



**AP® COORDINATORS:**  
**PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO AP ART HISTORY TEACHERS**

**Incorporating Context Into the AP Art History Course:  
A Message From the AP Art History Development Committee**

Like all academic fields, the discipline of Art History has undergone fundamental changes over the last three decades or so. Central to this transformation is the increasing emphasis placed on understanding the work of art in its historical context. For this contextual study, issues such as politics, religion, patronage, gender, function, ethnicity, as well as formal stylistic observations, all contribute to understanding the meaning of a work of art for any given historical period. The AP® Art History Exam contains an increasing number of multiple-choice questions and essays that reflect these evolving emphases.

For many AP Art History teachers, this change in emphasis from formal analysis and simple identification of works of art to contextual analysis is challenging. The following examples are provided to illustrate some of the more important kinds of contextual art history now central to the discipline. AP Art History students must therefore be familiar with these approaches.

**SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT**

**Short Essay**

Slides: Left: Jacob Lawrence, *No. 3* from *The Migration Series*, 1940 – 1941.  
Right: Jacob Lawrence, *No. 49* from *The Migration Series*, 1940 – 1941.

The American artist Jacob Lawrence painted the two works shown.

Discuss the historical and social themes in his work. How does the artist use formal elements to construct narrative? (10 minutes)

**Multiple Choice**

Which of the following art movements received widespread sponsorship by the United States government in the 1930s?

- a. Surrealism
- b. Social Realism\***
- c. Photo Realism
- d. Postmodernism

## GENDER

### Short Essay

Traditionally, only a few women painters from the Renaissance and Baroque eras are mentioned. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, many more women artists feature, among them painters, sculptors, photographers, printmakers, conceptual artists, installation artists, and video artists.

Choose two women artists you have studied, one from before 1750 and one from after. Discuss how cultural and social factors affected the development of each artist's career. (10 minutes)

### Multiple Choice

Women painters of the Renaissance era often found their career development significantly restricted by

- a. shrinking markets for art
- b. the lack of good teachers
- c. **social conventions\***
- d. patrons' unwillingness to pay for new work

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### Short Essay

Slides: Left: Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930.  
Right: Thomas Hart Benton, *Cradling Wheat*, 1939.

The work on the left is by Grant Wood, and the work on the right is by Thomas Hart Benton.

American painters such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton are known collectively as Regionalists. What was their primary subject matter? Discuss contemporary political and artistic developments to which they were reacting. (10 minutes)

### Multiple Choice

The concept of a divinely sanctioned Manifest Destiny was reinforced by the majestic landscapes of

- a. Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley
- b. **Albert Bierstadt and Frederick Edwin Church\***
- c. John Singer Sargent and Thomas Eakins
- d. John Sloan and Aaron Douglas

## PATRONAGE

### Short Essay

Slides: Left: Interior view of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne, Aachen, Germany. 792-805.

Right: Plan of the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne, Aachen, Germany. 792-805.

Carolingian art and architecture is clearly distinguished by its close association with the Emperor Charlemagne's very clear political and cultural ambitions.

Identify the building. Explain how the building reflects Charlemagne's specific political and cultural ambitions. (10 minutes)

### Multiple Choice

Black and white image: Robert Campin, *Mérode Altarpiece*, ca. 1425 – 1426.

During the period in which the work shown above was made, patronage shifted from

- a. imperial to papal
- b. middle class to imperial
- c. **ecclesiastical to private\***
- d. private to civic

## FUNCTION AND SETTING

### Short Essay

Slides: Left: *Theodora and attendants*, mosaic from the south wall of the apse, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 547.

Right: blank

The mosaic shown is often discussed as an early example of the Byzantine tendency toward abstraction in art. However, the mosaic played a significant role by virtue of its physical context and its placement within that context.

Discuss the original placement of the work, its role within the larger artistic program there, and its meaning. (10 minutes)

### Multiple Choice

Black and white image: Reconstructed west front of the Altar of Zeus, Pergamon, Turkey, ca. 175 BCE.

The monument shown, now reconstructed in a museum in Berlin, originally formed part of a Hellenistic

- a. gateway
- b. theater
- c. mausoleum
- d. **altar\***

## CONTEXT OF ARCHITECTURE

### Short Essay

Slides: Left: John Nash, Royal Pavilion, Brighton, England, 1815 – 1818.  
Right: blank

This 19<sup>th</sup>-century house was built in England for members of the royal family. Identify the style of the building. How does the building reflect the cultural, political, or social interests of the period?

### Multiple Choice

Black and white image: Plan of the Campidoglio, Rome, Italy, ca. 1537.

The plan shown, prepared by Michelangelo for his largest architectural project, was intended to

- a. mark the site of the martyrdom of an apostle
- b. express the power of the Counter-Reformation church\***
- c. complete the square in front of St. Peter's basilica in the Vatican
- d. symbolize the political authority of the Medici