

The Nightwatch by Rembrandt van Rijn

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1642
- Size: 142.9 X 172 inches (11 feet 10 inches X 14 feet 4 inches)
- Location: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Period:
- Style: Baroque
- Genre: Genre Painting
- This painting is best known for its huge size, its use of light and shadow, and its perception of movement.
- This painting is also known as *The Company of Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem Ruytenhurch*.
- This painting depicts a military company moving out.
- This painting has a lot of military symbolism (The claws of a dead chicken on the girls' belt represent the Arquebusiers, the dead chicken represents a defeated adversary and the color yellow represents victory.)
- For much of its existence the painting was covered with a dark varnish that gave it the illusion of a night scene.
- In 1715 the painting was moved and the movers cut portions off all 4 sides of the painting to make it fit between two pillars. As a result, two characters and some of the architecture in the painting were removed.
- The captain and 18 militiamen commissioned the painting. Each paid Rembrandt 100 guilders for a total of 1,600 guilders. (The drummer was a hired man and was allowed in the painting for free.) There are a total of 34 characters in the painting.
- Rembrandt used a pattern of zigzag lines to draw the viewer's eye forward and back again into the painting.
- Some of the militiamen were upset that their faces were not clearly visible.
- During WW II, the painting was hidden to keep it safe. It was taken from its frame, rolled around a cylinder, and then restored to its frame after the war was over.
- This painting has been attacked twice-once by a bread knife and once by acid.

Artist Facts for Rembrandt van Rijn

- Pronounced Rembrandt van [Rhyne]
- Born July 15, 1606 Leiden, Dutch Republic (Now the Netherlands which in its entirety is often referred to as Holland.)
- Died October 4, 1669 (age 63) Amsterdam, Dutch Republic (Now the Netherlands which in its entirety is often referred to as Holland.)
- He was buried in an unmarked grave.

- Rembrandt's father was a miller and his mother was a baker's daughter.
- Rembrandt loved his mother and painted her many times.
- He met his wife when he was commissioned to paint a portrait of her.
- His wife, Saskia, was a wealthy aristocrat.
- They had four children, but only one survived to adulthood. Saskia died shortly after her fourth child was born, probably from tuberculosis.
- Rembrandt was also a printmaker and created etchings
- Rembrandt is generally considered as one of the greatest painters and printmakers in European art history and the most important in Dutch history.
- His artwork was popular throughout his lifetime, and he had a good reputation as an artist.
- Rembrandt was a teacher and had a large studio and many students who copied his style.
- "Rembrandt's own studio practice is a major factor in the difficulty of attribution, since, like many masters before him, he encouraged his students to copy his paintings, sometimes finishing or retouching them to be sold as originals, and sometimes selling them as authorized copies. Additionally, his style proved easy enough for his most talented students to emulate. Further complicating matters is the uneven quality of some of Rembrandt's own work, and his frequent stylistic evolutions and experiments. As well, there were later imitations of his work, and restorations that so seriously damaged the original works that they are no longer recognizable. **It is highly likely that there will never be universal agreement as to what does and what does not constitute a genuine Rembrandt.**"
(Wikipedia.org)
- In 1633 Rembrandt added the "d" to the original spelling of Rembrant. In previous years he had experimented with his signature as "R", "RH", "RHL", "RHL-van Rijn", "Rembrant", and then in 1633 "Rembrandt" which he maintained as he signature from that time on.
- Proof of Rembrandt's fame is the fact that he is known throughout the world simply by his first name.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- Value is the use of light and dark in an art piece. Higher values are described as being light and lower values are referred to as being dark. In painting, value is often referred to as tint and shade. Tint is light and shade is dark.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Value

- Have the students squint at the painting to help them distinguish the light areas from the dark ones. (Dark areas will fade back when you squint.)
- Where do you see areas of light and dark in this painting?
- Where is the light coming from? (The front, shining down on their faces.) How can you tell where the light is coming from?
- Do you see shadows in this painting? Where?

Keywords

- Value, Portrait, Tint, Shade, Light, Texture, Mood

Other Possible Questions

- Can you see the company's colors being raised? (The flag)
- Who is Rembrandt trying to draw your eye to? (The three people)
- Where do you think these troops are going? (Possibly to shooting practice, parade, leaving a battlefield)
- Are the people in this painting moving or still? How can you tell?
- What colors do you see in this painting? Would you describe them as bright or dull?
- What are the two men in front doing?
- Can you find a man loading a gun? A drummer? A dog?