

## **BACKGROUND READING FOR PRESENTERS**

### *Rembrandt van Rijn – Night Watch*

Rembrandt van Rijn was born on July 15, 1606 in Leiden, [Netherlands](#). He came from a large family where he was the ninth child. His father was a miller and saw to it that Rembrandt had an excellent education.

Rembrandt began attending the University of Leiden, but really wanted to study art. Eventually he left school to become an apprentice to the artist Jacob van Swanenburgh. He also was a student of the painter Pieter Lastman. It didn't take long for Rembrandt to become known for his skill as a painter. He opened his own art studio when he was nineteen and was teaching others how to paint by the time he was twenty-one.

In 1631 Rembrandt moved to the city of Amsterdam where he started to paint portraits of people professionally. In the 1600s cameras had not yet been invented, so people had portraits painted of themselves and their families. Rembrandt gained the reputation as a great portrait artist. Many art critics today think that he was one of the greatest portrait artists of all time. He also painted numerous (over 40) self-portraits and portraits of his family. Sometimes he would spice these up by wearing fancy and colorful clothes.

Rembrandt had a way of capturing a person's personality and emotion on the canvas. The people looked natural and real. In some of his paintings it feels as if the person in the painting is looking directly at you. In his later years he became more confident. He wouldn't just paint people in a line or sitting still, he would have them appear active. He also used light and shadow to create a mood.

Rembrandt didn't just paint portraits. He also enjoyed painting scenes from the Bible and landscapes. Some of his paintings that depict scenes from the Bible include *The Raising of Lazarus*, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and *The Visitation*. Some of his landscapes include *Winter Scene*, *Landscape with a Stony Bridge*, and *Stormy Landscape*.

Today Rembrandt is considered one of the greatest artists in history and, by some, the greatest Dutch painter of all time. He painted over 600 paintings and had a large influence on other painters throughout art history.

### **Interesting Facts about Rembrandt**

1. He was a big spender and liked to collect art and other items. For this reason he never had a lot of money despite his paintings being fairly popular.
2. He liked dogs and put them in several of his paintings.
3. He outlived his wife and his only son, Titus.
4. His home in Amsterdam has been turned into the Rembrandt House Museum.

## SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Rembrandt van Rijn – Night Watch*

The most famous painting by Rembrandt is the *Night Watch*, or "*The Corporalship of Captain Banning Coq's Civic Guard*". It was a large portrait (over 14 feet long and nearly 12 feet tall) of Captain Banning Cocq and seventeen of his militiamen. A typical portrait at this time would have shown the men lined up in a row, each man looking similar and the same size. Rembrandt thought this would be boring, however. He painted each man doing something different in what looks more like a large action scene. *The Night Watch* is currently displayed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

1. Study this picture for a minute or two. What do you think of it?  
What was the first thing that attracted your attention?  
What is happening in this painting?
2. Did Rembrandt want to paint this scene true to life?
3. Did he use many colors or just a few?  
Are they lifelike? Intense or subdued? Does he use mainly lights or darks?  
How does his choice of color make you feel about his subject?
4. Are the lines sharp and clear or are they blurry?  
Are they lifelike? Natural?
5. Is there movement in the picture? How does this make you feel?
6. Do the people look flat or solid? Near or far? Clear or fuzzy?
7. How does Rembrandt show us perspective? Light and shadow?
8. From what point of view are you looking at these people? Above, below, straight on?
9. What do you see first, second, third?
10. What is the mood or atmosphere of the painting? How does this make you feel?
11. Would you like to be in this scene? Why or why not?

## **SUGGESTED EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

### *Rembrandt van Rijn – Night Watch*

#### 1. Shadow Experiment

Materials: flashlights, paper, pencils

Darken the room as much as possible. Using flashlights, allow students to cast light on faces to note their appearance. Place the light from above, below, to the right, left, behind and forward to see changes in features. Use any of these in drawings as desired by pupils.

#### 2. Crayon Resist

Materials: crayons, white paper, thin black tempera paint or black watercolor.

Using crayons on white paper, color a picture or a design with a center of interest. Do not color the background. Paint over the entire sheet of paper with thin black tempera paint or black watercolor. Notice how your center of interest shines through.

#### 3. Crayon Scratch

Materials: crayons, construction paper, thick black tempera paint mixed with liquid soap, tools for scratching.

Color the entire surface of the paper with as many colors as desired. Press firmly, making the colors bright and solid. Color scribble pictures, circles, wavy lines, etc. Paint over the entire paper with the thick, black tempera paint, which has been mixed with some liquid soap. When dry, use any tool to scratch a picture, design a shape, allowing the colors to show through. Use tools that will leave interesting lines, also. Try scissors, comb, bobby pins, etc.