



The National Gallery's *Youthful David* by Andrea del Castagno is a rare surviving shield painted by a master artist of the Renaissance. Instead of illustrating the shield with a traditional coat of arms, Castagno decorated it with the biblical story of David and Goliath.

Visit the West Building from February 13 to March 21, 2004, and view three Renaissance Davids. A small focus exhibition in Main Floor Galleries 74 and 75 will feature Castagno's work, Andrea del Verrocchio's *David*, and *The David of the Casa Martelli* by Bernardo or Antonio Rossellino.

Andrea del Castagno, *The Youthful David* (detail), c. 1450, tempera on leather on wood, National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection



A painting on a shield  
Andrea del Castagno,  
*The Youthful David*, c. 1450,  
tempera on leather on  
wood, National Gallery of  
Art, Widener Collection

## 2

### What's the story?

The boy dominating the shield is David. His story is told in the Old Testament of the Bible. David was a shepherd who spent most of his time tending his sheep. He grew to be courageous by protecting his flock from lions and bears.

At that time, the Israelites were locked in combat with their old enemies the Philistines. Hoping to end the conflict, the Philistine giant Goliath stepped forth and challenged the Israelites to choose a man to fight him. For forty days the mighty Goliath waited for an Israelite brave enough to meet his challenge, but no one stepped forward. Then David, who was actually too young to be in the army, heard about the terrifying Goliath and took on the fight.

Goliath's size proved no match for David's quick thinking and skill. The youth gathered stones from a riverbed for his sling-shot and with a single cast hit Goliath so hard in the forehead that the giant fell to the ground. Drawing Goliath's own sword, David cut off his head and carried it back as a sign of victory. With their champion dead, the Philistines fled, and the Israelites were free to return to their homes in peace. David's bravery and cleverness made him a hero. Later, he would become the king of Israel.

#### Which moment of the story is represented on the shield?

Actually, the painting shows *two* moments: when David tenses to begin his throw *and* the aftermath when the giant's severed head—a stone embedded in his forehead—lies at David's feet. Together, they summarize the dramatic story from beginning to end.

## 1

### Why this unusual shape for a painting?

When this painting was made over five hundred years ago in Florence, Italy, it was not meant to hang on the wall. Made of leather stretched over a wooden frame, it is actually a shield. Although most shields were carried to protect the body in battle, they were also used during festivals and pageants. For those occasions, leading artists designed shields, colorful banners, and special armor. A wealthy Florentine probably commissioned this shield and displayed it in a ceremonial parade. Carrying a shield with a picture of a powerful hero or animal suggested that the bearer was important, strong, and brave.

# 3 How did Castagno portray David? In action!

How can you tell that David is young and athletic? Look closely at the way Castagno painted David's body.

Like many Italian artists of his time, Castagno studied anatomy and was interested in painting realistic details, such as the muscles and veins of David's arms and legs.

The shield depicts dramatic action. David is shown running and winding his sling.

To understand how Castagno suggested David's movement, look for:

- defined muscles
- flying hair
  - windblown garments
  - stretching arms
  - tensed fingers

This sculpture was recently restored, revealing gilded details in the hair and clothing: Andrea del Verrocchio, *David*, c. 1465, bronze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello



# 4 Look and Compare

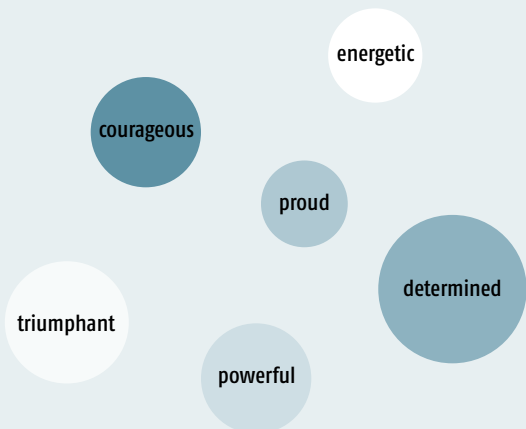
During the fifteenth century, Florence was the most important artistic center in Italy, and the great artists working there—Castagno, Verrocchio, Donatello, Michelangelo, and others—made sculptures and paintings of the hero David to adorn the city.

Compare Castagno's painting to the sculpture by Andrea del Verrocchio.

Each artist had to imagine how David might have looked—his hair, his face, his clothing. Each also had to decide how to tell the story.

Which moments do they choose to depict? How do they show David's weapon, expression, and pose? What similarities can you find between the painting and the sculpture? How are the painting and sculpture of David different?

Which adjectives best describe Verrocchio's David? Which ones best describe Castagno's David?



## book nook

These books about Italian Renaissance artists can be found in the Children's Shop located on the Gallery's concourse level or at your local library or bookstore.

### A Boy Named Giotto

By Paolo Guarnieri, illustrated by Bimba Landmann  
Ages 4 and up

This story tells the legend of how Giotto, a young shepherd boy living near Florence, became a world famous artist who painted magnificent frescoes in churches.

### Uh-Oh, Leonardo!

By Robert Sabuda  
Ages 6 and up

Meet Providence Traveler, a curious mouse whose hero is Leonardo da Vinci. Working on an invention, she is transported back in time to Renaissance Florence. Will Providence get to meet her hero?

### The Neptune Fountain

By Taylor Morrison  
Ages 6 and up

This book describes the apprenticeship of a Renaissance sculptor in Rome. Learn the secrets behind the creation of a monumental marble fountain.

### Michelangelo

By Diane Stanley  
Ages 8 and up

This vivid biographical account captures the life of Michelangelo, from his first sculptures to his radiant paintings in the Sistine Chapel.

## try this!

# activity



### A Hero for Florence

As a symbol of bravery and freedom, David became a favorite subject for artists from Florence. In the fifteenth century, Florence was a small city-state often threatened by its more powerful neighbors. The story of David and Goliath inspired the people of Florence because the brave young shepherd overcame seemingly insurmountable odds and triumphed over his enemy. David's ingenuity in the face of the giant symbolized the independent spirit that characterized Renaissance Florence. And in turn, it decorated its palaces, streets, and government buildings with his image.



Bernardo Rossellino or Antonio Rossellino, *The David of the Casa Martelli*, c. 1461/1479, marble, National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection

### Make a decorative shield to honor your own hero

Who are your heroes? Choose one to represent on a ceremonial shield. What characteristics do you admire in that person? What difficult or challenging situation did he or she face? Which details from your hero's story will you include on your shield?

#### You will need:

- a large piece of poster board
- a hole punch, scissors, tape, string
- paints, markers, or crayons

First, draw the outline of your shield on the poster board. Look at the shape of the *Youthful David* shield for help. Remember, the top part protects your chest and shoulders and should, therefore, be wider than the bottom. Next, with a pencil, sketch your hero or heroine in action. Make the figure large so that the body fills most of the shield.

David's large, silhouetted form on Castagno's shield would have been easy to see as the shield was carried through the streets of Florence. Also, Castagno painted David's vest a bold red to capture our attention. In the background, Castagno painted a landscape with the river where David found the stones for his sling.

For your own shield, draw a background that tells something about your hero. Now color your drawing with paints, crayons, or markers.

Next cut out the shield (you may need to ask an adult for help). From a scrap of the leftover poster board, cut a strip about two inches high and ten inches long. Bend this strip to make a handle and tape the two ends of the handle to the middle of the back of the shield.

The round "bumps" on the front of Castagno's shield show where straps were once attached.

Finally, punch a hole at the upper two corners of the shield. Tie a piece of string from one hole to the other, just tightly enough to make the shield arch a bit.

Now, what will you do with your shield? Will you parade around with it or hang it on the wall?