

UNIT 5: 'BENJAMIN FRANKLIN' STATUE





PREVIEW THE ARTWORK

What is your first impression or emotional response to this artwork? (Consider mood, tone, or feeling before analyzing details)

What questions or ideas come to mind immediately? (About the subject, artist, or technique)

IMPORTANT

In the LMS assignment for this packet, I have attached large images you will be able to zoom in on & observe more closely!

LEARN ABOUT THE ARTWORK

‘BENJAMIN FRANKLIN’ STATUE

Artist: Hiram Powers **Year:** 1862 **Medium:** Marble
Original Location: United States, U.S. Capitol **Style:** Neoclassical

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND CONTEXT

The marble statue *Benjamin Franklin* was created in 1862 by the American sculptor Hiram Powers. It shows Benjamin Franklin standing calmly, dressed in eighteenth-century clothing. At first glance, the sculpture may seem simple and quiet, but the longer you look, the more intentional the artist's choices become.

Before reading further, take a moment to observe the statue. How is Franklin standing? Does he feel stiff or relaxed? What details help you decide?

Hiram Powers was known for his realistic sculptures and careful study of the human figure. Rather than showing Franklin in a dramatic or heroic moment, Powers presents him at rest, thoughtful and composed. This choice helps the sculpture feel believable and grounded.

FORM, FIGURE, AND BALANCE

Franklin stands with his weight shifted slightly onto one leg. This creates a natural sense of balance in the body and helps the figure feel lifelike. Artists call this kind of pose **contrapposto**. Even though Franklin is standing still, his body feels comfortable, as if he could move at any moment.

Why do you think artists often choose this type of pose instead of having a figure stand perfectly straight?

Notice how Franklin's shoulders and hips are not level. This creates gentle curves through the body and helps show that the figure has **weight and structure**. How does the way Franklin stands help show that he occupies real space?

GESTURE AND MEANING

One of the most noticeable details in the sculpture is Franklin's hand resting near his chin. This gesture suggests thinking and reflection. It tells us something important about how Franklin was remembered. He was known as a scientist, inventor, writer, and statesman, and this quiet pose emphasizes his intellect rather than physical action.

How does this small gesture change the mood of the sculpture? What might feel different if Franklin's arms were posed in a more active way?

Franklin's overall posture is relaxed but confident. He is not slouched or tense. His stance suggests calm authority rather than force.

CLOTHING, TEXTURE, AND STRUCTURE

Franklin's long coat, vest, and breeches are carefully carved in marble. The artist paid close attention to how fabric folds and drapes over the body. These folds are not random. They **respond to gravity and the shape of the figure underneath**.

Look closely at the folds in the coat.

Where are they tight and compressed? Where do they fall more freely? What do these details tell you about the body beneath the clothing?

The **surface of the marble** shows subtle texture differences. Some areas appear smoother, while others are more detailed. These changes add visual interest and help define the form.

LIGHT, SHADOW, AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL FORM

Because the sculpture is made of marble, Hiram Powers uses **light and shadow** to show depth. Raised areas catch the light, while deeper folds and spaces fall into shadow. This use of value helps the sculpture feel solid and three dimensional.

Where do you see the brightest highlights on the statue? Where do the deepest shadows appear? How do these contrasts help define the form?

This connects directly to earlier lessons on **shading and value**. Even without color, the sculpture clearly shows volume and structure.

COMPOSITION AND SUPPORT

Beside Franklin stands a tree trunk. This element helps support the marble, which is heavy and fragile, but it also plays an important role in the composition.

The **strong vertical line of the tree balances** Franklin's pose and helps anchor the figure visually.

How does the tree trunk affect the balance of the sculpture? What do you think would change if it were not there?

EXPRESSION AND REFLECTION

Franklin's facial expression is calm and thoughtful. There is no dramatic emotion, only focus and reflection. This **realistic** approach helps the figure feel human and approachable rather than exaggerated or heroic.

As you study this sculpture, think about how form, figure, posture, gesture, and balance work together.

How does Hiram Powers use the human figure to communicate personality and character? What choices make this sculpture feel realistic and believable?

This statue reminds us that form and figure are not just about anatomy. They are also **powerful tools for storytelling**. Through careful observation and thoughtful design, the artist shows us who Benjamin Franklin was and how he was remembered.

OBSERVE THE ARTWORK

What is the **subject** (the main focus/story)?

A Single Person Group of people Landscape or Nature Still Life
 Scene: Scripture Scene: History Scene: Mythology/Legend Other:

What **message** or **purpose** does this artwork have?

Sacred / Religious Secular / Non-Religious Unknown / Unclear

How **realistic** is this artwork's style?

Very Realistic / Naturalistic Stylized but still recognizable Abstract / Non-Representational

TECHNIQUE & DESIGN

What is the **medium** used in this piece of artwork?

What do you observe about the **surface/technique**?

Smooth and Polished Detailed and Precise Textured or Layered
 Energetic or Expressive Repetitive or Patterned Other:

What do you observe about **texture**?

Smooth Surface Rough or Uneven Surface A Mix of Textures

What do you observe about **line**?

Strong Outlines Around Shapes Subtle/Blended Edges
 Lines Create Movement or Direction Lines Create Rhythm or Pattern

What do you observe about the **proportions**?

Natural / Realistic Idealized (more perfect than real life) Exaggerated or Distorted

LIGHT & SPACE

Can you locate the **light source** in the artwork?

No Yes If yes, from where?

What do you observe about the **light**?

Natural Symbolic/Unrealistic Studio Light Direct Light/Harsh

Is there a sense of **movement**?

Everything appears still & stable A sense of motion (describe what suggests it):

Is there a sense of **depth**?

Illusion of distance flat/lacking depth

How did the artist suggest depth? (*Overlap, scale, perspective, color, etc*)

COLOR & SYMBOLISM

What **hues** do you see? (*If applicable per the medium, check all that apply*)

Red Red-Orange Orange Yellow-Orange Yellow Yellow-Green
 Green Blue-Green Blue Blue-Violet Violet Red-Violet

Where do these hues appear on the **color wheel**?

Complementary (opposite) Analogous (side-by-side) Warm Cool

What **saturation**s are used?

Bright/Intense Pale Darkened

Are there **symbolic uses** of color? Any meaning/purpose in the colors used? Explain.

INTERPRETATION & MEANING

Use complete sentences!

What do you notice about the gesture/positioning/gaze/placement of the subject(s)?

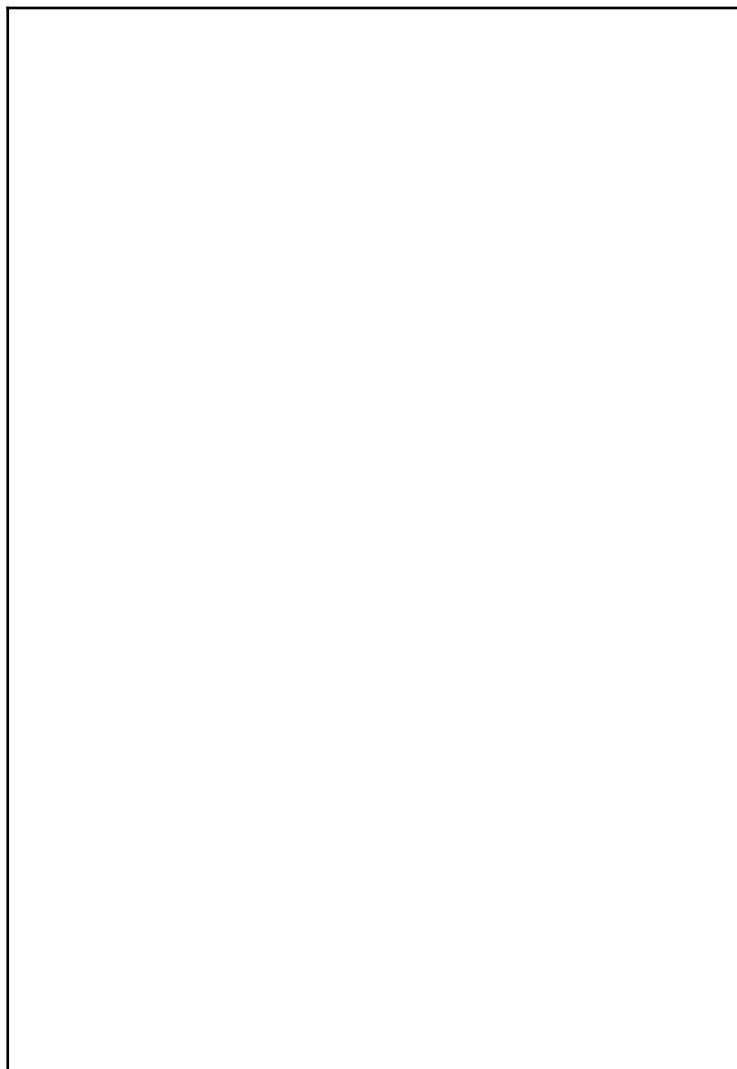
What **story, idea or emotion** might the artist be communicating to you through this artwork? What story are they trying to tell?

How might someone in the original time and place have understood or appreciated this artwork differently than you do today? Would there be a different narrative around it?

Does this artwork **remind you of another** artwork, story, or cultural symbol? Does it look like anything else you have observed in your studies or the world around you?

COMPOSITION SKETCH

Sketch the **figure positioning** and **proportions in simple shape form** (circles, rectangles, triangles, etc).



* KEY FACTS FOR MEMORIZATION *

TITLE:

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ARTIST:

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YEAR:

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LOCATION:

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MEDIUM:

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STYLE:

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