The Getty Villa

Perfect Bodies, Ancient Ideals

A Set of Three Activities Focusing on the Human Form and Portraiture

VILLA ITINERARY

Your Name _____

These gallery activities will challenge you to investigate particular art historical concepts relating to the works of art found in two or more Villa galleries. Each gallery investigation will take about 15–30 minutes to complete. Number each activity in the order your group will do them.

Group _____

Number	Activity	Location
_____	BEAUTY BY NUMBERS	Galleries 210 & 211
_____	STRIKING A POSE	Galleries 106, 108 & 109
_____	IDEAL OR REAL	Galleries 201B, 206, 207 & 209

BEAUTY BY NUMBERS

INTRODUCTION

Ancient sculptors used canons—sets of "perfect" mathematical ratios and proportions—to depict the human form. The earliest known canons were developed by the Egyptians, whose grid-based proportions influenced Greek sculptors in the Archaic period (700–480 B.C.). Over time, sculptors and painters sought to create a canon that would allow them to depict the perfect human body—not a body based on a real person but a body based on a defined harmony among parts. This idea prevailed into the Classical and Hellenistic periods even as artists became increasingly interested in presenting the human body in more natural poses.

CONCEPTS TO EXPLORE

Canon of proportions:

A set of ideal, mathematical ratios in art, especially sculpture, originally applied by the Egyptians and later the ancient Greeks to measure the various parts of the human body in relation to each other.

Symmetry:

An arrangement of parts such that the shapes, colors, and patterns are identical to one another on either side of a central boundary. Artists in the Archaic period often used this approach, believing that beauty was found in symmetry.

YOUR VILLA MISSION:

Find the **kouros** statue in **Gallery 211** and make a drawing of it using the proportion grid on the next page.

Grids like the one on the next page were drawn onto blocks of stone to help sculptors maintain proportion among a figure's parts as they began carving the sculpture.
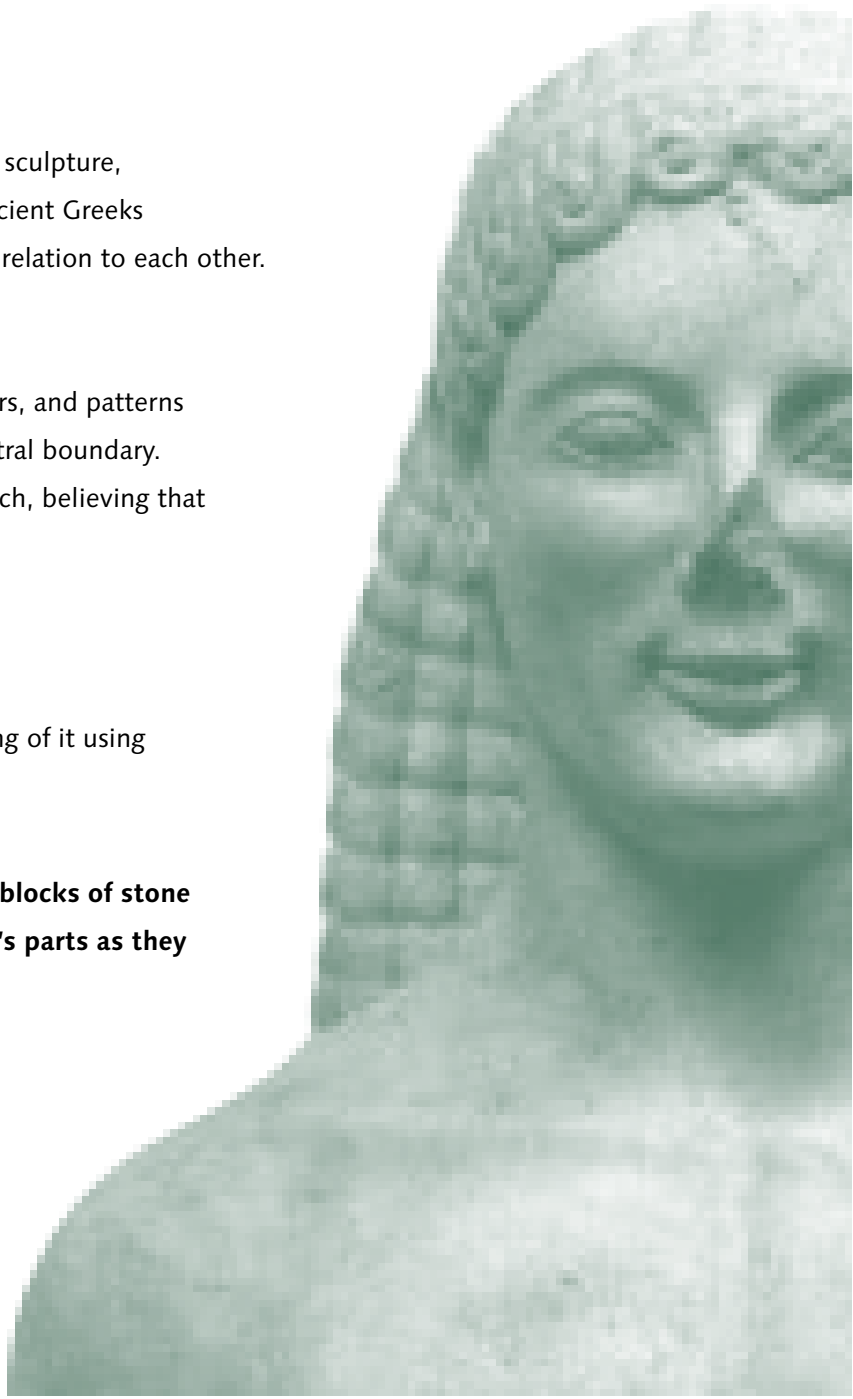
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DRAW the front or side of the *kouros* statue in Gallery 211, based on the Egyptian grid.

Label (left)	Row						Label (right)

Grid rows numbered 1–23 (bottom to top), 6 columns wide.

Left labels:
- Eyes — 22
- Neck & Shoulders — 19
- Waist & Belly Button — 14
- Hands — 9
- Knee Caps — 7
- Feet — 1

Right labels:
- Head
- Torso & Upper Arms
- Thighs
- Lower Legs

Did the use of the grid make drawing the kouros easy or difficult?

_____

_____

How did the grid help or hinder your understanding of the sculpture's proportions?

_____

_____

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER . . . MEASURE YOUR FRIENDS!

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE ANCIENT CANON IS THAT IT WAS BASED ON MATHEMATICS, **NOT** REAL PEOPLE.

Back in your classroom, **test the canon of proportions** using five of your classmates as models.
Set up a chart with seven columns to record each person's name and the following measurements in inches (two columns will initially be blank):

Distance from top of the head to bottom of the chin
Length of thumb from the joint that attaches to the hand
Length of arm from top of shoulder to end of thumb
Distance from top of head to floor

THEN

Using the canon or "rule of thumb" applied to the ancient kouros, **multiply each person's head measurement by 6.5**.
This is how tall each person would be by ancient ideal standards. Record those numbers in column six.

NEXT

Multiply the length of each person's thumbs by 6.5 to get the "ideal" length of the arm.
Record these numbers in column seven.
If you multiply the ideal length of arm by 3,
you should get the person's ideal height (as in column six).

Name	Head to Chin	Length of Thumb	Actual Length of Arm	Actual Height (head to floor)	Ideal Height (head x 6.5)	Ideal Arm (thumb x 6.5)

How do the REAL and IDEAL measurements compare?

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STRIKING A POSE

INTRODUCTION

Moving from the Archaic period (700–480 B.C.) to the Classical period (480–323 B.C.) ancient artists became interested in trying to depict human figures with a more naturalistic, life-like quality. One of the ways they achieved this was by developing what has become known as the *contrapposto* pose. In contrast to the stiff, symmetrical poses of archaistic figures in which weight appears to be evenly distributed between legs, the contrapposto pose is a stance in which figures rest most of their weight on one leg, much as people do in real life.

WHERE TO LOOK

The Basilica (Gallery 106), Temple of Herakles (Gallery 108), and Mythological Heroes gallery (Gallery 109).

CONCEPTS TO EXPLORE

*Arête (*pronounced "AIR-uh-tay"):

From the eighth century B.C. onward, the Greeks often represented male figures in the nude; no other culture of the time had this custom. Greek youths trained and competed in athletic contests in the nude. The beauty of a perfectly proportioned, well-trained body was considered an outward manifestation of an internal quality known as *arête*, or excellence.

Contrapposto:

From the Italian meaning "counterpose." A way of representing the human body so that one leg appears to support the weight, while the other leg is bent or relaxed. Figures sculpted in the contrapposto pose often have an active or bent arm opposite the weight-bearing leg.

LOOK in galleries 108 and 109 to **FIND** the work of art you feel best represents the following modern description:

He tracked the Nemean Lion down to its cave, went inside, and strangled it with his big bare hands. The animal protested needless to say; but before too long, out he walked, holding the skin of the Nemean Lion—a kind of gross souvenir that he had cut off the no-longer living beast by using its claw as a razor.

—from *Strong Stuff* by John Harris & Gary Baseman

Take a moment to **LOOK** at the object from a variety of angles. **Consider its size, age, body type, pose, and facial expression.** List six adjectives that describe the figure's physical and emotional qualities.

1._____   2._____   3._____

4._____   5._____   6._____

STRIKING A POSE

Who is the figure and how can you tell? _____

Is the figure represented in the **contrapposto** pose? Describe what you see that supports your answer:

_____

_____

FIND THE POSE

The **contrapposto** pose was introduced during the Classical period in ancient Greece.

Search galleries 106, 108, and 109 for the figure you feel best demonstrates the **contrapposto** pose.

Note the artwork's title: _____

Describe the artwork's physical qualities: _____

_____

Why do you think the artist used **contrapposto** to depict this ancient subject?

_____

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

Can you find evidence of the contrapposto pose in present-day? Bookmark and e-mail yourself the work of art you selected above by using one of the GettyGuide stations (found on Floor 1 in the TimeScape Room or on Floor 2). Use that image for reference as you look through magazines or online to find a modern-day representation of the **contrapposto** pose. Create a visual and written comparison that identifies three things that are similar between the ancient and modern depictions, and three things that are different. Describe why you think those similarities and differences exist.
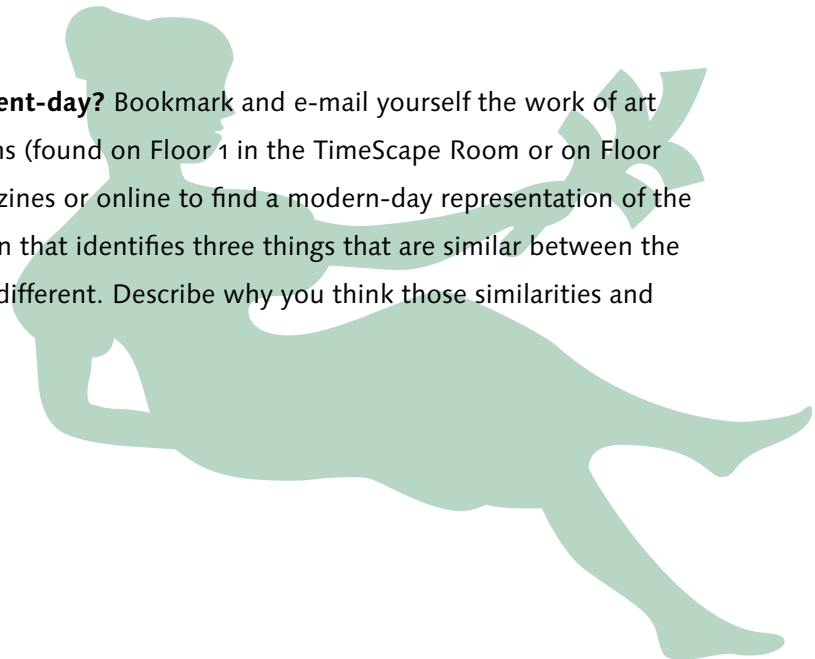
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? IDEAL OR REAL?

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Roman portraiture is often categorized as "real" or "ideal." If you were a prominent leader, you may have had your likeness carved in stone and distributed throughout the empire. If you were a common citizen or freed slave, the only portrait you may ever have had was the one adorning your gravestone. In either case, depending on the style of your time, you might have chosen to have the artist show you as you were in real life, complete with wrinkles, scars, and moles. If you wanted to be remembered at the height of your power or beauty, you may have asked the artist to present you in an idealized form, perhaps even in the guise of a god or goddess.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Have you ever used Photoshop to enhance a picture of yourself or put your head on someone else's body? Once you investigate the works of art in these galleries, you'll discover that that idea is truly ancient. As you look closely at the various portraits—both heads and full figures—you'll begin to see that some appear idealized and some seem more realistic.

CONCEPTS TO EXPLORE

Realistic or **veristic** portraits were developed during the Roman Republican period (509–27 B.C.). In that time period, it was the fashion to show a person as he or she appeared in life. An expression that suggested the person was carrying the weight of the world was considered a positive feature of a responsible citizen.

Idealized portraits were often made to look like a god, goddess, or hero, sometimes by means of hairstyle or ornamentation, or by putting a recognizable head on an idealized body. Idealized portraits were popular during the Roman Imperial period (27 B.C.–A.D. 312).
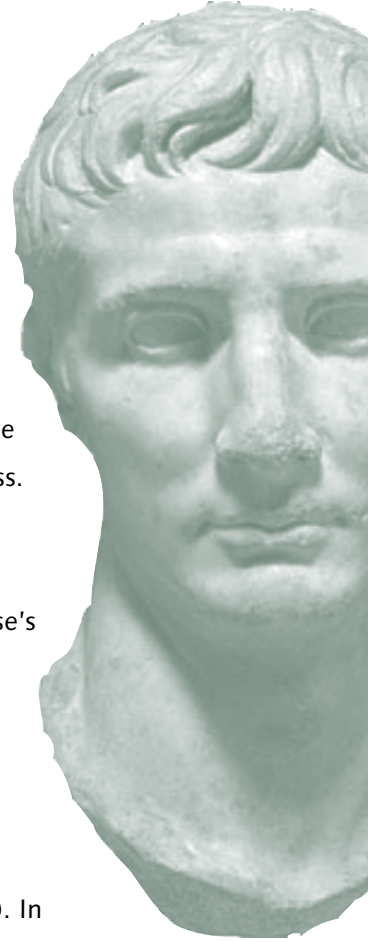
YOUR MISSION:

Investigate the various portraits in Galleries 207, 209, & 201B.
Try to find one you feel best fits the description of a **realistic** portrait.

Describe at least five of the portrait's defining characteristics (hair, jewelry, expression, eyes, unique features, etc.)

1._____   2._____   3._____

4._____   5._____   6._____

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? IDEAL OR REAL?

Does the portrait have any imperfections in its facial features, depiction of skin, or hair? **Describe them.**
(Some surface damage may be due to actual breaks or repairs.)

_____

_____

Next, **LOOK** in galleries 207 or 209 to find a work of art you feel best fits the description of an idealized portrait.
List three things about the portrait that make you believe it is idealized:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

MOVE into Gallery 206. Do you feel that the mummy portraits exhibited here can be best categorized as ideal or real?
Sometimes it can be hard to tell. **Describe two qualities of the portraits that support your claim.**

1. _____

2. _____

TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

Ancient Roman sculptors often used standard body types for portraits of men and women. In these cases, a body type
would be pre-carved and a head later inserted onto the body. Imagine you are an ancient Roman (with a computer!).
Select a head and a body type from those exhibited in the galleries and make your own composite back at school. If
you're really clever, add your face to the mix!

Head: _____

Body: _____

MAKE A NOTE

of the art works' titles, subjects,
and numbers so that you can locate
pictures of them on **www.getty.edu**
(in the **"Explore Art"** section).