

RODIN

A MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

**SCULPTURE FROM THE
IRIS AND B. GERALD CANTOR FOUNDATION**

TEEN ACTIVITY GUIDE

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WELCOME TO RODIN: A MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION.

The exhibition you will see today contains over 60 bronze sculptures in addition to drawings, photographs, and a model demonstrating the complex process of lost-wax casting.

Auguste Rodin (sounds like AH-GOOST RO-DAN) lived from 1840 until 1917. He was born to a middle class family in Paris and was a typical child, although somewhat shy and very nearsighted. His vision was a problem in his early years at school, but he took a serious interest in drawing. He soon devoted himself to the arts, enrolling at the *École Impériale de Dessin*, a government school for craft and design. He kept himself very busy attending classes, visiting museums to study Greek and Roman sculpture, and frequenting the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, where he also studied drawing. During these years he also discovered clay and found himself to be a very promising young sculptor. Yet although at the age of seventeen he was awarded two prizes for drawing and sculpting, Rodin was unable to gain admittance to the prestigious and conservative *École des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts), which rejected him three times.

Rodin's *The Thinker*



During his 20s and 30s, Rodin worked for another sculptor by day and on his own sculpture by night. His struggle for recognition dominated his early career. While his day work provided a steady income, Rodin greatly wanted to exhibit his own work. In the 1860s he repeatedly submitted his sculpture *The Mask of the Man with the Broken Nose* to the annual juried Paris Salon exhibitions – the most important shows of their day – but suffered a series of rejections. (His work was finally admitted in 1877.)

Rodin started getting noticed in 1880 when he was hired to create his first major public commission. He was paid to create large bronze doors for the entrance of a museum of decorative arts that was to be built in Paris. The subject of his entrance, *The Gates of Hell*, was inspired by Dante's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* (written about 1308), which was very popular in France in the nineteenth century. In the years that followed, Rodin was commissioned to produce other monuments, including *The Burghers of Calais* (1884-88), the *Monument to Balzac* (about 1897), and the *Monument to Victor Hugo* (about 1897-1900).

In 1900 Rodin reached the peak of success. He had an entire exhibition area at the Paris World Exposition devoted to his sculpture and his work was known internationally. In 1908 he moved to the Hôtel Biron, a very large home where he lived and worked until his death in 1917. A year before he died, Rodin donated this home and his studio and their contents to the French government, in exchange for France's agreement to establish a museum in his honor. Today the Hôtel Biron is home to the Musée Rodin.

1.) **LOOK CLOSELY!**

Below are photos of small details of Rodin sculptures in the exhibition. Analyze the detail, and try to find the sculpture to which it belongs. If you are stumped, you can check the answer key in the back of this guide.



DETAIL 1:



DETAIL 2:



DETAIL 3:



DETAIL 4:

2.) UNITING THEMES

Go through the galleries (these works may not all be in the same gallery) and find the sculptures in each group below and then decide on a theme or characteristic that unites each group. The label text in the galleries may help with this. There is no one correct answer, only ideas. We listed our ideas in the key in the back of the guide.

GROUP ONE:

FLYING FIGURE
NARCISSE
THE PRAYER

GROUP TWO:

THE FALLING MAN
DANCE FIGURE, PAS DE DEUX 'B'
THE BENEDICTIONS

GROUP THREE:

THE THINKER
THE KISS
THE THREE SHADES

GROUP FOUR:

BUST OF JEAN BAPTISTE RODIN
MASK OF THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE
HEAD OF HANAKO (TYPE 'D')

3.) **UNITING THEMES, PART II**

Now come up with your own groupings of three or more sculptures that match each of these proposed themes or characteristics. Again, there is no "right" answer here, only ideas.

DETERMINATION/RESOLVE

PASSION/DESIRE

MOTION/MOVEMENT

SMOOTHLY MODELED SURFACES

ROUGHLY MODELED SURFACES

4.) **WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

The name of a painting or sculpture often affects our ideas about that work of art. Many of Rodin's sculptures were known by several titles. For instance, *The Age of Bronze* was first called *The Vanquished*. Rodin sometimes even let other people suggest names for his sculpture. Below are the names of some of the sculptures in the exhibition. Locate each and then write your suggestion for another title you feel could identify it.

The Creator

Clenched Left Hand with Figure

The Age of Bronze

The Benedictions

Tragic Muse

The Call to Arms

Illusions Received by the Earth (The Fallen Angel)

Meditation (With Arms)

5.) A TEN-STEP PROCESS

So, how do you get from a sculpture modeled in clay to the bronzes you see throughout this exhibition? The most common method used throughout the centuries to cast all kinds of bronze objects (sculpture, weapons, tools, etc.) has been the *cire-perdue* or lost-wax process. Although expensive and time consuming, the lost-wax method enables the artist to accurately reproduce the fine details of a clay, plaster, or wax model. In the exhibition, you will find a ten-step model that illustrates the lost-wax casting process Rodin used to make his sculpture *Sorrow* (1889) in bronze. Each modeled step is accompanied by a written description. Think of something complicated that you do often and try to explain it in ten steps. Write your title and your steps below:

How to: _____

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____

5.) _____

6.) _____

7.) _____

8.) _____

9.) _____

10.) _____

ANSWER KEY:

-Activity one-

Detail 1: *Pierre de Wiessant, Vetu*

Detail 2: *The Kiss*

Detail 3: *The Three Shades*

Detail 4: *The Cathedral*

Our ideas: -Activity two-

GROUP ONE: Partial Figures

GROUP TWO: All are showing movement

GROUP THREE: All are works that derived from *The Gates of Hell*

GROUP FOUR: All are portraits of people Rodin knew.