



Oath of the Horatii

by Jacques-Louis David

David is the central artist of the Neoclassical period and this is his most famous painting. It was done in 1784 in oil on canvas.

The painting depicts a Roman legend about three brothers who agree to fight three brothers from a rival city rather than subject their armies to the contest. In the painting they are swearing an oath of sacrifice and allegiance to their father, who represents the city. They are putting the welfare of the state above their own. The weeping woman in white is Camilla, married to one of the Horatii brothers, but also sister of the rival Curatii brothers, and so she knows that no matter the outcome she will lose loved ones.

The brush strokes are invisible, the lines are strong and straight, there are many triangles and geometric shapes, and the columns in the back are orderly: all elements of Neoclassicism.



Death of Socrates

by Jacques-Louis David

This was painted in 1787 and in oil on canvas. It depicts a story told by Plato. Socrates had been convicted of corrupting the young and his sentence was death by poisoning. Though he had opportunity to escape, Socrates decided to face his death calmly. In this painting he is shown still teaching moments before he accepts the cup of poison. The men surrounding him are stricken with grief, but Socrates himself expects that death is only the beginning of a new existence.



Death of Marat

by Jacques-Louis David

This was painted in 1793 in oil on canvas. It depicts the assassination of Marat, one of the leaders of the French Revolution. He was stabbed to death by Charlotte Corday, who opposed the extremist Reign of Terror which was being led by Marat in Paris. Corday did not attempt to flee, but was arrested and executed. She was viewed as a heroine by many for her actions. David, as a member of the Committee of General Security, a signatory on most of the orders of execution, and a supporter of Marat saw the death of Marat as a tragedy. Marat is painted in an idealized heroic light. He appears as a martyr for the cause, bathed in soft light, pen still in hand, working for the Republic to his last breath. This is the world's first depiction of a political, as opposed to religious, martyr.



Napoleon Crossing the Alps

by Jacques-Louis David

Painted in 1801, this is oil on canvas. This painting depicts a real event, the 1800 crossing of the Alps by Napoleon, but in an idealized way. In the real event Napoleon actually crossed the Alps two days after his men, in good weather, on a little trail, and on the back of a donkey. But the painting is intended as propaganda. You can even see the names of other great generals who crossed the Alps, Hannibal and Charlemagne, etched into the rock at the lower left of the canvas, linking Napoleon to the greats of the past.



Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi

by Angelica Kauffman

Kauffman painted this in 1785. It depicts a story from ancient Rome. Cornelia, mother of two future leaders of Rome, Tiberius and Gaius, has welcomed a visitor into her home. The woman pulls out her jewels, showing them off and demanding admiration. She then asks Cornelia to display her jewels. Cornelia brings forward her children and points to them. "These are my jewels," she says. The message is that the most precious thing a woman can have are her children, the future of her nation.

The moral, the Roman subject matter, the symmetrical arrangement of the figures, the hidden brush strokes and the classical architecture are all indicative of Neoclassical style.



Venus Induces Helen to Fall in Love with Paris

by Angelica Kauffman

This was painted in 1790 in oil on canvas. It is a story from the Iliad by Homer where Helen is carried off by Paris, an act which causes the Trojan war. But in this painting Helen is not a hapless victim, she is making the choice while Paris stands by with baited breath waiting for her to accept or reject his suit.

Venus and Cupid are both intervening in the love match, suggesting that this is the will of the gods and the right choice for Helen to make.

The composition is classical both in terms of the story and the setting. The figures are symmetrically placed and the columns suggest a Greek palace or temple.



Princess Albert de Broglie by Jean August Dominique Ingres

Ingres is best known as a master portrait painter, much to his chagrin. He always wanted to focus on grand history paintings as these were held in the highest esteem during his life. But portraits paid the bills.

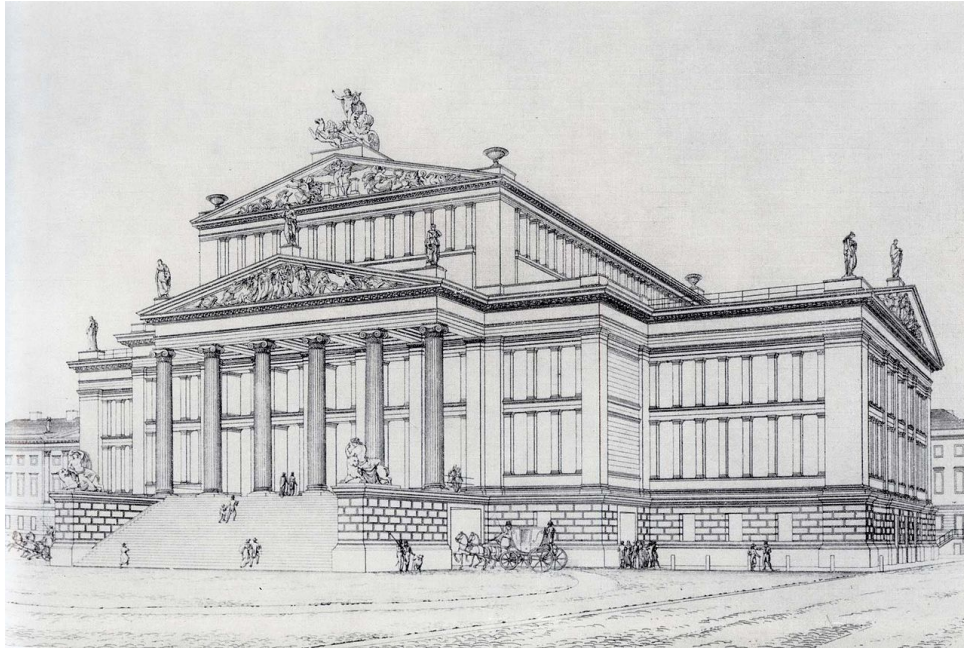
In this 1853 painting of the princess the shimmering cloth is masterfully produced. And while the clothing is obviously very fine, it is not particularly ornate. The princess wears simple jewelry and is in a rather plain room. Her hair style is simple and her pose is natural and informal. These are all elements and values of the Neoclassical and the Age of Enlightenment.



George Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon

Houdon was a prolific sculptor. He did statues, but his specialty was busts. He was invited by Benjamin Franklin to come to the United States specifically to create statues and busts of George Washington, which he did in 1785.

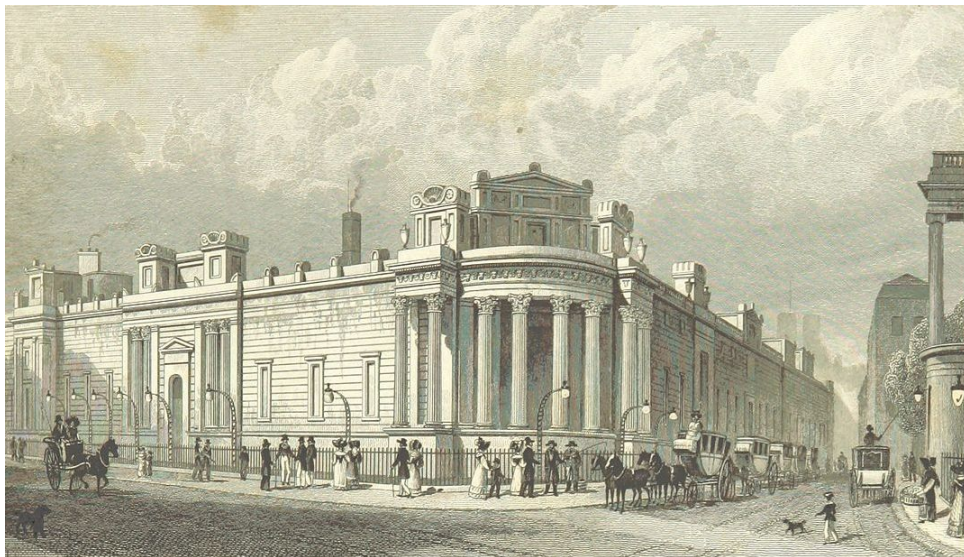
This is a bronze cast copy of a statue of Washington by Houdon. The original was completed in 1792 and was carved of Carrara marble. Washington rests his arm on a fasces, an ancient symbol of Roman power. Behind the fasces and partially obscured in this view is a plow. The fasces and the plow both invoke the story of Cincinnatus, a Roman who led his people in war and the voluntarily gave up his power upon victory returning to his farm, as Washington also did.



Konzerthaus

by Karl Friedrich Schinkel

This is a concert hall in Berlin, built in 1821 and designed by the architect Schinkel in the Neoclassical style. The building is symmetrical, contains triangular pediments with bas relief friezes of heroic figures in togas or the nude on the front, and Greek Ionic columns supporting the portico roof.



Bank of England

by John Soane

John Soane was a British neoclassical architect. This is his most famous work, the Bank of England. The building was remodeled after Soane's time, still in the neoclassical style, but far more ornate than Soane's original design.

The symmetrically placed windows and columns along with the carved frieze above the main portico on the corner are important elements of Neoclassical design.



The White House

by James Hoban

Hoban was an Irish architect who was selected by George Washington to design and build the presidential palace for the new United States government.

The Neoclassical style was popular at the time in part because the new governments of the United States and France were basing their political experiments on the ancient Roman republic.

The White House was completed in 1800. This view is of the north side which includes a columned portico flanked by symmetrical banks of windows and topped with a triangular pediment. In truly American style the pediment is plain, not carved with figures.



Somerset House, London

by Sir William Chambers

This building, commissioned by the British government to house governmental offices, was designed in 1776 and built over the next two decades. The goal was to create grand public buildings in the capital.

The style was Neoclassical, which fit well with the British character of simplicity coupled with a grand sense of self worth. The building has three massive wings around a central courtyard. Each wing is symmetrical and centered with a columned portico. Each portico is topped with a small dome.

Neoclassical Art Cards

Neoclassicism was a reaction to the over-the-top opulence of the Rococo style. As the Rococo exemplified and reflected the courts of the French kings so did the Neoclassical exemplify and reflect the austerity of the new French republic. The style involves symmetrical arrangements, lack of ornamentation, classical subjects such as Roman myths, and figures dressed in togas. The subjects of the paintings were often chosen to support and prop up the ideals of allegiance to the state, public virtue, and simplicity. The architecture of this period was done in Roman style, with large central domes and triangular pediments supported by pillars, all symmetrically arranged. Besides the political republicanism, this period was accompanied by the Age of Reason and the start of formal archaeology.

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the paintings in order of date. Which were painted first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title of the painting. After these are mastered, use the image cards to memorize the titles and artists together. Finally master the titles, artists, and a little information about the painting.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?