

Proportions of the human body

lesson plan



National Curriculum: KS 2,3 & 4 Art

Sculptor Nina Grey made a number of sculptures of human figures which are quite realistic in the way that they are modelled. If you are looking to make a realistic figure drawing or even a sculpture what proportions should the figure be?

Learning Objectives

Through using this lesson plan students should:

- increase their proficiency in the handling of different materials.
- gain knowledge and understanding of the work and approaches of artists, craftspeople or designers from contemporary and/or historical contexts, periods, societies and cultures.
- learn to refine their ideas as work progresses through experimenting with media, materials, techniques and process.

Overview

This lesson can be used:

- to develop drawing skills and use of sketchbooks to develop ideas
- to gain an understanding of the proportions of the human body

Suggested Classroom Activity

Artist Nina Grey was born in Poland in 1907 and moved to Austria and then fled to London in 1939. In London she studied sculpture at Hornsey School of Art, and then St Martin's. At art college at that time there would have been regular life drawing classes for students to practice drawing the human figure. What are the proportions of the figure and has Nina Grey applied these rules to her figurative sculpture?



Africa sculpture, Nina Grey

At first sight this sculpture in plaster by Nina Grey looks elongated and the figure looks elegant, so are the proportions correct? All people are slightly different sizes and proportions but artists usually apply the rule that the head goes in to the body seven and a half times. The head is measured from crown to chin. Here you will see that far from being elongated Nina Grey's figure seems to use a rule of just seven times



Ballerina, Nina Grey

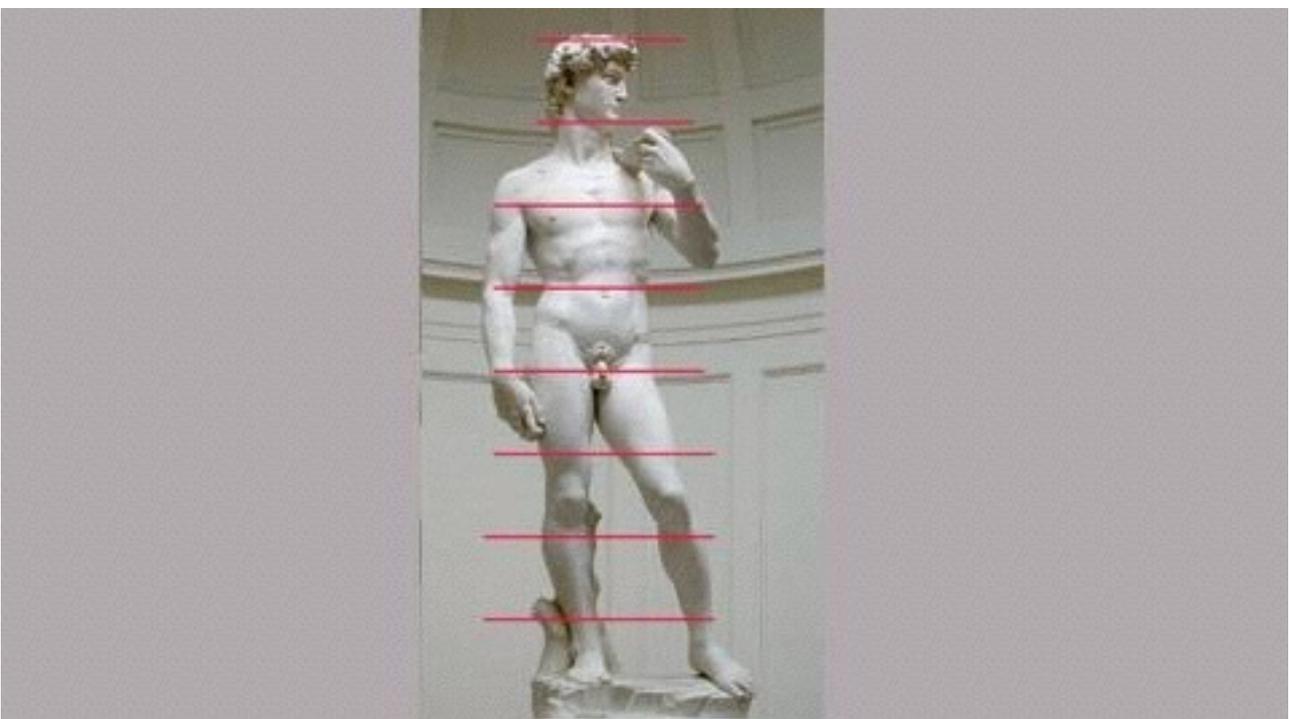
Another sculpture by Nina Grey and again made in plaster, this time of a Ballerina, but the proportions are very similar. Nina Grey seems to us to apply a rule of seven and yet again



she manages to make the figure look stylish and elegant. Here because the figure is on her toes the proportions are slightly harder to measure.

Michelangelo's David

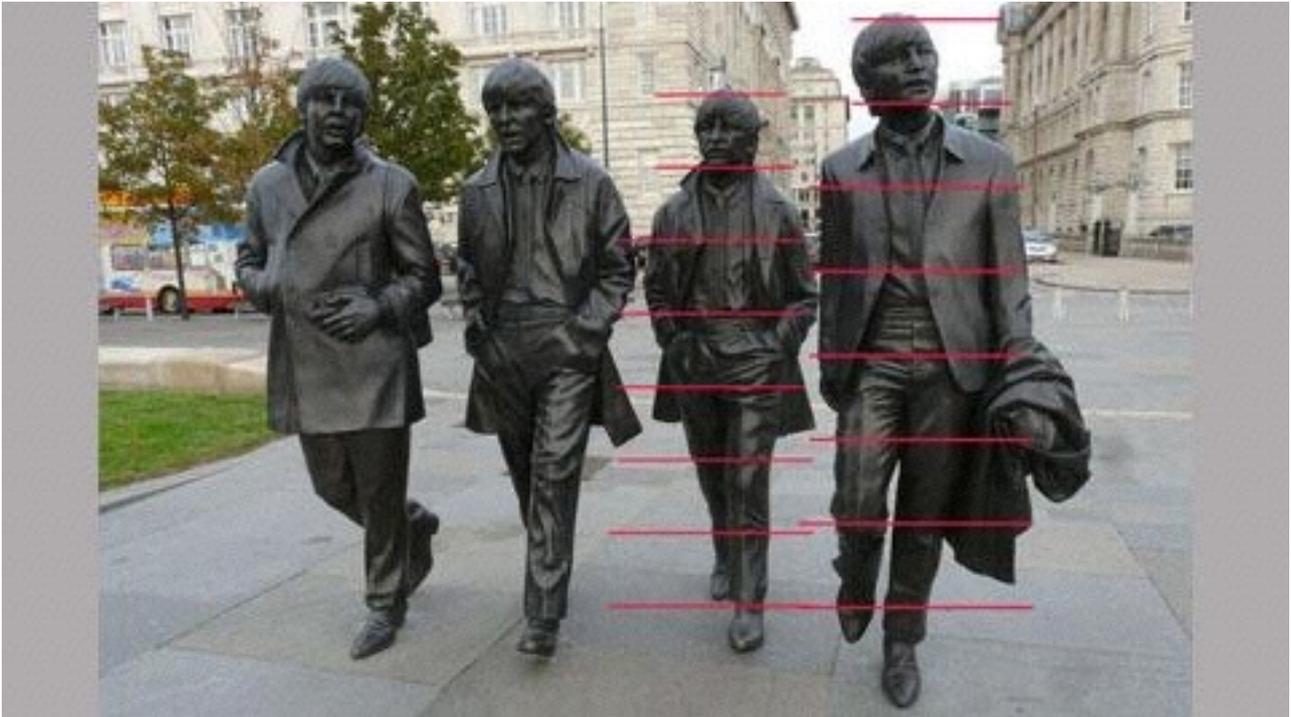
So how do the proportions in Nina Grey's work compare with other figurative sculptures? Some commentators have said that Michelangelo's David uses a rule of eight. From this photograph it is certainly close. Measuring from a photograph is always less accurate than standing in front of the sculpture itself. Michelangelo was aiming to produce a figure



of classical male human perfection. So should we follow Michelangelo and apply the rule of eight to our own drawings or sculpture?

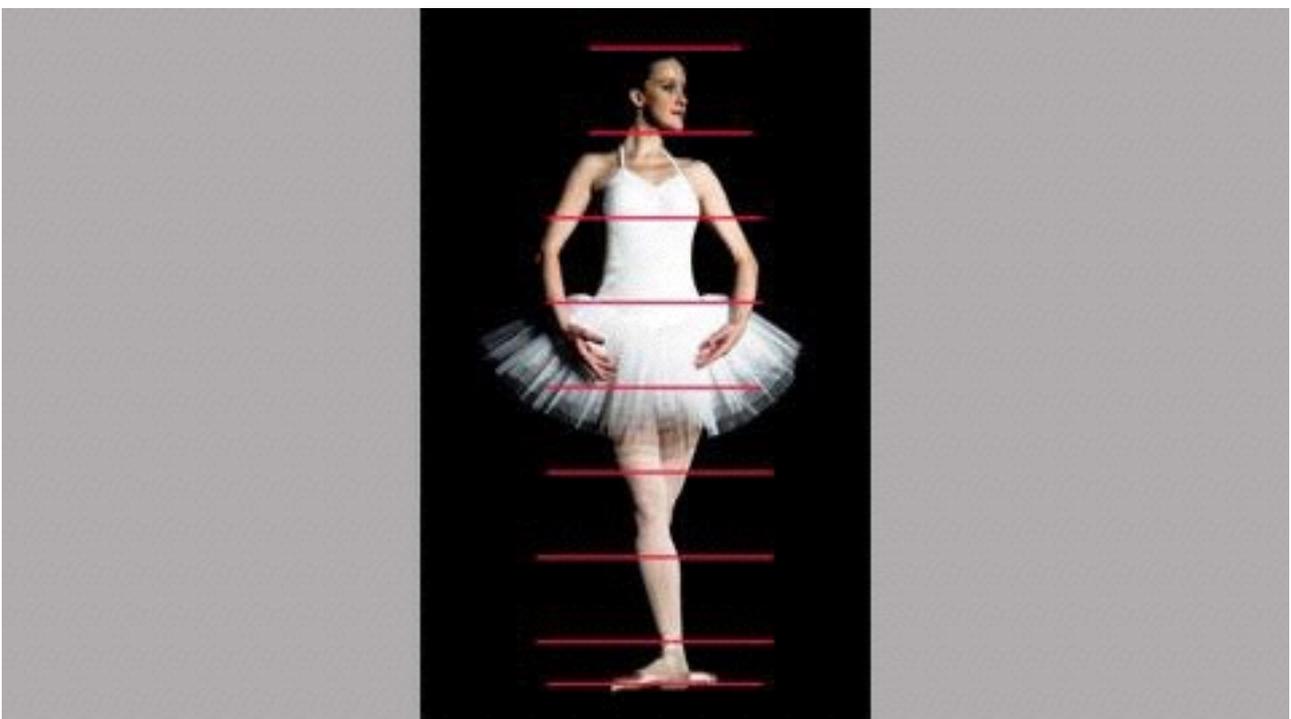
The Beatles, Andy Edwards

This contemporary sculpture of the Beatles by artist Andy Edwards was unveiled in 2015 in Liverpool. It is over life size but otherwise is a very realistic depiction of the famous four. By our measurements John is proportioned by the seven and a half times measure

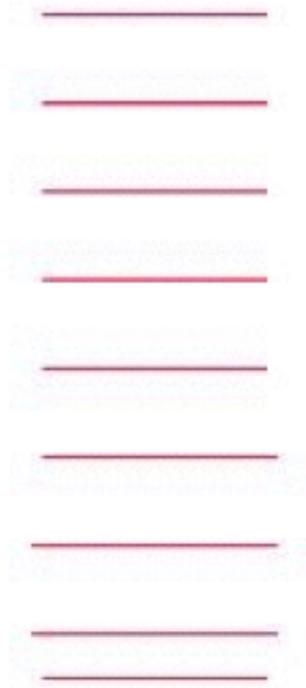


and for Ringo the head goes into the body seven times. Do not take our word for it, download the large image and measure yourself.

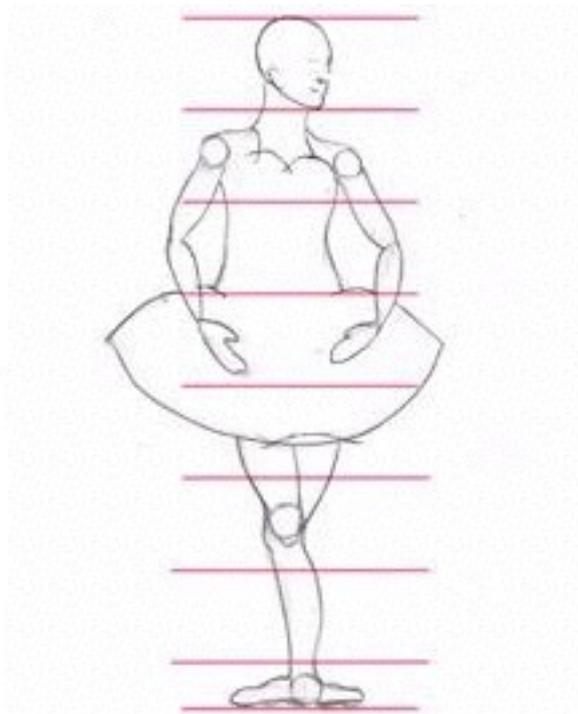
Test the rule yourself



Now get a friend, or your teacher, to stand upright a couple of metres in front of you (our image is of the dancer Faye Maughen). Holding a pencil put your arm out straight, close one eye and measure down the pencil with your thumb from the top of the head to the chin. Now see how many times that measurement goes into the body. With Faye it is seven and a half. Now make similar measurement marks on a sheet of paper and you are started on a figure drawing.



If you want to try the exercise another way. Download and print our seven and a half template sheet and start to draw rough shapes in the grid.



In a short space of time you should have something like this. Do not be afraid to rub lines out again and again until they are right with your life model. Only when you are happy with the rough proportions of your figure should you add details like fingers or eyes. If your figure looks too scruffy for you when you've got it about correct then simply trace the proportions onto a new sheet and continue.

Development Activity

CultureStreet has made a short Review film in which young people look at the figurative work of artist Nina Grey and compare her work to a female figurative sculpture by Joe Rose from the same collection. Find out what young people think about the two works, both of which are in the Ben Uri Collection, and then compare and contrast the two sculptures yourselves.

Elsewhere on CultureStreet we have an interactive activity called Figure it Out which reinforces the learning from this lesson plan. Be warned this activity only runs in flash so unfortunately may not run in all browsers. Figure it out

