



# THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



## Sofonisba Anguissola

Italian Female Renaissance Artist  
1532–1625

**Grade Level:** K–4

**Subjects:** Fine Arts / World History

**Categories:** Arts and Sciences / Italian and Italian American Women

**Standards:**

Please see page 4 of the lesson plan for complete New Jersey Student Learning Standard alignment.

**Objectives:**

The students will be able to:

1. identify Sofonisba Anguissola as a recognized Italian female influence in art history.
2. describe the challenges that women encountered during the Renaissance era.
3. decide whether or not women encounter similar or different challenges in today's society.
4. experience the challenge of creating a portraiture using a given medium.

**Abstract:**

We have all heard of famous Italian Renaissance Artists such as Michelangelo and Campi. What most people do not know is that somewhere in the male dominated world of artists, was Sofonisba Anguissola. She was an Italian woman who was encouraged to achieve greatness by her father. She showed a natural talent in painting. During the Renaissance era, women were very limited in what they were allowed to do. She defied this mindset and studied under Bernardo Campi. Sofonisba pursued her love of art and further developed her talent as she traveled to Spain and held the position of court painter for King Phillip II. Her work was sent to Michelangelo for review, who remarked on her incredible talent.

In this lesson students will have an opportunity to experiment with different mediums to make a creative masterpiece of their own.

### **Background:**

Sofonisba Anguissola was born in Cremona, Italy, in 1532. She was one of six daughters of a Genoese nobleman. Her father encouraged his daughters to achieve excellence in all they did. This was unusual given the fact that women during the Renaissance period generally led a quiet, private life of sewing, knitting, and other household duties rather than pursuing public careers. Five of the six daughters were artists. Sofonisba, however, was the most well-known. Her father sent her drawings to Michelangelo for critique. At age 11, her father sent her to study art under mentor Bernardino Campi. During the Renaissance era, female artists were not allowed to study “live nude” subjects and therefore not allowed to paint in cathedrals or paint historical events which were the primary subjects in such works of art. (*The teacher should consider the age appropriateness of the previous sentence before sharing it with the class.*) She later acquired, with her father’s help, the position of Lady-in-Waiting for the Queen of Spain in Madrid. In her early 20s, she was appointed court painter by King Phillip II. She held this position for 14 years.

While in Spain, Sofonisba married the brother of the Viceroy of Sicily. After his death, Sofonisba returned to Italy and remarried a Genoese ship captain in Genoa. Sofonisba continued to paint. After the death of her second husband, she retired and moved to Palermo, Sicily. Here she was visited by the famous artist, Van Dyck. Sofonisba was well supported by money left her by her second husband as well as her own pension from King Phillip II and lived comfortably until her death at the age of 95.

Sofonisba Anguissola is credited as being the first woman to have an international reputation as a painter of portraiture.

### **Procedures:**

- I. Have the students discuss the following: Many children have hobbies such as sports, dancing, or playing an instrument. Many children today start their hobbies at a young age and many are involved in multiple hobbies. Would you enjoy being sent to a far away place to become more proficient? Would you feel comfortable without your parents and siblings? Would you become homesick?
- II. Explain to the students that the focus of this lesson is to learn about a young Italian woman who is credited as being the first female artist during the Renaissance Period.
- III. Discuss with the students the background information on Sofonisba Anguissola and present an overview of the Renaissance. Define the role of a Lady-in-Waiting and a Viceroy.
  - a. **Lady-in-Waiting** — a lady who is in attendance upon a queen or princess.
  - b. **Viceroy** — a person appointed to rule a country or province as the deputy of the sovereign. Vice, means second in command and the suffix “roy” is derived from royal or “rex” meaning king.
- IV. Discuss with the students the assumed role of women during the Renaissance Era and the difficulties they overcame to pursue a professional career.
- V. Ask the students the following question: Do women today face similar types of difficulties or are they accepted equally in the professional world, be it business, sports, or the arts?
- VI. Explain to the students that artists use many types of mediums and styles and therefore creating art varies from artist to artist.

- VII. Explain that Sofonisba focused her paintings on portraits of people although some artists focus on landscape, historical events, or objects, just to name a few specialties.
- VIII. Invite the students to join in a portraiture activity. Assign each student a partner and have them work simultaneously to create a portrait of each other.
- a. The teacher may decide what medium the students should use based upon materials they have available such as paints, crayons, pencils, or markers.
- IX. Upon completion of their portraits, the students should present their works of art with the rest of the class. The teacher should ask the students to discuss what difficulties they encountered during the project. The teacher may also want to use these as part of a bulletin board display.

**Assessment:**

Review the portraits completed by each student. At this age, students are still developing their art skills and should only be assessed for a serious attempt of the project.

**Extensions:**

Have the students explore works of art by Sofonisba Anguissola via the internet.

<https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/a/anguisso/index.html>

## **New Jersey Student Learning Standards Visual and Performing Arts Standards**

- 1.2.2.A.1 Identify characteristic theme-based works of dance, music, theatre, and visual art, such as artworks based on the themes of family and community, from various historical periods and world cultures.
- 1.2.2.A.2 Identify how artists and specific works of dance, music, theatre, and visual art reflect, and are affected by, past and present cultures.
- 1.2.5.A.1 Recognize works of dance, music, theatre, and visual art as a reflection of societal values and beliefs.
- 1.2.5.A.2 Relate common artistic elements that define distinctive art genres in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.
- 1.2.5.A.3 Determine the impact of significant contributions of individual artists in dance, music, theatre, and visual art from diverse cultures throughout history.

## **New Jersey Student Learning Standards English Language Arts**

RI.K.3 With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

RI.K.4 With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

RI.1.3 Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

RI.1.4 Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.

RI.2.3 Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text.

RI.2.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 2 topic or subject area*

RI.3.3 Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

RI.3.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 3 topic or subject area*.

RI.4.3 Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

RI.4.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a *grade 4 topic or subject area*.

SL.K.2 Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

SL.K.5 Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.

SL.1.2 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL.1.5 Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

SL.2.2 Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL.2.3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

SL.3.2 Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL.3.3 Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.

SL.4.1c Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

SL.4.2 Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.