VISUAL ANALYSIS
This painting depicts serving trays of food consisting of fruit, seafood, and drinks that have been set out on a small table. The painting exhibits extraordinary detail that can only be appreciated with a close look at the minute brush strokes that construct this work. The artist uses a palette of muted, though colorful, tones: the two items that stand out the most are the pomegranate, as the inside is a bright red, and the zested lemon, as the rind has been painted a bright yellow-gold. The scene is balanced and logical in a way that adds to the appearance of reality, with a vertical line of symmetry, groupings of threes and four, and balancing different colors and textures throughout. The differing stages of consumption and aging of the food depicts the ephemeral nature of the material world and creates the illusion of time passing in a singular moment.

FUNCTION/FORM & STYLE
The concept of *vanitas* defined a painting that contrasts the ephemerality of...
Why would the issues of decadence, death, and material gain were subjects that the middle class felt the need to contemplate?

How does the subject of “decaying decadence” as seen through the aging fruit accurately encompass the idea of vanitas?

Additionally, a portrait that was a part of his oeuvre was quoted as having the highest value of any painting during this Golden Age, showing the overall importance, popularity, and quality of the work he produced.

**ARTIST BIOGRAPHY**
Jan Davidz. de Heem was born in Utrecht, a city in the Netherlands, in 1608. During his life, he also spent ten years in Leyden and thirty years in Antwerp, where he would eventually die in 1684. The botanical garden in the city of Leyden offered ample opportunity for de Heem to make studies of organic elements, as seen in *Still Life*. The most memorable works from this period were his vanitas still-lives, which were less somber than other contemporary pieces and had none of the complicated symbolic elements. The greater population, however, did not begin to take note of his career until he began work in Antwerp in 1636. The city was an international port of some renown, famous for exotic fruits imported from all over the world. These fruits were often featured in De Heem’s works, as exemplified in this painting. By 1667, he returned to his hometown of Utrecht, but political deterioration and a subsequent war with France drove him back to Antwerp in 1672, where he remained until his death.

**VOCABULARY**

**Oeuvre:** The works of a writer, painter, or the like, taken as a whole.

**Pronkstilleven:** Ornate or sumptuous still-lives meant to display wealth and decadence.

**Vanitas:** Type of painting concerned with the fragility of man and his world of desires and pleasures in the face of the inevitability and finality of death.
CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS: What kind of people do you think would have partaken in this meal? Do a “Mad Gab”: write down different adjectives that could describe those people, then pick out different verbs and adverbs that could describe their actions. Then, try to put the different lists of words into sentences. (Elementary School)

MATHEMATICS: Count how many different pieces of each fruit there are in this work. What if the number of cherries and the number of grapes were added together? The number of plums and the number of lemons? (Elementary School)

SCIENCE: What happens when plants and fruits get older? What is important to make sure that plants stay alive? Design an experiment to test for important factors in plant life—do they need sunshine? Water? Food?

Start a composting project to dispose of aging fruit. Why is composting important? What good things come from fruit that is decaying? What affect does the composted soil have on the growth of the plants in your experiment? (Elementary and Middle School)

Start a unit on the hormones that are in plants, perhaps in conjunction with a unit on the human endocrine system. What hormones control the aging of fruits? (High School)

SOCIAL STUDIES: Given the different limitations of the environment in 17th century Europe, who would have access to fruits like pomegranates and lemons? Learn about what requirements are needed to grow these foods, and look at their social aspects, such as economic concerns in farming, trading, and differentiations between the classes. (Middle and High School)