

Michelangelo



STUDENT HANDOUTS

BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK SERIES

MICHELANGELO
(1475-1564)

We have all heard of Leonardo da Vinci. Michelangelo, the other great luminary of art, was twenty-two years younger. But the more severe and reflective cast of Michelangelo’s mind rendered their difference of age far less in effect than in reality. It is usual to compare Michelangelo with Raphael, but he is more aptly compared with Leonardo da Vinci.

Michelangelo and da Vinci started from opposite points. They pursued throughout their whole existence, and in all they planned and achieved, a course as different as their respective characters.

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born at Setignano, near Florence, in the year 1475. He was descended from a family once noble—even among the noblest of the feudal lords of Northern Italy—the Counts of Canossa. But that branch of it represented by his father, Luigi Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni, had for some generations become poorer and poorer, until the last descendant was thankful to accept an office in the law, and had been nominated magistrate or mayor (*podesta*) of Chiusi.

1. **object that gives forth light:**
 - a. cast
 - b. extraordinary
 - c. luminary
 - d. point

2. **What was the age difference between Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo?**

All the great artists of that time, even Raphael himself, were influenced more or less by these two extraordinary men, but they exercised no influence on each other.

3. **When was Michelangelo born?**
-
-

4. **Who was Michelangelo’s father?**
-
-

In this situation, Luigi Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni had limited his ambition to the prospect of seeing his eldest son a notary or advocate in his native city. The young Michelangelo showed the utmost distaste for the studies allotted to him. Michelangelo was continually escaping from his home and from his desk to haunt the ateliers of the painters, particularly that of Ghirlandajo, who was then at the height of his reputation.

5. artist's studio:

- a. advocate
- b. atelier
- c. cubicle
- d. gallery

The father of Michelangelo, who found his family increase too rapidly for his means, had destined some of his sons for commerce (it will be recollected that in Genoa and Florence the most powerful nobles were merchants or manufacturers), and others for civil or diplomatic employments. But the fine arts, as being at that time productive of little honor or emolument, Luigi held in no esteem. Luigi treated these tastes of his eldest son sometimes with contempt and sometimes even with harshness.

6. Michelangelo's father wanted his son to grow up to be a great artist.

- a. True
- b. False

7. At this time, the most powerful nobles of Genoa and Florence worked as what?

Michelangelo, however, had formed some friendships among the young painters, and particularly with Francesco Granacci, one of the best pupils of Ghirlandajo. Michelangelo contrived to borrow models and drawings. He studied them in secret with such persevering assiduity and consequent improvement, that Ghirlandajo, captivated by his genius, undertook to plead his cause to his father. At length, Ghirlandajo prevailed over the old man's family pride and prejudices.

8. With whom did Michelangelo form a particular friendship?

At the age of fourteen, Michelangelo was received into the studio of Ghirlandajo as a regular pupil, and bound to him for three years. Such was the precocious talent of the boy, that, instead of being paid for his instruction, Ghirlandajo undertook to pay the father, Leonardo Buonarroti, for the first, second, and third years, six, eight, and twelve golden florins, as payment for the advantage he expected to derive from the labor of the son. Thus was the vocation of the young artist decided for life.

9. Michelangelo trained under what artist?

- 10. precocious:
 - a. loudly rude
 - b. mentally unstable in behavior
 - c. obnoxious
 - d. unusually advanced in mental development

At that time, Lorenzo the Magnificent, of the powerful Medici family, reigned over Florence. Lorenzo had formed in his palace and

gardens a collection of antique marbles, busts, statues, fragments, which he had converted into an academy for the use of young artists. At the head of it as director, Lorenzo placed a sculptor of some eminence, named Bertoldo. Michelangelo was one of the first who, through the recommendation of Ghirlandajo, was received into this new academy, afterward so famous and so memorable in the history of art.

11. Who ruled Florence at this time?

The young man, then not quite sixteen, had hitherto occupied himself chiefly in drawing. But now, fired by the beauties he beheld around him, and by the example and success of a fellow pupil, Torregiano, Michelangelo set himself to model in clay, and at length to copy in marble what was before him. As was natural in a character and genius so steeped in individuality, his copies became not so much imitations of form as original embodiments of the leading idea.

For example, his first attempt in marble, when he was about fifteen, was a copy of an antique mask of an

Michelangelo, while he yielded, perforce, to the caprices of his protector, turned the energies of his mind to a new study—that of anatomy—and pursued it with all that fervor which belonged to his character. His attention was at the same time directed to literature, by the counsels and conversations of a very celebrated scholar and poet then residing in the court of Piero—Angelo Poliziano. And he pursued at the same time the cultivation of his mind and the practice of his art.

- 15. caprices:
 - a. crazes
 - b. standards
 - c. stories
 - d. traditions

16. What poet strongly influenced Michelangelo at this time?

Engrossed by his own studies, Michelangelo was scarcely aware of what was passing around him, nor of the popular intrigues which were preparing the ruin of the Medici. Suddenly, this powerful family was flung from sovereignty to temporary disgrace and exile. Michelangelo, as

one of their retainers, was obliged to fly from Florence, and took refuge in the city of Bologna.

17. As the Medici fell from power in Florence, Michelangelo fled to what city?

- a. Bologna
- b. Genoa
- c. Milan
- d. Rome

During the year Michelangelo spent in Bologna, he found a friend who employed him on some works of sculpture. On his return to Florence, he executed a Cupid in marble, of such beauty that it found its way into the cabinet of the Duchess of Mantua as a real antique. On the discovery that the author of this beautiful statue was a young man of twenty-two, the Cardinal San Giorgio invited him to Rome, and for some time lodged him in his palace.

18. Who invited Michelangelo to Rome?

In Rome, Michelangelo, surrounded and inspired by the grand remains of antiquity, pursued his

studies with unceasing energy. He produced a statue of Bacchus, which added to his reputation. In 1500, at the age of twenty-five, he produced the famous group of the dead Christ on the knees of his Virgin Mother (called the *Pietà*), which is now in the church of St. Peter's, at Rome. This last, being frequently copied and imitated, obtained him so much applause and reputation, that he was recalled to Florence, to undertake several public works. We find him once more established in his native city in the year 1502.

19. How old was Michelangelo when he created the *Pietà*?

20. When did Michelangelo return to Florence?

In 1506, Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II. The pope had conceived the idea of erecting a most splendid monument to perpetuate his memory. For this work, which was never completed, Michelangelo executed the famous statue of Moses, seated, grasping his flowing beard with one hand, and with

the other sustaining the tables of the Law.

While employed on this tomb, the pope commanded Michelangelo to also undertake the decoration of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Pope Sixtus IV had, in the year 1473, erected this famous chapel, and summoned the best painters of that time, Signorelli, Cosimo Roselli, Perugino, and Ghirlandajo, to decorate the interior. But down to the year 1508, the ceiling remained without any ornament. Michelangelo was called upon to cover this enormous vault, a space of one hundred and fifty feet in length by fifty in breadth, with a series of subjects representing the most important events connected, either literally or typically, with the fall and redemption of mankind.

21. Who erected the Sistine Chapel in 1473?

22. Which of the following did not paint the interior of the Sistine Chapel?

- a. Da Vinci
- b. Ghirlandajo
- c. Perugino
- d. Signorelli

No part of Michelangelo's long life is so interesting, so full of characteristic incident, as the history of his intercourse with Pope Julius II, which began in 1505, and ended only with the death of the pope in 1513.

- 23. **intercourse:**
 - a. **communication**
 - b. **employment**
 - c. **partying**
 - d. **trade**

Michelangelo had at all times a lofty idea of his own dignity as an artist, and never would stoop either to flatter a patron or to conciliate a rival. Julius II, though now seventy-four, was as impatient of contradiction as fiery in temper, as full of magnificent and ambitious projects as if he had been in the prime of life. In the pope's service was the famous architect, Bramante, who beheld with jealousy and alarm the increasing fame of Michelangelo, and his influence with the pontiff. Bramante set himself by indirect means to lessen both.

24. Who worked as an architect for Pope Julius II?

Bramante insinuated to Julius that it was ominous to erect his own mausoleum during his lifetime. The pope gradually fell off in his attentions to Michelangelo, and neglected to supply him with the necessary funds for carrying on the work. On one occasion, Michelangelo, finding it difficult to obtain access to the pope, sent a message to him to this effect, "that henceforth, if his Holiness desired to see him, he should send to seek him elsewhere." And the same night, leaving orders with his servants to dispose of his property, he departed for Florence.

- 25. **ominous:**
 - a. **brilliant**
 - b. **felicitous**
 - c. **inauspicious**
 - d. **wise**

- 26. **mausoleum:**
 - a. **cathedral**
 - b. **gloomy graveyard**
 - c. **magnificent tomb**
 - d. **obelisk**

27. Finding it difficult to speak to Julius, Michelangelo left Rome for what city?

The pope dispatched five couriers after Michelangelo with threats, persuasions, promises—but in vain. Julius wrote to the Gonfaloniere Soderini, then at the head of the government of Florence, commanding him, on pain of his extreme displeasure, to send Michelangelo back to him. But the inflexible artist absolutely refused. Three months were spent in vain negotiations. Soderini, at length, fearing the pope's anger, prevailed on Michelangelo to return, and sent with him his relation, Cardinal Soderini, to make up the quarrel between the high contending powers.

28. Who ruled the government of Florence at this time?

On his return to Rome, Michelangelo wished to have resumed his work on the mausoleum, but the pope had resolved on the completion of the Sistine Chapel. He commanded Michelangelo to undertake the decoration of the vaulted ceiling. The artist was obliged, though reluctantly, to obey.

At this time, the frescoes which Raphael and his pupils were painting

in the chambers of the Vatican had excited the admiration of all Rome. Michelangelo, who had never exercised himself in the mechanical part of the art of fresco, invited from Florence several painters of eminence, to execute his designs under his own superintendence. But they could not reach the grandeur of his conceptions, which became enfeebled under their hands.

29. eminence:
- a. high rank
 - b. ill repute
 - c. low regard
 - d. noble birth

30. Michelangelo found that the painters he hired did not live up to his high expectations.

- a. True
- b. False

One morning, in a mood of impatience, Michelangelo destroyed all that they had done, closed the doors of the chapel against them, and would not thenceforth admit them to his presence. He then shut himself up, and proceeded with incredible perseverance and energy to accomplish his task alone. He even prepared his colors with his own hands. He began with the end toward

the door, and in the two compartments first painted (though not first in the series), the *Deluge*, and the *Vineyard of Noah*, he made the figures too numerous and too small to produce their full effect from below, a fault which he corrected in those executed subsequently.

31. What were the first two paintings Michelangelo completed in the Sistine Chapel?

When almost half the work was completed, the pope insisted on viewing what was done. The astonishment and admiration it excited rendered Julius more and more eager to have the whole completed at once. The progress, however, was not rapid enough to suit the impatient temper of the pontiff. On one occasion, he demanded of the artist when he meant to finish it. Michelangelo replied calmly, "When I can."

"When thou canst!" exclaimed the fiery old pope. "Thou hast a mind that I should have thee thrown from the scaffold!"

At length, on the day of All Saints, 1512, the ceiling was uncovered to public view. Michelangelo had employed on the painting only, without reckoning the time spent in preparing the cartoons, twenty-two months, and he received in payment three thousand crowns.

When the Sistine Chapel was completed, Michelangelo was in his thirty-ninth year. Fifty years of a glorious though troubled career were still before him.

32. How old was Michelangelo when he completed the Sistine Chapel?

Pope Julius II died in 1513, and was succeeded by Leo X, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent. As a Florentine and his father's son, we might naturally have expected that Leo would have gloried in patronizing and employing Michelangelo. But such was not the case. There was something in the stern, unbending character, and retired and abstemious habits of Michelangelo, that was repulsive to the temper of Leo. The new pope preferred the graceful and amiable Raphael, then in the prime of his life and genius. Hence arose the

memorable rivalry between Michelangelo and Raphael. On the part of the latter, it was merely generous emulation, while it must be confessed that something like scorn mingled with the feelings of Michelangelo.

33. What member of the Medici family succeeded to the papacy following the death of Julius II?

The pontificate of Leo X, an interval of ten years, was the least productive period of Michelangelo's life. In the year 1519, when the Signoria of Florence was negotiating with Ravenna for the restoration of the remains of the writer Dante Alighieri, Michelangelo petitioned the pope that he might be allowed to execute, at his own labor and expense, a monument to the "Divine Poet."

34. How long did Leo X serve as pope?

Michelangelo was sent to Florence to superintend the building

of the church of San Lorenzo and the completion of Santa Croce. But Michelangelo differed with the pope on the choice of the marble, quarreled with the officials, and scarcely anything was accomplished.

Clement VII, another Medici, was elected pope in 1523. He had conceived the idea of consecrating a chapel in the church of San Lorenzo, to receive the tombs of his ancestors and relations, and which should be adorned with all the splendor of art. Michelangelo planned and built the chapel, and for its interior decoration designed and executed six of his greatest works in sculpture.

35. What member of the Medici family succeeded to the papacy following the death of Leo X?

While Michelangelo was engaged in these works, his progress was interrupted by events which threw all Italy into commotion. Rome was taken and sacked by the Constable de Bourbon in 1527. The Medici were once more expelled from Florence. Michelangelo, in the midst of these strange vicissitudes, was employed by the republic to fortify his

native city against his former patrons. Great as an engineer, as in every other department of art and science, he defended Florence for nine months.

36. Who sacked Florence in 1527?

37. vicissitudes:

- a. abominations
- b. changes
- c. occurrences
- d. squabbles

At length the city was given up by treachery, and, fearing the vengeance of the conquerors, Michelangelo fled and concealed himself. But Clement VII was too sensible of Michelangelo's merit to allow him to remain long in disgrace and exile. He was pardoned, and continued ever afterward in high favor with the pope, who employed him on the sculptures in the chapel of San Lorenzo during the remainder of his pontificate.

In the year 1531, Michelangelo had completed the statues of *Night* and *Morning*. Clement, who heard of his incessant labors, sent him a brief commanding him, on pain of excommunication, to take care of his

health, and not to accept of any other work but that which his Holiness had assigned him.

38. excommunication

- a. act of cutting someone off from holy communion
- b. act of ending a conversation unexpectedly
- c. divorce negotiations
- d. the end of a conversation

Clement VII was succeeded by Pope Paul III, of the Farnese family, in 1534. This pope, though nearly seventy when he was elected, was as anxious to immortalize his name by great undertakings as any of his predecessors had been. Paul's first wish was to complete the decoration of the interior of the Sistine Chapel, left unfinished by Julius II and Leo X.

39. What member of the Farnese family succeeded to the papacy in 1534?

Paul summoned Michelangelo, who endeavored to excuse himself, pleading other engagements. But the pope would listen to no excuses which interfered with his sovereign power to

dissolve all other obligations. Thus the artist found himself, after an interval of twenty years, most reluctantly forced to abandon sculpture for painting. Michelangelo consented to serve Pope Paul only because he could not do otherwise.

The same Pope Paul III had in the meantime constructed a beautiful chapel, which was called after his name the chapel Paolina, and dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. Michelangelo was called upon to design the decorations. He painted on one side the *Conversion of St. Paul*, and on the other the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, which were completed in 1549. But these fine paintings—of which existing old engravings give a better idea than the blackened and faded remains of the original frescoes—were from the first ill-disposed as to the locality, and badly lighted, and at present they excite little interest compared with the more famous works in the Sistine.

40. When did Michelangelo complete the *Conversion of St. Paul* and the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*?

With the frescoes in the Pauline Chapel ends Michelangelo's career as

a painter. He had been appointed chief architect of St. Peter's, in 1547, by Paul III. He was then in his seventy-second year. During the remainder of his life, a period of sixteen years, we find him wholly devoted to architecture. His vast and daring genius found ample scope in the completion of St. Peter's. He has left behind him in his capacity of architect yet greater marvels than he has achieved as painter and sculptor. Who that has seen the cupola of St. Peter's soaring into the skies, but will think almost with awe of the universal and majestic intellect of the man who reared it?

41. Michelangelo spent the last sixteen years of his life working as a/an _____.

- a. architect
- b. clergyman
- c. painter
- d. sculptor

It appears, from the evidence of contemporary writers, that in the last years of his life, the acknowledged worth and genius of Michelangelo, his widespread fame, and his unblemished integrity, combined with his venerable age and the haughtiness and reserve of his deportment to invest him with a sort of princely

dignity. It is recorded that, when he waited on Pope Julius III, to receive his commands, the pontiff rose on his approach, seated him, in spite of his excuses, on his right hand. While a crowd of cardinals, prelates, and ambassadors, were standing round at humble distance, the pope and the artist carried on the conference as equal with equal. When the Grand Duke Cosmo was in Rome, in 1560, he visited Michelangelo, uncovered in his presence, and stood with his hat in his hand while speaking to him. But from the time when he made himself the tyrant of Florence, he never could persuade Michelangelo to visit, even for a day, his native city.

- 42. haughtiness:
 - a. agedness
 - b. boastful pride
 - c. indignity
 - d. scornful snobbery

The arrogance imputed to Michelangelo seems rather to have arisen more from contempt for others than from any overweening opinion of himself. Michelangelo was too proud to be vain. He had placed his standard of perfection so high, that to the last hour of his life he considered himself as striving after that ideal excellence which had been revealed to

him, but to which he conceived that others were blind or indifferent. In allusion to his own imperfections, he made a drawing, since become famous, which represents an aged man in a go-cart, and underneath the words "*Ancora imparo*" (still learning).

43. Michelangelo was too proud to be ____.

Michelangelo continued to labor unremittingly, and with the same resolute energy of mind and purpose, till the gradual decay of his strength warned him of his approaching end. He did not suffer from any particular malady, and his mind was strong and clear to the last. Michelangelo died at Rome, on February 18, 1564, in the ninetieth year of his age.

44. How old was Michelangelo when he died?

A few days before his death, Michelangelo dictated his will in these few simple words: "I bequeath my soul to God, my body to the earth, and my possessions to my nearest relations."

His nephew, Leonardo Buonarroti, who was his principal heir, by the orders of the Grand Duke Cosmo, had Michelangelo's remains secretly conveyed out of Rome and brought to Florence. They were, with due honors, deposited in the church of Santa Croce, under a costly monument, on which we may see his noble bust surrounded by three very commonplace and ill-executed statues, representing the arts in which he excelled—Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture.

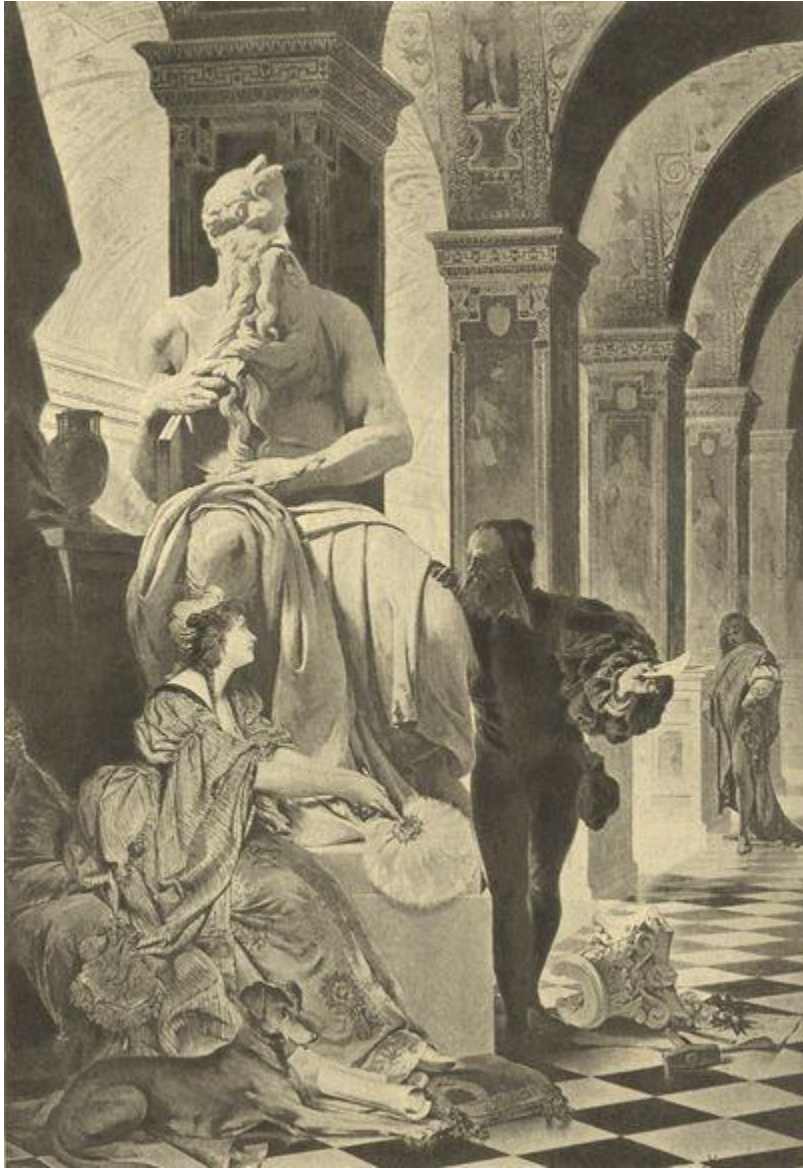
They might have added Poetry, for Michelangelo was so fine a poet that his productions would have given him fame, though he had never peopled the Sistine with his giant creations, nor "suspended the Pantheon in the air." The object to whom his poems are chiefly addressed, Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, was the widow of the celebrated commander who overcame Francis I at the battle of Pavia. Herself a poetess, Vittoria was one of the most celebrated women of her time for beauty, talents, virtue, and piety. She died in 1547.

45. Where was Michelangelo buried?

46. Michelangelo addressed most of his poetry to whom?

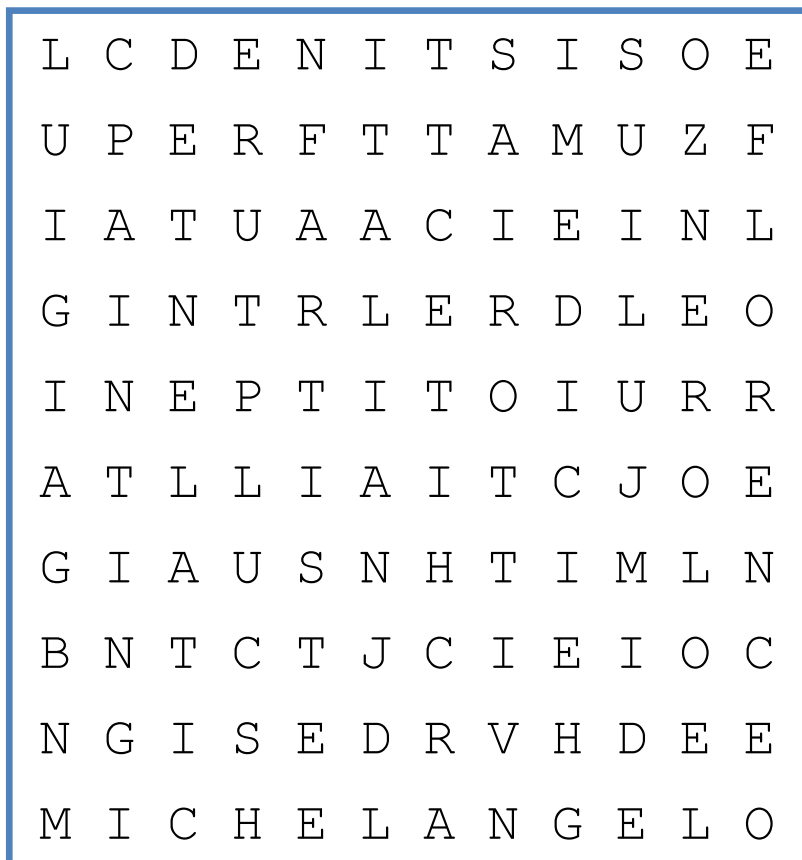


47. Michelangelo was well known for his "artistic temperament"—that is, he was highly emotional about his work. As you have read, he got into many arguments with people as high in rank as several popes. In general, society expects its artists to have this artistic temperament. Do you agree? Does artistic genius merit acceptance of a so-called artistic temperament? Explain your answer.



Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna.

Word Search Puzzle



architect
artist
design
Florence
Italian
Julius

Leo
Lorenzo
Luigi
Medici
Michelangelo
painting

Rome
sculpture
Sistine
talented
Vittoria