

Adapted from BBC News

Does Mona Lisa have a hidden personality? (BBC News)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV1MJA7yILo>

PREPARING FOR THE DISCUSSION

1. A transcript of the video.

Her smile and air of mystery have gripped our imaginations for more than 500 years but could Mona Lisa finally be giving up some of her secrets? Scientist Pascal Cotte was given rare access to the painting at the Louvre museum in Paris over a decade ago. Since capturing images of her, he's been scrutinising these using technology he's pioneered. The painting has been analysed by a multi-lens camera under intense light

'We can now analyse what happened exactly inside the layer of paint and we can peel like an onion all the layers of paint.'

He claims he's discovered an earlier portrait underneath the surface and working from his scans of the painting he was able to create this reconstruction of what he thinks that version of the Mona Lisa looks like.

'Side by side with the portrait of Mona Lisa today, for me, it is evident this is not the same woman.'

Take a look at the painting we all know. She's staring straight at you with that enigmatic smile. But, in the newly discovered image underneath, instead of that direct gaze, she's looking off to the side and there's no trace of that famous smile. There's always been a debate about the Mona Lisa's identity though, over the centuries, it's been widely believed that she's Lisa Gherardini, wife of a Florentine silk merchant. But how likely is it that she's actually a different woman? Art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon has been studying historical documents together with this latest scientific research.

'I think the new discoveries are like a huge stone thrown into the still waters of art history. They disturb everything that we thought we knew about the Mona Lisa. There will probably be some reluctance on the part of the authorities at the Louvre to think about changing the title of the painting because that's what we're talking about. It's goodbye Mona Lisa. She is somebody else.'

The Louvre has declined to comment and the findings are dividing opinion. Leonardo constantly reworked his paintings but not everyone's convinced by the findings suggesting another portrait underneath.

'They're ingenious in showing what Leonardo may have been thinking about the idea that there is that picture, as it were, hiding underneath the surface, is untenable. There is no doubt that it is Lisa.'

More than nine million people flock to see the Mona Lisa every year imagining the story behind her smile and, after 500 years, it seems she's still keeping everyone guessing.

2. Examples of questions:

a. The Mona Lisa is arguably the most famous portrait ever painted. Do you think its fame is justified? Explain your answer.

b. If you had to choose a work of art to decorate your home, what kind of art would you choose? Explain your choice.

3. Examples of answers:

a. No, I do not think its fame is justified. There are many other painters that could have the same fame as Leonardo but researchers have been too focused on the Mona Lisa painting that they can hardly see the mystery or beauty hidden in other paintings.

b. I would choose *Cafe Terrace at Night* and *The Starry Night over the Rhone* of Vincent Van Gogh because they have beautiful landscapes and combination of colors. Also the painting lets the observer draw his own interpretations about what is happening in the scene.