



OCTOBER 2013

## A Face in Light and Shadow

Rembrandt van Rijn | *Titus, the Artist's Son*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and study the effects  
of light and shadow  
in portraits through-  
out the galleries.

Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606-1669).  
Detail, *Titus, the Artist's Son*. 1660. Oil on  
canvas. 32 x 27 inches. The Baltimore Museum  
of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection,  
BMA 1938.206

Meet Rembrandt's son Titus, a likable-looking fellow, nineteen years old. Titus appears utterly relaxed as he poses in his black velvet beret. Slumping comfortably into his armchair, he leans on his elbow and supports his chin with his hand as his father captures his image on canvas. Rembrandt was very fond of his son and made many portraits of him as a boy and as a young adult. On this occasion, Titus wears a plain brown jacket that all but disappears into the dark background. It is his illuminated face that captures our attention.

Set off by the lively contour of his beret, the rusty red of his sleeve, and the spark of a white collar behind bumpy knuckles, Titus' spotlight face draws us in. This is not a spotlight that shines on all parts of his face evenly or equally. Rembrandt's light is highly selective as it plays ever so subtly over Titus' facial features. Bright light touches portions of his forehead, nose, cheeks, and chin while transparent shadows cast a veil over his eyes, lending a bit of mystery to the portrait. What might Titus be thinking? It is impossible to know, but his half smile suggests a certain satisfaction with whatever private thoughts or daydreams keep him occupied while posing for his father.

Rembrandt painted more than 400 portraits during his lifetime. Unlike other painters of his day who produced strictly realistic likenesses of their sitters, Rembrandt went much deeper, using his exceptional skill, power of observation, and mastery of light and shadow to hint at the inner life of those who appear to come alive on his canvases.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Trace the entire outline of Titus' hat, shoulders, and arms with your finger. Where does the outline stand out clearly against a lighter background? Where does the outline nearly disappear into the dark?

Do you see something odd about Titus' hand? Why would the artist paint two thumbs? Rembrandt must have painted out the first thumb after deciding that it was too high on Titus' chin. Over the years, the paint has become somewhat transparent, allowing us to see how Rembrandt changed his mind.

As an experiment, shine light on the face of a classmate, friend, or family member from different angles. Make a portrait based on your observations.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**



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