Bernardo Strozzi (Italian, 1581-1644, active in Genoa and Venice),
*Act of Mercy: Giving Drink to the Thirsty*, 1620s. Oil on canvas,
52 1/4 x 74 5/8 in. Museum purchase, 1950. SN634

Space, in a work of art, refers to appearance of depth or three dimensions. It can also reference the artist’s use of space on the canvas.

In this painting, the artist used the space by placing four figures together at the front of the picture plane. The figures themselves occupy the positive space, defined as the main focus of an image. The area behind and in between the figures is undefined and dark. This dark space around the figures is called negative space, which is simply defined as the space that surrounds an object in an image.

In this work, the dark background contrasts sharply to the well-lit figures and their vividly colored attire. This distinction helps to draw attention to the figures and to make the work seem more dramatic.

As illustrated above, the figures in the featured painting occupy the positive space, while the black background surrounding them is the negative space.

STANDARDS:
VA.3.S.2.1
VA.68.S.2.1
VA.912.S.1.7

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On this page of the worksheet, we have removed the figures from the painting to leave only the NEGATIVE SPACE. We invite you to fill in the positive space (the white area) with figures, patterns, or images from your imagination!

DON'T HAVE A PRINTER AT HOME? Hold a blank piece of paper to the computer screen and lightly trace the outline of the figures. You can also experiment with positive and negative space by tracing figures from a storybook or a family photograph.
On this page of the worksheet, we have removed the black negative space from our painting to leave only the figures and objects in the POSITIVE SPACE. We invite you to fill in the negative space (the white area) with a background scene from your imagination!

DON’T HAVE A PRINTER AT HOME? Hold a blank piece of paper to the computer screen and lightly trace the outline of the figures. You can also experiment with positive and negative space by tracing figures from a storybook or a family photograph.