

Italian  
Renaissance  
Learning  
Resources

In collaboration with  
the National Gallery of Art



Artists and Patrons:  
**Activities**

**OXFORD**  
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# 1. Art for Embassies

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In this activity, students suggest themes appropriate for a large, highly visible art project for a US embassy, and then select a Renaissance (and optionally a contemporary) artist whose oeuvre is appropriate for the work. Taking the role of the artist(s), they submit drawings that illustrate the planned design and explain its rationale.

**PURPOSE:** to promote students' understanding of the use of art as promotion or propaganda by Renaissance rulers and cities; to consider contemporary ideals that can and should be projected to enhance the nation's prestige; to consider how those ideals can be given visual form; to encourage students to apply their knowledge of Renaissance artists.

**BACKGROUND:** Across the globe, the art displayed in US embassies, consular offices, and other official sites gives visual expression to American ideals. The Department of State runs a program called "Art for Embassies" that secures loans of works from US collections for placement in ambassadors' residences. The nonprofit Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies (FAPE) commissions large-scale projects, indoor and out, from contemporary American artists for various diplomatic buildings and sites. (See Resources below for more information.)

# 1. Art for Embassies (Continued)

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**PROCEDURE:**

Students can work as a one group or be divided into “commissioners” and “artists.”

1. Have students (acting as commissioners) decide on a city where the new art will be placed. They can research actual sites or work with an imaginary location.
2. As a group, commissioners should discuss and write up a list of ideals that are to be represented. These should form part of a formal document that also specifies the site, the cost, the type of work desired (e.g., a new building, mural, sculpture).
3. Commissioners should identify a Renaissance artist whose work they believe will be well-suited for this project. Their rationale should include specific references to similar works or projects in the artist’s oeuvre. (Students can also identify a contemporary artist for the project, if desired.)

4. Ask students (acting as artists) to submit drawings for the planned work. The drawings should be accompanied by a written document that outlines the specific ways in which the imagery, scale, use of material, and so on project the ideals outlined by the commissioners.

5. Have artists and commissioners discuss how well the project meets the stated goals.

**GLOSSARY:** [propaganda](#)

**RESOURCES:**

These websites will give students more information about art of the United States in embassies and official diplomatic buildings.

[Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies \(FAPE\)](#).

[U.S. Department of State, Art in Embassies](#).

## 2. Be a Portrait Patron

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Portraiture is perhaps the most familiar type of art today that is bespoke, or custom-made for a patron. After researching the means by which artists connect with portrait seekers (including through websites), students will select an artist to do their portrait.

**PURPOSE:** to prompt students to consider what they want in a portrait and how to match that with an artist's oeuvre; to give students a feel for the operation of private patronage today.

**MATERIALS:** the means to search for artist websites, the websites and publications of artist guilds and organizations, and advertisements in art and (certain) lifestyle magazines

**PROCEDURE:** Have students embark on individual research that can be reported back to classmates as a stimulus for further discussion. They should indicate what sort of image they want to project, why they chose one medium over another, how they located the artist they chose, what attracted them to his or her work, and how those qualities met their own goals for a portrait. Pricing information might be difficult to obtain in many cases, but students should report on it if possible.

### 3. What a Scene!

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In this activity, students become dramaturges to flesh out the relations between artist and patron.

**Scene i:** The artist is many months behind schedule, and the patron is worried because the Holy Roman Emperor will soon be making a ceremonial visit. The patron explains what is needed and the importance of the display to the state.

**Scene ii:** The work is complete, and now the artist feels he has been inadequately compensated. The artist explains what further compensation is wanted (e.g., money, land, a title) and why it is deserved.

**PURPOSE:** to exercise creative writing skills and demonstrate an understanding of patronage relationships in the Renaissance.

**PROCEDURE:** Have students read the letters reproduced in the Primary Sources section of this unit. They can also research the biographies of individual patrons and artists. Students will write two dramatic scenes in which the conflict plays out. The setting should be elaborated, the characters described, and the dialogue appropriate to their roles. Students can also design sets and costumes if desired.