

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: JK – Grade 12

CURRICULUM LINKS: Visual Arts, Science, Geography, Social Studies

KEY WORDS: history, politics, power, patronage, spirituality, Catholicism, Baroque

EARLY RUBENS

OCTOBER 12, 2019 – JANUARY 5, 2020

Early Rubens focuses on Peter Paul Rubens's (1577 – 1640) most innovative period: between 1609 and 1621. After training in Italy, he returns to Antwerp (modern day Belgium) and develops a style of painting known as Baroque art. Incorporating theatrical elements of Baroque art such as heroic figures, intense colours and energetic brushwork, his paintings earn him a glowing reputation among the noble elite. Amid a decade of war between Protestants and Catholics in Antwerp, Rubens's art plays a key role in rebuilding the city. Rubens soon becomes the most sought-after and widely copied artist of the 1600s in Europe.



Peter Paul Rubens,
*The Flight of Lot and
his Daughters from Sodom*,
1613–1615. Oil on canvas,
220.3 x 243.8 cm. Ringling
Museum of Art, Sarasota,
Fla. SN218.

GUIDED OBSERVATION

Use the Critical Analysis Process to explore the works in this exhibition:

DESCRIPTION

- What is your initial reaction to these works?
- What captures your attention?
- How does this work make you feel? How does it achieve that?

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

- What is the theme of this work? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What do you think the purpose of this work is?
- What message or meaning is this scene trying to communicate?

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- How has the artist's life in Antwerp and Italy influenced his style and subject matter?
- Who the intended audience for this artwork?
- How does Rubens forge a relationship between the political, religious and social landscape to create a unique opportunity for himself?

WHO WAS RUBENS?

Peter Paul Rubens was the sixth child of Jan Rubens, a lawyer from Antwerp, and Maria Pypelinckx, the daughter of a wealthy tapestry merchant. In 1568, the Protestant family fled to Cologne to escape the religious hostilities between the Protestants and the Catholics. Rubens spends his childhood against the backdrop of the Eight Years' War.

After becoming a Master Painter at 22, he leaves for Italy. He is appointed a court painter by the Duke of Mantua, an important appointment that enabled him to explore all of Italy's cultural riches. While in Italy, Rubens carefully observes and studies ancient art from Greece and Rome as well as Renaissance masterpieces. They will serve as inspiration for his own work as he studies the new dramatic Baroque style. With its vibrant colours, and dynamic compositions portraying strong human emotions, it suited the religious and political climate of the time.

He takes on church and private commissions, laying the groundwork for the production of artwork on a large scale – a studio with numerous assistants. Rubens was both an artist and a diplomat who used both his reputation and the marketability of his art to forge strong relationships with powerful people throughout Europe.

Rubens lived to nearly 63 years old (1577–1640).



DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN AROUND 1614-1616



Peter Paul Rubens, *Daniel in the Lions' Den*, c. 1614–16. Oil on canvas, 224.2 x 330.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1965.13.1
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

GUIDED OBSERVATION

- What is your initial reaction to this artwork? What story is being told?
- Which area of the artwork does the artist emphasize?
- How does the artist create mood in this image?

CONTEXT

Rubens's painting recounts a story from the Book of Daniel which captures the moment of Daniel's deliverance from a harrowing test of faith. The painting represents a dramatic episode from the Old Testament, in which Daniel is sentenced to death for praying to God rather than to the Babylonian king. By order of King Darius, he is thrown into the lions' den. After a sleepless night, King Darius returns in haste to the den and finds that Daniel has miraculously survived. In this painting, Rubens brilliantly captures the tension between the lions – who could pounce at any moment – and Daniel in his vulnerable state.

Describing this painting in a letter, Rubens declared it was: "taken from life. Original, entirely by my hand." Rubens drew inspiration for this artwork from various Renaissance sources as he demonstrates his ability to evoke the dramatics. This was among a handful of works that Rubens kept for himself.

EXTENDED EXPLORATION

- Ask the artist: Working in pairs, create a list of five questions you would like to ask the artist if you were able to speak to him. Share the questions with the larger group.
- Put your body into the position of Daniel. How does it feel to be in that position?
- Reimagine this artwork in another art genre – Cubist, Futurist, Minimalist – how would the mood and feeling change?



THE TRIBUTE MONEY 1612



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Tribute Money*, c. 1612. Oil on panel, 144.1 x 189.9 cm. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, M.H. de Young Art Trust Fund, 44.11. Image Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

GUIDED OBSERVATION

- How does your eye move through the artwork? What devices has the artist used to make that happen?
- What words would you use to describe the look on individual character's faces?
- How has the artist created a sense of space in this work?

CONTEXT

According to the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), this story unfolds when Jesus enters Jerusalem. A group of Pharisees and Herodians try to entrap him. They catch Jesus around the corner of the Temple and ask him if taxes or "tribute money" should be paid to Rome. Jesus, noting the Roman emperor's image on the coin, raises one hand up to God and the other grazing the coin, says "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

In this painting, Rubens captures the moment of reaction between Jesus, the Pharisees and the Herodians. Rubens uses dramatic lighting to capture the reaction of each figure in the composition – whether it is amazement, curiosity or indifference.

EXTENDED EXPLORATION

- How does Rubens engage his audience, us, with his painting?
- Imagine that you are one of the characters in this painting. Write about this specific encounter from your perspective. What is the conversation? How do you feel? What is the mood?
- Create a Tableaux Vivant using nine people and this painting as inspiration. Have the pose photographed and hashtag #AGOSchools



CONNECTION TO THE COLLECTION

THE RAISING OF THE CROSS AROUND 1638



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Raising of the Cross*, c. 1638. Oil on paper; later mounted on canvas, 72.1 x 132.7 cm. Purchase, 1928. Image © 2017 Art Gallery of Ontario.

CONTEXT

The Raising of the Cross is one of Rubens's most compelling works – not only for the composition itself, but for the history behind the painting. This painting captures the dramatic moment when the cross of Christ's crucifixion is being raised to its upright position. Rubens emphasized the dynamism in this work with diagonal lines that draw the viewer's attention from the far lower right of the image to the top of the cross.

This artwork was stolen from the AGO, not once, but twice! – in 1954 and 1959. The work was later recovered in Parkdale in the west end of Toronto. Watch the videos on the next page to learn more about the consequences of the theft and conservation techniques that were used to repair the work.





Video 1

Dr. Sasha Suda, Curator, *Early Rubens*

<https://youtu.be/Bsnz22ZwMcM>



Video 2

Sandra Webster Cook, Conservator

<https://youtu.be/XZzpGzKzJel>

EXTENDED EXPLORATION

- It is believed that Rubens sent a studio assistant to the Church of Saint Walburga, the location of the original altarpiece, to make the sketch. When he received the rough sketch of the altarpiece, Rubens modified the composition. Research the original altarpiece, created in 1610. What similarities and differences do you notice between the altarpiece from 1610 and his sketch from 1638?
- Choose a work of art or a graphic image and modify it in your own composition. Consider your reasons for modifying the work and describe your process.

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