

# FUNNY FACES

TEACHING MANUAL: ETCHING WORKSHOP AND TOUR OF REMBRANDT HOUSE MUSEUM  
FOR HIGHER GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS



MUSEUM  
HET REMBRANDTHUIS

# FUNNY FACES

## *Facial expressions in Rembrandt's self-portrait etchings*

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# INTRODUCTION

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In this workshop pupils learn about Rembrandt's prints, especially his self-portrait etchings. They discover how Rembrandt used the reflection of his own face in a mirror to practise different facial expressions.

Then the children get to make a simple print of a face with a specific expression.

# PROGRAMME SUMMARY

## 1. IN CLASS

Pupils prepare for their visit to the Rembrandt House Museum under your direction at school. They each draw a picture which they get to cut into a plastic plate and print in a printing press. They are also shown around Rembrandt's former house in a guided tour.

### *Content – Subjects*

A school lesson is designed to handle key themes - Rembrandt, his work, his portraits and his self-portrait etchings - in preparation for your visit. This preparatory lesson provides pupils with the necessary information for the tour and the workshop. For the museum docents, it is important that this lesson is completed shortly before the school visit to enable pupils to get the best possible benefit from the tour and the workshop.

### *Content – Presentation*

To prepare content for this programme and the museum visit use the accompanying Power Point presentation and the information provided in this teaching manual. This ensures that pupils receive a proper introduction on the workshop theme: *Facial expressions in Rembrandt's self-portrait etchings*. The material provides an introductory narrative and a summary of the illustrations.

### *Practical – Art Assignment*

Pupils are asked to draw a picture in a 15 x 10 centimetre rectangle. Their subject is a face, whether their own face, or that of a friend. This will be used at the workshop on the day of your visit. So remember to bring the drawings when you come to the museum.

## 2. REMBRANDT HOUSE MUSEUM

### *Museum Visit*

The pupils visit the museum. They receive a tour of Rembrandt's house: a vivid impression of everyday life in the seventeenth century. Then, during the workshop they find out about the techniques involved in making a work of art. Sometimes the programme starts with a tour of the Rembrandt House, sometimes with a workshop: both elements are part of the programme.



# CONTEXT

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

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### *On Rembrandt's portraits and the portrayal of narrative*

#### *Golden Age*

In the seventeenth century, the young Dutch Republic was the scene of some remarkable achievements. For both the economy and in the arts this was a Golden Age. Burghers made fortunes through trade.

Foremost was the grain trade with the countries along the Baltic coast (Poland, Germany, Estonia and Latvia). In 1602, a group of traders founded a Dutch East India Company (VOC). Their ships sailed to distant lands in the Far East; voyages took months. They bought luxury products, such as coffee from Mocha (in Yemen), cinnamon from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), silk, tea and porcelain from China, silver from Japan, costly cloth from India, cloves from the Moluccas, pepper from Sumatra, and sugar from Formosa (Taiwan).

In Amsterdam, newly wealthy merchants had canals constructed, lined with magnificent houses, each mansion more impressive than the other. Their interiors were sumptuously decorated with art. Artists had more than enough work.

#### *Rembrandt as Portrait Painter*

Rembrandt (1606, Leiden - 1669, Amsterdam) was originally apprenticed to artist Jacob van Swanenburgh in his native Leiden before studying in Amsterdam under artist Pieter Lastman. Later, Rembrandt settled in Amsterdam, where he made his name as a portrait painter.

The city's wealthy burghers wanted portraits of themselves and their family. You could earn a good living as an artist. When commissioning a portrait, a patron had various choices: you could have a head-and-shoulders picture for around forty guilders, or a full-length head-to-toe picture for around a hundred guilders. That was a huge amount at a time when an ordinary working person might earn about 250 guilders a year.

Rembrandt also painted various group portraits. His most famous is *The Night Watch*, which shows a group of militiamen about to march out on patrol; each figure is busy doing something. Everyone portrayed in the picture paid Rembrandt around a hundred guilders.

#### *Rembrandt as Storyteller*

Like his teacher Lastman, what Rembrandt really wanted was to paint narrative scenes, so-called history paintings. These showed enthralling scenes from fascinating biblical stories, or intriguing subjects from wonderful classical myths. You had to be able to paint everything: landscapes, architecture, costumes and above all, you had to be able to convey emotions in the faces of the characters in your story.

#### *Rembrandt uses his own Face*

To learn what happens to a face when a person experiences a certain emotion, Rembrandt would examine his own face in a mirror. He would pull faces: happy, angry, sad or surprised and then study what happened to his eyes, mouth, eyebrows, cheeks and forehead. He sketched what he saw, and created a series of small etchings. This graphic technique was perfectly suited to the rendering of subtle lines in the face, and the light and shade which made expressions even more eloquent.

#### *Tronies*

While Rembrandt made all these self-portraits, he was not trying to make accurate pictures of himself. Like the many anonymous old men and women he depicted, he was really only trying to capture a particular facial expression. That it happened to be his own face was by the way. These expressive faces are known as 'tronies': common types. Rembrandt would sometimes pull a funny face in the mirror and then sketch a tronie of his own face.

# SLIDE PRESENTATION

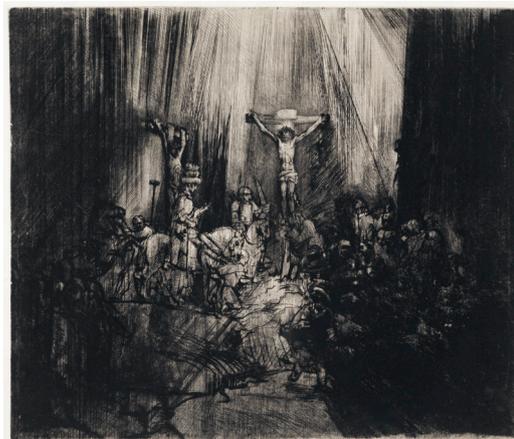


*Duration: c. 20 minutes*

The presentation features **12 slides**. An explanatory text accompanies each section. These texts can be used to explain key artistic concepts which are helpful when making expressive prints later.

## *Who was Rembrandt?*

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was born in Leiden on 15 July 1606, the son of a miller. He died in Amsterdam on 4 October 1669. His oeuvre includes drawings, etchings and paintings. He lived at the height of the Dutch Golden Age: in addition to a thriving economy, the young Republic was also home to a flourishing art scene. Among the many major and minor masters, Rembrandt was one of the best. Famous paintings by Rembrandt include: *The Night Watch*, *The Jewish Bride* and *The Syndics*. He exploited contrasts of light and shade to the full. Rather than embellishing the subjects he drew and painted, he showed them with all their faults, like real flesh-and-blood people. His paintings invariably depict a narrative, preferably a sensational episode from the Bible or from a classical legend. He also made numerous portraits and expressive self-portraits.





## Rembrandt scrutinised his own face



**Rembrandt, *Self-portrait looking surprised*, 1630, etching and drypoint, 5.1 x 4.6 cm  
Rembrandt House Museum**

This is Rembrandt in 1630. When he drew this portrait of himself he was 24. He was still living in Leiden, where he was born. It was not long after that he moved to Amsterdam where he was to become a famous artist. Rembrandt worked in different mediums: he painted and drew, and he made prints too. This small **etching** is just 5 by 4 centimetres.

Rembrandt created many portraits. This was long before photography. So if you wanted a portrait you needed to draw or paint or make an etching. This print shows Rembrandt himself. It is a **self-portrait**.

Rembrandt looks like he has suddenly seen or heard something unexpected. He looks surprised. His eyes are wide open, his eyebrows are raised high and his mouth is gaping slightly. This gives his face a certain **expression**.

Rembrandt practised portraying different facial expressions. How did he do that? He stood in front of a **mirror** and pulled funny faces: besides surprise, he also practised being happy or angry. He looked at what happened in his face when he expressed a certain emotion. Then he drew this. Later he turned the sketch into an etching.

Why did Rembrandt do that? Rembrandt wanted to be able to portray **stories**, from the **Bible** or from other books. If you could render a person's facial expression you could convey what that person was supposed to be feeling, whether it was a king from a biblical story or a hero in a classical myth. He started by practising drawing his own face.



## A lifelike portrait of a rich woman



**Rembrandt, *Portrait of Agatha Bas*, 1641, oil on canvas, 104 x 82 cm  
The Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace, London**

This is a portrait painting of Agatha Bas. She was the daughter of a burgomaster of Amsterdam and lived with her husband, a wealthy textile merchant, not far from Rembrandt's house. This was a commissioned portrait. Rembrandt looked closely at his subject when he painted this portrait, particularly at the complexion of her face (with its patches of red) and her hair, as well as her **clothes**. He painted her clothing so convincingly, it is almost as if you can feel the fabric. The soft velvet of the gown, the delicate lace collar and cuffs, and the magnificent goldthread of the bodice. She is also holding a fan, opened to reveal its splendid design. With her other hand, she is leaning against the side of the (painted) frame. As if she were about to step out of the painting.



## The Night Watch is a group portrait

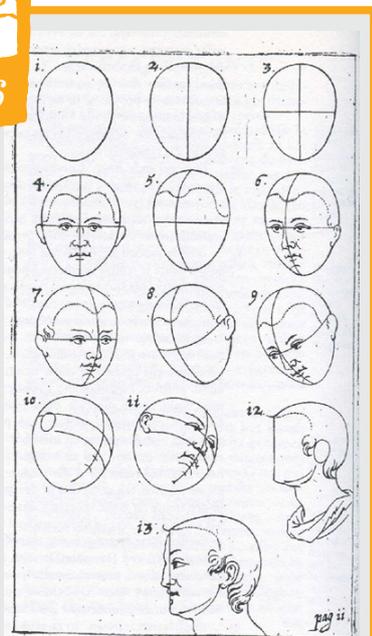


Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*, 1642  
Oil on canvas, 363 x 438 cm,  
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

This is *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt's best-known painting. Although parts were cut away along the edge in the eighteenth century, it remains a huge canvas measuring 3 by 4 metres. It is displayed in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. You might not think so at first, but this is also a portrait. It is a **group portrait**, a portrait of a group of people. They are civic guardsmen, part of the militia organised to defend the city from attack. At the front are the officers. Frans Banning Cock is one (in black with a red sash) and the other is Willem van Ruytenburgh (in yellow). They are standing in the light and you see them from head to toe. All the people behind are doing something: loading a musket, sounding a drum, holding up a flag or rushing past. At first, artists would paint groups in rigid poses in a neat line, like a football team. Rembrandt's idea of painting a portrait in which the subjects appear in different poses, in front, beside or behind each other, was a revolutionary innovation.



## Guidelines for drawing a head



Willem Goeree, *Diagrams with guidelines for drawing a head from: Inleydinge tot de Al-ghemeene Teycken-Konst*, Middelburg, 1668

If you want to draw a portrait, you need to know how to draw a face. Young artists have always found drawing a face in a realistic manner, with the eyes, the nose and the mouth exactly in the right place, a difficult technique to master. A long tradition exists of diagrams which artists use as a guide for drawing a face. This example is a page from an artist's manual from the time of Rembrandt.

You start with a simple egg shape (1). The sharp end of the egg is pointing down. That will later serve as the chin. To find the right position for the eyes and nose, begin by drawing a vertical line that divides the egg precisely into two halves, the left and right being exactly the same size (2). Then draw a horizontal line which is also exactly across the middle (3). These lines provide the position for the eyes, nose, mouth, chin and ears. The eyes are on the horizontal line. A helpful tip: the distance between the eyes is equal to the size of a single eye. Between the eyes and along the vertical line is the nose. Just below this is the mouth. The ears are at either end of the horizontal line (4). If you use this diagram, the result is a face which looks straight at you.

You can shift the egg-shape slightly to the right. Then you see the side of the head as well as the face. We call that a **three-quarter** pose (5 and 7). When the head is looking perfectly to one side, this is known as **en profil** (12 and 13).

## Rembrandt made etchings. What is an etching?



Rembrandt, *Portrait of a boy*, 1641  
Etching, 9.3 x 6.7 cm  
Rembrandt House Museum

Etching is a technique which is still used. It is a method of transferring a design onto a metal plate. When ink is applied, this collects in the grooves on the plate and can then be printed onto paper. The impression is known as an etching, or more simply, a print.

Rembrandt made around three hundred etchings. Many of these are no larger than 10 centimetres. Yet they are invariably full of detail, as is this portrait. To be able to draw as minutely and as precisely as this, Rembrandt needed extremely precise tools. He used a sharply-pointed metal burin to make his etchings. This tool is known as an **etching needle**. With this you scratch your drawing onto a metal surface, an **etching plate**. Actually, you draw into a ground layer of soft wax coated over the plate. Wherever you draw, you remove the protective wax. Then you dip the plate into an acid bath. The acid bites into the metal wherever it has been exposed by the needle, creating grooves, after which the remaining ground is washed away. When ink is smeared over the plate, it fills the grooves. Excess ink is wiped off with a cloth. When it is ready, the inked plate is placed in a printing **press** over a sheet of paper. This method allows you to make multiple impressions of the same picture.

You can also scratch directly into the metal plate with a needle. In the print, these lines are deep black and irregular, slightly fuzzy even. That is useful if you are drawing dark shadow. No acid is needed here. This technique is known as **dry-point**.



## What does laughing look like?



Rembrandt, *Self-portrait wearing a cap, grinning*, 1630, etching  
Rembrandt House Museum

In this etching by Rembrandt, he has portrayed himself at a slight angle, grinning. The eyes are smaller and the cheeks are rounded in a smiling face like this. Haarlem artist and art theorist Karel van Mander wrote a manual for artists in the early seventeenth century: *Schilder-Boeck*. In addition to descriptions of the lives of famous artists and instructions for depictions of historical scenes, he also included tips for young artists starting out on their career. He offers the following advice for those drawing a laughing face: a 'tronie'.

*"People are not wrong when they say that it is hard to distinguish a laughing from a weeping tronie. But if we look carefully then we notice that laughing makes the mouth and the cheeks wider and higher. The forehead is lower and in between the eyes are squeezed shut. Near the ears, the eyes have small folds (wrinkles). Weeping tronies are far less round. The cheeks are narrower and lower, as are the bottom lip and the corners of the mouth."*



Rembrandt, *Self-portrait, frowning*, 1630  
Etching, Rembrandt House Museum

## An angry face

Here Rembrandt depicted himself looking displeased. That is evident from the frown; the wrinkles between the eyebrows, you can also tell from the pursed lips.

Also evident in this etching is the shaded area on the left of the face.

The face is portrayed directly from the front, yet Rembrandt has made the pose more interesting by looking over his shoulder. The head is turned in relation to the body. So that it looks like he is about to walk away, but has turned to scowl angrily.



Rembrandt, *Self-portrait with Saskia*, 1636  
Etching, Rembrandt House Museum

## Rembrandt en Saskia

This is a portrait of two subjects, a **double portrait**. Rembrandt depicted himself and his wife Saskia in this etching in 1636. Rembrandt and Saskia, daughter of a Frisian burgomaster, were married two years before.

The brim of the big beret Rembrandt is wearing casts a shadow across his face. Shade also covers part of his left arm in the foreground. He rendered shadow by drawing parallel lines closely together to create **linear hatching**. When he wanted even darker shadow, he added perpendicular lines to create **crosshatching**.

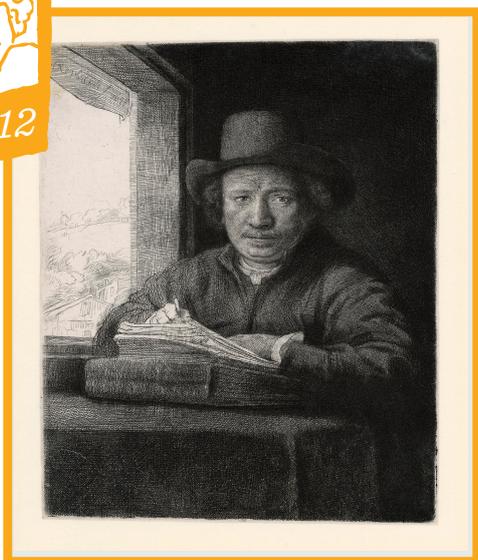


**Rembrandt, *Self-portrait with raised sabre*, 1634, etching and drypoint  
Rembrandt House Museum**

## *Rembrandt in fancy dress*

Rembrandt depicted himself in an exotic costume for this etching: he is wearing a feathered cap, a cloak with a thick collar, a necklace, while in his hand he is holding a weapon, apparently a sabre with a serrated blade.

Although he had a diverse collection of exotic objects at his disposal, Rembrandt probably drew the unusual clothes and attributes in this sketch from pure **fantasy**. Here he looks like a character in a work of fiction.



**Rembrandt, *Self-portrait sketching beside a window*, 1648, etching and drypoint, Rembrandt House Museum**

## *Rembrandt twice in reflection*

In this final self-portrait etching, Rembrandt portrayed himself in his everyday working clothes, he is even wearing his hat. He is drawing by the light that shines in through the window beside him.

Rembrandt looked into a mirror to draw his reflection when making these self-portraits. When you print the image on a plate onto paper, the impression produces a **mirror image**. Rembrandt's face is therefore **reflected** twice: first in the mirror that Rembrandt used while sketching, and then in the printing process. This is therefore what he actually looked like. The landscape visible through the window was actually added later by another artist. It is an imaginary view.

# CONCEPTS

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## Hatching

Parallel lines drawn closely together. This is to represent shadow, or areas of darkness.

## Biting

The effect of a corrosive acid. When an etching plate is dipped into an acid bath, the acid bites the exposed areas where the ground has been removed. There the acid eats away some of the metal: the actual etching process.

## Three-quarter view

Portraits can be made from different angles. When a subject is observed askance, from the front or back, it is a three-quarter view. You see three-quarters of the face.

## Drypoint

In contrast to etching technique, drypoint involves engraving directly into the plate with a sharp metal tool. In the print, the lines appear slightly fuzzy and irregular. That is due to the burr, the residue along the side of the groove that builds up when it is engraved. You can use this to create areas of deep black.

## Printing press

The apparatus in which ink is transferred from a composition, such as an etching plate, onto paper. There are many kinds of printing presses in different sizes. Rembrandt used a wooden press for his prints; today, artists use cast-iron or steel presses. Here the plate is pulled through two heavy cylinders. There is a big difference between a press on which a print such as an etching is made and a mechanical press like that on which newspapers are printed. With the first you make one impression at a time, re-inking the plate each time it is placed in the press and pressure is applied by turning the wheel. The second sends a long roll of paper through several cylinders, making hundreds of impressions at lightning speed.

## Double portrait

You can combine portraits of two subjects in one composition, both as accurate as possible. This is known as a double portrait.

## Etching

To create an etching, incised lines are bitten into a metal plate in an acid bath. The first requirement is a metal plate. Iron was used for the first etchings; in Rembrandt's day artists preferred copper, while today zinc is also used. The plate has to be polished smooth and the edge neatly filed down. Then it is covered with an etching ground: a soft mix of wax, resin and asphalt over the entire plate. You can then draw a composition onto the ground with a sharp metal needle. Wherever you draw lines, you scratch away the ground to reveal the shiny metal underneath. When the plate is ready, it is immersed in a bath of corrosive acid. In Rembrandt's day this was a compound of vinegar, ammonium salt, kitchen salt and copper salt. Today, a diluted saltpetre acid is preferred, or ferric chloride. While the ground protects the metal from the mordant compound, the acid bites into the metal wherever it has been exposed, i.e. where the lines are drawn. The longer the plate is dipped into the acid, the deeper the grooves in the plate. Once the whole composition has been sufficiently etched, you can take the plate out of the bath. Then the ground is removed from the plate. When the plate is completely clean, you can apply thick printing ink to the surface. Then you remove this by wiping the plate carefully with a cloth or the palm of your hand, until only the ink in the grooves remains. At this stage, the plate can be placed on a sheet of paper in a press. When it is drawn through the press, the ink transfers under its weight from the grooves to the paper.

### Group portrait

Instead of portraying just one person, you can also depict a group of people. While these days you simply take a photo, in Rembrandt's time groups of people would commission a portrait painting. Since this could take a long time, artists would invite the various individuals to come and pose separately before combining them in a large composition later.

### En profil

When you portray a subject from the side it is known as a profile: or to use the French term, 'en profil'. You actually see only half the face. The contour of the nose, the mouth and the chin are clear to see.

### Crosshatching

A pattern of parallel lines combined with perpendicular similarly parallel lines.

### Print

A print is a general term for the product of a printing technique. This may range from a linocut (made with a piece of lino), or it may be a woodcut, an etching, an engraving cut with a drypoint needle, or a lithograph (made with stone).

### Shadow

There are different types of shadow: for example, there is form shadow and cast shadow. When a candle shines onto a boy's face, one side is lit by the light while the other remains shaded. That shaded area is what is known as form shadow.

Cast shadow is the dark shaded area on an object, ground or background caused by the interruption of a light source. For example, the sketchbook in which a boy is drawing casts a shadow on the table. A candle creates a sharper shadow than the sun because of their relative distance from the object. The higher the light source, like the sun at midday, the shorter the shadow, compared to when the light source is low.

### Reflection

When making a print, an artist has to remember that the impression on the paper is the reverse of the image on the plate. So whatever is on the left in the drawing, is on the right in the print, and vice versa. This did not always bother Rembrandt. He would sign his name normally on the plate, from left to right. In the print, the handwriting is a mirror-image.

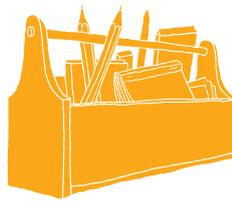
### Tronie

A tronie is not a portrait. In the seventeenth century, paintings and prints of figures which were not intended to represent a particular person came into vogue; they were interesting because they appeared exotic, or expressive and emotional. So for example Rembrandt made numerous drawings and etchings of old men and women with wrinkled, character-filled faces often wearing oriental clothes. Rembrandt also made portraits of himself pulling a particular face or dressed in exotic garments.

### Self-portrait

A portrait of yourself is known as a self-portrait. You can make that in several ways. For example, by imagining how others see you and trying and depict yourself as nicely and attractively as possible. Or you can look at your own face honestly and include everything you see in your portrait: spots, wrinkles, crooked nose and all.

# ART ASSIGNMENT



*Explain the assignment.*

*Draw a (self) portrait.*

Like Rembrandt, pupils draw a face full of expression. It may be a self-portrait, or it may be a portrait of someone else, a classmate, for example. As long as the picture shows someone who is clearly happy, or sad, or emotional. Go ahead and exaggerate! Those who want to portray themselves can use a mirror. Pupils should select a position: full-face, three-quarters or profile. They can use their fantasy too, inventing unusual clothes or an imaginary landscape in the background.

## *Requirements*

— paper, with space to draw measuring 15 x 10 cm

— HB pencils

— rubber

— if needed: mirrors

Bring the drawings on your Rembrandt House Museum visit. They form the basis for the print which will be made later.

**Remember to bring the drawings made at school on your Rembrandt House Museum visit!**

# MUSEUM VISIT

*duration of programme: around two hours.*

## Sections:

### *tour*

The pupils are shown around the rooms of the old house. Taking the spiral staircase, the pupils explore the various floors. The modern museum wing is accessible via the second floor. Here the tour includes the Rembrandt prints which are on display.

### *workshop*

The workshop is held in a workshop space near the museum. There the pupils make their own print. They cut the lines of the drawing they made at school onto a transparent plastic plate (15 x 10 centimetres). Then they print the composition onto a damp piece of paper.

For practical reasons, we divide classes of 15 pupils or more into two groups. It would be helpful if you could divide your class in advance.

It is advisable to warn pupils to wear clothes which they can get dirty. In the workshop they will be wearing an apron, but some will probably get ink on their clothes! In case that happens, we use water-based ink.

At the end of the visit the prints are given to the teacher to take back.

# HOUSE RULES

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**Supervisors are responsible for the conduct of their pupils throughout the school visit.**

Coats and bags must be deposited in the cloakroom, in the locked luggage storage. Valuables may be placed in lockers. Pupils are only allowed to use pencils for drawing.

If you guide your pupils without a museum docent and the museum is busy please try to spend no more than ten minutes in each room.

If your visit is unable to proceed, please let us know at least five weekdays in advance in writing, by fax or e-mail (c/o the Education department). Unfortunately, if you fail to inform us on time we will nevertheless have to charge you 75 euro for the cancelled programme.

Please ask your pupils to respect the following rules:

- 1.** Stand away from the paintings, and if your assignments require you to use a pencil, be careful (don't point).
- 2.** No food or drink may be consumed in the museum.
- 3.** Do not touch the objects displayed in the house or sit on the chairs.
- 4.** The spiral staircase goes up; the stairs going down are in the new building.
- 5.** Please respect that other visitors prefer quiet.

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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For information about school programmes:

Check out our website [www.rembrandthuis.nl](http://www.rembrandthuis.nl) under 'Education'

Or: call our Department of Education and Visitor Engagement

Phone +31 (0)20 5200400

Or: e-mail [educatie@rembrandthuis.nl](mailto:educatie@rembrandthuis.nl)

## *Maximum group size*

30 pupils. Groups of more than 15 pupils are divided in two.

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