

The Crucifixion: Mantegna (1457)

This painting originally formed one of 3 panels of a church altarpiece, but now hangs in the Louvre.



Lesson Plan

This painting is best covered in 2 lessons, if done thoroughly. Otherwise, each set of questions is probably sufficient to teach something of the meaning of the crucifixion.

Lesson 1

Read account of crucifixion.

Divide class into pairs. Divide up questions so equally distributed among class (equal number of pairs are doing Composition/ Characters? Realism&Mood)

Pairs answer questions on sheet.

Plenary: students draw 2 speech bubbles on any characters on their picture, showing what they would think/ say in that situation. Students can use quotations from the bible text if they wish.

Lesson 2

Using questions sheet from last lesson (completed), mix up students so students share their answers and teach their peers about their aspect of the analysis, and as students listen, they take notes. All students should have complete answers to all the questions on all 3 aspects of the painting by the end of the lesson. Feedback.

Homework: write up painting: what is artist teaching us about meaning of crucifixion by referring to aspects of the painting.

Final Reflection

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering; beaten and mocked, whipped and crucified - one from whom other men turn away their faces in disgust. He went to his death meekly, never opening his mouth - like a lamb led to the slaughter, he never complained .

But as we looked on him, hanging there on the cross, we thought of him as someone justly punished by God, and we did not hold him in any respect. It did not occur to us, that he was carrying our sins and bearing our faults, that on him weighed a punishment that brings us peace, that by his sufferings, we are healed.

By his outstretched arms on the cross, he brought us back - back to the Kingdom of his Father and the heavenly Jerusalem, where he now lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Some Teacher Notes about the Painting

Characters

- Posture of Christ vs. thieves - tortured, escaping or resigned. Shadow and light - good thief shown in light. Christ in part darkness ? taking on the sin of the world
- Groups of figures: about daily business / market place scene, surrounding agony.
 - Lots of mini-dramas going on, vs. the isolation of Christ.
 - Only the apostle & centurion are fixed on Christ, contemplating him. They are on either side of the cross, and we, from our perspective in the middle and below, are invited to mirror this attitude and adore.

Mood & Realism

- Jagged, uncomfortable, lots of jarring contrasting scenes – viewer to make up his own mind where to “rest” and identify himself with. Contemplation, disregard, sorrow and pain, bemusement, wonder, interest, ignorance.
- city is the heavenly Jerusalem, the rocks are an altar (the lamb of sacrifice)/ grave: ambiguous if natural or man made. Also a kind of stage?? skulls = death, the clouds strangely unsettling in their regularity. Is all this planned?

Composition

- perspective of sky dark to light (infinity). Light seems further away than the dark.
- Christs feet at junction of the “heavenly” landscape –, and path to Jerusalem starts from foot of the cross and Christ is its starting point (the grace of His passion) leading down to the skulls ie to deal with death.

- Perspective of christ's arms – tho foreground, illusion of being background and surrounding all elements in embrace: Christ is before all Creation and redeems it. - Cross looks like its being taken up to God the Father, above earth.