

## **BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS**

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

The Hands of God and Adam: detail from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born in Caprese, Italy on March 6, 1475. He was still young when his family moved to Florence where Michelangelo grew up. His mother died when he was only six years old. Growing up in Florence during the Italian Renaissance was the perfect environment for young Michelangelo. Even as a child all he wanted to do was paint and be an artist. His father, a local government official, wanted Michelangelo to go to school, but he had little interest in school. At the age of thirteen he was apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio, a painter and artist.

Michelangelo's talents became apparent as he worked for Ghirlandaio. Within a year or so he was sent to the powerful Medici family to continue his training under the sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni. Michelangelo was able to work with some of the finest artists and philosophers of the time. Over the next few years Michelangelo produced many sculptures including Madonna of the Steps, Battle of the Centaurs, and Bacchus.

Michelangelo's fame as a great artist began to grow. He returned to Florence and received another commission to create a large statue of David. It took him a couple of years to finish the giant statue. The piece of marble he began with was very tall and thin. Many people didn't think he could do much with it. He worked in secrecy, not letting anyone see it until it was finished. David became Michelangelo's most famous work of art. It is thirteen feet tall and was the largest statue made since Ancient Rome. It is considered by many experts in art to be a near perfect sculpture. Today the statue resides at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, Italy.

In 1505 Michelangelo returned to Rome. He was commissioned by the Pope in 1508 to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo considered himself to be a sculptor, but agreed to paint the Sistine Chapel for the Pope. He worked for four years, painting upside down on a scaffold in order to finish the painting. The painting was huge (141 feet long by 43 feet wide). It contained nine scenes from the Bible down its center and over 300 people. At the center of the scene, God's hand and Adam's hand nearly touch. This is one of the most recreated scenes in all of art and, along with the Mona Lisa, is one of the most famous paintings in history.

Read more at: <http://www.ducksters.com/biography/artists/michelangelo.php>

## **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475-1564)

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“Of all things, the hand is by many considered to be the hardest to draw, and yet it is also the thing for which we carry a visual reference at all times, right at the end of our arms.” Joumana Medlej

### **1. Description**

What do you see in the painting?

How does it make you feel? What mood does it create?

### **2. Color**

What colors you see in the painting? Do they create a mood?

What does contrast mean? How does the artist use contrast in this painting?

How does shading help the hands to look real?

### **3. Size**

This is only a small part of a very large series of paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Italy.

How long do you think it took Michelangelo to paint just these hands?

Look at the website picture of the whole chapel. See if you can find these hands. How long do you think it took him to paint just the ceiling? (4 years)

### **4. Line, Shape, Movement**

Do these hands look flat or 3 dimensional?

Do the hands look like they are moving? Which direction?

### **5. Emotional Response**

Would you like to have your bedroom ceiling covered with lots of paintings?

**SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

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**Hand drawing**

Materials: Paper, drawing pencils or colored pencils, tape

Have students attempt to draw their own hand. They may focus on just a finger, if desired. For a more 'realistic' Michelangelo experience, tape the paper to the bottom of the students' desks and have them lie on the floor to draw upside down.