Suggested levels for Guided Reading, DRA™, Lexile®, and Reading Recovery™ are provided in the Pearson Scott Foresman Leveling Guide.

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Art’s Inspiration

~ by Ellen B. Cutler ~

Genre Comprehension Skills and Strategy Text Features
Vocabulary

baroque

cast

cubism

facade

incorporated

innovative

intricate

razing

sinuous

Word count: 2,437
Imagine how it must have been on a January day in Rome in 1506.

Under dark gray skies, workers cleared a large area on the Esquiline Hill, the highest of the famous seven hills of Rome. The workers had been laboring on the Esquiline Hill, razing old buildings and carting away the rubble, when a group of men digging out rock came upon something quite surprising.

It was a statue fashioned from white marble. While the sculpture was still partly buried, it was possible to see the head of a man and what looked like the body of a great snake.
Crowds gathered and stared. Pope Julius II, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, governed Rome at that time. He sent his architect, the man in charge of all building projects in Rome, to see what was going on. The architect brought his friend Michelangelo with him.

Michelangelo was one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance period. The pope had brought him to Rome to create art for Rome’s churches. Michelangelo had spent countless hours looking at the Roman and Greek art displayed in Rome’s museums. He had also studied the cities and cultures of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire.

Michelangelo quickly recognized the statue. It had been carved by three Greek sculptors and was called the Laocoön. The famous statue had been missing for more than fourteen hundred years. People knew about this work of art because the Roman writer Pliny the Elder had described it in his encyclopedia Natural History, which he published in the year A.D. 77. Michelangelo himself had read Pliny’s description of the sculpture.

The story of Laocoön comes from Greek mythology. Laocoön was a priest in the city of Troy. He warned his people to keep away from a huge wooden horse that had been left outside Troy by the city’s enemies, the Greeks.

The people of Troy didn’t listen to Laocoön. Thinking the horse was a gift, they brought it inside the city. But hidden inside the horse were Greek warriors who leapt out after dark to do battle inside the city. Laocoön had been right, although no one chose to listen to him. The goddess Athena punished Laocoön for having warned the city of Troy by sending two huge snakes to attack him.

The Laocoön had been a prized possession of the Roman emperor Titus. Titus put it on display in his palace on the Esquiline Hill where many people, Pliny the Elder among them, marveled at its beauty. After Titus died, the Laocoön disappeared. It is likely that the next emperor added it to his own art collection, although this is not known for certain. Pliny the Elder seems to have been the last person to have written about the sculpture.
Back to that January day in Rome in 1506: Now, after so many years, the Laocoön had been found! Interestingly enough, although Emperor Titus was the last person who was known to have possessed the statue, it was found near the palace of the Emperor Nero, who had ruled before Titus. As soon as the Laocoön was dug up, Pope Julius II took possession of it and added it to his art collection.

Many popes have been enthusiastic art collectors. During Michelangelo’s time, special galleries were built within Rome’s Vatican, the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. These special galleries still hold the enormous number of statues, vases, coins, and other objects owned by the Roman Catholic Church. Special rooms to hold new paintings were also built at the Vatican. During the Renaissance, artists from all over Europe traveled many hundreds of miles to Rome in order to examine these treasures.

Michelangelo Studies the Laocoön

Many Renaissance artists most appreciated the Vatican’s art collection from ancient Greece and Rome. Along with most artists of his time, Michelangelo believed that the best art had been produced during the peak years of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. In an effort to create new art as great as that of ancient Greece and Rome, Renaissance artists patterned their own work on Greek and Roman models.

Michelangelo had looked carefully at many Greek and Roman works of art. He had even sketched some of them. Now he drew the Laocoön and studied it carefully. He did everything he could to understand this remarkable piece.

The more he looked at it, the more the Laocoön inspired Michelangelo. He found it to be beautiful. Its muscled bodies and sinuous poses seemed so realistic.
Michelangelo believed that the human body was beautiful. He was committed to capturing its beauty in his sculptures. Michelangelo also wanted the people who viewed his sculptures to be as moved as he was when he studied the *Laocoön*. To achieve this, Michelangelo made sure to use techniques from ancient Greek sculpture as he carved his statues.

**Michelangelo’s Masterpiece:**
**The Sistine Chapel**

In 1508 Michelangelo began painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, a task he had been hired for by Pope Julius II. The Sistine Chapel is an older, smaller place of worship located within the Vatican. The *Laocoön* and other Vatican artwork provided much of the inspiration for the scenes and figures that Michelangelo painted onto the ceiling of the chapel.

It took Michelangelo four years to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. That may seem like a long time. But considering how much work was involved, it was incredible that Michelangelo took only four years to finish!

Art experts are unsure how Michelangelo was able to paint the Sistine Chapel in only four years. They suspect he either used models, or copied his figures’ poses from artwork found in the Vatican collection. However he did it, Michelangelo accomplished an amazing thing: no two figures on the Sistine Chapel ceiling are alike!
When Copying Is a Compliment

Michelangelo was not the first artist to borrow designs from work done in the past. Artists have always studied the art of earlier times. Often they have copied individual figures to use in their own works of art. In Michelangelo’s time, this kind of copying was considered a compliment. It showed respect and admiration for older artists and contributed to the preservation of important themes from past artistic styles.

The same is true today. Just as Michelangelo used works like the Laocoön for ideas for the Sistine Chapel, other artists have used Michelangelo’s art for inspiration.

Of course, artists do more than repeat designs they have seen. Often an artist will look at the work of other artists and re-create certain elements of their designs in an innovative way. Later in this book you will read about a gifted French sculptor who created a unique style of sculpting. Although his work was very different from the sculptures made by Michelangelo, this sculptor was interested in and inspired by Michelangelo’s work.

Artists do more than study the works of past artists. They also explore the world around them. They study plants and animals, colors, and the way that light causes shadows. Artists depend on all these things and more to create their art.
A Shift in Perspective

People began looking at art in a different way over the last century. In the past, most art was strongly related to the art that came before it. But now it is common for artists to invent new styles, use unusual materials, and make objects that don’t seem like the older art at all, such as Noguchi’s Red Cube. Being original has become much more important to painters, sculptors, architects, and artists. Still, as much as modern artists want to break out in totally new directions, it is almost unavoidable for them to borrow from the past. The best artists, such as Auguste Rodin, do a little of both.

These classical figures, among the many statues that were carved by Rodin during his lifetime, sit atop the La Bourse Stock Exchange in Brussels, Belgium.

Rodin: Something Old, Something New

French sculptor Auguste Rodin, who was known for carving extremely lifelike statues, invented a new style of sculpture. To make a bronze sculpture, Rodin began by modeling in clay. Then he cast, or repoured, the clay form in bronze. Every mark left by his hands and tools on the clay can be seen in the bronze.

Rodin’s innovative work was unusual compared to what people were used to at that time. It didn’t seem to match the art that was familiar to them. His sculptures looked quite different from those created by Michelangelo and others.

Rodin wanted his sculpture to look different. He tried to capture his unique vision of life and a sense of movement and feeling.

Auguste Rodin, shown here in a photo by Edward Steichen, invented a new style of sculpture.
One of Rodin’s greatest projects consisted of a set of huge bronze doors, on which he worked for seven years. Rodin used an intricate design, and it is obvious that he looked at the work of many Renaissance artists, including Michelangelo, when deciding what to do.

Many of the small figures that Rodin carved for the doors were later incorporated into his most famous sculptures. Rodin’s most famous sculpture, *The Thinker*, started as a detail on the bronze doors.

*The Thinker* looks exactly like what its name suggests. The sculpture, made out of bronze, shows a man sitting on a rock, with his chin resting in his right hand. The man is clearly lost in thought.

Rodin described *The Thinker* as a living being who thinks and feels. He used the sculpture to show that thinking involves more than what goes on in a person’s head. Every part of *The Thinker*, from the lines in his forehead to the muscles in his arms, shows that he is thinking.

Although Rodin created a modern style of sculpture, he also looked to the old masters such as Michelangelo for ideas. Rodin believed that he belonged to what might be called the “family” of artists. That is, he thought he belonged to the artistic tradition that stretches back to the time when human beings first started creating art.
Frank Gehry and the San Carlo

Sometimes the connections between the art of the past and the art of the present are hard to see. Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, offers a good example of these hidden connections.

The museum, which opened in 1997, is made of stone, glass, and metal. The curved metal sheets that cover most of the outside of the building look like the curve of a bird’s wing or the shape of a fast sports car. There are no straight edges and no square corners.

Some people have complained that the museum’s incredible appearance has taken too much attention away from its primary purpose, which is to display works of art. Other people have criticized Gehry’s Guggenheim for looking more like a sculpture than a building.

Gehry would agree that he creates buildings that are also meant to look like sculptures. In fact, when Gehry designs a building, he starts by making a sculpture with shapes, curves, and edges. Then engineers who work for his architectural firm create an image of the sculpture on a computer. Finally, Gehry, along with his designers, engineers, and other staff members, all get together to figure out how to turn the sculpture’s computer image into the building it is meant to become.

At first glance, Gehry’s buildings don’t seem to relate to those from the past. His designs seem to reject past architectural styles deliberately. However, upon further examination, it is clear that Gehry’s Guggenheim took inspiration from a small and very old church located in Rome, Italy. Called “San Carlo,” it was built in 1641 by Francesco Borromini. Gehry thinks it is the most beautiful building in the world.
The San Carlo’s Incredible Design

The San Carlo, like Gehry’s Guggenheim, can be interpreted as being either a building or a sculpture. Its design was revolutionary for its time. It helped to usher in the baroque style of architecture, which focused on much more intricate details than those used during the Renaissance. Instead of being flat on the outside, like most buildings of the 1600s, the San Carlo’s facade, or outer surface, is full of curves. Round columns seem to push forward, while hollow areas pull backward. Sunshine moving across the facade lights up some parts while other parts remain in dark shadows.

This contrast of light and dark, which is always changing, creates the effect of gentle motion. It makes the facade of San Carlo appear to ripple like the sail on a boat.

The San Carlo’s wavy, rippling appearance finds echoes in Guggenheim museums other than the one designed by Frank Gehry. The Guggenheim Museum of Manhattan, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and built in 1959, serves as a link between the San Carlo and the sinuous design of the Guggenheim in Bilbao. Like Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim, it was criticized when it opened for taking too much attention away from the art that it displayed. However, much like Gehry’s Guggenheim, it has earned everlasting fame for its bold and creative design.
Modern Painters Turn to the Past

Just as Michelangelo, Rodin, and Gehry looked to various sculptors and architects of the past for inspiration, so too have modern painters. The best modern painters have been able to combine past styles with their own styles, thereby creating new types of art.

This was certainly the case with Pablo Picasso. Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 but lived most of his life in France. Along with the painter Georges Braque, he invented the style of painting called **cubism**, which got its name from the way that its images could be broken down into simple geometric shapes. Because Picasso admired earlier artists, he often redid their paintings in his cubist style. Art historians have also detected the influence of ancient Greek and Roman art in Picasso's works.

Grace Hartigan has produced a series of paintings inspired by works of art ranging from the ancient Egyptians to the French Impressionists of the 1800s. Unlike many artists, she does not study the actual paintings that inspire her. Instead, she likes to study postcards or other kinds of reproductions made from the paintings.

Cindy Sherman and the twins Mike and Doug Starn are modern-day photographers. Cindy dresses up as the figure in a famous painting and takes a photograph of herself. Using this technique, Cindy adds new life to an old work of art by mixing the present with the past! The Starn twins photograph artwork of the old masters and then make them part of their modern photographs.

Throughout history, sculptors, painters, architects, photographers, and other artists have learned from those who created before them. Ideas from the past inspire the new ideas of the future!
Now Try This

What makes something a classic?
Michelangelo was inspired by the style of the ancient Greeks and Romans we call *classicism*. Renaissance architects also admired the classical style.

Classical elements are still used in architecture and design today. These elements can be found everywhere: on the outside of your house; on furniture; and on public buildings such as libraries, offices, banks, museums, and churches.

What are the elements of the classical style? How can you recognize them? Study the vocabulary list below to become familiar with the things that make up classical architecture.

**The Elements of Classical Architecture**
- **column**—a supporting pillar or post that is shaped like a cylinder.
- **capital**—the uppermost part of a column on which the main structure rests.
- **entablature**—the horizontal part of the structure that rests on top of the columns.
- **cornice**—a molded, horizontal piece that juts out at the top of a wall like a crown.
- **niche**—a recess, or cut-out area in a wall, where a statue might be placed.
- **pediment**—a triangular space that forms the gable of a low-pitched roof and is often filled with sculpture.
- **pilaster**—a rectangle-shaped column that projects from a wall.

A Book of Classical Elements
1. Cut pictures from magazines or newspapers that show elements of classical architecture.
2. Paste the pictures on pieces of paper. Draw call outs and write the name of each classical element.
3. Combine your pages into a book. Write a title on the cover, such as *Classical Elements Wherever You Look*.

A classical facade
baroque  n. a style of architecture, developed during the 1600s, that featured curved forms

cast  v. to create a sculpture from hot, melted metal

cubism  n. style of painting in which objects are represented by geometric forms

facade  n. the front outside wall of a building

incorporated  v. to have made something a part of something else

innovative  adj. tending to bring in something new or offer a new way of doing something

intricate  adj. complicated; with many twists, turns, and details

razing  v. tearing down; destroying completely

sinuous  adj. having many curves or turns

1. Review pages 16–18. Using a graphic organizer like the one below, write the main idea of this passage. Add details that support the main idea.

2. What do you think might have happened to the world if the Laocoön had never been found? What might Michelangelo's art have been like? Whose art might have been affected by Michelangelo’s lack of inspiration? Write a detailed description about what you think on a separate sheet of paper. How does this visualization help you better understand the book?

3. Three of the words in the glossary begin with the prefix -in. Find five more words in this book that begin with this prefix. Define these words and use each word in a sentence.

4. Which example of art or architecture pictured in this book do you like best? Why?