

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Objective**

In this lesson, you will identify and describe key principles of baroque art and architecture.

### **Links**

characteristics of Baroque painting and architecture

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337598>

*Entombment of Christ*

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337635>

*The Raising of the Cross*

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337636>

*Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq's Company of the Civic Guard*

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337637>

Rubens

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337599>

Caravaggio

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337600>

Rembrandt

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337601>

Baroque Art

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/337602>

Renaissance Art

<http://redirect.platoweb.com/65057>

## Introduction

Take a look at the painting *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*. It's quite dramatic, wouldn't you say? Notice how the stark dark background contrasts sharply with the light on the young woman's face, pulling our focus directly to her eyes. She seems to stand out from the background, as if she is actually standing in front of us. The style of this painting is characteristic of the baroque era in art.

Baroque art and architecture developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly in Europe. At the time, Protestantism was on the rise in Europe and religious tension with the Roman Catholic Church was strong. It was also an age of powerful rulers and increasing interest in science and exploration. Baroque art emerged in Italy in reaction to the Renaissance style and eventually spread throughout Europe.



***Girl with a Pearl Earring***  
**Jan Vermeer**

Baroque artists wanted to add more drama and emotion to their art. Baroque architects designed highly decorative and complex buildings that asserted the owner's importance in the society. Some of the world's best-known paintings and buildings come from the baroque period.

The Counter-Reformation, a movement started by the Catholic Church to curb the spread of Protestantism, employed the baroque style for its emotional, realistic, and dramatic qualities. Baroque paintings and sculptures appealed to both the illiterate and educated alike and helped to spread the faith.

Annibale Carracci and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio were two of the most important artists of the early baroque period. Caravaggio's revolutionary techniques in painting inspired baroque artists more than anyone else. Along with Carracci and Caravaggio, great painters including Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Diego Velazquez, and Jan Vermeer continued and developed the baroque style. Great baroque architects included Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Jules Hardouin Mansart, and Germain Boffrand, among others.

## Section 1: Characteristics of Baroque Art and Architecture

The word *baroque* means decorative or elaborate. It originates from the Portuguese word *barocca*, which means a pearl of irregular shape, implying strangeness, extravagance, and irregularity. In the context of baroque art, baroque simply means extravagant.

### Characteristics of Baroque Art

*Movement, energy, and drama:* Baroque painters often lent a sense of movement or energy to their subjects. The subjects often appear as frozen in motion at the most dramatic point of an event.

*Use of bright colors and light and shadow:* Baroque painters and sculptors used rich, bright colors and strong contrasts of light and dark to enhance the dramatic effect in their paintings. A typical baroque background was dark with light focusing only on the subjects.

*Intense spirituality:* A common theme in baroque art was showing people fainting in spiritual ecstasy or seeing visions of gods. Since the Catholic Church used baroque art to spread and strengthen its faith, spiritual and religious topics were important for the baroque artists.

*Involving the viewer:* One of the most important goals of baroque art was to involve the viewer for a high emotional impact. One way to do so was to use foreshortening to break down the barrier between the viewer's space and the space of the painting. This technique helped achieve the illusion of forms projecting into space.



***The Maids of Honor***  
**Diego Velazquez**  
**1656**

### Characteristics of Baroque Architecture

Baroque architects emphasized size and splendor. Their buildings were huge and lavishly decorated. They also used light and shadow for a dramatic effect in the interiors. Baroque churches thus made a visible statement about the power and wealth of the Catholic Church.

Some characteristics of baroque architecture include

- broad, circular forms
- dramatic use of light and shadow
- heavy ornamentation
- huge frescoes, especially on the ceilings



Palace of Versailles, France

### Activity 1: Baroque Art and Architecture

#### Directions

Visit this website about the [characteristics of Baroque painting and architecture](#). After you finish reading, answer the following questions. Circle your answer.

1. Which one is **not** a characteristic of baroque art?
  - a. showing movement
  - b. strong color contrasts
  - c. calmness of subjects
  
2. Which one is a characteristic of baroque architecture?
  - a. long naves
  - b. dramatic lighting
  - c. simple facades
  
3. Which one is **not** a characteristic of baroque sculpture?
  - a. use of multiple blocks of marble
  - b. flowing appearance of drapery
  - c. twisting of tall body shapes
  - d. use of one type of marble

## Section 2: Examples of Baroque Art

Now that you are familiar with the main principles and characteristics of baroque art, let's look at key examples of baroque art by Caravaggio, Rubens, and Rembrandt.

Caravaggio was an expert in *chiaroscuro*, the dramatic use of light and shadow. His *chiaroscuro* technique inspired many painters of his generation. He was also extremely skilled at making elements in the painting seem to project into the space of the viewer, involving us in the action.

He demonstrates these skills in the [Entombment of Christ](#). In this painting, Caravaggio shows the crucified Christ being lowered into an open grave. Two of the Christ's followers, the disciple St. John and the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, hold the body. The painting also shows Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, on the left, Mary Magdalene in the center, and Mary Cleophas on the right, all standing and looking on in despair.

Caravaggio structured the painting in a diagonal shape, from the upraised hand at top right to Christ's face in the lower left. The rest of the picture space is dark. The light seems to come from a focused source, as in a movie theater. Light falls on the subjects from the top left edge of the picture in different ways and helps to create a sense of drama. Almost the entire face of Mary Magdalene is in shadow yet a bright light on her shoulder creates a contrast with her bowed head. Light also falls on the extended right hand of the Virgin. The only subject that is entirely lit is Christ's body; all other subjects are only partially lit.



**Bacchus**  
Caravaggio

The perspective of this painting is striking. Caravaggio directs the viewers' eyes level with the stone slab on which the group is standing. The stone slab seems to protrude outward toward us, involving us in the action. With Nicodemus looking toward the viewer, one can easily imagine standing right in front of the people holding the body of the Christ.

Like most baroque Christian paintings, *The Entombment of Christ* was painted to hang over a church altar. When a priest stood at the altar, his head reached up to the level of the stone slab in the painting. In performing Mass, when the priest raised his hand holding the bread and said the words Christ spoke at his final meal, "This is my body," his hand would be right next to Christ's body in the painting. One can only imagine the emotional impact this must have created.

Peter Paul Rubens, a Belgian Flemish artist, was another great baroque master. Rubens studied the works of Italian masters, including Caravaggio. His famous painting [The Raising of the Cross](#) shares similarities with Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ*. Both paintings have a

diagonal composition and use light dramatically. But there are many differences in their paintings as well. The figures in Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ* are frozen in a moment of despair, while Rubens' painting is full of movement and energy. Rubens' characters seem to be straining at their task and are struggling to balance themselves. Caravaggio's characters project from the picture plane but do not suggest continuity of action around them. In contrast, Rubens' characters seem to be moving outside of the picture frame to join the action beyond its borders. Rubens has painted the body of Christ in a writhing S-curve, a typical motif of baroque paintings.

The Dutch baroque movement differed from baroque movements in France, Spain, and Italy. Holland was a Protestant country. Rather than focus on religion, Dutch society focused more on home, family, business, social organizations, and the community. This focus was evident in the works of Rembrandt, the great Dutch baroque painter.

Rembrandt's main teacher had traveled to Italy in his youth where he was inspired by Caravaggio's chiaroscuro technique. He studied this method and brought it back to the Netherlands. Rembrandt's mastery of Caravaggio's style of lighting and shadow is evident in his famous group portrait [Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq's Company of the Civic Guard](#). This painting is also called *The Night Watch* because years of accumulated smoke and dirt darkened the painting, making it appear a night scene.

It was common for Dutch organizations to hire painters to make group portraits for them. *The Night Watch* shows a private militia. When Rembrandt painted *The Night Watch*, the private militia's function was only ceremonial, yet these were prominent social groups and important people were members. Rembrandt painted brilliant individual portraits of each member of the group, making them seem ready to charge into a battle.

With Captain Cocq at the center, much of the composition builds on a series of V-shapes that make the subjects move from the center outward. To add naturalism to the composition, Rembrandt uses dramatic lighting. Light falls on Captain Cocq, the drummer on the far right, the lieutenant at Cocq's side waiting for orders, and especially the mysterious little girl in a golden dress.



## ***Activity 1: Exploring Baroque Art and Artists***

### ***Directions***

Visit these websites on [Rubens](#), [Caravaggio](#), and [Rembrandt](#) to read more about these artists and to see images of their paintings. Once you finish, answer the following questions.

1. List two artworks from each of these three artists.

2. Write two or three important facts about each of these artists.

3. Choose one artwork from each of these artists and write what you think was the inspiration behind it.

### Section 3: Baroque and Renaissance: Differences and Similarities

To say that baroque art differs completely from the Renaissance style is not entirely true. In fact, the art of the Late Renaissance shows signs that an artistic revolution was at hand.

Late Renaissance art uses exaggerated and emotional subjects and dramatic lighting similar to what was to come in the baroque era. In the baroque era, the emphasis on the emotional impact of art on the viewer (called emotionalism) scales exceptional heights. During the Renaissance itself, the subjects of paintings begin to take on true human forms with defined personalities and emotional expressions on their faces. Baroque art takes this characteristic of Renaissance art to a higher level.

Yet, baroque art is not just an extension of the Renaissance. Renaissance art stresses the calm of reason. Subjects appear as if they are relaxing or thinking. Baroque art stresses emotion, energy, and movement. Subjects seem to move out of the picture frame toward the viewer. The viewer feels as if he is looking at a theatrical performance.

Colors are also richer and brighter in baroque art than in Renaissance art. There is greater contrast between colors and between light and dark.

In the Late Renaissance, art became increasingly realistic. Baroque art leans toward naturalism, or actual representation of people, places, and objects. Baroque art is meant to seem alive. Renaissance architecture seeks classic simplicity. In contrast, baroque architecture favors ornamentation, the richer and more complex the better.



## Activity 1: Comparing Baroque Art with Renaissance Art

### Directions

Visit the websites on [Baroque Art](#) and [Renaissance Art](#) and compare the art of the two periods. Use the table below to write down their differences and similarities. The first two have been written for you.

Art Forms	Baroque	Renaissance
expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>emotionalism</li> <li>dramatic appeal to senses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>emotionalism</li> </ul>
characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>intense drama</li> <li>rich colors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>calmness</li> <li>less contrast between colors</li> </ul>
artists and artworks		
main themes		
background		
form of subjects		
perspective		