

# What makes a masterpiece a masterpiece?

## Research Assignment

### Instructions:

1. Research your artist, the art piece, the art movement, the culture in which it was made, etc.
2. Write in-depth paragraphs based on at least ONE factor found below
  - a. Topic sentence, concluding sentence, details, connections, transitions, etc.
  - b. Correct spelling, grammar, etc.
  - c. Font Style: Times New Roman or Calibri, 12 point, double-space
  - d. Include your chosen factor or factors in the title
  - e. Include the artist and title of the piece (if available) in paragraph – titles are italicized
  - f. Graded based on the Write Right rubric – attached
  - g. You MUST refer to specifics of the artist's culture such as other art pieces/artists, way of life, etc.
3. Be prepared to present your findings / paragraph to a small group or to the entire class

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### Factor #1: Energy – Time and Effort

How long did it take to complete?

How much work went into completing it?

How much research, experimentation, and exploration?

**Why is that amount of time and effort significant to why it is considered a masterpiece?**

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

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### Factor #2: Rarity – Beauty and Innovation

*Beauty = outstanding or conspicuous example of its kind*

What is unique about it?

Why is it so unique?

What is innovative about the piece?

Why was it groundbreaking?

What did the piece lead to? Was it a stepping stone to something else?

What makes it stand out amongst other work of its time?

What makes it a beautiful example of its time?

Why is the piece rare?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

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### Factor #3: Artistic Quality

Why does the piece come together so well?

What elements and principles have been used and used very well?

How have the elements and principles used to make an excellent piece?

Why is the technique of such high quality? How did the artist use the media so well?

How is the piece the perfect example of skill and technique?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

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**Factor #4: Age – survived the test of time**

How is the piece an excellent example of the time period, the culture?  
How is the piece a window to the past?  
How is the piece an epitome of the culture, the artist, and/or the art movement in which it was made?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

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**Factor #5: Provenance – history of object**

Is there a special or unique history behind the piece?  
What is the unique history? Why is this history significant?  
Is there a direct historical connection that makes it special today?  
Is there a significant story behind its creation or since its creation? What is it?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

*Example: James Dean's car has lots of mystery and curses surrounding it because .... Here are a few of the stories...*

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**Factor #6: Subject Matter**

Is the subject matter significant to the past, present or future?  
Is the “main idea” of the piece important? Why?  
Is the interpretation important? Why?  
What is the piece about and how is that significant?  
Who is in the piece and why does that matter?  
Does the subject matter have historical importance?  
Is the theme or main idea significant no matter the date?  
“Art Tells a Story” – What story does this piece tell and why it is influential?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

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**Factor #7: Universal Appeal**

*“Appeal” means attracting or arousing interest.  
This does not popular or a fad or cliché.*

Is this piece accessible or approachable for many different people through different time periods? Why?  
Does it appeal to many people? Why?  
Why has it retained its appeal throughout time and/or throughout the globe?  
Why do people want to understand it and interact with it even it has been decades or hundreds of years?  
What makes people stop and stare even if they are not from that time or that culture?  
How or why does it “speak” to people?

Connect to the culture, the time period, the media, the technology, the opinion of art critics/scholars, etc.

# What makes a masterpiece a masterpiece?

## Presentations

### Factor #1: Energy – Time and Effort

Name of Presenter:

Masterpiece Artist:

Masterpiece Title:

3 Details from presentation:

Connection to culture, etc.:

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### Factor #2: Rarity – Beauty and Innovation

*Beauty = outstanding or conspicuous example of its kind*

Name of Presenter:

Masterpiece Artist:

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3 Details from presentation:

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### Factor #3: Artistic Quality

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Masterpiece Artist:

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3 Details from presentation:

Connection to culture, etc.:

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### Factor #4: Age – survived the test of time

Name of Presenter:

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Connection to culture, etc.:

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**Factor #5: Provenance – history of object**

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**Factor #6: Subject Matter**

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**Factor #7: Universal Appeal**     *“Appeal” means attracting or arousing interest. This does not popular or a fad or cliché.*

Name of Presenter:

Masterpiece Artist:

Masterpiece Title:

3 Details from presentation:

Connection to culture, etc.:

## What makes a masterpiece a masterpiece? Research Worksheet

Artist: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date piece was created: \_\_\_\_\_ Chosen factor or factors: \_\_\_\_\_

Websites visited:

**Notes related to artist's biography** (born, died, where lived, art movement, style, etc.):

**Notes about artist's culture** – How does it relate to artist and art piece?:

**Notes about the art piece itself:**

*Write on back as needed.*

*Example: Factor #2 – Rarity: Beauty and Innovation*

### **What Makes the *Mona Lisa* So Beautiful and Unique**

We live in a culture that is so saturated with images, it may be difficult to imagine a time when only the wealthiest people had their likeness captured. The wealthy merchants of Renaissance Florence could commission a portrait, but even they would likely only have a single portrait painted during their lifetime. A portrait was about more than likeness, it spoke to status and position. In addition, portraits generally took a long time to paint, and the subject would commonly have to sit for hours or days, while the artist captured their likeness. Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, completed in 1506, was originally this type of portrait, but over time its meaning has shifted and it has become an icon of the Renaissance, the most recognized painting in the world.

The *Mona Lisa* is a likely a portrait of the wife of a Florentine merchant, and so her gaze would have been meant for her husband. For some reason however, the portrait was never delivered to its patron, and Leonardo kept it with him when he went to work for Francis I, the King of France. Early Renaissance artist, Piero della Francesca's *Portrait of Battista Sforza* is typical of portraits during the Early Renaissance (before Leonardo); figures were often painted in strict profile, and cut off at the bust. Often the figure was posed in front of a birds-eye view of a landscape. With Leonardo's portrait, the face is nearly frontal, the shoulders are turned three-quarters toward the viewer, and the hands are included in the image. Leonardo uses his characteristic sfumata, a smoky haziness, to soften outlines and create an atmospheric effect around the figure. When a figure is in profile, we have no real sense of who she is, and there is no sense of engagement. With the face turned toward us, however, we get a sense of the personality of the sitter. Northern Renaissance artists such as Hans Memling's *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer* had already created portraits of figures in positions similar to the *Mona Lisa*. Memling had even located them in believable spaces. Leonardo combined these Northern innovations with Italian painting's understanding of the three dimensionality of the body and the perspectival treatment of the surrounding space. In conclusion, due to the position of the figure, the use of sfumata, and the handling of space, Leonardo created a painting that was both beautiful and innovative.