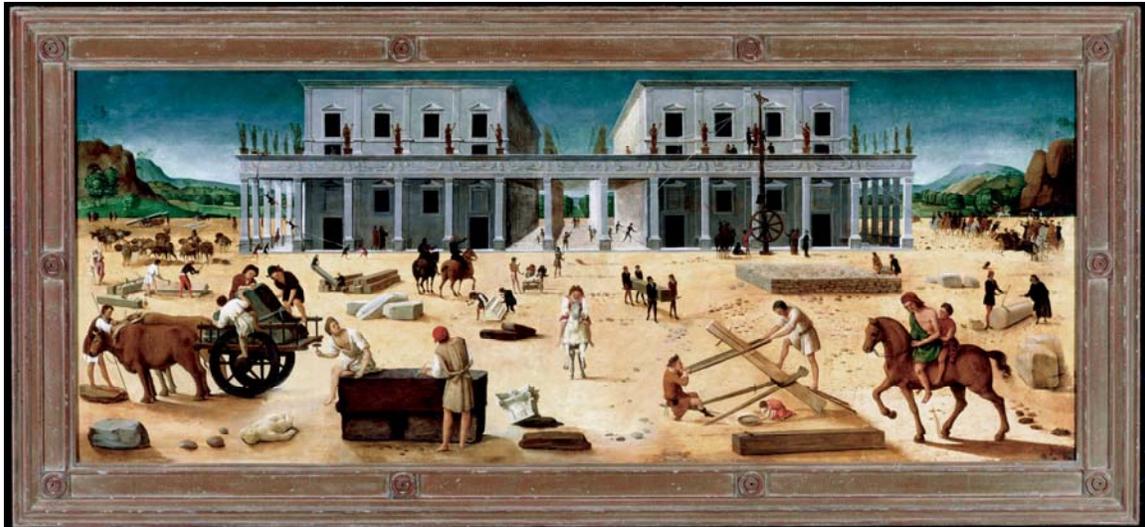


Building Your Dreams Teaching Poster



The Building of a Palace
Piero di Cosimo; Italian, 1461-1521
Oil on Panel
About 1515-1520
Bequest of John Ringling, 1936
SN22

Sunshine State Standards (3-5)

Math:

Measurement (MA.B.1.2, MA.B.2.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.B.4.2)
Geometry and Spatial Sense (MA.C.1.2, MA.C.2.2, MA.C.3.2)

Science:

Force and Motion (SC.C.2.2)

Visual Arts:

Skills and Techniques ((VA.A.1.2)
Cultural and Historical Connections (VA.C.1.2)



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Introduction

Objectives

Students will:

1. Learn that artists create landscapes and architecture that exist only in their imagination;
2. Learn that an understanding of the mathematical concepts of measurement and geometry is valuable and useful as a tool for the creative thinker and artist;
3. Learn about Renaissance innovations in the arts and science that impacted generations to come.

About the Art

The Building of the a Palace is a painting from the Renaissance period of art, which spanned the years 1450 to 1600. The Renaissance (or rebirth) was a time of rediscovery of Greek and Roman art and literature, and the beginning of scientific study of anatomy and the world. Philosophers, writers, scientists, and artists of the day based their principles on math and science as they knew it.

The Renaissance oil painting on wood panel, *The Building of a Palace* by Piero di Cosimo is unusual for a variety of reasons. Typically, Piero painted religious and mythological subjects. Many scholars believe this is not about an actual building, but an allegorical work created between 1515 and 1520, near the end of the artist's life. This work depicts the construction of an amazing double palace, a painting completely embodying the Renaissance's humanist ideals of harmony, symmetry, and perspective. The humanists believed that architecture was the combination of philosophical, mathematical and archaeological concepts, laws of divine order examined by studying the harmonious proportions and ideal beauty found in classical antiquity.

The building in this painting is in a state near completion, but we see all phases and aspects of construction. Contemporary building practices are shown, complete with tools and the most up to date technology of the times. Teeming with activity, the work site is strewn with decorative architectural pieces in the process of being cut, measured, examined, or installed by craftsmen. Statuary already in place on a parapet above the colonnade adorns three sides of the structure. Toward the right, another stature is being hoisted upward. A young man gallops towards the viewer from the center of the painting, further emphasizing the captured moments of activity and the orderly, symmetrical composition. Every age and both genders are represented in this work, as while as many professions. Ranging from visiting dignitaries and soldiers on the far right of the composition to a farmer with livestock and a mother carrying an infant walking with her child on the far left, Piero has addressed the purpose for such magnificent structures, their occupants and the people who surround, contribute to or help sustain their existence.



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About the Artist

Piero di Cosimo was born in 1461 or 1462 in Florence, Italy. Little is known about his childhood except that his father, Lorenzo di Piero d'Antonio, was a goldsmith and maker of small tools. Piero's career is scantily documented, much of what we know is from the biographer Giorgio Vasari in *Lives of the Artists*, published in 1550 and revised in 1568. According to Vasari, Piero was a recluse and never married. In his later years he lived on a diet of hard-boiled eggs.

Piero di Cosimo served in many roles as an artist in Florence. He was a successful planner of lavish public events which were popular at the close of the 15th century. In 1504 he served on a committee to select the best site for Michelangelo's statue of David. Piero also contributed to the Sistine Chapel frescoes. Known for his mythological scenes and religious subject matter, *The Building of a Palace* is unique in that it shows the present, not the past. The artist provides us with an interesting view of contemporary building practices.



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Looking and Discussing

Description: What do you see?

Ask student to spend a few moments looking quietly at the poster. Have them look from one side to the other and for objects close and far away. They need to discover as much as they can about this work of art by careful observation. Now ask students to describe in detail what they see. Record their observations on the board or chart paper for the class to view.

Ask the following questions:

- Is this painting real or unreal? Why
- If you could step inside this picture, which worker would you try to help? Why?
- Why is the work area so empty of plant life?
- How much time do you think it would take to build this palace?
- How many kinds of tools or simple machines can you find?

Analysis: How is the work organized?

- Ask students to look at the placement of objects in this work.
- What kind of balance do you see?
- Is the work symmetrically or asymmetrically arranged?
- How important is the placement of the palace in this work?
- What is the farthest point you can see in this painting?
- How does Piero use the placement of objects to show distance?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Tell the students that many art historians were not sure about the meaning of Piero di Cosimo's *The Building of a Palace* painting. There may be several possible meanings; perhaps students can find additional plausible meanings for the class to ponder.

Present day scholars believe this painting to be an allegory. An allegory is a story, whether in verse or prose, or a painting in which the literal presentation is intended to have another and parallel meaning. Share a brief recounting of a famous allegory with them such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

Renaissance humanist ideals of harmony, symmetry and perspective are presented in this work in allegorical form.

What might a written allegory about this work say?



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Suggested Classroom Activities

1. Write an Amazing Allegory

Remind students that an allegory according to Webster is the “expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence”, a “symbolic story.”

Use mathematical ideas as your characters and tell a story with them, e.g.: “The adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Tidy Triangle and their three children Isosceles, Obtuse, and Equilateral.”

Older students may read the allegory *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, by Edwin A. Abbott.

2. If I were a Bird Flying...

What would a birds-eye view of The Building of a Palace structure and grounds look like? What shapes do you see?

3. What's the Difference?

-Have the class create a word bank describing an imaginary palace of great beauty.

-Next, divide the class into two groups. One group will be the “artists” and interpret the palace individually with paintings or drawings. The others will be “architects” and will create front elevation drawings or floor plans of the imagines palace.

-Display the art and discuss the works as a class.

What is the same and what is different about the way an artists and an architect interpret a building?

-Invite an architect and an artist to the class to share their professions and ideas about the question above.

4. What was the used for?

Create a list of all the simple machines and tools seen in this work of art. Create an interactive display of the simple machines (using wood blocks and recyclables as building materials) and tools. Research and demonstrate their function for other students.

5. Home Sweet Palace!

Plan and draw your own palace. How large will it be? What will be the dimensions? How many rooms will it have? Will it look like a historical palace or a futuristic one?

Research and display pictures of palaces of all types from around the world along with student drawings of their own palaces.

6. Build it!

Use building blocks, soda cans, boxes and other recycled materials to design and build your own palace. Work in small groups, and document your progress with digital or traditional photography. Post your images on your web site. Compile and create a complete set of measurements of your palace so that it can be reproduced by someone else!



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Bibliography

Flatland: A Romance of May Dimensions, by Edwin A. Abbott. Published by New American Library, a division of Penguin Putman Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

A Time Line from 1450 to 1600

A time line is a very useful device for graphically illustrating art history or any other kind of history because it gives students a visual representation of consecutive events.

To use a time line, a student must know how to read dates and understand their meaning. The length of the time line, as well as the span of the intervals, are determined by the subject and the period of history which it illustrates.

Since art can be considered a reflection of its time, it is important to study some of the events that occurred in the time period 1450-1600. Tell the students that they will make a time line. Tell the students that the paintings they will see on a tour of the Museum were painted approximately three hundred or more years ago. Invite your students to help construct a class time line.

1450-1600 The Renaissance Era

1451

Christopher Columbus, sailor and explorer, is born.

1452

Leonardo da Vinci, artist and universal genius, is born.

1455

Johannes Gutenberg uses a printing press to print Latin Bibles.

1461

Piero di Cosimo, Italian artist, is born.

1492

Leonardo da Vinci draws a flying machine.

Columbus sights an island of the Bahamas and discovers the "New World."

1508

Michelangelo begins painting the seven story high ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which includes 340 human figures ranging in height from ten to eighteen feet. He completes the 10,000 square foot fresco in 1512.

1509

Peter Henlein of Nuremberg, German invents the watch, nicknamed the Nuremberg egg.



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1519

Cortex brings 300 Spanish soldiers and 18 horses to America. With the help of thousands of native Mexicans, by August 1512, the Aztec nation of 25 million is conquered.

1521

Piero di Cosimo dies.

1533

Pizarro conquers Peru.

1541

Hernando de Soto discovers the Mississippi River.

1553

The violin is developed.

1588

The English fleet defeats the Spanish Armada, ending Spanish dominion over the seas.