

Art History Riddles

Name _____

Famous Artists and Their Work

Below are 10 riddles. Each riddle provides clues to a famous artist from Art History and one of their famous works. It is your job to use the clues in the riddle to research and figure out the artist and the artist's work. Find out as much as you can in the time allotted. Feel free to work in any order you like. Your teacher may have you work independently or in groups. Provide your evidence of how you came to your conclusion.

Riddle 1:

I spent my quiet life painting soft rooms washed in daylight,
Dipping into costly lapis to drape an unknown girl in blue.
I left behind fewer than forty works before fading from sight,
Forgotten for two centuries until the world found me anew.
With just two marks of lead-white paint, I made a giant jewel gleam,
Floating beside a parted lip to catch an eternal dream.
They call me a "Sphinx" of Dutch masters, a ghost behind the frame—
The world knows the girl who turns her head, but do you know my name?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 2:

I filled my private journals backward, writing mirrored in reverse,
Dreaming up winged flying machines and dissecting how nerves traverse.
I mapped the flow of rivers and laid war machines across the page,
Leaving half my painted commissions undone throughout my age.
On a slab of poplar wood, I brushed soft glazes until shadows spoke,
Blurring lines around her eyes until an elusive phantom woke.
With hands resting in quiet grace before a wild, winding stream,
Her shifting lips hold a question that remains an endless dream.
Millions wait in line just to meet her guarded eye—
You know the woman with the smile, but can you tell which master am I?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 3:

I broke away from rigid schools to lead a bold new style,
Painting Vienna's high society with patterns full of guile.

Art History Riddles *cont'd*

Inspired by Ravenna's glittering church mosaic wall,
I wrapped my world in gold and silver leaf to dazzle all.
Around a fragile, pale-skinned face and rings of clustered pearls,
I poured a sea of geometric eyes, rectangles, and swirls.
Her gown dissolves into the light, encased in gilded sheen—
A stolen treasure of a war, once called a golden queen.
You may revere the woman wrapped in precious metal bold,
But can you name the master who set her face in gold?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

How you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 4:

Chasing the warm light of the south, I left the cold behind,
Creating worlds of feeling that were too vast for the mind.
I painted fields of sunflowers and made the cypress turn to fire,
My mind was oft a turbulent place, though my art sought to aspire.
From the quiet of a window, looking out upon the deep,
I captured energy exploding while the village was asleep.
Huge swirling vortices of light consumed the entire view,
With thick impasto brushstrokes, making everything brand new.
You may know this electric dream, where the colors start to fight—
But can you name the master who created this grand sight?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

How you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 5:

I sailed across the ocean to join a bold, rebellious crew,
The only woman from my shores the French masters ever knew.
Inspired by Japanese woodblock prints with flat, unusual space,
I favored quiet mother's love and everyday human grace.
Upon a bright turquoise sea, a dark oarsman pulls his oar,
His broad back turned against the viewer, facing far from shore.
A mother holds her wiggly child dressed in pink against the sun,
Tilted steeply from above until water and boat are one.
You know the summer afternoon adrift in vibrant blue—



Art History Riddles *cont'd*

Can you name the trailblazing painter who brought this scene to you?

The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 6:

I traded sweeping brushstrokes for the science of the eye,
Placing pure, unblended pigments side-by-side to amplify.
I mapped the laws of optics where complementary colors meet,
Letting retina and sunlight make the harmony complete.
Beside the Seine upon an isle, my frozen figures stand,
With parasols and bustle skirts across a dappled land.
A tiny monkey on a leash, a trumpet, and a hound—
Yet not a single person speaks, and stillness reigns the ground.
Millions of tiny dots unite to paint this sunny scene—
You know the quiet riverbank, but can you name who worked between?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 7:

I took the strange, forbidden paths of dreamscapes and the mind,
Using madness as a method to leave common sense behind.
With a waxed, upturned mustache and a taste for wild flair,
I painted silent shores of Catalonia thin and bare.
Upon a desolate, baked coast beneath an eerie sky,
Four unnatural, flaccid timepieces bend and twist and lie.
One drapes across a barren branch, one pools upon a ledge,
While ants devour a golden case along a table's edge.
A strange, pale creature sleeps below, unbothered by the crawl—
You know the soft, collapsing clocks, but can you name who dreamed it all?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion _____

Art History Riddles *cont'd*

Riddle 8:

I turned from cold reality to paint what soul and heartache feel,
Believing grief, anxiety, and dread were far more real.
No quiet portraits or still lifes could ease what I abhorred,
I poured my inner turmoil out across a painted board.
Along a tilted railing bridge beneath a blood-red sky,
Two shadowy companions walk while nature screams on high.
A hollow-eyed, skull-like face claps hands against its ears,
Its mouth agape in terror, vibrating with its fears.
The landscape twists in rippling waves of claustrophobic fright—
You know the soundless, panicked wail, but who brought it to light?



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The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Riddle 9:

I broke all forms to pieces, shifting viewpoints in the frame,
Challenging the canvas rules to play a bolder game.
Through blue and rose and cubist planes, my restless brush would tear,
Refusing ever to repeat or settle anywhere.
When bombs rained down upon a town, my bright hues turned to ash,
Stripped bare of color, stark and grey beneath the violent crash.
A shrieking horse with dagger tongue, a bull that stares ahead,
A mother weeping to the sky above her child dead.
A bare bulb hangs like an open eye where shattered bodies sprawl—
You know this monument of grief, but who unleashed it all?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____

Art History Riddles *cont'd*

Riddle 10:

I stripped away all trees and curves to seek the purest core,
Believing art should mirror truth and balance—nothing more.
Banishing all diagonals, perspective, depth, and shade,
A strict dynamic harmony was all my vision made.
Across a clean, asymmetrical grid of solid bars of black,
White negative spaces open wide, leaving no detail to track.
Only the primary colors stay, locked in their geometric space:
A block of red, a slice of blue, a touch of yellow grace.
You know the modern puzzle where straight edges never bend—
Can you name the Dutch purist who pushed painting to its end?



The famous artist is _____

The famous artwork is _____

Explain how you came to that conclusion: _____
