

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)



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and Britelle Smith

When God created Michelangelo Buonarroti, a special purpose was planned for his life. God has a special purpose for all of us. Everyone is made so differently. Sometimes a person has many dreams and talents in life. Sometimes a person only has a few extra special gifts. We all discover our very own gifts as our lives unfold. Only we can shine the light that we have been given.



Michelangelo was born on March 6, 1475, in a small village in Italy called Caprese. Caprese was in the countryside. Grape vineyards surrounded the village for as far as you could see. It was near the place where the Tiber River and the Arno River cross paths.

Michelangelo's family was well known in the area. His father was the mayor of Caprese and worked for the government his whole life.

By the time Michelangelo was old enough to go to school, he wanted to learn about art.

Michelangelo was still a boy when his parents sent him to live with a stonecutter's family.

These stonecutters would dig beautiful pieces of marble out of the hills in Italy. Many of these stones were used to build strong buildings and palaces. The very best pieces of marble were often used for sculpting.



Michelangelo learned to love carving figures from marble blocks. He loved it even more than he loved painting, designing buildings and writing poetry, even though he was very good at all of them. He liked carving from marble blocks best because he felt like he was freeing a figure that was trapped in the stone. Michelangelo used to tell his friends that once marble is cut out of the mountain then it is no longer a mountain, it is like a river. It can flow and change its course as you carve it.



When he was 12 years old, Michelangelo took painting lessons from Domenico Ghirlandaio, one of the most popular painters in Florence. After a few years he began to learn sculpture from Donatello. Donatello was a very famous sculptor. Lorenzo de Medici, the ruler of Florence, had started a small school for young artists. He invited Michelangelo to stay at his palace. Michelangelo learned a lot during these years.



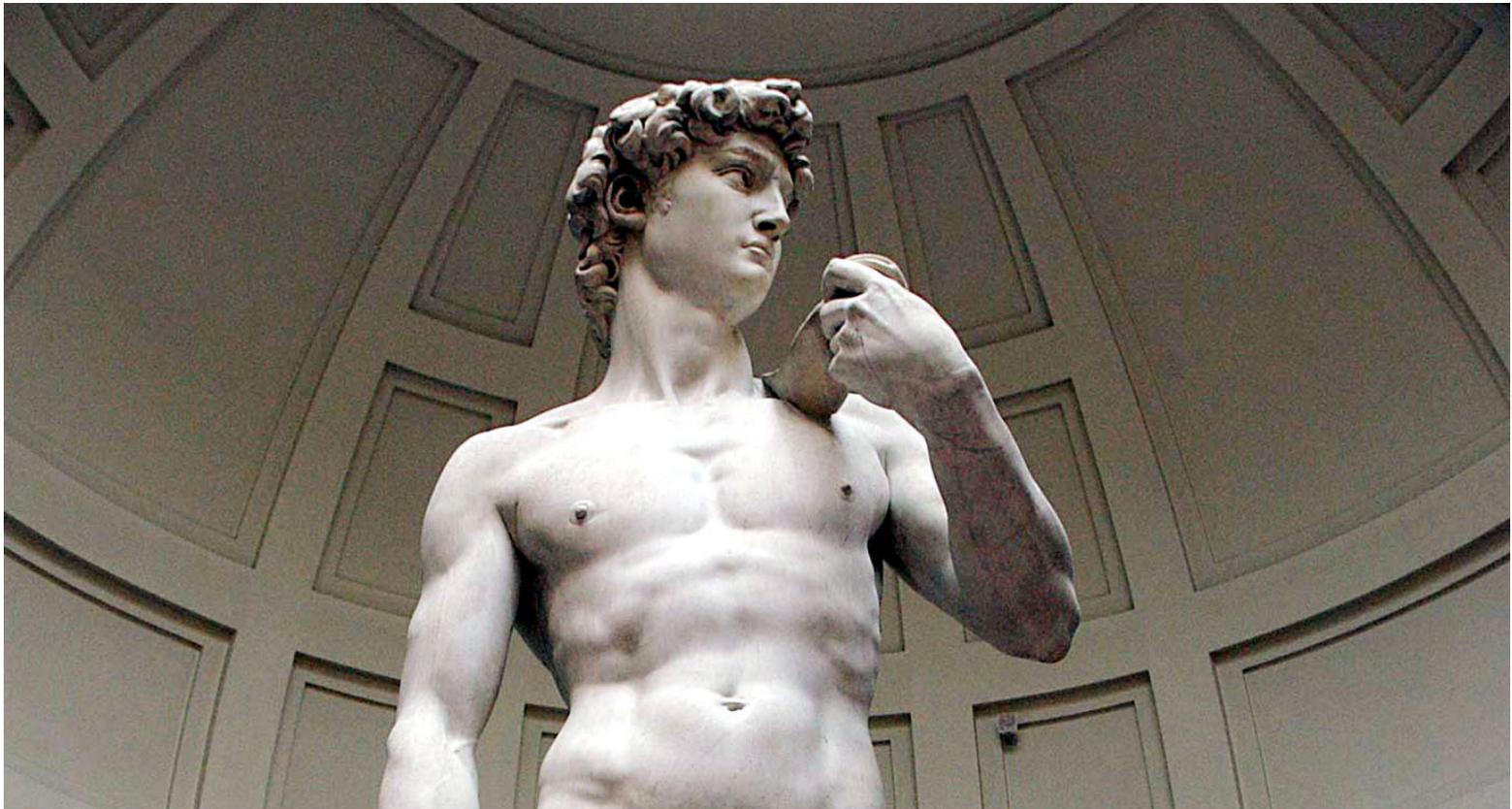
In the year 1494, the Medici family lost power in Florence, and Lorenzo was no longer the ruler. So Michelangelo began traveling around Italy. He lived in Rome for five years. When he was 23, he carved one of his first very famous works of art. The piece is called the *Pieta*. A pieta is a sculpture of Mary holding Jesus after his death. This statue is now in St. Peter's Church in Rome. It is very beautiful.



After living in Rome, Michelangelo moved back to Florence for a few years. In Florence he met another artist named Leonardo Da Vinci. Leonardo painted the famous *Last Supper*.



In 1501, Michelangelo began carving the figure of King David, from the Bible, out of a block of marble. Someone had started carving into this block 35 years earlier, but the person had never finished it. So, Michelangelo took up the challenge of carving the figure of David. The sculpture is over 14 feet tall.



Michelangelo chose to carve David just before David went into battle against Goliath, the Philistine giant. When you look at this great work of art, you can see courage and strength.



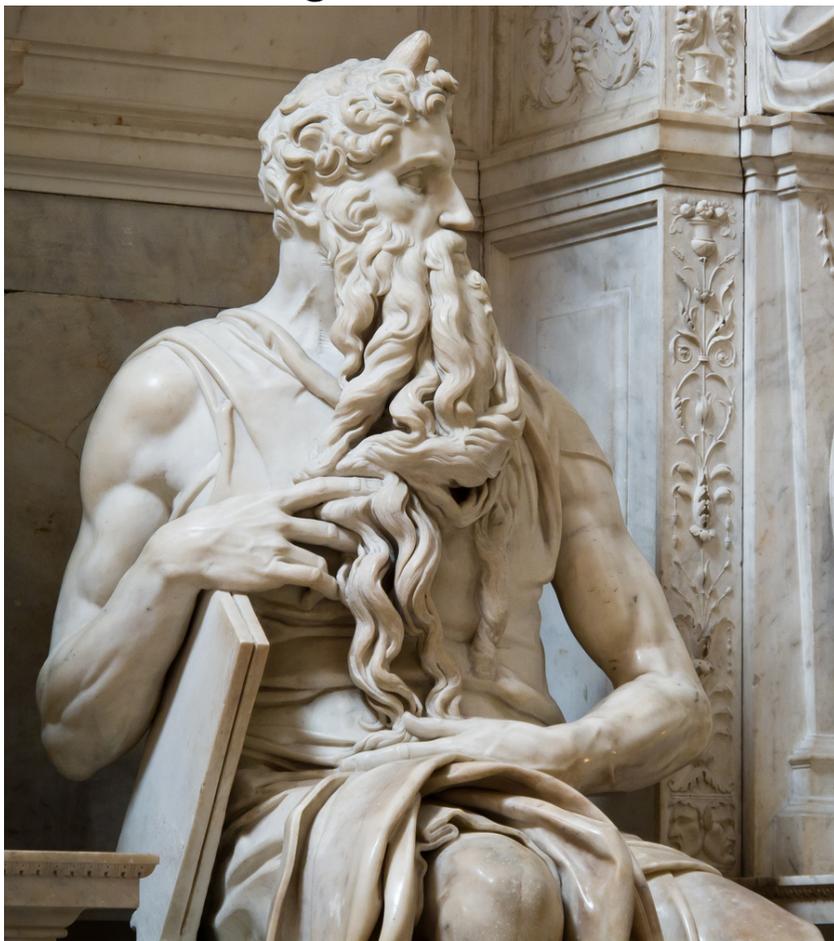
David holds a sling in his left hand and a pebble in his right hand. He is trusting God to help him.

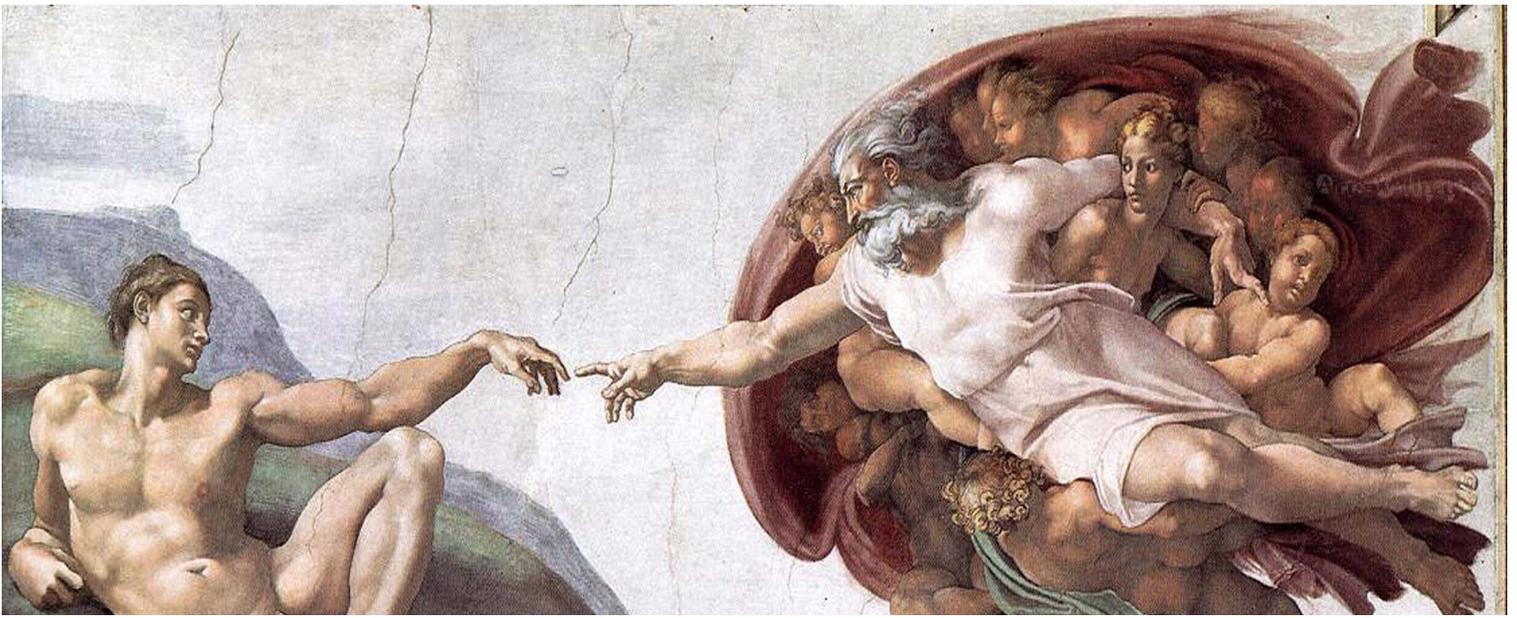
Michelangelo finished this masterpiece two and a half years later. The city of Florence put the *David* outside in an important place for everyone to see. But air is not good for marble, so the *David* was moved inside to the Accademia Gallery. You can still visit it there today.

In 1505, Pope Julius II asked Michelangelo if he would build a large tomb for him. Pope Julius II was the head of the Catholic Church. He wanted a tomb with many statues in his honor. It was very common for rich or famous people to have big tombs or chapels built for them before they were even dead.



Michelangelo never finished building the pope's tomb. But one sculpture that he did finish for the tomb became very famous. It was a sculpture of Moses. Michelangelo showed Moses holding the stone tablets that the Ten Commandments were written on. He carved Moses to show that Moses was thinking very hard about something.





In the year 1508, Michelangelo began painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He was 33 years old. The Sistine Chapel is inside the Vatican in Rome. The Vatican is the place where popes live. At first Michelangelo didn't think he should take on such a big project. He really liked to sculpt better than he liked to paint. But the pope asked him over and over again. So he finally decided to do it.

The type of painting he did was called “fresco.” In fresco painting, the artist uses colors that are ground in water. The artist paints with these colors on a wet plaster surface. This was a common way to paint during this period of time called the Renaissance. When the painting dried, it was actually a part of the wall or ceiling.



Of course, this was not an easy way to paint.

Once the paint dried, the artist could not paint over it very easily to fix mistakes.

There were several very hard things about painting on a ceiling. A special



platform had to be built for Michelangelo to sit or stand on. This was not very comfortable for his back or neck. He also had to make the people he painted a lot bigger than normal. That way, people standing on the ground would be able to see as many details as possible.

The ceiling was finally finished in 1511. Everyone who came to see it was amazed. Michelangelo had painted a masterpiece.

Michelangelo studied the stories of the Bible while he was painting the Sistine Ceiling. He painted 9 scenes from the Old Testament. In the center of the ceiling he painted God creating the world. He painted the story of Adam and Eve. And he painted Noah and the flood. Around the edges of the ceiling Michelangelo painted 12 Old Testament prophets and women. The women were lady prophets, or oracles, called sibyls.



Someday maybe you can visit the Sistine Chapel in Rome. When you look at the ceiling, you will see it the way it would have looked back when Michelangelo painted it. Over the years the ceiling got very dirty. Some experts have done the long, hard job of cleaning it. It looks so much more colorful now.



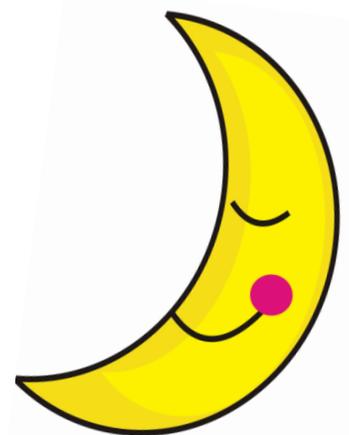
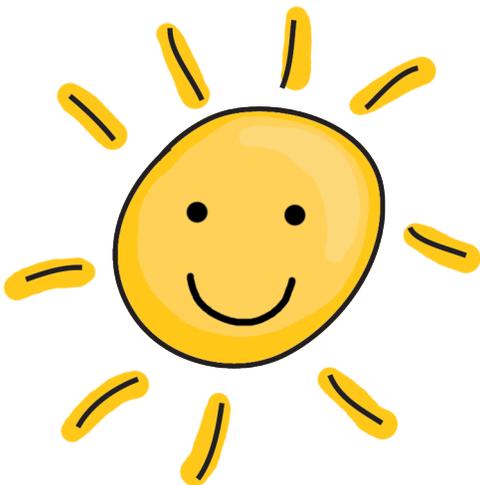
Before and after restoration

It took Michelangelo three years to finish painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Then he moved back to Florence to work for the Medici family. They were back in power again. He worked for them for about 15 years. He designed what is called the Medici Chapel.



He also made sculptures for the tombs of two Medici princes. The figures he sculpted for the tombs are now very famous. He called one of his works *Day and Night*. He called the other one *Dawn and Evening*.

You can tell which figure is “Day” because he looks like he is pulling off his blankets in the morning. The figure called “Night” has her head face down like she is sleeping.



Then Michelangelo once again moved back to the great city of Rome. Pope Paul III asked him to paint *The Last Judgment* on a wall in the Sistine Chapel. He had painted the ceiling there more than 10 years earlier. The wall the pope asked him to paint was the altar wall. The altar wall was the most important wall of the chapel. People who came to visit the Sistine Chapel always looked toward the altar when they worshipped.



Michelangelo worked on this painting for seven long years. He painted Jesus in the center near the top of the wall. After he finished painting *The Last Judgment*, he spent more time working on architecture. Architecture is designing buildings. He helped design the famous St. Peter's Church in Rome. He also wrote a lot of poetry during the last years of his life.



Michelangelo lived a very long life. He died on February 18, 1564, in Rome. He was buried in Florence, at the Church of Santa Croce. He was 89 years old

