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Michelangelo

Before reading *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, had you ever heard of Michelangelo? Michelangelo was one of the greatest artists the world has ever known. Born March 6, 1475, in Caprese, Italy, he and Leonardo da Vinci did much to cause the Italian Renaissance.

Michelangelo wanted to be an artist from his childhood. He grew up in the Settignano district—famous for its stone quarries—near Florence. It was here he probably learned to chisel stone. At that time an artist was considered only a day laborer, and his father was against his becoming an artist, so Michelangelo was sent to school. He did not do well in his studies, preferring to spend most of his time drawing. Finally, after many arguments with his father, Michelangelo was apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio, a famous painter, from whom he learned to paint in fresco, a method of painting onto wet plaster.

About a year later, he was taken to visit the home of Lorenzo de Medici. Full of art and statues, the home was a center for art for the entire city of Florence. Once he saw the wonderful art treasures which filled the home and the grounds, Michelangelo never again returned to Ghirlandaio's.

Most art of the time was religious in nature, and so it was that Michelangelo's first really well-known sculpture was the *Pietà*, a statue of Mary holding the crucified Christ, which he carved for St. Peter's Church in Rome. In 1504 he completed his statue of *David*. Over 12 feet (3.6 m) high, this statue had the power and strength of the best Greek sculpture. Michelangelo was commissioned to work for at least seven different Popes.



Probably the greatest of Michelangelo's creations is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which took four years to paint. Michelangelo had not wanted to paint the ceiling, wanting to sculpt instead, but Pope Julius II insisted. Once he had agreed to do it, he determined that it would be a work of art unmatched by any other. The ceiling measured 40 feet by 130 feet (12 m x 39 m), and its center curved up to more than 60 feet (18 m) above the floor. At times lying on his back on a scaffold he had designed, he worked on the ceiling and finished it in October, 1512. With scenes from the Bible painted in fresco, the ceiling is truly one of the world's wonders in art. Twenty-nine years after he completed the ceiling, he also painted *The Last Judgement* on the altar wall of the chapel. He continued creating art until he died at the age of 88.

Michelangelo *(cont.)*

Michelangelo's first success as a sculptor came early in his life when he carved a life-sized statue of the wine god Bacchus. At the age of twenty-three he carved a version of the traditional *Pietà*, which portrays a mourning Mary holding Jesus. This larger-than-life statue established Michelangelo. The statue is now housed in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

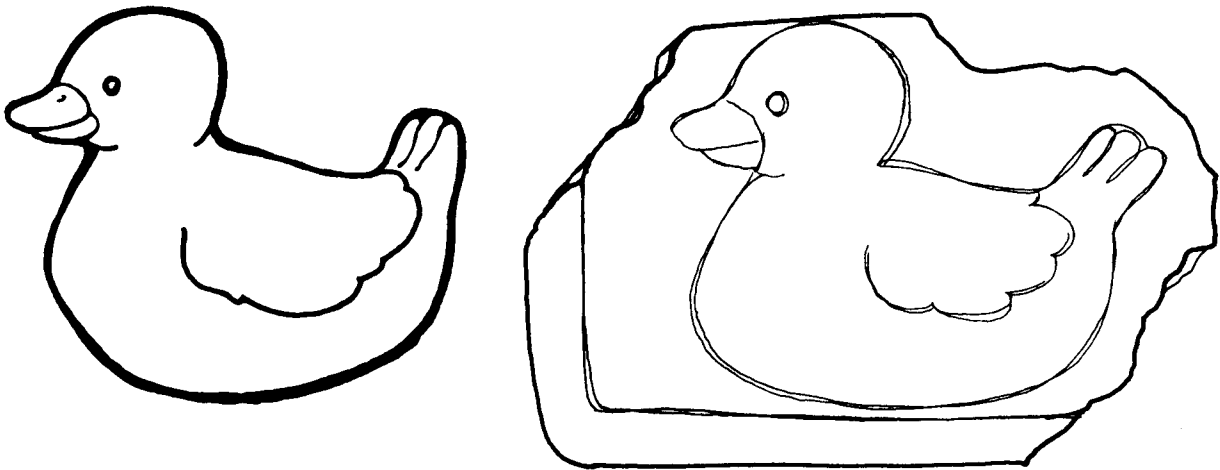
What is it like to be a sculptor? How does it feel to create a statue. To gain a greater appreciation for the work of Michelangelo, try this simple sculpting activity.

Materials:

- bar of soap or piece of clay
- small toy animal or angel about the same size as the soap or clay
- carving tools—butter knives, cheese spreaders, toothpicks
- pencil
- container of water

Directions:

Choose a simple animal or angel to sculpt. The lines should be very simple to copy. Study the shape of the object by both looking closely at it and holding it in your hand. Turn it over so you can see how it is made. Place it nearby where it is clearly visible.



Take the soap or clay and study it. Determine where you will begin your sculpting. Use the tip of a carving tool or a pencil and outline the areas you wish to carve away.

Cut into the soap or clay. Take your time, carving out small pieces first. If you need to soften the soap to make it easier to manipulate, use a small amount of water on it. When you have finished the outline, use whatever carving tools you can to create a smooth finish for your project. If you have never carved before, you may find this hard to do, so be patient.

Display it next to the animal or angel you attempted to copy.