Middle & High School Discussion Questions for:

*A Beggar Seated on a Bank (Self Portrait), 1630*

Etching on paper

The Heckscher Museum of Art

Bequest of Mrs. John H. Livingston  2001.024.005

You may utilize the following questions and discussion topics to help students describe, analyze, interpret, and conclude about this work of art. They have been developed specifically for middle and high school grade levels to ensure that the questions relate appropriately to students’ evolving and developing interests, motivation, and skill levels.

What do you see in this work of art? This is considered by many to be a self portrait of the artist. How is creating a self portrait different from making a portrait? In Rembrandt’s time, the world was a very different place than it is now. How might the process of and reasons for creating a self-portrait or portrait today differ from Rembrandt’s time?

Often portraits and self portraits show a person from only the shoulder or neck upward. Why do you think Rembrandt chose to show the full figure? What additional information or feeling does including the body provide for the viewer?

How might this person be feeling? What do you see that makes you say that? [Facial expression as well as gesture help to convey emotion.]

What materials, or media, do you think were used to create this work of art? What do you see that makes you say that?

This work of art is an etching, which is a type of print. Have you ever made a print before? There are many different methods of printmaking. An etching is created by using a metal printing plate, covering it with ground, and drawing an image with a metal stylus. The plate is then placed in an acid bath. The ground protects the areas of the plate that are not drawn on and the acid etches the lines. The plate is then inked (with the ink being pushed into the incised lines) and printed on a printing press which applies pressure that pushes the ink out of the lines onto paper.
What might be some advantages to creating a print of an image compared to a drawing or painting?

Why do you think Rembrandt chose to create this work of art as a print and not a painting? How might it be different as a painting?

Etchings often solely utilize line to create an image. What types of lines do you see? Describe (direction, length, width, darkness, lightness, placement.) How did he change the lines to make certain parts darker than others? What do you notice he did with the lines to create the darkest areas? The lightest?

Do you feel that this print is finished? Why or why not?

Why do you think Rembrandt chose to depict himself as a beggar? What might he be trying to say about artists’ and beggars’ role or place in society at the time he was alive? Do you feel an artist may still draw parallels between these two roles today? Why or why not?

This educational material was developed by:
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