



# MICHELANGELO: CREATION OF ADAM

## Adam

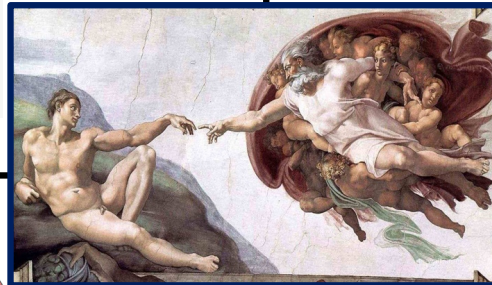


Genesis  
Young  
Handsome  
Strong  
Not fully alive  
Resembles God  
Imago Dei

- Adam is seen on the left of the painting, lying back on the earth from which he has been formed, as described in Genesis
- He is portrayed as a perfect human being: young, handsome and strong. This reflects the Catholic belief that everything that God created was good.
- The youthfulness of Adam is a reminder that in comparison to God, humanity and the earth itself are new.
- Adam appears quite a laid back figure, his arm resting on his knee, barely reaching out to God, suggesting that he is not fully alive yet. This symbolises that humans need God to give them life.
- Adam resembles God. He has the same physical build, is striking a similar pose and details such as the arms, shoulders and feet are almost identical.
- **All this is a reminder that humans are made in the image of God: imago Dei.**

Michelangelo has expressed Catholic beliefs about creation, God and human beings in his Creation of Adam, by including allusions to the idea that God is the **ETERNAL, ALL-POWERFUL, Creator EX NIHILO**, that creation is good, and that humans are God's greatest creation.

The Creation of Adam is one of the nine scenes painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The scenes depict stories from Genesis. The Sistine Chapel is important for Catholic Christians. It is part of the Vatican (the centre of the Catholic world) and is also the place that new popes are chosen.



## God



Dynamic  
Active  
Hard at work  
Older being  
Bearded  
Strong  
Eternal  
Omnipotent  
Ex nihilo

Parent-child relationship

- Unlike Adam, God is presented as a dynamic, active figure as if he is hard at work at his greatest creation.
- God reaches out to the more passive figure of Adam because he loves him, reflecting the Christian belief that God creates the world.
- Michelangelo's God is portrayed as a much older being; bearded yet strong and powerful in his body.
- The difference in age between Adam and God signifies the parent-child relationship that exists between God and humanity; indeed God is the Father of all Creation.
- **The viewer is reminded of the belief that God is ETERNAL and OMNIPOTENT; he is responsible for all of creation which he made from nothing, because nothing existed before God.**



## Knowledge Check

1. Where is this painting displayed?
2. The painting expresses different ideas about the nature of God, such as the idea that He created *ex nihilo*. What else does it suggest?
3. How is Adam portrayed in this image?
4. How is God portrayed in this image?
5. What does the difference in age between Adam and God signify?
6. Two elements of the cloud-like shape have provoked much discussion. What are they?
7. Two key figures in the Church have been suggested for the female figure under the left arm of God. Who are they?
8. What does the image of the hands remind the viewer of?

## The Cloud



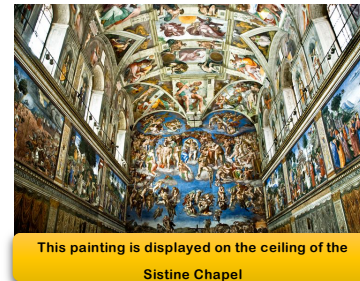
- The shape behind God that shows him being carried towards earth by a group of angels has caused much debate.
- On a simple level this detail shows the **TRANSCENDENCE** of God and conveys his greatness in sharp contrast to the earth bound figure of Adam.
- Some believe the cloud resembles the Brain and that the message being expressed is that **GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM** – he is **OMNISCIENT**.
- Others believe that the cloud represents a womb because of the red background.
- Furthermore, the green cloth hanging down could be the umbilical cord. This interpretation of the cloud reinforces the idea that **GOD GIVES LIFE**, in the same way the womb gives life to a new child. God is the Father of all humanity, who are his loving children.
- The **FEMALE FIGURE** under the arm of God seems to be an important figure because: a) he has his arm round her, and b) she in turn has her arm around a child.
- Some believe the figure represents Eve who has not yet been created for Adam, but is already in the mind of God.
- If this is true then it is reinforcing the great love that God has for humanity because he does not want to be lonely but to experience the gift of love (God creates Eve as a 'companion' for Adam).
- Others believe that the figure is the Virgin Mary, and the child on her left is her son Jesus. Those who take this view describe Mary as the 'new Eve' and Jesus as the 'new Adam'. Michelangelo may be expressing the idea that Adam will soon sin and that Jesus will come in the future to bring humans back to God.

Debate  
Transcendence  
Brain:  
Knowledge,  
Wisdom  
Womb: God  
gives life  
Umbilical Cord:  
God gives life  
Female Figure:  
Eve/Virgin Mary  
'New Eve'

## The Hands



Reaching to  
touch  
Close  
Loving  
Spark of Life  
Life is sacred  
Life is a gift  
Genesis 2:  
God breathes  
life



This painting is displayed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

- Adam and God are shown reaching out to touch each other with their fingertips.
- Not to be overlooked in the painting is that there appears to be a close, loving relationship between God and man.
- The touch of fingertips represents the spark of life given to all humans by God – human life is sacred and a gift from God.
- In the painting Adam's fingertips are bent, signaling that they have **NOT YET RECEIVED LIFE** from God in order to straighten them.
- **The viewer is reminded here of the second account in Genesis where God breathes life into Adam.**

## Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

## Exam Question

b) Describe how Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' demonstrates Catholic belief in God as creator [5]

b) Describe how Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' demonstrates Catholic belief in the nature of the relationship between God and humanity [5]