

Mortyangelo and the Mystery Art

A Reading A-Z Level S Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,166

Connections

Writing

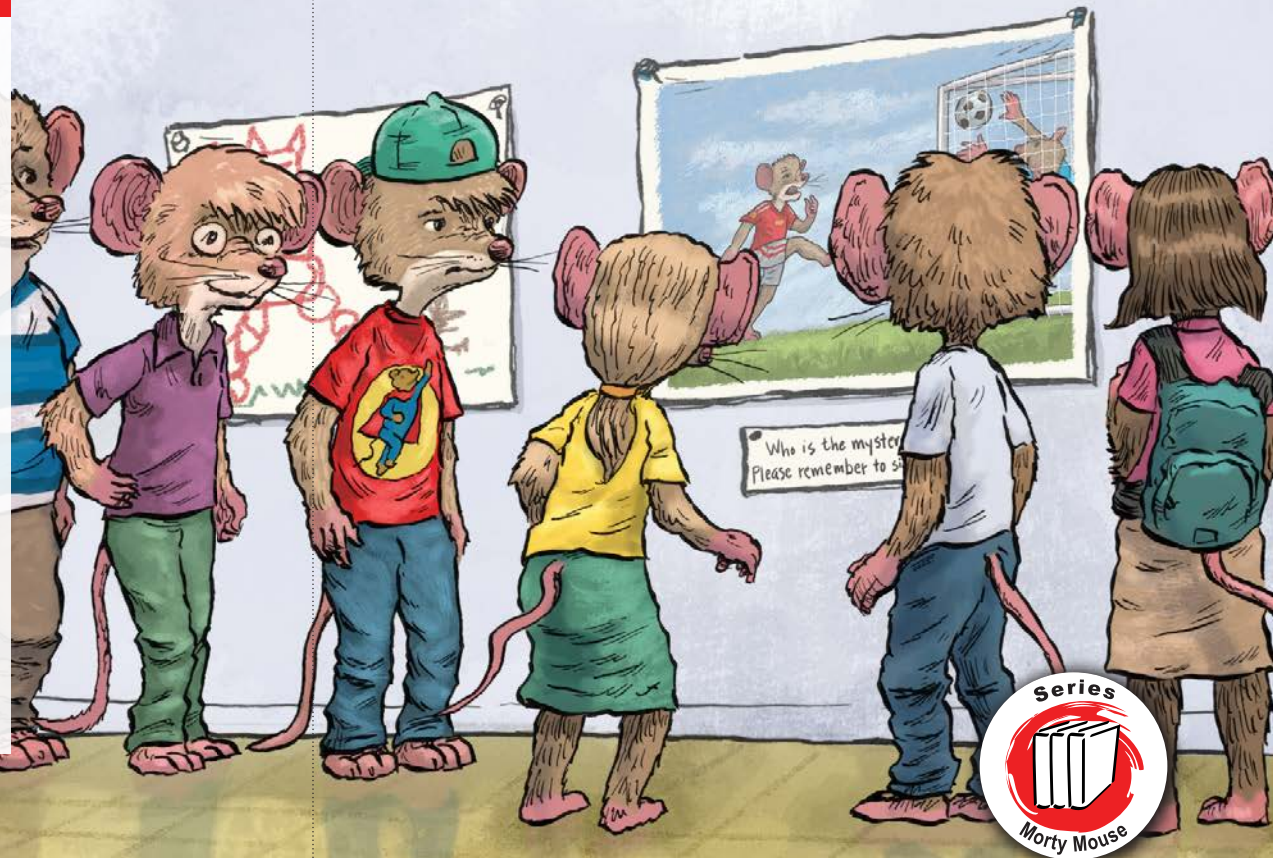
If you were Morty, would you have taken credit for the mystery art? Why or why not? Write a paragraph explaining your answer.

Social Studies and Art

Research to learn more about Michelangelo's art on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Create a poster with the information you find and share it with your class.

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Reading A-Z

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Written by Kathy Hoggan
Illustrated by David Opie

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Focus Question

What did Morty learn about himself?

Words to Know

apprenticed	indignant
chapel	masterpiece
chiseled	radiant
circulated	renowned
engraved	

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Correlation

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Chapter One

Morty stood in the school hallway with his friends, staring up at a drawing that hung on the wall in front of the art room. Under it, Miss Micasso, the art teacher, had posted a sign reading, “Who is the mystery artist? Please remember to sign your work.” Rumors about the creator’s identity spread through the school like wildfire.

The illustration was a triumphant action shot of soccer superstar Messi Mouse powerfully shooting the ball to score. His tail swung through the air, and the ball soared between the goalposts at incredible speed.





"That's amazing," Ben exclaimed. "Look at the droplets of sweat on Messi's face."

"Seriously!" Fred agreed. "Even the grass on the field looks realistic."

Morty gazed up at the art in silence. Part of him wanted to explain that he had used dark green for shadowing on the lighter grass blades, but he kept quiet.

Morty loved to dribble and doodle. When he was outside, he was dribbling his Official Mouse Champion soccer ball. When he was inside, Morty was doodling with his deluxe set of Magnificent Markers, and he mostly liked to draw soccer players in action. Morty never thought about being an artist—instead, he dreamed of becoming a famous athlete who young mice would want to sketch.

Discovering his soccer illustration hanging in the hallway, Morty reflected on yesterday's art class. As he'd been rinsing paintbrushes, the bell had rung, signaling the end of the period. "Please remember to put your assignments in the box as you leave," Miss Micasso had called after the babbling mice as they shuffled out the door.

Morty had sighed, plunging his hand into his backpack to fish for his sloppy drawing. He didn't like to be told what to draw. When Miss Micasso assigned art homework, he spent mere minutes on it. Morty had felt his hand curl around a wrinkled paper, hurriedly pulled it from his bag, and had flung it in the homework box. Later that afternoon, he had been puzzled to find his assignment crumpled in the bottom of his backpack.





Morty shook his head, bringing himself back to the present. More students were gathering around the painting. Morty heard one whisper, “Wilbur’s the best artist. He’s the only one who draws that well.” **Indignant**, Morty almost squeaked up to claim his work, but he quickly changed his mind.

“If I could draw like that,” Ben was saying, “I’d put my name all over it!”

“Well, if I could draw like that,” Fred added, “I’d sell my art and get rich!”

Morty mumbled, “If I could play soccer like that, I wouldn’t bother coming to school.”

His friends laughed in agreement as the bell rang, then hustled to class.



Chapter Two

The next day, Morty hovered in the doorway of the art room. Not admitting to being the mystery artist felt dishonest. On the other hand, he preferred to be known as the school’s top soccer player, not its most accomplished artist.

“Oh, hello, Morty,” Miss Micasso said as she glanced up from her grading. “Did you bring your art assignment? It’s overdue, and you usually get homework in on time.”

“Miss Micasso,” Morty said as he closed the door behind him, “I have a problem.”

Miss Micasso got up from her desk and gestured for Morty to sit at a worktable with her. "Tell me about it," she said sweetly.

"The art in the hall is mine," he admitted.

"That's wonderful news, Morty! You're very talented," Miss Micasso exclaimed. "So, what's the issue?"

"I didn't mean to turn that drawing in," Morty said quietly. "I'm not really an artist. I mean, I don't want my friends to think I'm the artsy type. I'm more of a soccer player."



"I see," Miss Micasso said. Morty waited for Miss Micasso to say more. "Have you ever heard of Miceangelo?" she finally asked.

"No," Morty confessed.

"He was a **renowned** Italian artist who lived long ago," Miss Micasso explained. "He **apprenticed** to be a sculptor, and he was a fantastic one, but Miceangelo could also paint. One day he was asked to go to Rome and paint the ceiling of a great **chapel**. Let me show you."

Miss Micasso got up, plucked a book from the shelf, and opened it wide.

"Wow!" Morty gasped. He recognized the painting but had never really looked at the many detailed scenes so closely.

“Miceangelo spent four years on his **masterpiece**, and now five million mice wait in line to see it every year,” Miss Micasso said with a smile. “Still, Miceangelo never signed the ceiling.”

Maybe Miceangelo was like me, Morty thought. He wanted to sculpt, and I want to play soccer, but we are both pretty good at other things, too.

Miss Micasso turned to another page showing a **radiant** white statue of a woman. “Miceangelo sculpted this from marble and polished it,” Miss Micasso said.

Morty looked closely at the **chiseled** figure. The woman’s sad expression was so lifelike that it seemed she had frozen and turned to stone.



“When Miceangelo finished the statue, it went on public display,” Miss Micasso continued. “People gathered to admire its beauty. That night, Miceangelo snuck back and **engraved** his name into this sash. It was the only piece of art he ever signed.”

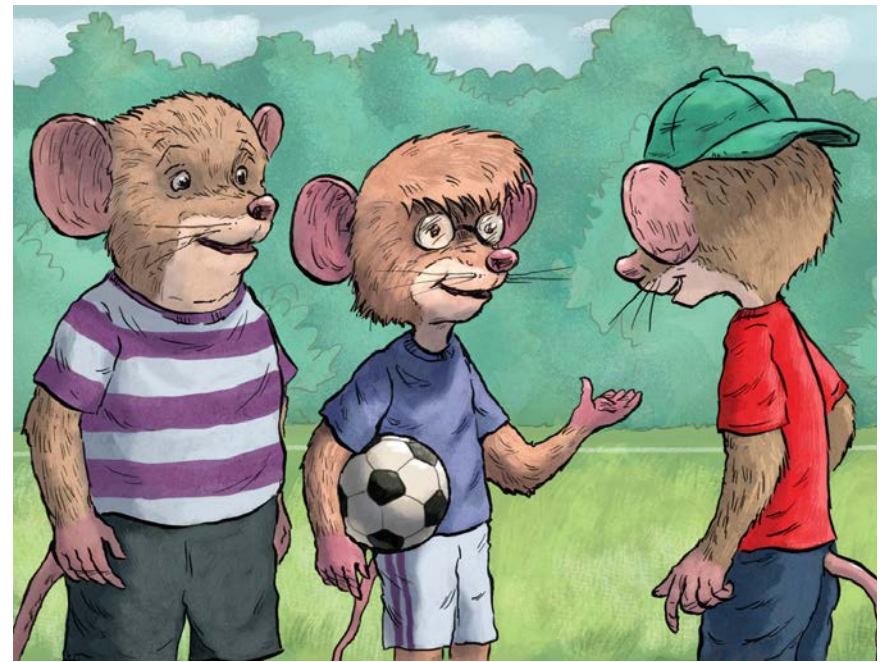
“Why’d he sign it?” Morty asked.

“No one knows for certain, but some have said that Miceangelo heard admirers saying it was the work of another sculptor,” she replied. Morty understood what Miceangelo must have felt.

“Morty,” Miss Micasso said softly, “you can choose what you would like to do, but you’re a very gifted artist, and you should consider taking ownership of your work.”

“Miceangelo was pretty cool,” Morty mused. Then he rummaged through his backpack for his charcoal-colored Magnificent Marker. “I’m not sure if I’ll sign all my art, but signing the mystery art feels like the right thing to do.”

Miss Micasso beamed. “I think that’s a good decision,” she said. “And Morty, I’m sure your friends will think of you as the most artistic soccer player they know.”



Chapter Three

The next day at school, Fred, Ben, and Morty scurried to the soccer field for recess.

“C’mon, Morty,” Fred pleaded. “If you can draw Messi playing soccer, you can draw your best friends playing soccer.”

Morty laughed. He had told Fred and Ben that the mystery art was his after his conversation with Miss Micasso. Then the news of Morty’s talent had **circulated** quickly through the school. He enjoyed getting art requests from his eager classmates.

“So, what do you say?” Fred continued.
“Draw me as the glorious goalie who blocks Ben’s shot.”

“I can punt one past you with my eyes closed!” Ben responded. “Morty only draws realistic scenes.”

Morty booted his soccer ball to Ben.
“Okay, Fred, prove you can block Ben’s shot, and maybe I’ll draw it,” he teased.

They all laughed and scampered to the field, but Morty was lost in thought. He wondered if Miceangelo ever sculpted soccer players.



Glossary

apprenticed (<i>v.</i>)	learned a skill or trade from a skilled professional (p. 10)
chapel (<i>n.</i>)	a small place of worship (p. 10)
chiseled (<i>adj.</i>)	cut or shaped with a sharp metal tool called a <i>chisel</i> ; having a clean, well-defined shape or outline (p. 11)
circulated (<i>v.</i>)	passed or moved around from person to person (p. 14)
engraved (<i>v.</i>)	cut or carved letters or patterns into a hard surface (p. 12)
indignant (<i>adj.</i>)	showing anger or annoyance about something that seems wrong or unfair (p. 7)
masterpiece (<i>n.</i>)	a work of art made with extraordinary skill (p. 11)
radiant (<i>adj.</i>)	brightly shining (p. 11)
renowned (<i>adj.</i>)	recognized and admired by many people; famous (p. 10)