Note-taking Outline for the Reading: A Brief History of Western Culture

(LINK: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-history-basics/beginners-art-history/a/a-brief-history-of-western-culture>)

NOTES:

Purpose of the reading: providing background on the history of art and culture in the Western world leading up to the modern period

Paragraph 1: history is a continuum without divisions but historians use characteristics and changes to study distinct periods in history

(On Concept and Terms document: see ‘Styles & Movements in Art’ and ‘Context’)

Prehistoric: means before written history, cave paintings, sculpture and architecture were made

Neolithic period: cities and civilizations developed with farming, no longer only nomadic populations

Ancient Civilizations: Locations: Near East; ancient Egypt, Greece; Etruscans and Roman Empire (If you don’t know where on a map these places are, look them up. The information is meaningless without understanding this.)

*Ancient Greece* – understanding of the world structured around the application of reason; naturalistic representations of humans; birth of Western civilization – philosophy, math, theater, science, democracy and reason

Roman Empire – absorbed cultures (Egypt and especially Greek) and established vast empire across European continent, expert engineering (will contribute to architecture)

Beginning of Christianity: during this time, birth of Jesus in Israel (designation of time changes from BCE to CE or AD; Christianity legalized by Roman emperor Constantine in 312 CE or AD)

Middle Ages: thousand years marked by economic and political turmoil in Western Europe (eventually leading to establishment of modern European countries) and Christianity under the Pope emerges as dominant in Western Europe; simultaneous establishment of Eastern capital in present day Istanbul, Turkey, leading to Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Church in the East

Birth of Islam: foundation of Islam with death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD; one of three great monotheistic religions (What does monotheistic mean? Look it up. What are the other two?); Islam spreads from Southern Spain across North Africa and Near East; leading developments in science, math, astronomy and learning, translating and preserving ancient Greek

(Look at the map in the text. Why is the geographic location of Constantinople, now Istanbul in Turkey, still significant today, just as it was in the Middle Ages?)

Middle Ages referred to as the *Dark Ages* in Western culture because of perceived decline in human achievement between the period of the ancient Greeks and Romans until the beginning of the Renaissance

Feudalism: Medieval Society – rigid social stratification/no social mobility; kings and nobles were landowners, peasants and serfs worked this land in exchange for protection

Artworks during the Middle Ages largely focused on religion. Population largely illiterate; images could communicate religious ideas

Renaissance: French word meaning ‘rebirth’ of interest in ancient Greek and Roman learning, knowledge and art; Italy and Northern Europe were prosperous centers with distinct characteristics in art

Humanism – renewed value on human reason and verifiable knowledge of the world over solely religious doctrine

Printing Press – major milestone in human achievement; 15th Century invented in Germany by Gutenberg, literacy rates increase

The Protestant Reformation (Martin Luther): challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church, which had become increasingly corrupt; aided by an increasingly literate populace and the printing press; rise of the autonomy of the individual – a principle that continues to structure society

Science and quantifiable knowledge proliferated over religious doctrine; developments in astronomy and science changed understanding of man’s relationship to the larger cosmos

Early Modern: modern society owes much to the developments of the 17th and 18th centuries;

Baroque style (17th Century – 1600-1699) – European nations under monarchies and establishment of European countries France, Spain and Germany; period of colonization – Western exploitation of non-Western populations in Africa, Central America, including beginning of slave trade and forced religious conversions

18th Century (1700-1799) – the Age of Enlightenment – continuation of the principles of Humanism and individualism; philosophers and thinkers including Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot elevated the necessity of individual reason and choice over following religious doctrine; in art, styles include Rococo and Neoclassical

American and French Revolution: emergence of the autonomy of the individual and the unified efforts of the lower or working classes from under the control of monarchies and the aristocracy; ongoing reform movements, including the universal right to vote, occur in 19th and 20th Centuries

Modern Period (after c. 1800):

19th Century: capitalism becomes dominant economic system in Western society; production of goods made by laborers and working classes, means of production owned by individuals with capital; foundation of labor unions; steam-power and industrialization begin to replace skilled artisans; Industrial Revolution leads to growth of cities and urban centers (London, Paris, New York) where there is large pool of unskilled labor to work in factories

20th Century: violent century – two World Wars, Cold War, several Totalitarian regimes and dictatorships, abolishment of colonization involving brutal wars;

in art, in the Middle Ages, artists served the Church and in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, artists served the king or the monarchy or wealthy patrons, in 20th Century, art becomes a part of the capitalist market system and with the rise of individuality, art also becomes a potent form of individual or social expression; in the modern period, because the force of change and the pace of events is so rapid, art styles change as rapidly to reflect larger social, cultural and individual changes

Contemporary Culture: definition of a modern artist is one who is insightful about their particular time in society.

(Given this, what issues and ideas would an artist today be preoccupied with in their artwork? Think about this question. You will use it for the next reading.)