

2018 AP® ART HISTORY FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

6. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is the Delphic Sibyl in the Sistine Chapel, painted by Michelangelo c. 1508–1512 C.E.

Describe the visual characteristics of the Delphic Sibyl.

Using at least two examples of specific visual evidence, explain how the visual characteristics of the Delphic Sibyl reference and/or depart from the classical tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome.

Describe the place that the Delphic Sibyl occupies within the larger iconographic program of the Sistine Chapel.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how the inclusion of the Delphic Sibyl within the larger iconographic program of the Sistine Chapel represents the ideals of the Renaissance.

**AP® ART HISTORY
2018 SCORING GUIDELINES**

Question 6 (continued)

Scoring Information

Describe the visual characteristics of the Delphic Sibyl.

Michelangelo depicts the Delphic Sibyl, one of the five ancient Greek women prophets on the Sistine ceiling, as an idealized young woman seated in an illusionistic architectural space. Her monumental form fills a throne-like niche and appears to project outward from the surface of the ceiling. The sibyl's twisting pose reinforces the sense of balance within the circular composition. One of her arms extends down, alongside her torso, the hand resting in her lap. The other extends across her body, the hand clasping a large unfurled scroll. Turning away from the document, the sibyl directs her face over her shoulder toward the viewer. Her gaze is focused to the right as if responding to a sound or a vision; her mouth is slightly open as if she is about to speak or has just taken a breath.

The Delphic Sibyl wears a light blue veil that covers most of her hair, except for a few blonde tendrils that float above her back. The sibyl's sleeveless, light green tunic is held closed by a round brooch visible below her raised arm. Over the tunic she wears a vibrant two-toned cloak, the blue outer shell covering her shoulders and the intense orange of the underside enveloping her lower torso and legs.

Using at least two examples of specific visual evidence, explain how the visual characteristics of the Delphic Sibyl reference and/or depart from the classical tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome.

Several ancient Greek and Roman influences inspired Michelangelo's depiction of the Delphic Sibyl. On the one hand, the Delphic Sibyl evokes the classical Greek idealism of Polykleitos. She projects heroic monumentality, combines repose and balance, and recalls the perfected form of classical arts based on the nude as a standard of perfection and beauty. At the same time, the Delphic Sibyl has Hellenistic athletic musculature, shows emotional intensity growing from within, and twists with the torsion of figures on the Altar of Zeus and Athena from Pergamon. Her pose, musculature, and the physique of the youths behind her demonstrate the likely influence of classical sculptures such as the Belvedere Torso. In this work Michelangelo synthesizes his Florentine training that valued classical art with inspiration gained from newly discovered Pergamene-style Hellenistic sculptures entering the Vatican's collection.

Michelangelo enhances the classical, sculptural illusionism of the work through the use of chiaroscuro, intense contrast and highlights that accentuate the musculature of the figure and the volume of her clothing. The sibyl's garments, especially her long tunic and cloak, reference the sculpted drapery of classical antiquity. Neither purely classical nor Hellenistic, the draperies both conform to the volumes of the body like those on the grave stele of Hegeso as they swell into deeper pockets of light and dark as found in Hellenistic art. Michelangelo's careful studies of these draperies show the attention made to their form. Finally, Michelangelo's use of fresco mimics visual qualities of carved marble or stone to create an architectural setting with antique features. An elaborate painted cornice unites the various scenes of the chapel ceiling. The architectural features reveal additional influences drawn from the classical tradition of Greece and Rome.

That said, the Delphic Sibyl includes elements that depart from the classical tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome. The palette's intensity and color range departs from classical art, leaning toward Mannerism. The saturation of the colors, especially in the earlier phases of the ceiling, burst out of classical restraint. The Greeks and Romans, who frequently depicted sibyls as enigmatic young women, did not create colossal, enthroned versions of these seers. The superhuman scale of the figures are a departure from antiquity.