

Auguste Rodin, "The Thinker" (c1897)

1. INTRODUCING THE ART:

This sculpture is so famous, the students may be familiar with it. Ask if anyone has seen this work of art before. Does anyone know its name? Though they may have seen it before, ask them to take a moment to really look closely at it now. If you have a replica of the sculpture, be sure to turn it so the students can look at it from all angles.

2. SHARING OBSERVATIONS:

Ask, how would you describe this sculpture? What is this person doing? How do you think he is feeling? Why?

What might he be thinking about? Is he having peaceful thoughts? Does he look like he's struggling inside? Why?

What about this pose indicates the man is struggling and tense? (Toes that grip the base, fist against teeth, bulging neck muscles, furrowed brow, precariously perched body, twisted torso.) Try posing with your right elbow on your left knee as this figure is doing. Is it comfortable? How does it make you feel?

Why do you think the artist chose to show this figure without clothes? Clothing tends to set an individual in a certain time and place. It gives clues to that person's specific life. By leaving the figure unclothed, he becomes a symbol of every man. "Man's naked form belongs to no particular moment in history; it is eternal, and can be looked upon with joy by the people of all ages." -- Auguste Rodin.

This sculpture stands high on a pedestal in a sculpture garden in Paris, France. Viewers look up at it from below. How would that make you feel?

How would you describe the texture of the sculpture? What is it made of? How do you think the sculptor made this? The artist, Auguste Rodin, first made the sculpture out of clay. Then a plaster cast was made of the clay sculpture. Molten bronze was poured into the plaster cast to make the final sculpture.

Notice the way light and shadow play across the figure. Rodin believed that broken surfaces were important to sculpture. He wanted to push the art of sculpture close to that of painting by "coloring" his pieces through this play of light and shadow on his surfaces.

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS:

This sculpture is actually part of another very large work. Rodin was commissioned to create a pair of giant doors for a decorative arts museum. He decided to depict a scene from the classic epic poem by Dante, *The Divine Comedy* in which Dante depicts the Gates of Hell. The figure now known as The Thinker was originally called The Poet, and he was meant to represent Dante. In the final sculpture, a miniature of the statue sits atop the gates, pondering the hellish fate of

those beneath him. Rodin sculpted 180 figures writhing on those doors and spent 40 years working on it. However, the museum was never built.

Knowing where The Thinker was originally posed and what it was meant to be a part of, does that change your mind as to what he might be thinking?

Because of the way The Thinker was made, several casts from the same mold could be made. In fact, there are many copies of this sculpture all over the world. How do you feel about that? Does it make the sculpture any less special?

4. MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST:

If there is time and the children are interested, you can provide more background information about the artist. Auguste Rodin was one of the most celebrated sculptors of the past 100 years. He was born into a poor Parisian family in 1840. He hated school and dropped out to train as a decorative stonemason. He tried three times to be accepted as a sculpture student at the best art school in France, but he was rejected each time. He continued to create decorative ornaments for a living and work on his own sculptures in his free time.

Rodin traveled to Italy where he was greatly influenced by the sculptures of Michelangelo. Like that great artist, Rodin wanted to create sculptures that looked like they could come to life. Unlike Michelangelo, Rodin did not like sculpting with stone, preferring to create clay models instead.

Rodin spent years on each of his sculptures. He made hundreds of sketches and plaster models for his life-like bronze sculptures. His sculptures were quite different for the times. As the Impressionists had challenged the normal way of painting at this time, his sculptures were quite different than the norm of rigid lifeless, bland figures. His work had a great influence on modern sculpture, giving it a new sense of freedom, emotion, and spontaneity.

5. ART ACTIVITY

Students can experiment with showing movement in sculpture by creating a simple aluminum foil sculpture. Give each child a piece of aluminum foil 15" wide and 18" long. Make two cuts on each of the long sides and one cut in the middle of one short side. The short side without a cut will be molded into the head. The other short side will be formed into two legs, and the long sides will have strips to mold into arms. Try posing the foil figure into different positions to show different emotions.



