

Tutor Hints for Rembrandt:

Introduce Rembrandt, either by reading the short biography in the Great Artists’ book, or the one provided on Drawing Demystified. (Or pick out a couple of facts from that longer biography you like)

This year, Classical Conversations wants us to make sure our students and their children (because we are really modeling for the parents) can pronounce the artist’s name correctly, and the technique we are learning. Since the Great Artists’ book does not often include specific vocabulary I’ve added vocabulary which emphasizes something in the assigned projects.

Pronouncing Rembrandt’s Name

The Dutch would include, apparently, rolling the “R” sound in Rembrandt’s name. That may not be possible or easy for some people, and isn’t strictly necessary.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn

“Rhem-Brant Harmens-zoon van Rhine”

Yes, that last part means, “from the Rhine River,” Rembrandt grew up near the mouth of the Rhine. Rembrandt means, “Sword Advisor” The middle name, “Harmenszoon,” means “Harmen’s Son”, and his father was, indeed, named Harmen.

Over his lifetime, Rembrandt changed his name several times:

- 1625 – 1629 He signed his works and went by “Rembrant Harmanszoon” (Signed “RH”)
- 1629 – early 1632 He signed his works “Rembrant Harmanszoon from Leiden” (“RHL”, or “RL” On his works)
- After 1632, he signs most work with “Rembrandt” (to which he added the “d” in 1633, for some reason—it doesn’t impact the pronunciation of his name. In legal documents, he still went by “Rembrant.”)

Handwritten signatures of Rembrandt: "RL.", "RL - van Rijn", "Rembrant. fr.", and "Rembrandt. fr."

(Often, his signatures are followed by an “f” and sometimes a year. The “f” is shorthand for the Latin “fecit”, meaning “he made”)

Introduce any vocabulary. For littles, I might stick with:

- Portrait
- Tronie

For parents and older children, I would include:

- Chiaroscuro
- Tenebrism
- Rembrandt Lighting

But you never know, little kids like saying big words too!

TIMELINE...REMBRANDT’S TIMELINE

If you’re interested in showing some of Rembrandt’s timeline contrasted with the Acts and Facts timeline, checkout my Rembrandt Timeline, also downloadable on Drawing Demystified. You will need the standard Timeline Cards (Acts and Facts) and can integrate the Artist/Composer cards and Scientist cards too, if you like.

If you’re doing the draw emotional faces project, here’s some tips.

(For the light and shadow, see below)

First



have your kids put their hands on their cheeks, Kevin McCallister style (yes, I recognize not everyone will get that reference now...which makes me feel old...) . If they can, (or if the parents want to follow along,) if they rest their pinky finger near the corner of their lips, they will feel a lot more of this exercise, but is isn’t necessary.

Ask the kids to

- Smile
- Frown
- make a surprised face
- angry face,
- disgusted face, (ect.)

and FEEL how those motions change the muscles under their hands, and the shape of their face. (if your jaw drops in surprise, for example, it will cause your face to look longer, and feel narrower under your hands.)

Next

Have the kids place their fingers across their foreheads, just above their eyes. If they can lay one finger right on top of their eyebrows, and the rest on their forehead, this next exercise will be very interesting.

Ask them to make the same, happy, sad, surprised, angry, disgusted faces again, and feel how the eyebrows and forehead move too.

Then

Pass out the mirrors, and finally do these expressions one more time, asking the kids to watch their faces in the mirror. Do they see how the parts of the face that we were feeling a couple minutes ago move, now that we’re looking?

When we show emotions, and when we read emotions on other people, we are really reading:

- The shape of the mouth (with associated jaw drop, if any)
- The movements of the eyebrows from “neutral/normal”
- The shape of the eyes. Watch how the eyes open, narrow, crinkle, ect as you go through your faces. (In real emotions, the pupils will also dilate (love, excitement, and fear...they will also dilate when you are actively problem solving!) or constrict (anger, disgust, looking at something disturbing...)

So while we’re doing quick drawings of either our own faces reflected in the mirrors, or drawing a volunteer [parent] making faces, pay close attention to the shape of the mouth, eyebrows, and eyes, as those will change the most.

If...

If someone is unhappy with how “realistic” their portrait turns out, encourage to try a cartoon-style. Cartoons are already stylized, over-sizing and emphasizing eyes and mouth shape and size (where our emotions are expressed) and under-sizing or de-emphasizing nose, ears, forehead, where emotion tends not to be expressed.

Drawing the human face is difficult for many. Part of it has to do with psychological tricks the brain plays: we tend to draw the eyes and mouth either over-large in proportion (tends more often with female drafters) or over-small (tends more often with male drafters) than is realistic, plus we mis-size the location/size of foreheads, noses, ears, and the back of the cranium itself.

Artists are trained in the proportions of the “average” face, and then spend time studying different faces to see how things like age, ancestry, gender, or variations change these proportions. Once you learn the proportions of the human face, drawing that can be a lot more fun. But that requires some time all on its own, not a half-hour.

If you’d like a face template, just ask, but I think that might be better in its own lesson.

If you’re doing the highlights and shadows Exercise (Pg. 29)

The technical term for how light and how dark a color is in the art world is “Value.”

Value (in art): How light or how dark a color is in a painting.

- Colors are often (not always) made lighter by adding white to it (a tint of a color)
- Made darker by adding black to it (a shade of a color)
- Made less vibrant and bright by adding grey to it (a tone of a color)

Taking any color picture or painting and converting it to black and white (whether through a filter, or a Photoshop setting) will reveal the different values of the painting.)

Ask someone to be the model, and let the model get comfortable. The crick in the neck you get after modeling a difficult pose for several minutes is NOT fun, get I-could-almost-fall-asleep-like-this comfortable, then set the light on the model until you get a nearly half-light, half shadow look.

Ask the kids to squint, if they know how, to really see the shapes the bright and dark areas make on the painting. Try not to think of it as, “The right cheek is dark” but think more like, “I see a diamond-ish shape on the right side that’s light...and a dark circle in the middle of that diamond...”



Top right:

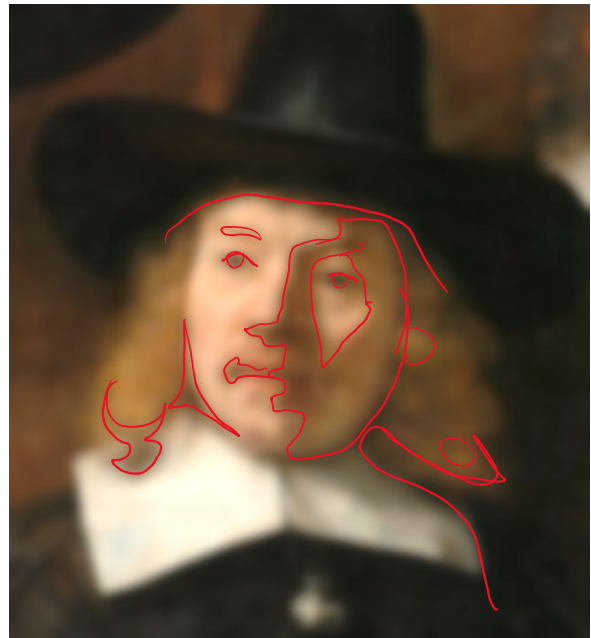
Detail portrait from Rembrandt's 1662 "The Draper's Syndicate."

Top Left:

Same portrait, but softened, as though through squinted eyes.

Right:

Blocks of light and dark value outlined in red, which is what you are looking for in the painting. Squinting is a common artist technique to try to simplify a complicated figure to see the simplified shapes inside it.



For fun, if the model is willing to sit still for longer, move the light around and ask the kids to look at the shadows again, and again. Raise the light high over the face, low under the chin, behind the model, straight on, and explore how the shadows change.

During some movies set in flickering lights, the shape of an actor's face can actually look like different people. In the most recent Star Wars movie (Rise of Skywalker) there's a moment when Daisy Ridley is laying still, eyes closed while light flickers around her—it causes a lot of different looks in a few seconds.