

# AP<sup>®</sup> ART HISTORY

## 2013 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 4

The work is *The School of Athens* by Raphael.

Analyze how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. (10 minutes)

#### Background

The question asks students to analyze how both the form and the content of a particular work reflect the intellectual concerns of the period during which it was made. Specifically, the question asks how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* reflect the humanist interests of the High Renaissance. The intent of this question is to prompt students to use skills of both formal and contextual analysis to situate *The School of Athens* within its art-historical period.

Humanism is the term used to describe the intellectual movement of the late Medieval and Renaissance periods that was first begun by scholars, called *umanisti*, in opposition to medieval Scholasticism, the university model of Paris. Interested in the revival of Classical languages and texts for their utility in contemporary society, humanists looked to the great democratic cultures of Classical Athens and Classical Rome as ideal models for the present. Humanists believed that knowledge could only be attained through well-rounded study of the liberal arts. As part of this movement, there arose the first systemization of language—Latin—using Cicero’s rhetorical style as the epitome. Soon the intense textual focus on Classical Antiquity resulted in a broader interest in the culture and arts of the ancient period. For Italians, this focus was centered on Rome, inspiring scholars and artists to travel to the city to obtain first-hand knowledge of its ancient monuments. The incorporation of Classical motifs and models is therefore one of the distinguishing features of Italian Renaissance art.

Raphael’s *The School of Athens* incorporates this humanistic interest in both its subject matter and its style, thereby reflecting the culture of the High Renaissance. Painted by Raffaello Santi, known as Raphael, between 1509 and 1511 C.E., *The School of Athens* represents the discipline of Philosophy on one wall of the *Stanza della Segnatura*, located within the papal apartments of Pope Julius II in the Vatican. Pope Julius II used the room as a library. It was where he signed official documents as well as kept humanistic texts. The texts, like the frescoes on the four walls of the room, were most likely arranged according to four intellectual disciplines: Theology, Philosophy, Poetry, and Jurisprudence.

*The School of Athens* is the most famous of the *Stanza della Segnatura*’s four frescoes and is filled with representations of distinguished philosophers from Classical Antiquity to the early 16th century; individuals who were revered by Renaissance humanists. This gathering of Plato, Aristotle, and other great ancient thinkers such as Socrates, Pythagoras, Ptolemy, and Zoroaster, together with contemporary scholars, such as Tommaso Inghirami (the Vatican librarian, dressed as Epicurus in the lower left with the wreath on his head), and artists, including portraits of Michelangelo (lower center, with head resting on fist) and Raphael (lower far right, looking out to the viewer), suggests that the Rome of Pope Julius II was a “New Rome” in an enlightened age. In terms of subject matter, the painting also includes self-conscious references to the Classical sculptures and buildings of Rome that were popular at the beginning of the 16th century, both to collectors like Pope Julius II and to humanists, who came to the city for work or study. For instance, the building in which the philosophers gather takes the form of a Greek cross, with coffered arches reminiscent of the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine in the Roman Forum. The architectural plan most likely was inspired by the current building project of St. Peter’s basilica, sponsored by Pope Julius II and undertaken by the architect Bramante. Monumental marble sculptures of the ancient gods are set in niches that line the walls.

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### Question 4 (continued)

Such emphasis on ancient culture in *The School of Athens*, coupled with the architectural allusion to the current building project of St. Peter's, is indicative of the blending of ancient philosophy with Christianity under the reign of Julius II, and reflects the humanist interests of the era.

In terms of style, *The School of Athens* exemplifies a Classical instinct combined with a sense of self-assurance indicative of the High Renaissance. The fresco reflects humanist interests in that its formal aspects are modeled after the Classical principles of harmony, balance, and symmetry in order to provide an idealized setting, flooded with a clarifying light that dignifies the prestigious gathering. With the use of one-point perspective as an organizing element, Raphael emphasizes how his interest in illusionism equates with an investigation of the natural world that humanists went to such great lengths to explore. In addition, the sculptural solidity of the human forms, as well as their grounded placement within their rationalized surroundings, ties the schematic program to the earthly domain of man and human perception. The figures are also individualized, bearing the countenance of many of Raphael's contemporaries. This may suggest a parallel between the dynamic energy of the Italian Renaissance with that of the antique past, ennobling the ideas and actions of singular minds. Moreover, in a composition that conveys symmetry and balance, the scholars are grouped either with Plato (to the left) or Aristotle (to the right), with placement determined by whether the scholars were interested primarily in matters of heaven or the earth. The poses of the two central philosophers reflect the philosophical arguments contained in the texts held in their left hands: Plato holds his *Timaeus* and uses his right hand to point to the heavens to the eternal truths that exist in idea only, while Aristotle holds his *Ethics* and extends his right hand out forward from his body with his palm facing toward the material earth, which he argued was the empirical reality that can be measured through sight and touch. Rather than being divisive, however, Raphael's composition uses perspective to harmonize these two schools of thought, with the viewer's gaze directed upwards through the successive series of arches into the sky beyond, bringing together not only Platonists and Aristotelians, but also Christians with humanists at the center of the work, and thereby creating one unified School of Athens.

### Two Tasks for Students

1. Analyze how the subject matter of *The School of Athens* reflects the humanist interests during the High Renaissance.
2. Analyze how the style of *The School of Athens* reflects the humanist interests during the High Renaissance.

### Points to Remember

This question asks students to combine skills of both formal and contextual analysis. Since students are given the name of the artist, the title of the work, and the art-historical period during which the work was created, students should be able to focus their responses on analyzing how *The School of Athens* reflects the humanist interests of the High Renaissance.

If students do not address humanist interests during the High Renaissance in at least a general way, it will be difficult to analyze the painting in a manner relevant to the question. Students must identify, at least implicitly, what the humanist interests during the High Renaissance were in order to analyze *The School of Athens* in a manner relevant to the question.

Although students may identify the specific philosophers represented in the painting, they are not required to do so. Such identification can help provide context for a more thorough discussion of humanism, but it is not essential for answering the question.

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## 2013 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 4 (continued)

#### Scoring Criteria

##### 4 points

**Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.**

The response clearly and correctly analyzes how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful effect on the analysis.

##### 3 points

**Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.**

The response correctly analyzes how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. However, the response may be somewhat unbalanced—with a stronger analysis of either subject matter or style, although both are represented—and/or may include minor errors that have some effect on the analysis.

##### 2 points

**Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.**

The response attempts to address how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance, but the discussion of that evidence is less analytical than descriptive. It may be overly general, simplistic, or unbalanced. For example, the discussion of the subject matter may be mostly accurate, whereas the discussion of the style includes errors that affect the response.

##### OR

The response analyzes how *The School of Athens* reflects humanist interests during the High Renaissance, but the response focuses entirely on either subject matter or style, not both.

**NOTE:** This is the highest score a response can earn if it does not discuss both the subject matter and the style of the work.

##### 1 point

**Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.**

The response demonstrates some general familiarity with the issues raised by the question by discussing how the subject matter and/or the style of the work reflects humanist interests during the High Renaissance. However, the response is weak, overly descriptive, and/or contains significant errors.

##### 0 points

**Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge or understanding of the question.**

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements about *The School of Athens*. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

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4. The work is *The School of Athens* by Raphael.

Analyze how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. (10 minutes)

The High Renaissance in Italy was driven by humanism. The Italians at this time valued the human potential for greatness, as its founders, including Leonardo Da Vinci were praised for being masters in many fields. Leonardo Da Vinci was coined the "Renaissance man", having been expert not only in painting, but in botany, engineering, mathematics, and optics to name a few. Thus, the High Renaissance spirit encapsulated mankind's potential for greatness.

In Raphael's *The School of Athens*, he paints a group portrait of some of the greatest philosophers minds in history. In the center of the composition, he places Plato and Aristotle, the greatest of Greek philosophers. Among the crowd of gifted men, he includes Socrates and Pythagorus. He even portrays the geniuses of his own time, painting the figure of Aristotle as Leonardo Da Vinci. Raphael also includes his contemporary rival, Michelangelo, in the foreground and even includes a self-portrait, indicating that he stands among the geniuses of history. To further portray the Renaissance interest in human potential and accomplishment, he sets the scene in the interior of the then unfinished St. Peter's, a tribute to the architectural successes of the Renaissance.

In agreement with High Renaissance tradition, Raphael depicts each figure in an ideal form, using ~~perfect~~ ideal proportions and painting the figures with a sculptural quality. Each figure can stand alone as a testament to the proportional excellence, unity, and balance of the human body. Raphael also paints *The School of Athens* using one-point linear perspective, the vanishing point centered between the heads of the two central figures. This again serves to commemorate

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the celebrated invention and mastery of perspective during the Renaissance. Overall, Raphael's School of Athens exemplifies the accomplishments of the great human mind, as seen through his use of celebrated philosophers, mathematicians, and artists as subjects, as well as through ~~his use~~ the style of the artwork.

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4. The work is *The School of Athens* by Raphael.

Analyze how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. (10 minutes)

Humanist views in the High Renaissance are loosely defined as views deriving ~~is~~ from a renewed interest in human nature, potential, & general purpose in an earthly life rather than focusing on eternal salvation. The subject of "The School of Athens" is ancient Greek & Roman philosophers such as Plato & Aristotle among their-contemporary figures such as Michelangelo & Raphael himself. This integration of modern life with classical antiquity reflects the humanist idea of studying all forms & interpretations of human nature. The fact that this fresco is located in a papal apartment shows the shifting focus from the eternal life to the worldly life, even at the epicenter of the Catholic faith. Finally, the style itself shows Raphael's interest in the world around him. He uses linear perspective to illustrate receding space; both the figures & the architecture are 3-dimensional & realistically shaded.

4. The work is *The School of Athens* by Raphael.

Analyze how both the subject matter and the style of the work reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. (10 minutes)

The *School of Athens* by Raphael is one of the most prominent and obviously humanistic pieces of the High Renaissance. The very subject matter depicted, a school fostering discussion of theology, religion, mathematics, and science, represents a main pillar of Humanism, the desired ~~improvement~~ augmentation of knowledge and discussion of theology and mathematics. ~~The~~ Many of Raphael's contemporaries, ~~such as~~ are pictured, such as Da Vinci, sitting by himself in the lower center of the image. The style also reflects another main aspect of Humanism, the love of all things classical. Raphael's inclusion of grand arches, idealized and heroic male nudes, and an especially important kind of round ~~portico~~ processional arch framing the picture, all call attention to a relationship with the Classical. Even the robes and drapery that adorn the supposed "students of Athens" adds to this important detail.

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## 2013 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 4

#### Overview

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* by Raphael reflect the humanist interests of the High Renaissance. The intent of this question was to prompt students to use skills of both formal and contextual analysis to situate the work within its art-historical period.

#### Sample: 4A Score: 4

This response clearly and correctly analyzes how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. The response correctly states that the fresco depicts “a group portrait of some of the greatest minds in history,” including Plato and Aristotle. Although the response incorrectly states that Leonardo da Vinci’s likeness is used to depict Aristotle and not Plato, this is a minor error that has no effect on the analysis. Addressing the setting, the response states that “to further portray the Renaissance interest in human potential and accomplishment,” the artist “sets the scene in the interior of the then unfinished St. Peter’s, a tribute to the architectural successes of the Renaissance.” Humanist interests are therefore associated with the work’s subject matter, as “mankind’s potential for greatness” is reflected in the depiction of this “crowd of gifted men.” In terms of style, the response equates “ideal proportions” and a “sculptural quality” of the figures with a desire to achieve unity and balance, qualities the response connects, albeit in an implied way, to humanism. The response also mentions how linear perspective is used as a “celebrated invention” associated with the Renaissance. In this way, the response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

#### Sample: 4B Score: 3

This response correctly analyzes how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. The response sets the tone of the discussion by equating humanism with a “general purpose in an earthly life rather than focusing on eternal salvation.” It correctly identifies the subject of the fresco as that of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and interprets the image as an “integration of modern life with classical antiquity” by including the likenesses of Raphael’s contemporaries. The response, however, is unbalanced because the analysis of style is weaker than the analysis of subject matter. It describes aspects of the fresco related to style, such as linear perspective and the use of shading, but it struggles to connect these to humanist interests. It states that “the style itself shows Raphael’s interest in the world around him” without further analysis. It does, however, associate this idea with a “shifting focus from the eternal life to the worldly life.” In this way, the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

#### Sample: 4C Score: 2

This response attempts to address how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* reflect humanist interests during the High Renaissance. Yet while the response relates humanism to a “love of all things classical,” the subject matter is misread as being connected to a “desired augmentation of knowledge and discussion of theology and mathematics,” failing to identify correctly the pursuits of those depicted in the fresco as purely secular. In its attempt to discuss style, the response mostly describes what is seen. It lists “Raphael’s inclusion of grand arches, idealized and heroic male nudes, and an especially important kind of round procenium [*sic*] arch framing the picture” to call attention to “a relationship with the Classical.” In this way, the response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.