio's work portrays David as a young man, perhaps 12-13 years of age. Many historians and artists believe the statue is actually a representation of the studio's most famous student Leonardo, who was a young teen around the time it was cast, but this is purely conjecture. There are many statues of David in Florence. The biblical story was a favorite of the Medici family (and thus Florence) because of its message that David was more powerful than he seemed (they saw Florence under their leadership in much the same way). Late in life, in 1483, Verrocchio was awarded the contract for a statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni (a famous Venetian military commander) and he moved to Venice, where he lived the remainder of his life, dying in 1488 (the final statue was completed by his students).

Studying Florentine Renaissance art necessitates studying the great artists of the time, and it is natural for students to be drawn to Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and others, but it is also important to remember that these great artists didn't just wake up one day, pick up a paintbrush and start producing masterpieces. Each studied the craft for years before they were ready to strike out on their own. Just as teachers over the centuries have influenced their students (and continue to do so), Plato had Socrates and Aristotle had Plato, Alexander had Aristotle, and Leonardo had Verrocchio.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society, both in terms of the importance of his own artistic creations, especially his statue of David, and his link to and possible influence on his students, in particular a young inquisitive apprentice from Vinci named Leonardo.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society in terms of his own artistic creations.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society in terms of his link to and possible artistic influence on his students, in particular a young, inquisitive apprentice in his workshop from Vinci named Leonardo.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Can teachers influence the way a student thinks or creates? If so, how? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Verrocchio (20 min)
- Video – Verrocchio (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about Verrocchio. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: What was Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society, both in terms of the importance of his own artistic creations, especially his statue of David, and his link to and possible influence on his students? (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail Verrocchio's place in Renaissance Florentine society, both in terms of the importance of his own artistic creations, especially his statue of David, and his link to and possible influence on his students, in particular a young inquisitive apprentice from Vinci named Leonardo.

Extension

On tour: Orsanmichele, Florence

While on tour, students in Florence can visit the Orsanmichele (Kitchen Garden of St. Michael) where they can see for themselves one of Verrocchio's most famous bronze statues, Christ and St. Thomas. The Orsanmichele, a church constructed on the site of a kitchen garden of the Monastery of San Michele (now demolished), was built in the 14th century and was a chapel used by Florence's powerful trade and craft guilds. The outside of the church had 14 architecturally designed external niches, each owned and maintained by one of the guilds. The guilds in turn commissioned different artists to create religious statues representing their individual trades or status in Florentine society. Verrocchio cast Christ and St. Thomas for the merchant's guild, one of the wealthiest and most powerful associations in the city. The subject of the piece (Jesus showing the doubting apostle his wounds) was chosen carefully, as the Merchant guild was a judicial, overseeing body for the tradesmen of Florence. The statue outside is a copy. Verrocchio's original cast is inside the church (now a museum as well).

On tour: Bargello National Museum, Florence

While on tour, students in Florence can visit the Bargello National Museum, where they can see for themselves famous works of art from many Florentine Renaissance master artists. Two of Donatello's David statues are in the museum, one in marble and the other in bronze (the bronze one was the first free standing bronze cast during the Renaissance). Michelangelo is well represented in the museum as well, as are Ghiberti, Giambologna and Brulleneschi. Arguably the greatest piece in the extensive collection is Verrocchio's David. Cast in bronze in the 1470s, the statue was commissioned by the Medici family and was intended as a representation of Florence itself. Florentine rulers saw themselves and their city as represented in the biblical figure: much more powerful than first impressions led people to believe.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariVerr.html
Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Artists: Andrea Del Verrocchio (primary source)
- www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/andrea-del-verrocchio
Andrea del Verrocchio (website) – from the National Gallery (UK)
- www.palazzo-medici.it/mediateca/en/schede.php?nome=David_di_Verrocchio
David by Verrocchio (website) – from the Mediateca database at the Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence
- www.high.org/david/index.html
Verrocchio's David (website) – from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. The museum hosted the famous sculpture for a period of time after it was cleaned and restored in 2003. This is an outstanding site, with both student and teacher resources on Verrocchio and his work. Highly recommended for students and teachers.
- www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/bio/v/verocchi/biograph.html
Verrocchio (website) – from the Web Gallery of Art
- u3aswansea.org.uk/U3ASwansea/Notes_files/2%20Verrocchio.ppt
Verrocchio (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YMEIjHI9og
Verrocchio (with Leonardo), Baptism of Christ, 1470-75 (video) – from Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, Art history teachers at Khan Academy
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmpE3Q2bYHs
2003 - Verrocchio (video) – 1 minute video on Verrocchio's David statue

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Verrocchio
Andrea del Verrocchio – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_\(Verrocchio\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_(Verrocchio))
David (Verrocchio) – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence
On the Road: Florence – from Passports Educational Travel
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence_sightseeing
On the Road: Florence Sightseeing – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-botticelli-birth-of-venus
Renaissance Florence – Botticelli: Birth of Venus
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-brunelleschi-dome-on-the-duomo
Renaissance Florence – Brunelleschi: Dome of the Florence Duomo

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-donatello
Renaissance Florence – Donatello
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-giotto-father-of-renaissance-art
Renaissance Florence – Giotto
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-machiavelli-the-prince
Renaissance Florence – Machiavelli: The Prince
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-medici-family
Renaissance Florence – Medici Family
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david
Renaissance Florence – Michelangelo: The David
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio
Renaissance Florence -- Verrocchio
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-leonardo-overview
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: An Overview
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/renaissance-europe-leonardo-da-vinci-mona-lisa
Renaissance Europe – Leonardo da Vinci: Mona Lisa
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-italy-leonardo-last-supper
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: The Last Supper
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-last-judgment
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Last Judgment
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-sistine-chapel-ceiling
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Sistine Chapel Ceiling
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-pieta
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: The Pieta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-raphael-school-of-athens
Renaissance Rome – Raphael: School of Athens

Key Terms

- Apprentice
- Biblical David
- Bronze cast
- Florentine
- Leonardo da Vinci
- Renaissance
- Sculpture
- Verrocchio

