

**RENAISSANCE ROME:  
MICHELANGELO: LAST  
JUDGEMENT**



# RENAISSANCE ROME: MICHELANGELO: LAST JUDGEMENT

## Description

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story behind the painting of the Last Judgment by Michelangelo, the techniques used by the artist to paint the masterpiece and how he used different shading, tones and images to convey his message of fear and dread.

## Subjects

Art, Art History, World History, European History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Vatican
- Sistine Chapel

## Essential Questions

- Who was Michelangelo? Why was he commissioned to paint the Last Judgment?
- What techniques did Michelangelo use to paint the *Last Judgment*?
- What message does the Last Judgment try to convey to its viewers?
- Was Michelangelo successful in articulating his message to the public?
- How did the community receive the fresco?

## Academic Summary

On 31 October 1541, after almost five years of work, 66-year-old Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (commonly known simply as Michelangelo) unveiled his masterpiece *The Last Judgment* to his patron Pope Paul III and to the crowd who had gathered inside the Sistine Chapel. Many of the onlookers were stunned when they gazed upon the wall behind the altar. This fresco wasn't like Michelangelo's famous panels on the ceiling depicting scenes from Genesis and the creation of man, completed by Michelangelo decades earlier in the same building, but instead the *Last Judgment* was dark, emotional and even a little frightening. The entrance to Hell seemed to jump off of the wall. One could almost sense the misery evident on the faces of the damned as they descended towards the abyss. The central figure, Christ himself, seemed more like an emperor than a shepherd as with a gesture of his arms he damns a large part of humanity... and then there was the nudity. Michelangelo had painted everyone naked, including Jesus and the Virgin Mary (these images were later repainted with loincloths or clothes by Michelangelo's student Daniele da Volterra). According to contemporary sources, Biagio da Cesena, the Pope's master of ceremonies, complained that the images were not appropriate for a papal chapel, but rather for "taverns and inns." In the tradition of many Renaissance paintings and frescoes, many of the figures in the Last Judgment were strongly based on the major figures of the time, including Pope Paul III (as St. Peter holding the Keys to Heaven), Cesna (as Minos, the mythical Greek judge of the dead in Hades) and even Michelangelo himself (as the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew). There may even be some reference to the Reformation, the then current battle over religion raging across Europe, in the faces of the damned. Considered a masterpiece ever since and by some to be the artist's finest painting, Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* dominates the wall of the chapel and evokes a range of emotions regardless of perspective.

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story behind the painting of the *Last Judgment* by Michelangelo, the techniques used by the artist to paint the masterpiece and how he used different shading, tones and images to convey his message of fear and dread.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain who Michelangelo was and why he was commissioned to paint the *Last Judgment*.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain who Pope Paul III was and how he used the patronage of the arts to convey a message of power and prestige.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the artistic techniques, symbols and iconography used by Michelangelo in the *Last Judgment*.

## Procedure

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How can artists use their works to convey a message? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Paintings in the Sistine Chapel
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Michelangelo and the *Last Judgment*, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Michelangelo and the *Last Judgment* (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the message Michelangelo tried to convey through the images of the Last Judgment on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel and whether or not he was successful.

## Extension

### On tour: Vatican – St. Peter's Basilica

While on tour, you will visit the Vatican. Just inside St. Peter's Basilica is one of the most famous statues in the world: Michelangelo's *Pieta*. This work of art depicts Jesus on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion. The *Pieta* now sits behind bulletproof glass after an attack in 1972. This is the only sculpture Michelangelo ever signed (on the sash running across Mary's chest). See if the students can find the signature.

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [royscarbrough.hubpages.com/hub/When-Michelangelo-Made-an-Ass-of-his-Critic](http://royscarbrough.hubpages.com/hub/When-Michelangelo-Made-an-Ass-of-his-Critic)  
Arts and Design: When Michelangelo Made an Ass of his Critic (website)
- [www.michelangelo.com/buon/bio-index2.html](http://www.michelangelo.com/buon/bio-index2.html)  
Michelangelo website – good info on the artist and his works
- [www.academia.edu/1032518/](http://www.academia.edu/1032518/)  
Michelangelo\_Reading\_Landino\_The\_Devil\_in\_Michelangelos\_Last\_Judgment\_  
Academic paper (38 pages) – “Michelangelo Reading Landino? The Devil in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment.” A long academic paper, but it has great analysis and information – recommended for advanced/honors/AP classes.
- [www.artnews.com/2011/02/01/michelangelo-naked-truths/](http://www.artnews.com/2011/02/01/michelangelo-naked-truths/)  
Michelangelo: Naked Truths? (website)
- [entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/michelangelos-last-judgment.htm](http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/arts/artwork/michelangelos-last-judgment.htm)  
Michelangelo’s Last Judgment by Lauren Mitchell Ruehring, freelance writer recognized by the National Society of Arts and Letters
- [100swallows.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/the-last-judgment-by-michelangelo/](http://100swallows.wordpress.com/2009/02/08/the-last-judgment-by-michelangelo/)  
The Last Judgment by Michelangelo (website)
- [100swallows.wordpress.com/2009/02/12/whos-who-in-the-last-judgment/](http://100swallows.wordpress.com/2009/02/12/whos-who-in-the-last-judgment/)  
Who’s Who in the Last Judgment? (website)
- [www.fordham.edu/campus\\_resources/enewsroom/inside\\_fordham/november\\_30\\_2009/news/scholar\\_delves\\_into\\_\\_73798.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/campus_resources/enewsroom/inside_fordham/november_30_2009/news/scholar_delves_into__73798.asp)  
“Scholar Delves into Michelangelo’s Last Judgment” article on the Fordham University website
- [www.authorstream.com/Presentation/Daperro-826014-paintings-the-sistine-chapel/](http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/Daperro-826014-paintings-the-sistine-chapel/)  
Paintings in the Sistine Chapel – This PowerPoint slideshow presentation includes a selection of all the major paintings in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome. It includes painting by Botticelli, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, Rosselli and Michelangelo. In particular explores the paintings on the ceiling and The Last Judgment by Michelangelo.
- [www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Last-Judgement.html](http://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Last-Judgement.html)  
The Last Judgment: Images of a Masterpiece (website)
- [arts.muohio.edu/faculty/benson/Michelangelo%20Site/TheLastJudgment.html](http://arts.muohio.edu/faculty/benson/Michelangelo%20Site/TheLastJudgment.html)  
“The Last Judgment” – website at Miami of Ohio University
- [evergreen.loyola.edu/brnygren/www/Honors/MA.htm](http://evergreen.loyola.edu/brnygren/www/Honors/MA.htm)  
Michelangelo’s Last Judgment: the Response – good analysis by Nathan Zawie, graduate student in Art. On the Loyola University (MD) website.
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://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=KhyF9yxas2c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhyF9yxas2c)  
Michelangelo and the Last Judgment (video) by Kenney Mencher, art professor at Ohlone College (CA)

## **Background Information**

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo)  
"Michelangelo" – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Last\\_Judgment\\_\(Michelangelo\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_(Michelangelo))  
"The Last Judgment (Michelangelo)" – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_Paul\\_III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Paul_III)  
"Pope Paul III" – Wikipedia article
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/country\\_profile](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/country_profile)  
On the Road: Italy (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/rome](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/rome)  
On the Road: Rome – from Passports Educational Travel
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/the\\_vatican](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/the_vatican)  
On the Road: Vatican City – from Passports Educational Travel

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-botticelli-birth-of-venus](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-medici-family)  
Renaissance Florence – Medici Family
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david)  
Renaissance Florence – Michelangelo: The David
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio)  
Renaissance Florence -- Verrocchio
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-leonardo-overview](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-raphael-school-of-athens)  
Renaissance Rome – Raphael: School of Athens

### **Key Terms**

- Last Judgment
- Michelangelo
- Reformation
- Renaissance
- Perspective
- Pope Paul III
- Sistine Chapel

