



## Grades 4 – 8

### Finding History in Art

#### TEACHER INFORMATION:

This tour features works of art that record history. Students will use a variety of skills to uncover the historic component of each work. They will sketch, compare works, identify key elements of style, and suggest an ending to the story, or narrative, presented in the art. These skills are recommended in the California curriculum standards.

Before your visit, please select chaperones and prepare them for this visit; the Huntington requires one adult chaperone for each group of 10 students. Print enough copies of the worksheet and provide pencils for the chaperone and students (no pens are permitted in the galleries). The chaperone will lead a group to the four highlighted works and read the instructions.

When you arrive at the Huntington, get a map for each teacher and chaperone. The Huntington guards can also direct you to the galleries. Assign different starting points for each chaperone to avoid crowding before works of art. Please be informed that some works may not be on display the day you visit.

Additional activities before and after your visit can be based on materials provided at the Huntington's website, as well as images of the highlighted works.

*We hope you enjoy your visit to the Huntington!*

#### Optional Follow-up Activities for the Classroom:

Bingham, *In a Quandary*, or *Mississippi Raftsmen at Cards*

Classroom activity: Research types of transportation used in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, including river boats and overland stages. Refer to the contributions of the Huntingtons in the development of the transcontinental railroad.

Charles and Henry Greene, *Dining Room Furniture for the William R. Thorsen House*

Classroom activity: Design an inlay pattern for a piece of furniture. See, Lesson plan, "The Art of Furniture" on the Huntington's website (education). Visit [www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/greeneandgreene/259.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/greeneandgreene/259.html) and learn more about the Thorsen House and its furnishings. Write a research paper on the Greenes and this commission.

Gainsborough, *Jonathan Buttal: The Blue Boy*

Classroom activity: Based on notes taken at the Huntington, write a description of the "Grand Manner" style. An advanced activity can focus on the clothes chosen for *The Blue Boy*—similar to 17<sup>th</sup>-century costume in paintings by Anthony Van Dyck, an artist Gainsborough admired.

Reynolds, *Sarah Siddons as The Tragic Muse*

Classroom activity: Explore the references in this painting by locating an image of a sibyl from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel and a description of Aristotle's ideas on tragedy, centered on pity and terror. Based on these findings, write a paper on how well Reynolds used historic references to make the actress, Sarah Siddons, seem especially important.

### **Brief descriptions of the art works used for this worksheet:**

**George Caleb Bingham (United States, 1811-1879), *In a Quandary, or Mississippi Raftsmen at Cards*, 1851. Oil on canvas (17 ½ x 21 inches). Acc. No. 83.8.4**

BINGHAM grew up in Missouri, where he saw flat wooden boats, navigated by long poles, carrying cargo along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. To pass the time, boatmen often played cards. The grouping of the four men in the center of the painting, the strong light that shines on them, and the relaxed, mild-mannered behavior call attention to a civilized moment on the Western frontier. Most of Bingham's genre paintings (scenes of everyday life) depict the American West as a place where man and nature coexist harmoniously.

**Thomas Gainsborough (England, 1727-88), *Jonathan Buttall: The Blue Boy*, 1770. Oil on canvas (70 ½ x 48 ¾ inches). Acc. No. 21.01**

GAINSBOROUGH, a famous British portrait painter in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, actually preferred landscape painting. But his ability to present the human figure in a relaxed, but lively pose, and depict the luxury fabrics of silk and lace explain his success as a portrait painter. *The Blue Boy* shows his childhood friend, Jonathan Buttall (rhymes with cuddle), who was probably a teen at the time. Gainsborough asked his friend to dress in clothes fashionable a century earlier and strike a pose associated with the wealthy. This style appears in paintings by Anthony Van Dyck, the most admired painter in Britain at this time.

**Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene (United States, Charles: 1868-1957, Henry: 1870-1954), *Dining Room Furniture for the William R. Thorsen House, Berkeley, California*, 1908-09. Honduras mahogany, ebony, brass pins; fruitwood, oak, and abalone inlays; leather seats. On loan from Gamble House/USC**

The GREENE brothers became the most famous architects and furniture designers in Pasadena around 1910. They designed homes and furnishings in the Arts and Crafts style, and for clients throughout California. The dining room furniture on view at the Huntington was made for the Thorsens, who lived in Berkeley. The use of costly and exotic woods, the finest craftsmanship, simple lines, and delicate inlays (the technique of laying materials into tiny grooves on the surface of the wood) all characterize the Greenses' best work. The Thorsen pieces include an inlay resembling a periwinkle, a plant Charles Greene may have found in his Pasadena neighborhood.

**Sir Joshua Reynolds (England, 1723-92), *Sarah Siddons as The Tragic Muse*, c. 1783-84. Oil on canvas (94 1/4 x 58 1/4 inches). Acc. No. 21.2**

REYNOLDS' fame rests on portraits and art theories he created in late 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. As a portraitist, Reynolds captured the essential quality of personality, and not just external appearances. Sarah Siddons was the finest actor in London, breathing life into tragic roles. She had a commanding presence and an intense gaze. Reynolds, as an art theorist, believed great art was not limited to its day, and so he presents Siddons as one for the ages, with references to Aristotle (the shadowy figures may personify Pity and Terror), Michelangelo (his Sistine Chapel sibyls sat on great thrones) and Rembrandt (the master of dramatic light and shadow).



## FINDING HISTORY IN ART

### *Worksheet*

#### **Sketching California History**

Furniture: Charles and Henry Greene, *Dining Room Furniture for the William R. Thorsen House*  
In the Scott Gallery of American Art

Look for all the pieces of furniture made for the Thorsen House dining room. Each piece includes a decoration of a flower. In the box provided, sketch the flower.

Are the flowers identical on each of the Thorsen House pieces of furniture? Look carefully and check the box next to the pieces that have a design identical to the one you sketched.

- Table top
- Sideboard (cabinet displayed against one wall)
- Chair with arms
- Chair without arms

A flower like the one on the Thorsen House furniture grows in Pasadena. The artists who designed this furniture—Charles and Henry Greene—lived near the Arroyo and may have found a similar flower. The Greenes designed furniture and architecture about 100 years ago. They earned a place in history because their designs were inspired by California and fit so well in our environment. Which California tree or flower would you choose to decorate furniture in your home? Why?

## **The Story of Transportation**

Painting: Bingham, *In a Quandary*, or *Mississippi Raftsmen at Cards*  
In the Scott Gallery of American Art

Look at this painting and answer these questions:

- Question: Before the invention of trucks, airplanes, and trains, how did people move cargo across America?
- Answer:
- Question: How did these boats move up and down the river without a motor? (Clue: What are some of the boatmen holding?)
- Answer:
- Question: In this painting, what are two activities—one work and one play—carried out by the boatmen?
- Answer:

Look at the boat in the foreground, with the men playing cards. Can you find the cargo? Have the boatmen just begun their trip, or are they coming home? What details in the painting make you think that?

## **Making History in a Grand Way**

Painting: Gainsborough, *Jonathan Buttall: The Blue Boy*  
In the Huntington Gallery

Artists follow the style of art popular in their day, just as we tend to wear clothes of a certain style today. These styles help us understand where people fit in history. This young man lived in England in the 1700s (18<sup>th</sup> century). His name was Jonathan, and he was a friend of the painter, Thomas Gainsborough.

Using the checklist below, decide what makes this portrait stylish and circle your answer, yes or no:

Yes or No: He's standing.

Yes or No: He's wearing shorts and a t-shirt.

Yes or No: He's standing in a pose called *contrapposto* (with one leg straight and one bent at the knee).

Yes or No: There's a baseball field in the distance.

Yes or No: He holds one arm *akimbo* (that means bent at the elbow, one hand on the hip)

Yes or No: He's laughing at a joke.

Yes or No: A bright light falls on his face and clothing, showing lots of details.

Yes or No: He's the largest and most important part of this painting.

Congratulations! You've just discovered what makes a portrait a "Grand Manner" portrait. A person, dressed in fine clothing, stands before us with a serious expression. Everything calls attention to the person—the pose, the lighting, the beauty of the clothes, and even the dark, shadowy background, which doesn't compete with the person portrayed. Big, important, grand—this style of portrait was popular in England in the 1700s (or 18<sup>th</sup> century). Look around this gallery and find three more "Grand Manner" portraits. Write their titles below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **Pieces from the Past**

Painting: Reynolds, *Sarah Siddons as The Tragic Muse*

In the Huntington Gallery

Meet Sarah Siddons. She lived in London in the 1700s, and was the most famous stage actress of her day. The most famous painter of the day—Sir Joshua Reynolds—painted this portrait. It's made up of pieces from the past—from the Renaissance period and even further back—from ancient Greece. Why would an artist mix details from different periods in the past? You decide.

### **First piece from the past: the throne**

In the Renaissance, there was an artist named Michelangelo (b. 1475). He painted women from the Bible who were prophets (who were very wise). They were seated on big thrones that floated on air. Does Sarah Siddons seem especially important because she sits on a throne?

You decide: Yes/No. Explain your answer.

### **Second piece from the past: the two people in the shadows behind her**

In ancient Greece, there lived a great writer named Aristotle (b. 384 B.C.E.). He was interested in plays, and especially tragedies (sad plays that reveal the truth about life). He thought that people sometimes got stuck in life, between things they fear and things that make them sad. Sarah Siddons sits between two shadowy figures. Choose the figure you think represents fear.

You decide: Fear is the figure with the knife or the figure with the cup. Explain your answer.

### **Conclusion**

Sarah Siddons was a famous actress because she played tragic roles that made people think about their own lives. Do you think the artist, Sir Joshua Reynolds, made her seem especially important by adding in these pieces from the past?

You decide: Yes/No. Explain your answer,