Rubens was a master at recording history. In many of his paintings he told stories of the ancient Greeks and Romans or of events that occurred during his own lifetime. In this lesson students will work in collaborative teams. Students will participate in a focused looking activity with several of Rubens’s historical scene oil sketches and write a research paper detailing the scene depicted.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Students will participate in a focused looking activity with several of Rubens’s historical scene oil sketches.
- Students will work in collaborative teams.
- Collaborative teams will research one of the historical events in the list of oil sketches provided.
- Collaborative teams will write a research paper on one of the historical events from the list of oil sketches provided.

**MATERIALS**

- Images of the oil sketches from the following list
- Background information on the oil sketches
- Focused Looking Worksheet
- Paper
- Pencils
- Internet access
- Library resources

**HISTORICAL SCENE OIL SKETCHES BY PETER PAUL RUBENS**

- Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Buckingham, c. 1625
  Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, no. AP 1876.08

- The Reconciliation of King Henry III and Henry of Navarre, 1628
  Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 44.24

- The Labarum, 1622
  Private collection

- The Triumphant Entry of Constantine into Rome, 1622
  Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Clowes Collection, inv. IMA2001.237

- Decius Mus Relating His Dream, c. 1617
  National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., no. 1394

- Briseus Returned to Achilles
  The Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb, acc. no. 54.536
TEACHER PREPARATION

1. Download and print copies of listed oil sketches.
2. Download and print background information on listed oil sketches.
3. Review background information on Rubens.
4. Print class set of Focused Looking Worksheet (p. 4).

CLASS PROCEDURE

1. Explain to students that they are going to learn about history as recorded by Rubens.
2. Review with class the life of Rubens, highlighting the various historical events he witnessed and recorded in his works.
3. Project the image of Rubens’s *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Buckingham* on a screen. Do not give students any information about the painting.
4. Pass out the Focused Looking Worksheet to students.
5. Ask students to answer the questions on the Focused Looking Worksheet as they pertain to the projected image. Give students five minutes to look at the painting.
6. Once students have completed their worksheets, open a discussion with students about this oil sketch. Ask them what they thought of the person depicted and encourage them to share their worksheet answers.
7. Once you have completed this activity, students should be eager to know who is depicted in this oil sketch. Share with students the biographical information on the Duke of Buckingham.
8. Break students into five collaborative teams.
9. Pass out one of the above images to each team. Each team should have a different image.
10. Have each team repeat the above activity with their image. Students should be given another copy of the Focused Looking Worksheet to record answers.
11. Once collaborative teams have completed the focused looking activity on their image, have team members share findings.
12. Upon completion of this activity, share with each team the background information on each of their oil sketches.
13. Inform students that Rubens was required to be knowledgeable about these events in history in order to paint them, and, like the students, he was required to do research on the topics he portrayed.
14. Inform collaborative teams that they are going to research the scene taking place in their oil sketch and they will need to compile their research in the form of a research paper.
15. Research papers must include the date of the event taking place, a detailed narrative on the subject, and how Rubens may have researched or known about the topic in which he was painting.
16. Students should also address the following question in their papers: How does Rubens manipulate the facts or skew our understanding of this historical scene through his choice of visual elements?
17. Upon completion of research papers, collaborative teams will present their findings to the class.
Recording History with Rubens | Social Studies | Grades 9–12

National Standards: History

Historical Understanding

Standard 1—Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns

Understands the organizing principles of alternative models of historical periodization

Knows how to identify the temporal structure and connections disclosed in historical narratives

Standard 2—Understands the historical perspective

Analyzes the values held by specific people who influenced history and the role their values played in influencing history

Analyzes how specific historical events would be interpreted differently based on newly uncovered records and/or information

Knows how to perceive past events with historical empathy

Knows how to evaluate the credibility and authenticity of historical sources

Evaluates the validity and credibility of different historical interpretations

World History

Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires, 1000 BCE–300 CE

Standard 9—Understands how major religious and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean Basin, China, and India from 500 BCE to 300 CE

Understands shifts in the political framework of Roman society

Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300–1000 CE

Standard 12—Understands the Imperial crises and their aftermath in various regions from 300 to 700 CE

Understands political and social elements during the decline of the Roman and Han Empires and the rise of the Byzantine

Era 6: Global Expansion and Encounter, 1450–1770

Standard 27—Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750

Understands factors that influenced the economic and political development of the Dutch Republic, England, and France
FOCUSED LOOKING WORKSHEET

Answer the following questions about the image:

FACIAL EXPRESSION AND POSE (OR BODY LANGUAGE)
What does the subject’s physical being tell you?

CLOTHING
What does the subject’s attire tell you about his or her job, values, etc.?

PROPS OR ACCESSORIES
What can you learn about the subject from looking at the things that are included in the oil sketch?

SETTING
What impression does the place in which the subject is located create for you?

EXTENSION
If you could add one additional element to this oil sketch that would enhance its appearance, what would it be?

OTHER COMMENTS
Anything else that really strikes you about this oil sketch?