

Lesson Plan: The Enlightenment, Neo-Classicism, and Houdon

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Course: AP Art History

Audience: AP 11th and 12th graders

Timing: 55-minute Period

Pre-Reading

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jahd/hd_jahd.htm

Essential Questions:

Why do artists intentionally revisit styles from the past?

How can works of art create and reinforce political ideologies through form, function, content, and context?

What role do works of art take in constructing a historical legacy?

Procedure:

Step 1: Bell-Ringer:

- Begin the class by showing students a current photocopied image of the White House. Ask students to identify the structure and annotate the handout with at least three architectural elements they observe.
- Ask students to brainstorm at least one architectural complex that may have inspired the design of the White House.
- Once the class has shared their ideas, pose the question: Why do you think the White House and other civic buildings in Washington resemble Greco-Roman architectural complexes?
- In summation, ask students what connects this discussion about the White House to the content they took notes on for homework from the Met Museum's Heilbrun Timeline of Art History.

Step 2: Group Work:

- Place students into three groups and assign each group one of the following individuals:
 - Benjamin Franklin
 - George Washington
 - Thomas Jefferson
- Once students are in groups, provide them with two "big post-its" or pieces of bulletin board paper and poster markers. Challenge students to list everything they know about their individual thinking about key historical events, achievements, personality traits, and historical legacy.
- Ask students to highlight or circle the 3-5 elements they think an artist would want to emphasize about this individual when creating a public portrait in the context of the Founding era.

- Have each group report out and add any additional suggestions to their initial list that their classmates suggest.

Step 3: Mini-Lecture:

- Define Neo-Classicism:
Neoclassicism is characterized by clarity of form, sober colors, shallow space, strong horizontal and verticals that render that subject matter timeless (instead of temporal as in the dynamic Baroque works), and classical subject matter (or classicizing contemporary subject matter).
- Review key turning points that led to the creation of the Enlightenment and the Rise of the Neo-Classical Movement in Art. You may wish to include:
 - Newton's empirical observation of Gravity
 - Locke's "natural" rights of life, liberty, and property
 - Voltaire's rejection of the "old order" of Church and State through satirical theatre like *Candide*
 - Rousseau's elevation of "simple nature" and "pure feelings" over the corruption of civilization
 - The Discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, 1709
 - Johannes Winkelmann – wrote the first text of art history on Classical Greek Art, 1764
 - Edward Gibbons – *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776
 - 1776 – The American Revolution
 - 1789 – The French Revolution

Step 4: Pass out a folder and glue to each group with the following images from the work of Houdon and the AP Art History Curriculum and copies of the relevant art historical reading.

- 1) Benjamin Franklin Group: Bust of Benjamin Franklin by Houdon (Diplomatic Reception Room), Doryphoros by Polykleitos, Veristic Head of a Roman Patrician, Augustus at Prima Porta.
Reading 1
<https://www.diplomaticrooms.state.gov/objects/terracotta-portrait-bust-of-benjamin-franklin/>
 - 2) George Washington Group: Statue of George Washington by Houdon (Virginia State Capitol), Doryphoros by Polykleitos, Veristic Head Head of a Roman Patrician, Augustus at Prima Porta.
Reading 2 -
<https://smarthistory.org/houdon-george-washington/>
 - 3) Thomas Jefferson Group: Bust of Thomas Jefferson by Houdon (Monticello), Doryphoros by Polykleitos, Veristic Head Head of a Roman Patrician, Augustus at Prima Porta.
Reading 3 -
<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/thomas-jefferson-bust-houdon-sculpture/>
- Ask students to read and annotate the articles together.

- Then, students should work together to glue the images to their second “big post-it” or piece of bulletin board paper and then mark them up to create a diagram with similarities and differences in form, function, content, and context between the four works of art.
- Each group will then display its list of characteristics alongside its diagram.

Step 5: As a closing activity, ask students to individually reflect on the following questions in writing:

- How are Houdon’s sculpted depictions of Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington influenced by Greco-Roman traditions from the past?
- How are Houdon’s sculpted depictions of Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington influenced by Neo-Classicism?
- What political ideology was Houdon attempting to express through these depictions?
- To what extent do Houdon’s sculpted depictions of Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington align with our current understanding of these individuals? What do they add? What do they leave out?
- If you were to depict these individuals today, would you represent them as Houdon did? Why? If not, can you suggest another artist who might inspire your depiction? Explain why?

HW: Thomas Jefferson and Monticello