

## Teacher's Guide to Student Worksheet 2: Historical Clues

### Group 1: Artist

Charles Willson Peale was born in Maryland in 1741. He completed this painting in 1822. How old is he in the painting? **81 years old**

Peale was an artist. **He symbolically includes his palette and paintbrushes on the green table in the painting.**

Before Peale created his museum, he painted portraits of many famous Revolutionary War figures (He painted George Washington 14 times). **Many of these portraits are lining the top of the walls in the museum.**

He displayed his portraits in a gallery which later became the location of his museum (Independence Hall, Philadelphia). **This might be one reason for the presence of the portraits in the museum. It has also been suggested that Peale placed the portraits of Revolutionary war heroes and prominent figures above the animals to present the order of society and to give the American public a sense of national identity still nascent.**

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### Group 2: Scientist

He was a scientist and avid [eager] collector. **Some of the examples in the painting include the mastodon mandible and femur bones, the turkey lying on top of taxidermy kit, the mastodon skeleton behind the curtain, and the numerous dioramas in the museum.**

One of Peale's greatest achievements in his museum was rebuilding the skeleton of a mastodon that was unearthed in New York and placing it on display. **This can be seen behind the curtain to the right. This was the first mastodon skeletal reconstruction in the Americas, and one of the first in the world.**

He was the first person to think of displaying animals in the natural environment at museums. **Although not readily apparent in the painting, these are the mini dioramas that line the walls of his museum.**

He pioneered ways to preserve animals who had died to display them to the public to study (art of taxidermy). **The included detail of the dead turkey on top of the taxidermy kit in the foreground shows this fact.**

He loved both investigating old things (artifacts) and inventing new things (steam bath, chimney, better false teeth, for example). **Peale's creation of the museum embodies both old and new things—he went on anthropological digs to find old fossils to display in his museum. Then he had to “invent” methods of display and categorization.**

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### Group 3: Teacher

Peale was a teacher at heart, who believed learning was exciting and should be shared with everyone.

**The concept of the museum is democratic—displaying and sharing knowledge with the public. The bench in the painting indicates this learning opportunity for all, as well as a place to rest of course!**

Peale was the founder of America's first museum in 1786. **He paints his self-portrait and displays a room of this museum, the Long Room, in the background.**

Peale co-founded the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. This institution has an equal interest in educating future artist and displaying art to educate the public. What in this painting shows Peale was interested in educating the young? **Boy in the background**

Peale was a bit of a showman who felt learning should take “center-stage” and be a process of discovery.

**Hopefully students will contemplate the inclusion of the red curtain in the painting.**

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#### Group 4: Events of the Time Period

His museum was where Lewis and Clark (famous men who explored west of the Mississippi) placed the flower and animal examples (floral and fauna specimens) they brought back from their trip.

**This would explain how Peale received some of his large collection. It is interesting that these artifacts of such national importance were entrusted here.**

Charles Willson Peale wanted his museum to become our official national museum and he tried to convince the government to make it so.

**This might be one reason Peale so strongly featured the museum in his self-portrait at the end of his life. He was not successful in getting the government to agree. However, the museum survived Peale's death as one of his capable son's took over its management.**

When Peale painted this picture America was still young. The country was trying to establish its identity, separate from England. It also wanted to show other countries that, despite its young age, it was still smart.

**The discovery and categorization of new species would be an intellectual enterprise. National symbols could include the bald eagle, our national bird (in the top mini-diorama); the Revolutionary heroes looking down at the museum (portraits); the young boy engaged in learning (background).**

Peale was friends with Benjamin Franklin who thought the national bird should be the turkey. The turkey is a native bird to our country. What is our national bird? Do you see it in the painting anywhere?

**Was Peale joking around with his friend Franklin by placing the dead turkey foremost in the painting? The bald eagle diorama is the first, top bird diorama in the painting.**

He believed in an orderly American society with men as heads of family.

**Notice the portraits at the top of the wall and the well-mannered family viewing collection.**