

# AP<sup>®</sup> ART HISTORY

## 2014 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 5

**Attribute the painting to the artist who painted it. Justify your attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of that artist. (10 minutes)**

#### Background

This question asks students to correctly attribute a painting to the artist who painted it. Students are asked to justify the attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the work commonly associated with the artist's *oeuvre*. These characteristics are not strictly visual; they may include content or context as well as formal elements. The intent of this question is to have students apply their knowledge of the characteristics of an artist's painting to their discussion of a presumably unknown work.

The painting is *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* by Rembrandt van Rijn. Created for the art collector Antonio Ruffo in 1653 C.E., the painting portrays Aristotle as though he were a Dutch contemporary posing for his portrait. Aristotle stands in half-length before a sculpted bust of the epic poet Homer. The painting is set within a dark interior pierced with strong raking light from the upper left. Aristotle wears a black tunic over billowing sleeves of white fabric. A gold ring appears on his left hand and a medallion bearing an image of his pupil Alexander the Great is attached to a thick gold chain that drapes from his right shoulder to his left hip. Highlights emphasize these sumptuous materials as well as the philosopher's face, which is cast down to his right and toward the portrait bust of Homer, who is dressed, by comparison, very plainly. The juxtaposition of Aristotle's deeply contemplative facial expression as he regards the bust of Homer with the luxurious materials of his clothing reflects the ambivalent attitudes towards wealth that prevailed in 17th-century Holland. They also serve to draw attention to areas of the canvas on which Rembrandt has applied his characteristic loose and highly expressive brushstrokes.

The assertive brushwork of Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* as well as its nuanced use of light and shadow, detailed costume, and captivating facial expression are characteristic of much of Rembrandt's other work, including his more than seventy self portraits. In this particular work, Rembrandt's depiction of a figure lost in thought exemplifies his longstanding preoccupation with rendering both visual and emotional experiences. His soft and meditative rendering of the dimly lit scene, in which fine gradations of shadow and light meld into one another, contrasts with the stark, dramatic tenebrism and crisply defined forms of the Italian Baroque painter Caravaggio and his followers. This technique reflects not only Rembrandt's skill in the rendering of light and shade but also his awareness of their power and expressivity. This particular painting has also been interpreted as Rembrandt's commentary on the art of portraiture, as the composition includes three portraits—Homer, Aristotle, Alexander—rendered, through paint, in three different media—sculpture, painting, jewelry. Just as Aristotle distinguished three modes of life—the poetic, the contemplative, and the active—so too does Rembrandt portray this schema through the representation of a poet, a philosopher, and a warrior. Through the serious expression on Aristotle's face and the deferential gesture of the hand resting softly on Homer's head, it is clear that for Rembrandt, the arts were preeminent.

In justifying their attribution, students may cite a range of specific characteristics that connect *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* to the formal or conceptual features found in other works by Rembrandt. In terms of style, students may cite the expressive use of light, the subtle gradations between light and shadow, as well as the loose brushwork and rich textures that characterize Rembrandt's psychologically complex works. Students may also seek to relate these and other stylistic elements of the painting to other portraits by Rembrandt, such as *The Night Watch*, (1642 C.E.), or his many self portraits. Students may cite history paintings such as Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1665 C.E.) and *The Blinding of Samson* (1636

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### Question 5 (continued)

C.E.). With regard to both content and context, students may place Rembrandt within the broader tradition of 17th-century Dutch art, which was concerned with both portraiture and history painting. Although *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* remains firmly rooted in the cultural context of its period, it nonetheless exemplifies a singular treatment of light and a meditative quality that differentiates Rembrandt's work from that of his contemporaries.

#### Two Tasks for Students

1. Correctly attribute the painting to Rembrandt.
2. Justify the attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt.

#### Points to Remember

This is an attribution question. The question requires attribution to a specific artist, not to an art-historical movement or time period. The correct answer is Rembrandt. The highest score a response can earn if the painting is not correctly attributed to Rembrandt is 2 points.

Students may imply an attribution to Rembrandt by identifying the artist not by name but as the same artist who painted works such as the *Return of the Prodigal Son* or *The Night Watch*. The highest score this kind of attribution can earn is 2 points.

When a response is granted partial credit, attention should be paid to the plausibility of the evidence cited for the incorrect artist and whether such evidence could reasonably be applied to Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*. In general, an incorrect attribution to another 17th-century artist will be a stronger response than an incorrect attribution to an artist outside of Rembrandt's era. The highest score such a response can earn is 2 points.

The task is to attribute the painting to one artist. If a student makes multiple attributions then the highest score such a response can earn is 2 points.

Note that students are not required to identify the painting or to provide a specific comparison to another work by Rembrandt, although some students may include such details in their responses.

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### Question 5 (continued)

#### Scoring Criteria

##### 4 points

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

The painting is clearly and correctly attributed to Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by citing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful effect on the discussion.

##### 3 points

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

The painting is correctly attributed to Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by citing characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt. However, the response may be somewhat general and/or includes minor errors that have some effect on the discussion.

##### 2 points

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

The painting is correctly attributed to Rembrandt, although this attribution may be implied rather than stated directly through reference to another painting by Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by referring to characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt; however, the response may be overly general, simplistic, or descriptive. The response may contain errors that affect the discussion.

##### OR

The painting is attributed incorrectly, but the specific visual characteristics cited as justification can reasonably be applied both to this painting and to the work of the incorrect artist.

**NOTE:** This is the highest score a response can earn if it does not correctly attribute the painting to Rembrandt.

##### 1 point

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

The painting is correctly attributed to Rembrandt, but there is no other discussion of merit.

##### OR

The painting is attributed incorrectly. The response includes an attempt at justification, but the discussion may be overly general, simplistic or descriptive, even if the characteristics cited as justification can reasonably be applied both to this painting and to the work of the incorrect artist.

##### 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. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

— This is a blank paper only.

5. Attribute the painting to the artist who painted it. Justify your attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of that artist. (10 minutes)

This painting can be attributed to the Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn, who was known for his portraits of the middle and upper classes of Holland. Rembrandt was a notable portrait artist who did not paint his subjects idealistically, but rather realistically in a manner that somehow conveyed their character. The man in the painting shown looks at some unseen location outside the painting with a forlorn expression, and Rembrandt's portraits were characterized by emotional and psychological intensity. Rembrandt's own self portraits showed the emotional turmoil he was suffering through his expressions and actions, and the figure's lugubrious stare indicates a mindset that only Rembrandt could convey through painting. Rembrandt also tends to focus on the intricate details of the face and clothing, and the wrinkles around the eyes and texture of the hair are characteristic of his style. The painting also uses a limited color palette with shades of brown and other dark colors. Rembrandt often used ~~more~~ more muted colors to highlight the psychological intensity, but it could also be an indication of bitumen, a substance put over Rembrandt's paintings (like Night Watch) to preserve them that also darkens the canvas over time.

5. Attribute the painting to the artist who painted it. Justify your attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of that artist. (10 minutes)

The piece shown ~~with~~ is a work by Rembrandt. The work depicts multiple aspects that are associated with Rembrandt and his style.

The ~~overwhelming~~ piece shows a large amount of darkness with it. The only light comes from the man in the piece who provides the contrast of dark and light inside of the composition. This use of tenebrism is shown in the dark background contrasting the figures white clothes, face and the bust he is touching. The bust itself glows, and seem attributes itself to someone wise such as a Greek philosopher, highlighted by books in the background of the composition.

The shimmering of the man's clothes displays another characteristic of Rembrandt's work. The style and texture of the brushstrokes all show the work of Rembrandt within the composition.

5. Attribute the painting to the artist who painted it. Justify your attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of that artist. (10 minutes)

This artwork was created by Rembrandt. Rembrandt is known for his use of chiaroscuro. This painting uses chiaroscuro in the way the light seems to be coming from nowhere to illuminate the dark scene. Similar to Caravaggio, the light only illuminates a single portion of the painting leaving the rest very dark and mysterious.

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## 2014 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 5

#### Overview

This 10-minute question asked students to correctly attribute a painting to the artist who painted it. Students were asked to justify the attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the work commonly associated with the artist's *oeuvre*. These characteristics did not have to be not strictly visual; they could include content or context as well as formal elements. The intent of this question was to have students apply their knowledge of the characteristics of an artist's painting to their discussion of a presumably unknown work.

#### Sample: 5A

##### Score: 4

The painting is clearly and correctly attributed to Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by citing specific characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt; for instance, that "Rembrandt was a notable portrait artist" who painted "his subjects ... realistically in a manner that somehow conveyed their character." The response demonstrates familiarity with Rembrandt's self portraits, pointing out the man's "forlorn expression," and concludes that "Rembrandt's portraits were characterized by emotional and psychological intensity." The response then addresses details such as "the wrinkles around the eyes and the texture of the hair" as being characteristic of Rembrandt's style. In addition, the response cites "a limited color palette [*sic*] with shades of browns and other dark colors" as evidence of the attribution, comparing the "muted colors" and possible use of bitumen to Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. In this way, the response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

#### Sample: 5B

##### Score: 3

The painting is correctly attributed to Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by citing characteristics of the painting that are commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt. Specifically, the response identifies tenebrism as "the contrast of light and dark inside the composition." The response notes the white clothes, face, and bust as elements that contrast with the dark background. The response makes a general attempt to engage with subject matter by stating that the bust in the painting is "someone wise such as a Greek philosopher" and also notes the "books in the background," but the response does not connect these observations specifically to Rembrandt. The response concludes by connecting "The shimmering of the mans [*sic*] clothes" to "the style and texture" of Rembrandt's brushstrokes. In this way, the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

#### Sample: 5C

##### Score: 2

The painting is correctly attributed to Rembrandt. The response justifies the attribution by citing a characteristic of the painting that is commonly associated with the work of Rembrandt. The response refers to the use of chiaroscuro, citing "the way the light seems to be coming from nowhere to illuminate the dark scene." The response also compares the use of light to Caravaggio, stating that "the light only illuminates a single portion of the painting, leaving the rest very dark and mysterious." The response is simplistic in that it focuses on just one aspect of the painting in an overly general fashion, rather than justifying the attribution to Rembrandt more thoroughly. In this way, the response demonstrates only some knowledge and understanding of the question.