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Breaking the Chains, Rising Out of Circumstances (Intermediate Level)

Grades/Level: Middle School (6–8)
Subjects: Visual Arts, History–Social Science
Time Required: 3–5–Part Lesson
Recess periods, plus independent research
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For the Classroom

- Curriculum Home
- Lesson Plans
- Image Bank
- Related Works of Art
- Glossary (PDF, 343KB)
- Print and Web Resources (PDF, 191KB)
- Standards Charts (PDF, 724KB)

Lesson Overview

Students will learn about ancient styles of Roman portraiture and their influence on western European art, research and write a paper that compares Roman and American slavery, and produce an original sketch of a grave relief for a freed slave.

Learning Objectives

- draw a detailed study of an ancient object.
- compare and contrast an ancient portrait with a Neoclassical portrait.
- contrast slavery in ancient Rome with slavery that existed in the United States.
- understand the far-reaching influence of the ideas and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome.
- describe the role of art and the media in spreading and influencing cultures and ideals, including reinforcing and debunking stereotypes.
- create a sketch of a grave relief with an inscription for a freed slave.

Materials

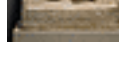
- Reproduction of *Bust of a Man* by Francis Harwood
- Background Information and Questions for Teaching about Harwood's sculpture
- Reproduction of the ancient Roman *Grave Relief of Publius Curtilius Agatus, Silversmith*
- Background Information and Questions for Teaching about the grave relief
- Student Handout: *K-W-L Chart on Slavery*
- Scratch paper
- Drawing pencils
- Black paper
- White chalk or colored pencils



Download this lesson (RTF, 500KB)



Bust of a Man, Harwood (PDF, 280KB)



Grave Relief, Roman (PDF, 461KB)



Student Handout: K-W-L Chart on Slavery (RTF, 65KB)



Timeline, Breaking the Chains... (PDF, 184KB)

Lesson Steps

1. Display a reproduction of Harwood's *Bust of a Man*. Refer to discussion questions provided in step 2 of the [Beginning-Level Lesson on this theme](#). Tell students that the sculpture is made out of a black stone called *pietra a paragone*, which was used to replicate the man's dark skin tone. Further explain that portrait busts were commonly displayed in interior spaces during this period. More-typical portrait busts would capture the likenesses of important people from history, politics, or a wealthy person's family. Sometimes portrait busts portrayed race, ethnicity, and gender in a generalized rather than individualized way. A portrait like this one could have been displayed in a sitting room as a conversation piece.
2. Point out particular details on *Bust of a Man*, such as the scar on the sitter's forehead and the creases under his bottom eyelids and on his neck. Explain to students that specific details such as the scar and creases tell us that this is an individual, albeit an idealized individual, and not a type. The artist spent time reproducing and copying ancient sculptures. His own works were created in a classicizing style. Harwood chose an antique format for the bust, terminating the figure in a wide arc below the chest. Ask students why this 18th-century sculpture would take its cues from ancient Greece and Rome. Point out that the sculpture is an example of the far-reaching influence of the ideas and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. It was made during the Neoclassical period, a time when there was a renewed interest in the classical world. For more information on how ancient Greek and Roman ideals inspired Harwood's bust, see the lesson plan "Statement of Principles" from the Getty Museum's *Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment* curriculum.
3. Display a reproduction of the ancient Roman *Grave Relief of Publius Curtilius Agatus, Silversmith* without explaining what the object is. Have students take the time to look closely at the work of art. Ask them for their initial observations. Give students 10 minutes to create a drawing of the sculpture and ask them to include a minimum of seven details.
4. Next discuss the following questions:
 - What details do you notice? What can you tell about this person by looking at the details of the artwork? What else?
 - Look closely at his hands. The family of the person in this portrait worked with the sculptor to create this object. Why would you want a portrait of a family member holding something specific in his or her hands? (The individual is holding a tool and silver cup.)
 - What do the tool and silver cup tell us about this man? (He is a silversmith.)
 - What is he wearing? (A toga and ring would have indicated his status. Note that the ring is visible as a slight protrusion on the ring finger of the subject's left hand.)
 - What can clothing and accessories tell us about someone? (The clothing and accessories included in a portrait would indicate an individual's personal taste and social/economic class.)
5. Inform students that the sculpture is made of marble. Point out to students that marble sculpture from this period would have originally been painted to appear lifelike. Tell students that portraits like this would have been placed in the façades of family tombs, advertising the social and professional status of the deceased to all who passed by. Ask students how this sculpture compares or contrasts with gravestones they have seen, perhaps during Halloween.
6. Explain to students that we can learn more about this object by looking at the inscription below the figure, which translates to: "Publius Curtilius Agatus, freedman of Publius, and silversmith." This inscription reveals that Publius Curtilius Agatus was a former slave of Publius and a silversmith. Explain that in antiquity it was typical for a slave to take the name of his owner.
7. Explain to students that this freed slave is shown with a hairstyle similar to Emperor Augustus. Why would this man want to be depicted with an Augustan hairstyle? (The Augustan hairstyle would show his devotion to the emperor and new status as a Roman citizen. You may wish to point out that many teens copy the hairstyle of a favorite musician in order to be associated with that musician.)
8. Ask students how this work is similar to and different from Harwood's *Bust of a Man*. Explain that these two objects were made for different reasons. The figure depicted on the gravestone is free—in style and format—of the funerary reliefs commissioned by freed slaves or their families during antiquity. The freed slave or his family would have commissioned the portrait to present the subject in a particular way. In contrast, *Bust of a Man* was created by an 18th-century artist with his own intentions. We can speculate that the work was created to capture the character and facial features of a particular individual of a different race than the artist.
9. Point out to students that the freed slave in the ancient portrait is shown dressed in the fashion of his day and indicates his economic status. Further explain that posture and gesture in classical art are usually more important than facial expression in evoking a subject's character. Ask students why this man (or his family) would want to be depicted with the status symbols of his time. Explain that the relief also reveals the former slave's skill as a craftsman, because he is shown making a silver cup that is chased. Explain that chasing means modeling and impressing decorations or patterns on a surface using a hammer and other tools. Point out that the fine craftsmanship of the relief and the fact that Publius Curtilius Agatus (or his family) was able to commission the portrait provide evidence of his financial success.
10. Pass out to the class the *K-W-L Chart on Slavery*. Ask students what they know of slavery in the United States during the 1800s and have them fill in the "K" column of the chart. Discuss how Roman slavery was different from the kind of slavery that existed in the United States during the 1800s. Explain that Roman slavery was based on class, not race, and that slaves could buy their freedom or be freed by their owners. Ask students how slaves were freed in the United States. If students know that the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves en masse, have them write this in the "K" column of their chart. If they don't know this, have them write, "How were slaves freed?" in the "W" column. Ask students what else they know and would like to learn about slavery in the United States, and instruct them to fill in the corresponding columns.
11. Instruct students to conduct independent research online or in the library. The following Web resources may be helpful:
 - "Slaves & Freemen" on the PBS Web site *The Roman Empire in the First Century*
 - "The Southern States" on the PBS Web site *The Time of the Lincolns*

Assessment

Students will be assessed on their inclusion in the gravestone drawing of five to seven details from the artwork as well as their participation in the group discussion. Students' research assignments should comprise 10 bullet points comparing and contrasting slavery in ancient Rome to slavery in the United States in the 19th century. Students' pencil sketches for a relief sculpture for a freed slave should include information learned while conducting independent research.

Extensions

Discuss rare portraits of African Americans made before the Emancipation Proclamation granted them freedom. View the following photographs in the Getty Museum's collection:

- [Portrait of a Seated Black Child with Hands Crossed, Unknown Artist](#)
- [Smiling Man, Unknown Artist](#)
- [Gentleman Caller, Unknown Artist](#)

Standards Addressed

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

Grades 6–8

WRITING

Production and Distribution of Writing
 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
 8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Comprehension and Collaboration
 1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Grade 6

1.0 Artistic Perception
 1.1 Identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value).
 2.0 Creative Expression
 2.1 Use various observational drawing skills to depict a variety of subject matter.
 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
 3.1 Research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected periods of history, using a variety of resources (both print and electronic).
 3.2 View selected works of art from a culture and describe how they have changed or not changed in theme and content over a period of time.

Grade 7

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
 3.2 Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and cultures and explain how those works reflect the society in which they were made.
 5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications
 5.2 Use various drawing skills and techniques to depict lifestyles and scenes from selected civilizations.

Grade 8

1.0 Artistic Perception
 1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
 3.2 Compare, contrast, and analyze styles of art from a variety of times and places in Western and non-Western cultures.

History—Social Science Standards for California Public Schools

Grade 6

6.7 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures during the development of Rome.
 8. Discuss the legacies of Roman art and architecture, technology and science, literature, language, and law.

Grade 7

7.1 Students analyze the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire.
 1. Study the early strengths and lasting contributions of Rome (e.g., significance of Roman citizenship; rights under Roman law; Roman art, architecture, engineering, and philosophy; preservation and transmission of Christianity) and its ultimate internal weaknesses (e.g., rise of autonomous military powers within the empire, undermining of citizenship by the growth of corruption and slavery, lack of education, and distribution of news).
 7.11 Students analyze political and economic change in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries (the Age of Exploration, the Enlightenment, and the Age of Reason).

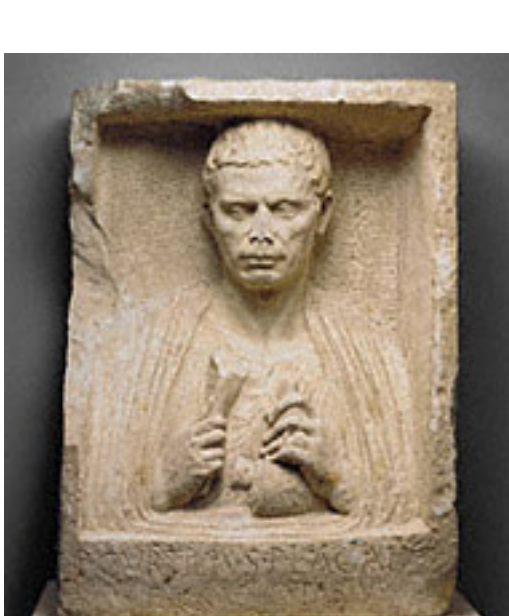
4. Explain how the main ideas of the Enlightenment can be traced back to such movements as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution and to the Greeks, Romans, and Christianity.

Grade 8

8.4 Students analyze the aspirations and ideals of the people of the new nation.
 4. Discuss daily life, including traditions in art, music, and literature, of early national America (e.g., through writings by Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper).

8.7 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the South from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.
 2. Trace the origins and development of slavery; its effects on black Americans and on the region's political, social, religious, economic, and cultural development; and identify the strategies that were tried to both overturn and preserve it (e.g., through the writings and historical documents on Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey).

8.9 Students analyze the early and steady attempts to abolish slavery and to realize the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.
 2. Discuss the abolition of slavery in early state constitutions.
 6. Describe the lives of free blacks and the laws that limited their freedom and economic opportunities.



Grave Relief of Publius Curtilius Agatus, Silversmith, unknown Roman artist, A.D. 1–25

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