



Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Picture Study

Kathy Weitz & Emily Cook

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Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1555



Tower of Babel
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1563



Children's Games
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1559



Hunters in the Snow
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565



Peasant Wedding

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1567



The Dutch Proverbs
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1559



Pieter Bruegel the Elder

ARTIST BIO NOTES

Pieter Bruegel (about 1525-1569) was a Flemish painter whose sons and grandsons were also successful and highly regarded artists. His name was originally spelled Breughel, and although he dropped the 'h' from his name, his sons did not. One of his sons was also named Pieter, and he is referred to as 'the Younger' to distinguish him from his father. Pieter the Elder is generally considered the greatest Flemish painter of the sixteenth century. Not much is known of his early life, except that he was probably born in what is now the Netherlands. He received his training in Antwerp under Pieter Coecke van Aelst and was accepted into the painter's guild there in 1551. He traveled and worked in Italy for several years, but returned to Antwerp where he married van Aelst's daughter. He painted natural landscapes and often told narrative stories with his paintings. Classical literature and biblical themes are evident in much of his work. Another favorite theme was peasants engaged in everyday life—working, feasting, celebrating, and playing. When Pieter Bruegel the Elder died in 1569, both of his sons were under the age of five, yet the family tradition of famous painters continued for several generations.

Note: There are several different acceptable pronunciations and spellings of the name Bruegel. Check www.dictionary.com to listen to pronunciations.

These notes are provided to aid the teacher's own background research on the artist and his or her works. This is not meant to be presented to students as a list of facts and dates. When you first introduce the artist, tell students where the artist fits into the timeline of history, and where the artist lived and worked. Add a few more details with each new picture, but the information you share should be short and simple unless your students ask questions or wish to know more. Keep the main focus of your Picture Study time on observation and narration of the details of the picture.

Note: if a footnote appears with a fact that is not a direct quote, the fact comes from ONE source only.

LIFE AND CHARACTER

Many of the details about Bruegel's life are unknown. The information we are providing here is generally accepted, but some details are unconfirmed.

- ◆ Born sometime between 1525-30 near Breda, Netherlands
- ◆ Lived most of his life in Antwerp, Belgium.
- ◆ 1563, married Pieter Coeck van Aelst's daughter Mayken. Moved to Brussels where Mayken and her mother resided. Bruegel's mother-in-law was also a painter who helped teach Bruegel's two sons, Jan and Pieter.
- ◆ 1569, died and was buried in Brussels.

TRAINING AND CAREER

- ◆ Apprenticed to Antwerp artist Pieter Coeck van Aelst.
- ◆ 1551, was made a master in the painter's guild in Antwerp.
- ◆ 1552-54, traveled through Italy and the Alps.
- ◆ 1553, stayed in Rome working with a miniaturist
- ◆ 1555, provided designs for Antwerp's leading printmaker.
- ◆ 1564, commissioned by a patron from Antwerp to paint the twelve months of the year. Only five of these paintings survive today.
- ◆ Painted until his death in 1569

ART STYLE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- ◆ Known as the greatest Flemish painter of the 16th century
- ◆ Called the most perfect artist of the century by one of his patrons
- ◆ Nicknamed "peasant Bruegel" not because he was a peasant (his life shows signs that he was prosperous), but because he painted landscapes with scenes from peasant life (working, resting, playing, celebrating).
- ◆ An innovator and a storyteller: he stood out from other artists for depicting scenes from peasant life and for using landscapes to tell part of the story of his painting rather than using them as mere backdrops to his figures.

- ◆ Style: his style changed briefly from many figures dispersed in landscape paintings to fewer, larger figures in the foreground. Historians attribute this style change to Bruegel's study of Italian Renaissance art.
- ◆ Types of art: drawings, engravings, paintings
- ◆ His two sons Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel the Elder became famous artists. The influence of Bruegel thus carried on through centuries.

ARTWORKS

- ◆ *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*: Icarus goes almost unnoticed in this painting. You can barely see his legs disappearing in the water on the right side of the painting.
- ◆ *The Tower of Babel*: historians speculate that Bruegel's tower imitates the Colosseum, which Bruegel would have seen when he visited Rome.
- ◆ *Hunters in the Snow*: depicts the month of January in Bruegel's Twelve Months series.
- ◆ *Peasant Wedding*: Scholars note that Bruegel's painting shows what an actual peasant wedding would have looked like in the 16th century.
- ◆ *The Dutch Proverbs*: Bruegel depicts around 100 proverbs in this single painting. His painting was so popular that his son created over twenty copies.

HOW CAN I BE A PAINTER LIKE BREUGEL?

- ◆ Think of a mythological or Biblical story. Create a landscape drawing or painting that tells that story. Try to draw small figures rather than large figures.
- ◆ Pick a month of the year and create a landscape with figures that depicts that month.
- ◆ Think of famous sayings or proverbs. Create a drawing of a village with people depicting as many sayings as you can. (Example phrases: "The pen is mightier than the sword", "The squeaky wheel gets the grease", and "The early bird catches the worm".) <http://www.phrasemix.com/collections/the-50-most-important-english-proverbs>

ARTIST BIO LINKS

<http://www.artexpertswebsite.com/pages/artists/bruegel.php> (medium length, contains pictures)

http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/artist-info.1031.html?artobj_artistId=1031&pageNumber=1 (short, good overview)

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/brue/hd_brue.htm (medium, good detail)

http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/bio/b/bruegel/pieter_e/biograph.html (long, good detail)

PICTURE SOURCE LINKS

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_de_Oude_-_De_val_van_Icarus.jpg

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Tower_of_Babel_\(Vienna\)_-_Google_Art_Project_-_edited.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Tower_of_Babel_(Vienna)_-_Google_Art_Project_-_edited.jpg)

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_Children%E2%80%99s_Games_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_Hunters_in_the_Snow_\(Winter\)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_Hunters_in_the_Snow_(Winter)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_Peasant_Wedding_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_-_The_Dutch_Proverbs_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (hover your mouse over the painting, and boxes appear with captions for each of the proverbs detailed in the painting)