



1st Grade: FEBRUARY

Abraham Lincoln Daniel Chester French

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About the Artist

The following information is provided to give classroom teachers a comprehensive understanding of the artist and artwork. Use your judgment on what to share with your students based on their level of curiosity, observation/inquiry skills, comprehension and age-appropriateness.

Daniel Chester French

Daniel Chester French was born in 1850 in Exeter, New Hampshire but his childhood home was in Concord, Massachusetts. French's father was Henry Flagg French, a lawyer and Assistant United States Treasury Secretary. The French family lived next to some very influential neighbors—the Emerson and Alcott families. French became a close friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist, poet and leader of the Transcendentalist movement. However, it was the Alcott family that most influenced French. The Alcott family had four daughters with Louisa May the most well-known for her authorship of *Little Women*. The youngest Alcott, Abigail May, (known as May) was identified as an artist at an early age. She studied art for many years and was a contemporary of artist Mary Cassatt while living in Paris. May befriended her young neighbor, Daniel Chester French, during the winter of 1868-69, gave him lessons with modeling clay and encouraged him to pursue his interest in sculpture.

French's higher education was somewhat limited. He attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology but, failure in three subjects led to an early withdrawal. He completed a brief apprenticeship in the studio of John Quincy Adams Ward, an American sculptor known for the statue of George Washington on the steps of Federal Hall on Wall Street, New York. French completed more formal anatomy training in Boston with William Rimmer and drawing lessons with painter William Morris Hunt. When he began to receive commissions, three from his home town of Concord, French was only twenty-three years old.

In 1874, with the recommendation of Emerson, French received a commission for the statue *Minute Man* for Concord. It was his first full-size bronze work featuring the image of a Revolutionary War Minute Man to honor the centennial of the Battle of Concord at North Bridge. He began the process by completing a twenty seven-inch model approved by a small committee representing the town of Concord. French appreciated the endorsement of the committee and, since he was still relatively unknown, he offered to execute the work for the cost of the materials. The committee was very pleased with the end result and paid French \$1,000 for his work. The statue's base holds an inscription from "Concord Hymn" by Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Minute Man* became one of the most beloved of French's statues and brought him immediate

fame. French was not present for the unveiling in 1875 because he left for Florence, Italy, to work in the studio of Thomas Bell for the next two years.

Upon his return, French purchased a home and studio in New York City and married his cousin, Mary Adams French. The couple spent their summers in Massachusetts and/or New Hampshire until they purchased a farm in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, which French called "Chesterwood." The new studio included a railroad track which allowed French to move his sculpture outdoors when he wanted to see in natural light. The couple had one daughter, Margaret, named after her grandmother.

French went on to create several more significant public monuments including the extremely imposing plaster monument, *The Republic*. This work was commissioned for the Columbian Exposition (Worlds Fair) of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois, where the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus landing in America was celebrated. The sixty-five foot plaster statue was covered in part with gold leaf. Unfortunately, the monument succumbed to fire in 1896, three years after it was created. Twenty-two years later, French was commissioned to create a smaller bronze version of *The Republic*, one third the size of the original, for the city of Chicago. Today it stands in Jackson Park, a five hundred-acre park on Chicago's South Side.

Statues of Abraham Lincoln are French's best known work. French's most famous statue of Abraham Lincoln was placed in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was completed in collaboration with architect and friend, Henry Bacon, in 1922.

Daniel Chester French died in 1931 at the age of eighty-one. His funeral took place in his studio, Chesterwood, where French had loved to work. He was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, in Concord. To honor her father's memory, Margaret French Cresson donated Chesterwood to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

About the Art

Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial is located at the western end of the public park known as the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The concept of a statue of Lincoln housed in an architectural-scale memorial was conceived by the Washington, D.C. Commission of Fine Arts in 1911. Henry Bacon was commissioned to design the memorial and, at the request of Bacon, Daniel Chester French was commissioned to design and execute the statue of Lincoln. Bacon's design for the memorial, a white marble temple, was approved in 1913 and two years later, French began his work on the statue.

Discipline-Based Art Education

The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience.

Art Aesthetics

Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

Art Production

Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

Art History

Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

Art Criticism

Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

ELEMENTS OF ART

- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area enclosed by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light.
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

COMPOSITION

- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

ARTISTIC STYLES

- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE

BOOKS

Children's literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Having Fun with Sculpture (Let's Do Art)* by Sarah Medina
- *L is for Liberty* by Wendy Cheyette Lewison
- *Mount Rushmore—From Mountain to Monument* by Luke S. Gabriel
- *The Story of the Statue of Liberty* by Betsy and Giulio Maestro

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Richman, Michael. *Daniel Chester French: An American Sculptor*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Washington, D.C. Preservation Press. 1983.
- En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Chester_French
- A lesson on monuments is available at www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/communication/percoco/html. This resource will need to be adapted for young students.

As always, French began the design process by creating a small three-dimensional "sketch." He referenced photographs of Lincoln and even Lincoln's facial and hand masks. These existing masks had been made of Lincoln years earlier when he was alive—a usual process for those wanting to create a bust of Lincoln. Once the clay sketch was approved, he went to work on several more models to work out details of Lincoln's clothing, including the drapery of cloth over the armrests and back of the chair. As the size of the models increased, French continued refining the details of the sculpture. At one point in the process, French brought an eight-foot model to Washington, D.C. to test its size and found it was too small for its setting in the memorial. Working with enlarged photographs of his model positioned on a wood frame, French found the perfect size for the scale of the memorial would be nineteen feet high and set on a base eleven feet high.

French turned the final sculpting process over to sculpting collaborators, the Piccirilli brothers, of New York who worked carefully to execute an exact likeness of French's model. French sculpted the final details of the statue himself. The final statue was executed in twenty eight sections of Georgia marble, transported to Washington, D.C., and then assembled on site.

Dedication of the memorial and statue took place May 20, 1922. Unknown to French at the time, slight changes in the memorial's skylights had affected lighting on the statue itself. Since these changes presented Lincoln's face in a rather ghostly manner, proper lighting was installed several years later to improve and enhance Lincoln's image.

One has to look carefully at the image of Lincoln. As the artist, French chose how he wished to portray Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president. French's portrayal of Lincoln is seated, approachable as a father might be. Some think Lincoln's posture speaks of a man who carried the burden of the Civil War. Whatever French's intentions, the likeness of Lincoln and the larger-than-life scale makes it easy to recognize why Abraham Lincoln is considered one of Daniel Chester French's best works and, indeed, a memorable gift for the American people.

Directed Observation

After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. Survey students. See if they know what a statue, a memorial or monument is.
2. Hand a penny to each student and have them look at the images on both sides. Use this to learn what they know about Lincoln and/or the Lincoln Memorial.
3. No matter the approach, eventually transition into a discussion about our sixteenth president and some of his contributions.
4. Introduce a full image of the Lincoln Memorial and the statue of Abraham Lincoln. Invite students to study the sculpture. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see.
5. Introduce Daniel Chester French to the students by sharing biographical information with them.
6. It's important to share French's design process—the use of multiple clay models.
7. Ask students to describe what they think would be the hardest part in making such a big sculpture. You may want to find something nineteen feet tall so student can have an idea of the statue's size.
8. Looking at the statue, have students describe the lines and shapes in the statue. Be sure to include images of the sides and back of the sculpture. (Resources available on the internet.)
9. Survey students' opinions on why French portrayed Lincoln seated versus standing.

Things to Do

1. Have students bring in pictures of someone they would like to sculpt. It could be someone in their family, a celebrity, or the president of the United States. Several pictures showing various views of the person would be helpful.
2. Consider using a live model who can be seated in front of the students.
3. Be sure to discuss the challenges when trying to render someone's likeness, including the front, sides and back. Why is it important to give attention to the sides and back of the sculpture?
4. Using modeling clay, allow students to create a 3-dimensional form in the likeness of the model.
5. If time permits, have students render a sculpture of the model in multiple poses.
6. Try other sculpting materials such as paper mache.
7. Students can create a sculpture that captures just the bust of the individual or the entire body. What are the challenges with each approach?
8. Once students have a sculpture, invite them to design on paper a building to house the statue.
9. Design a new coin, front and back, that features the model.