

Barbara Hepworth

Square with Two Circles (Monolith)

Teacher's Introduction

About This Resource

This classroom resource is designed to connect secondary students with primary source texts that offer opportunities for critical thinking and interdisciplinary connections with works in the Nasher collection. Students should follow the directions step by step. **The information on this page is provided to offer teachers a broader context to guide student discussion.**

Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)

Squares with Two Circles (Monolith) was created by Barbara Hepworth in 1963 and cast into bronze in 1964. Hepworth drew inspiration from the landscape of England and Neolithic stone monuments. The sculpture is an upright slab composed of three rectangles. Two circles are incised within the two largest rectangles, creating portholes that the viewer can look through to see the surrounding landscape.

Hepworth began, as she described it, "piercing the form" in the 1930s. Including negative space was a revelation both to her artistic practice and within modern sculpture. The green patina of the sculpture further connects the work to nature. Patsy and Raymond Nasher purchased this work in 1968; it was one of the earliest additions to their collection.

Barbara Hepworth

Barbara Hepworth was an influential, British abstract sculptor who was born in 1903. She worked for five decades, creating over 500 sculptures. She was born in Yorkshire, lived in London before the start of the second World War, and spent 30 years in her Trewyn Studio in St. Ives, Cornwall near the sea. She was fascinated by natural materials and humans' sense of touch. She often created and imagined her sculptures outdoors within the natural landscape.

Further Reading and Viewing

Barbara Hepworth: A Pictorial Autobiography, Barbara Hepworth, Praeger, 1970.

Barbara Hepworth: Writings and Conversations, Sophie Bowness (Ed.), Tate Publishing, 2016.

Inside the Hepworth Studios, Tate, 2020. (Available on [Youtube](#))

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

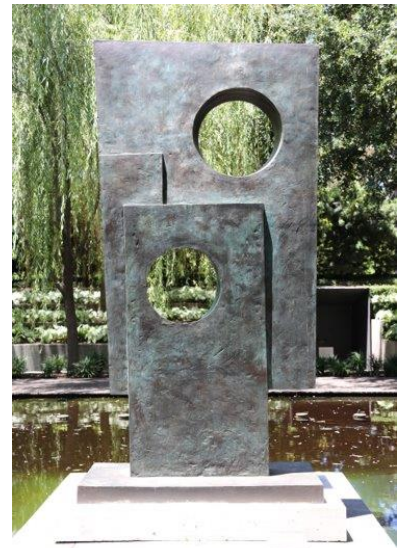
Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Heritage, Critical Evaluation | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (3) and (4)

English: Reading Comprehension of Literary Nonfiction | §110.31. English I (b) (6)

Learn More at the Nasher

You can learn more about *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)* and see what's currently on view by visiting the "Art" section of the Nasher website. Discover more resources and lessons in the "Read & Watch" section or book a guided or self-guided tour in the "Visit" section.

www.nashersculpturecenter.org



Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*, 1963 (cast 1964), Bronze, 124 x 65 x 30 in. (315 x 165.1 x 76.2 cm.)

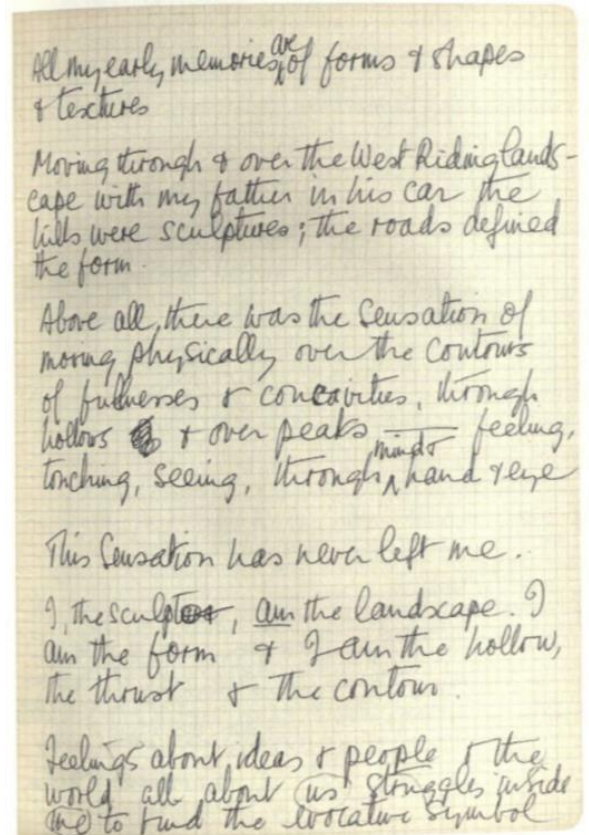
Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*

Read

Artist Barbara Hepworth looked to the natural world for inspiration. As a child, she was fascinated by the landscape of Yorkshire in the north of England. As an adult, she was inspired by St. Ives, Cornwall in the south of England on the sea, where her Trewyn Studio was located.



Photograph of Yorkshire by Lee Sheldrake, Commissioned by Barbara Hepworth in October 1964



Hepworth's hand-written notes for a 1961 documentary film.

Read the following excerpt from the film *Barbara Hepworth*, directed by John Read.

Remembering the Yorkshire Landscape

All my early memories are of forms and shapes and textures. I remember moving through the landscape with my father in his car, and the hills were sculptures. The roads defined the forms. There was a sensation of moving physically over the fullness of a moor and through the hollows and slopes of peaks and dales, feeling, seeing, touching through the mind, the eye and the hand... the touch and texture of things... sculpture, rock, myself and the landscape. This sensation has never left me. I, the sculptor, am the landscape.

Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*

Sketch

Barbara Hepworth recalls being inspired by the British landscape outside the car window as she drove with her father. Some of Hepworth's sculptures include openings, like windows, that allow us to see the landscape behind them.

What types of things stood out to you when you looked out the car window as a child?

Sketch the shapes of those objects or places from memory:



Squares with Two Circles (Monolith) in the Nasher Sculpture Center Garden.

Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*

Read and Discuss

Hepworth loved to work with her hands. She disliked power tools and only used them to create the initial hole in a sculpture that she would finish with hand carving.

Use of Hand Tools

I have always loved the joy of carving and the rhythm of movement that grows in the sculpture itself, just as I like dancing or skating. I like the relaxation of sound and movement. When I am carving or when I am listening to someone else carving, I know what is happening not by what I see but what I hear. The tools a sculptor uses become his friends, they become intensely personal to one, the most precious extensions of one's sight and touch. The right hand is the motor in carving, and the left hand is the thinking, feeling hand... Feeling the use of the gouge, the chisel, the adze, the point. all these tools have their special uses, and the left hand senses the organic structure of the material as it feels its way about the form.

Excerpt from the film *Barbara Hepworth*, directed by John Read

Answer these questions with a partner:

What activities does Hepworth compare carving to?

What senses does Hepworth engage as she carves?

How does Hepworth describe her relationship with her tools?

Looking at the photo of her tools, how do you imagine she moves her body as she uses them?

What tools do you prefer to use when making art?



Assorted tools from Hepworth's Trewyn Studio in St Ives.
Photo: Barbara Hepworth Museum, St Ives

Squares with Two Circles (Monolith) was sculpted in plaster, which Hepworth then had cast into bronze. With her early works, she carved directly into stone or wood. When she started working with plaster and bronze casting, she was able to make works that were larger in scale and had more extreme forms because she was using a flexible material.

"It took nearly thirty years to reach the point where I felt free to work in metal. I am basically and primarily a carver and the properties of stone and wood and marble have obsessed me all my life."

– Barbara Hepworth

Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*

Read and Reflect

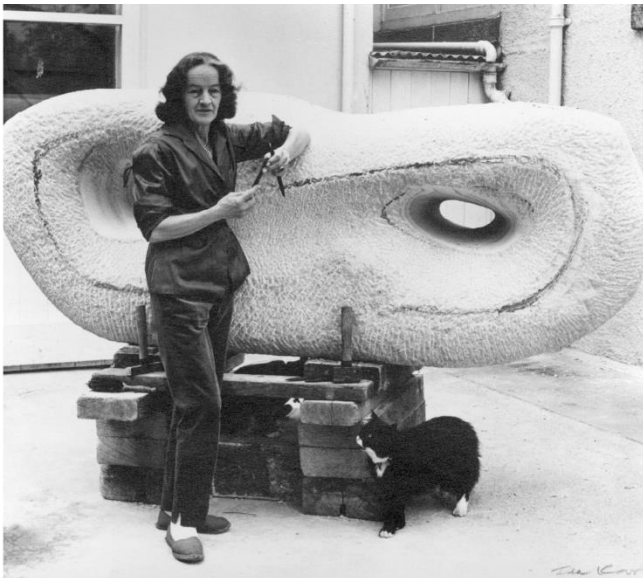
Review the definition of a monolith.

Definition of "monolith," Merriam Webster

- 1: a single great stone often in the form of an obelisk or column
- 2: a massive structure
- 3: an organized whole that acts as a single unified powerful or influential force

How does this definition connect to Barbara Hepworth's sculpture? Why do you think she chose this word to be part of the work's title?

Hepworth's work was compared to ancient stone monuments found in Cornwall, even before she lived there. After moving to Cornwall, these monuments became even more important to her identity as an artist.



Barbara Hepworth with her cat Nicholas and her sculpture 'Reclining Form (Rosewall)', Ida Kar, 1961, National Portrait Gallery



Trethevy Quoit, A burial chamber from the late Neolithic period, c. 3500 BC, Cornwall, Photo: Megalithic Portal

Barbara Hepworth, *Squares with Two Circles (Monolith)*

Research

Hepworth was inspired at the age of seven when her headmistress gave a school lecture about the sculpture of ancient Egypt. Hepworth's sculptures have also been linked to Neolithic stone monuments in her native country of England.

Research and find an ancient sculpture that was made in 500 CE or earlier (at least 1,500 years old). Answer the following questions:

When and where was it created?

Describe the culture or person that created it.

Why was it made?

Create

"I prefer my work to be shown outside. I think sculpture grows in the open light and with the movement of the sun its aspect is always changing; and with space and sky above, it can expand and breathe."
—Barbara Hepworth

Hepworth believed that the landscape surrounding a sculpture was just as important as the sculpture itself.

On a piece of paper, sketch the ancient sculpture you researched. Cut out your drawing.

Imagine, if you could place this sculpture in any setting, what would it be? The setting does not have to match the landscape where it was made. Be creative! Consider the weather, lighting, and scenery surrounding the sculpture.

On a thick piece of paper, layer collaged magazine images and use paint to depict your made-up landscape. Don't forget to include the sketch of your ancient sculpture. When finished, present your work to the class.

If you don't have collage or paint, sketch your ancient sculpture and imagined landscape.