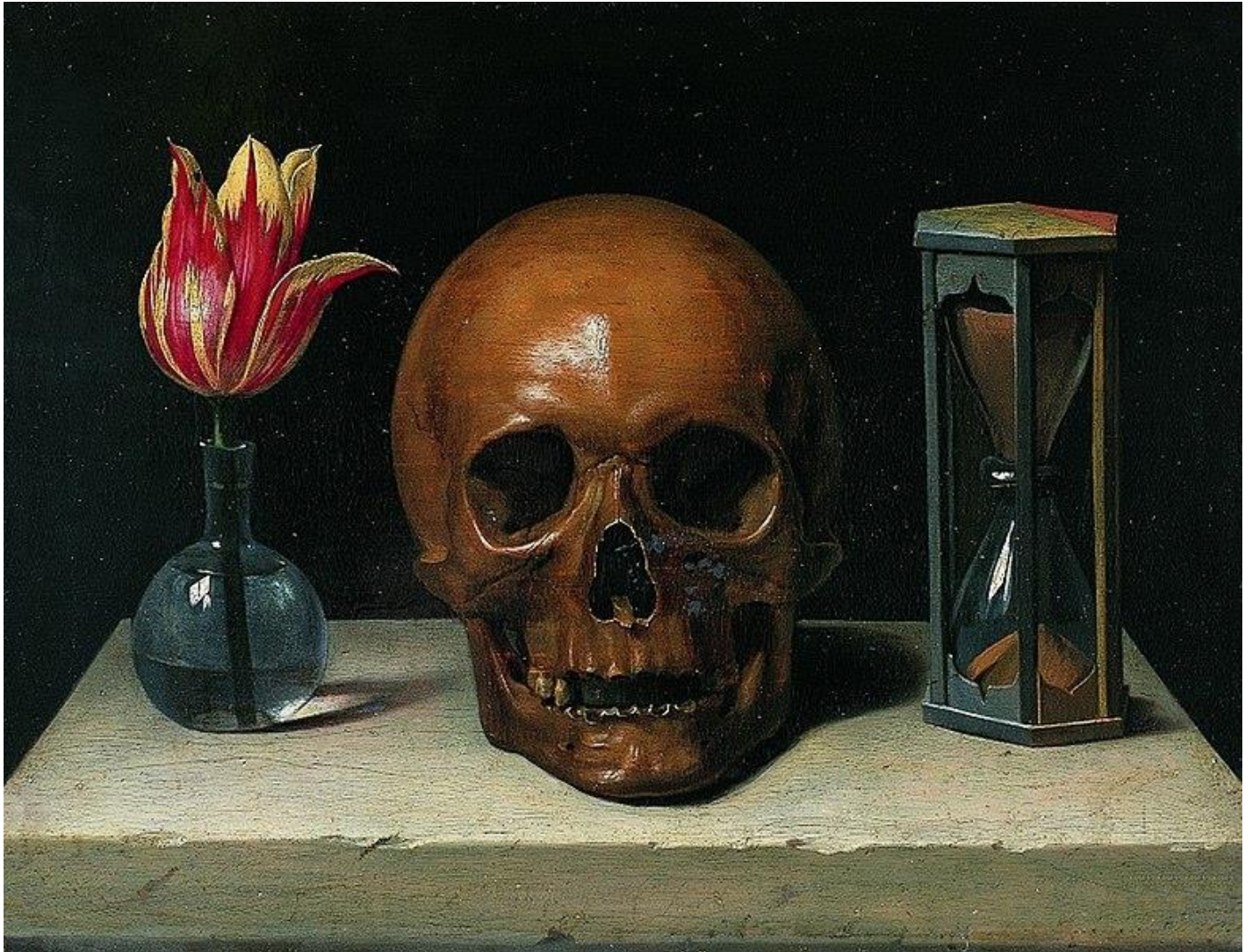


Philippe de Champaigne, *Still-Life with a Skull*, c. 1671



**\*\*First Question First\*\***

What is *your* immediate reaction to this artwork?

Trust it. Write about it. Use the guide sheet for help.

Continue reading for another perspective and journal questions.

## Philippe de Champaigne, *Still-Life with a Skull*, c. 1671

A skull. A recently snuffed candle, its smoke rising in ethereal spirals. An hourglass with sand half settled. Books with pages breezily turning. Flowers, butterflies. Time pieces. What was once is no longer. *Memento mori* have a long history in western art. These “reminder of death” paintings may be seen as macabre to our contemporary sensibilities. And this response may help to explain an added layer of suffering we may experience as we grieve.

We live in a death-denying culture. (Where have all the hearses gone?). Add to this youth-worshipping and the result is abhorrence and fear around anything associated with death; decay, sickness, aging. Think about this for a moment. Our culture resists the natural cycle. Life is born, grows, decays, dies. Every single one of us will experience death. Isn't it, then, a bit problematic to deny that which *is*? *Memento mori* remind us that we too shall pass. But, also, as my Dad once excitedly exclaimed, “This is it! This is it! Don't wait to be happy! This is it!”

Q.) Many of us feel like death is unnatural, or even a personal affront. So, on top of the searing pain of loss, our cultural denial of what is natural slaps us in the face.

How has your experience or inexperience around death affected your grieving? Is death “natural” to you?