

# Mannerist and Baroque Gesture Drawings



As a warm-up exercise, quickly and loosely draw lines that look like tight spirals or metal springs of the two angels above.



## Lesson Plan: The Body Talks

- students explore Mannerist and Baroque works by El Greco, Alessandro Vittoria, and Peter Paul Rubens to come to a better understanding of gesture and its ability to bring drama and meaning to art.
- Older students are introduced to different kinds of gesture (descriptive, symbolic, and rhetorical).
- All students act out charades incorporating the gestures in the objects, and then make gesture drawings of fellow performers in their class.
- In a project for evaluation, students create a narrative drawing that incorporates well-defined, easy-to-read gestures.

# Introduction

- [Mannerist](#) painting and sculpture of the 16th century and [Baroque](#) art of the 17th century are populated by figures whose gestures are active, even vigorous, and often convey intense emotions. The lively gestures in Mannerist and Baroque art contrast with those of figures in [Renaissance](#) art of the previous 15th and early 16th centuries, whose bodies are posed to lend [compositions](#) greater order and harmony.

## Lesson Objectives

- Gain an appreciation of how gestures express moods and emotions and help define artistic narratives
- Create a charade inspired by human gesture
- Make gesture drawings

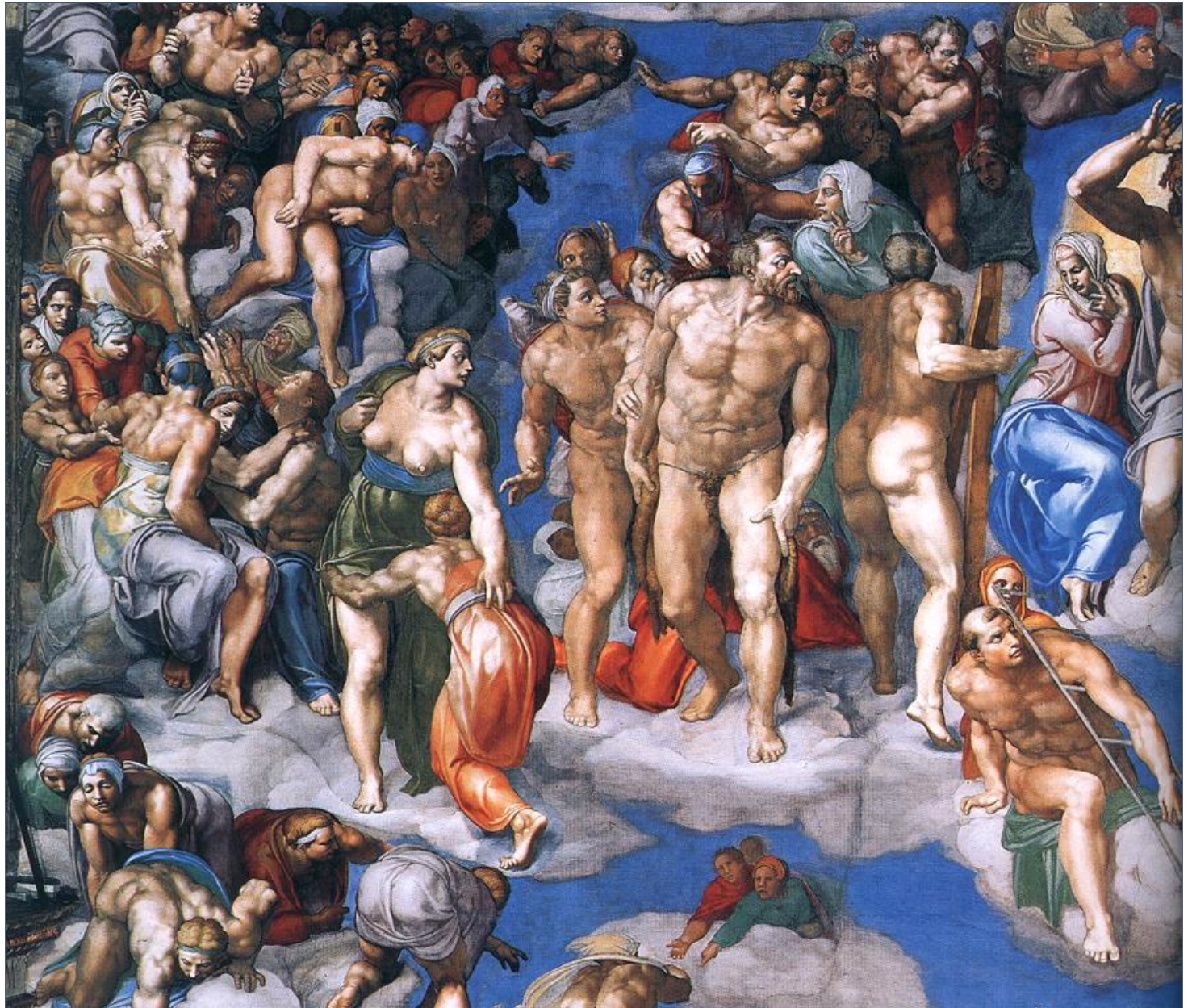
# Types of Pictorial Gestures

gesture :a movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude

**"We may perhaps differentiate between three...‘pictorial types of gestures, namely between descriptive, symbolic, rhetorical...**

- "Descriptive gestures, like pointing, elucidate a story or narrative and are therefore needed when painting or sculpture have to deal with a literary theme.
- "Rhetorical...gestures reflect and illuminate emotional conditions.
- "Symbolic gestures belong mainly to pre-Renaissance art; from the 15th century on they are, as a rule, confined to such attitudes as blessing. I call this symbolic gesture because, in contrast to the rhetorical ones, we are faced with a code which must be known in order to be understood."

# Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" (Sistine Chapel – left side)



# Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" (Sistine Chapel – right side)



- Paintings contained artificial color and unrealistic spatial proportions.
- Figures were often elongated and exaggerated, positioned in imaginative and complex poses.
- Works of the movement are often unsettling and strange, probably a result of the time period's upheaval from the Reformation, the plague, and the sack of Rome.
- In 1600, Mannerists were accused of disrupting the unity of Renaissance classicism. However, in retrospect, the Mannerist movement supplied the link between Renaissance perfection and the emotional Baroque art that later developed in the 17th century



# 1. Replace Harmony With Dissonance & Discord

- “Susanna & the Elders”
- Alessandro Allori
- Twisted bodies or “weight shift”

## 2. Replace Reason with Emotion



- “Pietà” by Rosso Fiorentino
- 1530-1540





## 5. Pictorial Space is Crowded

- “Madonna with the Long Neck”
- Parmagianino
- 1534-1540

Identify, sketch, and describe carefully at least one gesture in the projected works and then select a word to describe this gesture.



“Joseph in Egypt” Jacomo Pontormo

## 6. Hanging Figures



Mary grasps at her chest with wide fingers indicating surprise or shock; a rhetorical gesture.

Archangel Gabriel lifts his right arm and points to heaven; the cupid above his head does the same. They are both indicating that Gabriel's message for Mary has arrived from heaven; descriptive gestures.

**Notice if the gesture you chose connects with another gesture. If so, how?**

“The Annunciation” Jacopo Tintoretto 1583-1587



What characteristics of Mannerism can you spot?

- Agnolo Bronzino  
*The Deposition*  
c. 1545-50

# Baroque Style of Art & Architecture

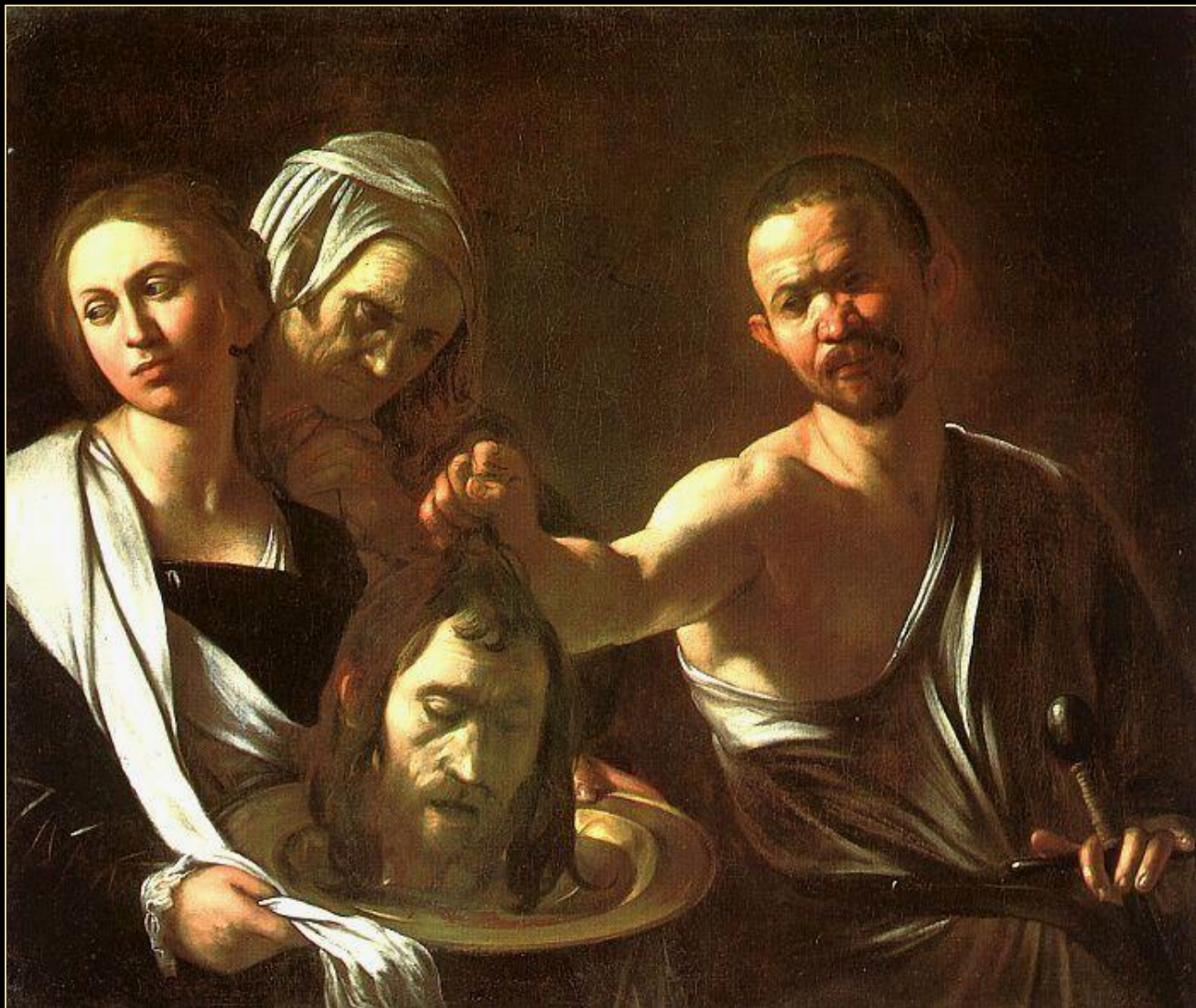
- ▶ Dramatic, emotional.
- ▶ Colors were brighter than bright; darks were darker than dark.
- ▶ Paintings & sculptures in church contexts should speak to the illiterate rather than to the well-informed.
- ▶ Ecclesiastical art --> appeal to emotions.
- ▶ Holland --> Real people portrayed as the primary subjects.

## “Salome with the Head of the Baptist” by Caravaggio

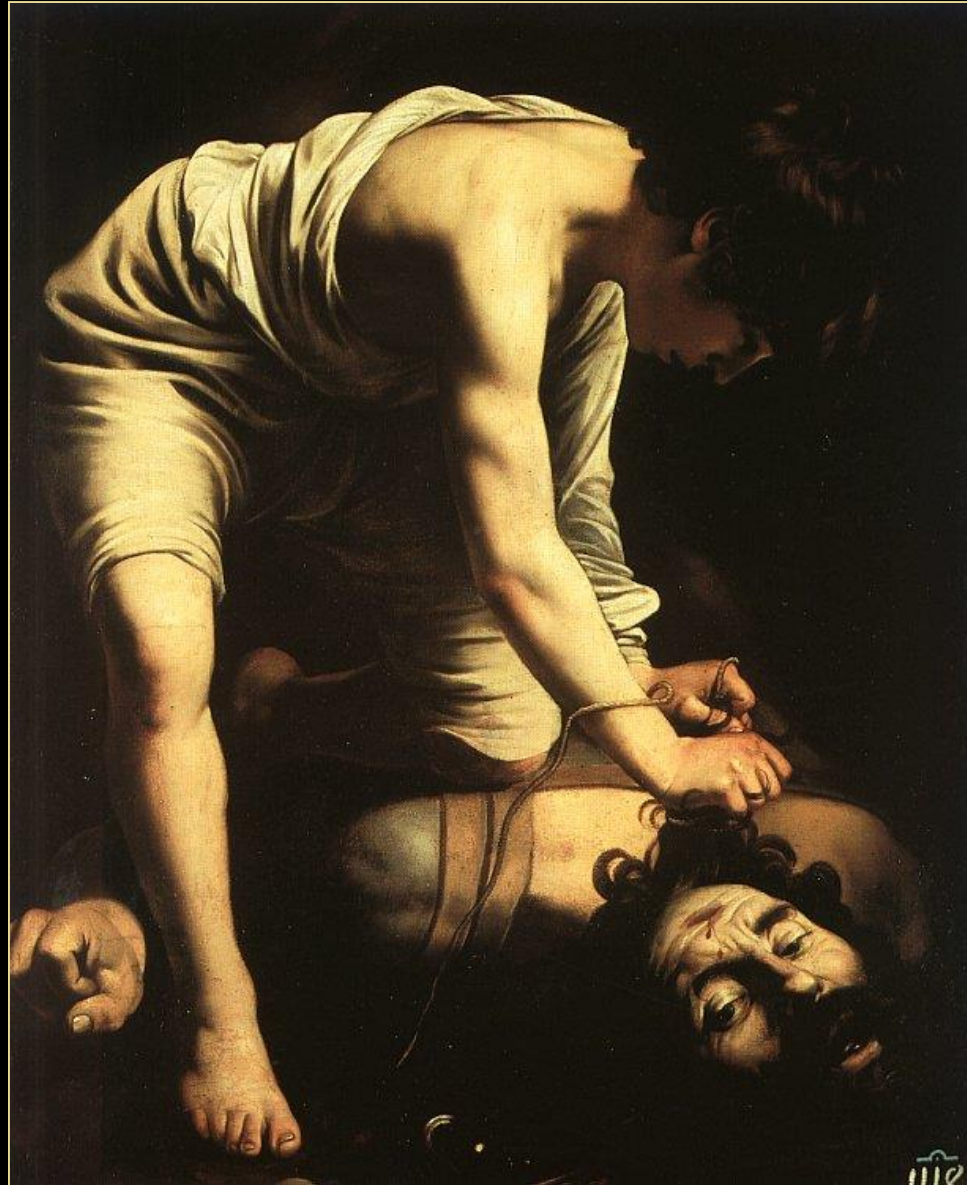
Identify the gestures that most help the viewer understand the characters' relationship and what is happening.

- Imagine what a speech bubble from each figure's mouth might say.
- How do the gestures and facial expressions allow the viewers to understand emotion and mood, as well as the narrative?

How do the gestures create tension in the subjects?



# “David and Goliath” by Caravaggio



# “The Cardsharps”

Caravaggio, 1595





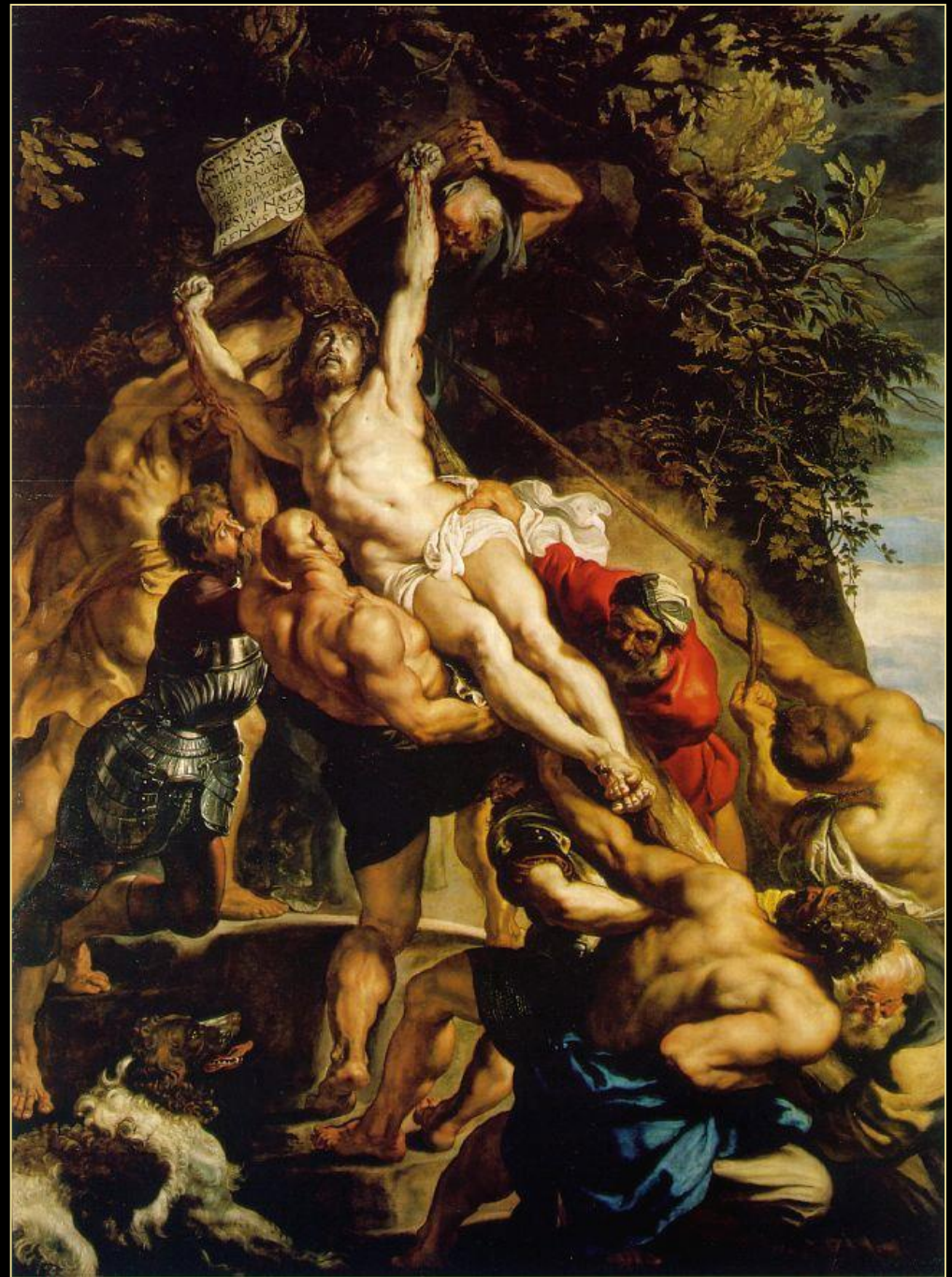
# “The Dead Christ Mourned” Annibale Carracci, 1603



“The  
Elevation of  
the Cross”

by Peter Paul  
Reubens

1610-11



# Day Two Activity

**Prep with printed copies of PPT images**

## **Charades**

Divide into groups of two to five. Select a work and then a character in that work. Develop a two-minute skit using some of the gestures portrayed in the work and others needed to act out the skit.

You have 15 minutes to prepare before pantomiming your skit.

As skits are performed, The rest of the class will be asked to suggest dialogue for the gestures. At the end of each performance, compare the viewers' interpretation with the actors' intended meaning for various gestures.

## **Gesture Drawing**

Have each group pose in a moment of their skit (one that includes well-defined gestures). Ask the other students to quickly sketch the group's poses using spirals or other gesture technique, to define the body movements. Allow students a minute per figure in the group to complete their gesture drawings.

# Final Project and Evaluation

Use your gesture drawings as the basis for new narratives (incorporating at least two figures) to execute in another drawing.

Students can identify another moment in one of the charades or create another scene altogether.

Encourage students to incorporate gestures in their drawings that create an interesting tension and make the narrative in the work relatively clear.

Base students' evaluations on their incorporation of well-defined gestures in their final projects and on their earlier class participation.