

Italian
Renaissance
Learning
Resources

In collaboration with
the National Gallery of Art



Picturing Family and Friends:
Activities

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1. Design a Wedding *Cassone*

Students select images from museum collections to “reassemble” a *cassone* (marriage chest), and then design one for themselves using contemporary imagery.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to consider the iconography of weddings in the Renaissance and today.

MATERIALS: images of Renaissance paintings and contemporary photographs.

PROCEDURE: Show the *cassoni* and other works with wedding and childbirth imagery from this unit in class (see *The Story of Esther* [fig. 1], *Cassone with The Conquest of Trebizond* [fig. 2], *Cassone Made for Strozzi Family* [fig. 3], *Journey of the Queen of Sheba* [fig. 4], *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* [fig. 5], Interior cassone panel: *Reclining young man* [fig. 6]), and discuss the kinds of scenes portrayed. They include moralizing stories from the Bible, images of conquest, themes from Petrarch, nudes, and infant boys. Consider what made these images appropriate for the objects on which they appeared.

Then have students go online to collect images of other Renaissance paintings to assemble into a virtual (or actual if you prefer) *cassone* that presents a united theme. Students should write a short description of what that theme is and why it is suitable as marriage imagery.

Finally, have students assemble a modern *cassone* (virtual or real) using contemporary photographs or their own artwork. They should similarly describe the imagery they have chosen and its suitability for a wedding chest.

GLOSSARY: *cassone*, *spalliera*, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, *Petrarch*

RESOURCES:

Pope-Hennessy, John, and Keith Christiansen. “Secular Painting in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, *Cassone* Panels, and Portraits.” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (1980): 1–66.

Callmann, Ellen. *Apollonio di Giovanni*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.

1. Design a Wedding *Cassone*:
Image Reference / page 1



Fig. 1: Marco del Buono Giamberti and Apollonio di Giovanni di Tomaso

The Story of Esther, 1460–70

Tempera and gold on wood, 44.5 x 140.7 cm (17 1/2 x 55 3/8 in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY



Fig. 2: Marco del Buono Giamberti and Apollonio di Giovanni di Tomaso

Cassone with The Conquest of Trebizond, 1460s

Tempera, gold, and silver on wood, distemper on inner lid, 100.3 x 195.6 x 83.5 cm (39 1/2 x 77 x 32 7/8 in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY



Fig. 3: Florentine, first half of 16th century

Cassone made for Strozzi family

Walnut and poplar, 191.5 x 64.2 x 69.7 cm (75 3/8 x 25 1/4 x 27 7/16 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Widener Collection

Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art

1. Design a Wedding *Cassone*:
Image Reference / page 2



Fig. 4: Apollonio di Giovanni and workshop
Journey of the Queen of Sheba, c. 1464–5
Tempera on panel, 43.2 x 176.2 cm (17 x 69 3/8 in.)
Birmingham Museum of Art, Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation



Fig. 5: Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buono di Marco
Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, c. 1464–5
Tempera on panel, 52.5 x 185.5 cm (20 11/16 x 73 1/16 in.)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Mrs. Harriet J. Bradbury



Fig. 6: Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi
Interior *cassone* panel: *Reclining young man*, c. 1450
Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

2. Dowries

Dowries were a normal part of marriage negotiations in Renaissance Italy and remain important in some cultures. In this activity, students research contemporary dowry customs.

PURPOSE: to foster a better understanding of the place of dowries in Renaissance and contemporary societies.

PROCEDURE: After discussing Renaissance dowries in class (see [fig. 7] and “**Wedding preparations for Caterina Strozzi**”), have students conduct independent research on dowry customs, as practiced today in South and Southeast Asia, certain African regions, areas of the Middle East, or other parts of the world. In a presentation or paper, students should note similarities and differences with Renaissance customs.

RESOURCES: Start by going to the United Nations Web site (un.org) and looking under human rights or searching “dowry.”

2. Dowries: Image Reference



Fig. 7 Ambrogio de Predis

Bianca Maria Sforza, probably 1493

Oil on panel, 51 x 32.5 cm (20 1/16 x 12 13/16 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Widener Collection

Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art

Students consider Renaissance ideals of friendship and their own, and then create a double portrait of themselves with a best friend.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to compare their own values about friendship with those of the Renaissance and to think about how values can be expressed by visual means.

MATERIALS: images of Jacopo da Pontormo's portrait of two friends [fig. 8].

PROCEDURE: In class look at Pontormo's portrait (and others that students have identified online) and identify the visual elements that point to friendship. In the case of the Pontormo, the passage from Cicero one of the men holds is the most obvious, but other, more intangible clues, such as expression, gesture, and mood, also contribute. After discussing the work(s) and Renaissance notions of friendship, have students design (art students can execute) a double portrait depicting themselves and their own best friends. Their portraits should convey, through details of the setting, objects held, dress, color, lighting, and the like, what is most important in their friendship.

GLOSSARY: Jacopo da Pontormo, Cicero

RESOURCES:

Kent, Dale. *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

3. BFF:
Image Reference



Fig. 8 Jacopo da Pontormo
Two Men with a Passage from Cicero's "On Friendship," c. 1524
Oil on panel, 88.2 x 68 cm (34 3/4 x 26 3/4 in.)
Fondazione Giorgio Cini/Galleria di Palazzo Cini, Venice

4. What are they selling?

Most of the art presented in this unit “sells” a certain image of self, family, or a relationship of some kind. In this activity, students decode a contemporary advertisement using the same skills of visual analysis by which viewers of Renaissance art perceived the motivations of art makers.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to consider methods by which images projected certain values in the Renaissance, and to practice seeing those or similar methods in contemporary images

MATERIALS: students supply images of advertisements.

PROCEDURE: Have students work in two-person teams (or larger groups). Each student selects an advertisement, and then removes its logo, slogan, or anything else that explicitly identifies the product or service being promoted. After trading images with their partners, students guess what the advertisements are selling and explain why they think so. Extend the activity by asking them to research how and why these symbols acquired the meanings they have.