

100. A PHILOSOPHER GIVING A LECTURE ON THE ORRERY. JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY. C. 1763–1765 C.E. OIL ON CANVAS.

JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY



FORM

- ▶ Oil on canvas
- ▶ Strong use of light and dark = CHIAROSCURO
- ▶ Seeing the effects of the light but not the source adds to the dramatic effect



FUNCTION

- ▶ Showcase the scientific advancements of the ENLIGHTENMENT, such as the orrery that is central in this painting
- ▶ Also meant to illustrate the general feeling of curiosity and thirst for rational knowledge of the ENLIGHTENMENT
- ▶ The work also shows that women and children were getting involved in the movement, as they are also surrounding the orrery



CONTEXT

- ▶ During the Enlightenment, and meant to showcase a moment that captures the discoveries and vibrant learning atmosphere of the era
- ▶ The Enlightenment was a philosophical shift into a more secular, scientific way of thought. It deviated from the traditional and religious models on life and the universe that had been practiced during the Middle Ages.
- ▶ Of course, scientists and inventors were essential to the Enlightenment; however, artists and writers were also important to spread Enlightenment ideas and inspire rational thinking
- ▶ Joseph Wright of Derby actually became the unofficial artist of the Enlightenment
- ▶ Lived all his life in Derby, England, and spent much time discussing and learning about science. Part of the Lunar Society of Birmingham



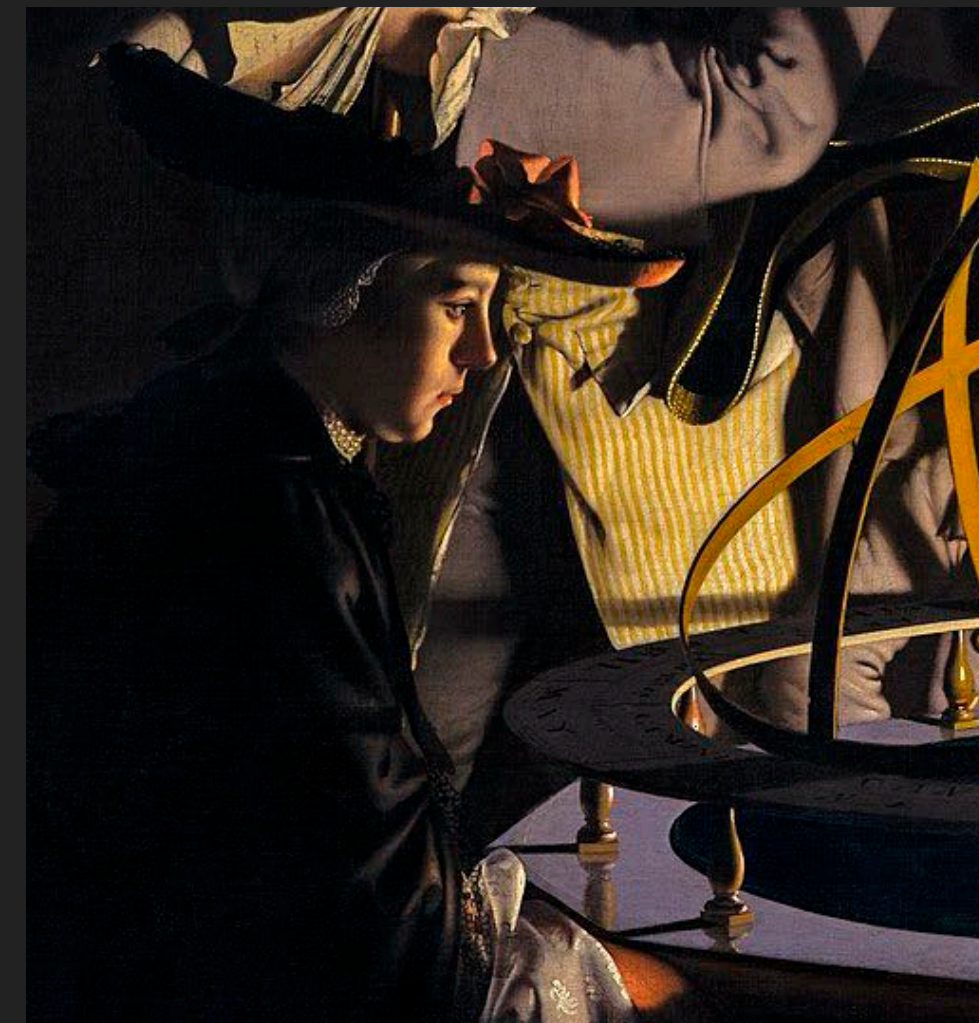
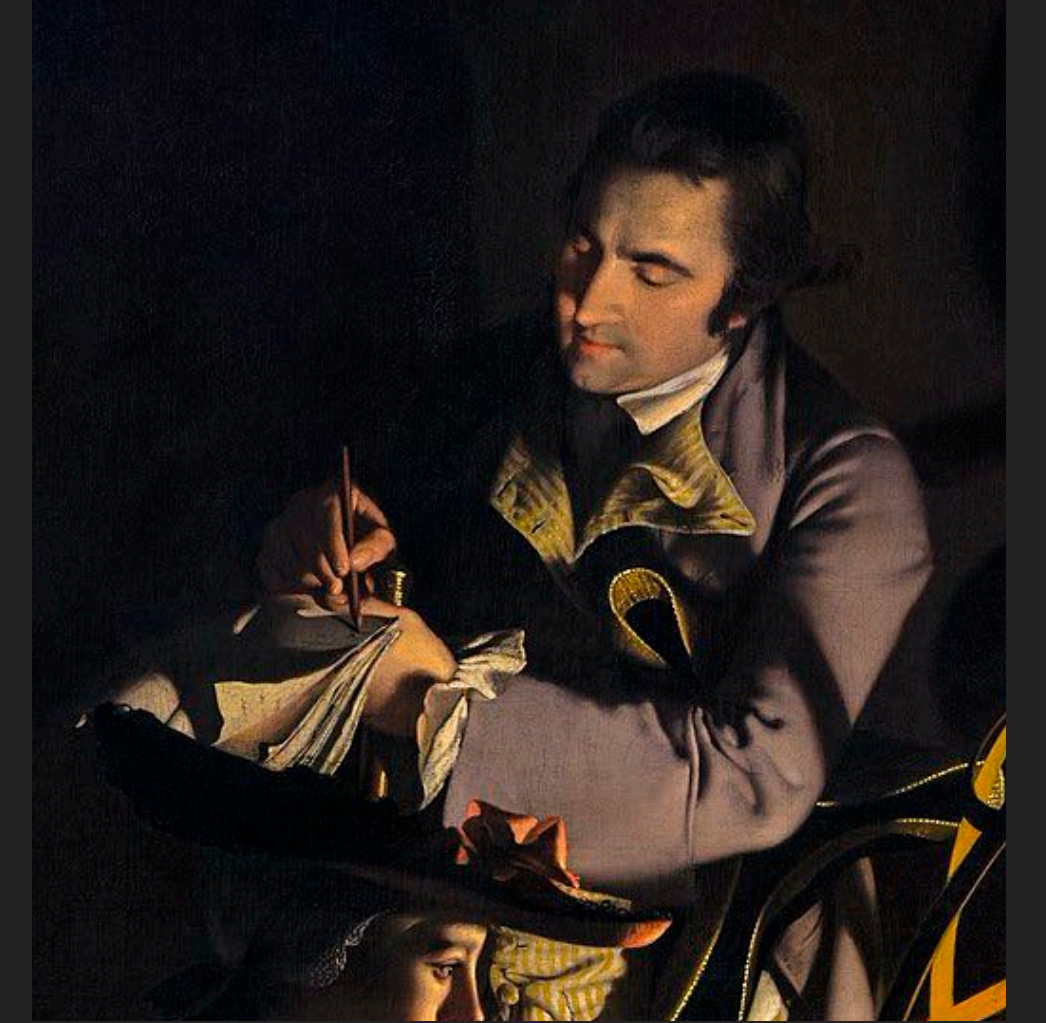
CONTENT

- ▶ Scientists, note-taker, and kids surrounding a central orrery. An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system, depicting the orbits and relative relationships of the planets and sun. The placement of the people around the orrery mimics the planets around the sun



CONTENT

- ▶ Each person depicted is meant to be a specific, real person, but we do not know who they are for certain. The philosopher in red that is giving the lecture is believed to be modeled after Isaac Newton, yet another theory states that it is in fact a member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham



CONTENT

- ▶ Strong internal light source representing the sun, also symbolizing the Enlightenment and the new search for reason and rational thinking.



CONTENT

- ▶ Painting also features women and children gathered around the orrery. This likely is meant to suggest that these groups were also being given these opportunities for rational learning and higher education



THEMES

- ▶ Nature - planets, sun
- ▶ Time - orbit, cycles
- ▶ How do we understand the world?
- ▶ Scale - large vs. miniscule
- ▶ Location - sense of place
- ▶ Technology



COMPARE WITH

- ▶ Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew*
- ▶ Chiaroscuro
- ▶ Here light symbolizes God not enlightenment
- ▶ Depicts a different type of conversion



COMPARE WITH

- ▶ Raphael's *School of Athens*
 - ▶ Also depicts learning, logic, philosophy, and science.

