

ArtWonders



PORTRAIT

Classroom Discussion and Activity Ideas

Portrait, Please!

Narrative: Portraits talk in a language of *pose, clothes, clues* and *mood*. Students look at historic portraits and learn to identify these aspects and then speculate on the personalities of the people portrayed. The suggested art activity allows students to understand that portraits are not just “snapshots” casually made, but carefully crafted images intended to communicate certain information about a person.

Discussion: Looking at the portraits in this web program, or others you have available, introduce *pose, clothes, clues* and *mood* as the language of portraits. Ask students about school or team pictures. What clothes do they wear? What do they hold in their hands (a soccer ball is one example)? Are they smiling? Using the language of *pose, clothes, clues* and *mood*, help students “listen” to a historic portrait talk. **What is the portrait telling us?**

POSE: Is the person standing or sitting? Is the person pointing or resting hands on nearby objects? (Add in notes on facial expressions if students note them.)
What does pose tell us about the person?

CLOTHES: Is the person wearing work clothes or play clothes? Are the clothes in fashion or old-fashioned? What do clothes tell us about the person?

CLUES: What does the person hold? What surrounds the person in the near and far distance? What do clues tell us about the person?

MOOD: What’s the weather? What time of day is it? How does mood reveal information about the person, or the person’s feelings?

Art Activity: Using the student worksheet, *Portrait, Please!*, students will “order” a portrait from either Mr. Peale or Mr. Van Dyck. This activity can be adapted for younger students by having the group “order” a portrait for an adult who works at school. Based on the information included in the “order,” take photos of students

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P O R T R A I T

Classroom Discussion and Activity Ideas (*continued*)

(or adult at school). Follow this up with a critique: Does the photo portrait match the “order?” What changes might be made to improve the portrait?

Other activities:

1

Produce a photo or drawing of each student’s head and shoulders. Xerox multiple copies of each image. Have students change the background to change the mood or meaning of the portrait.

2

Look at the dollar bill. Does the man look like the same one in Peale’s portrait? Why is the picture of our first president on the dollar bill? If you could design the dollar bill, whose face would you include? Why?

3

Collect images of U.S. presidents over the centuries. Compare them to Peale’s image of George Washington. How do the images stay the same? What changes? As a class, “order” a picture of our current president.

Connections to other subject areas:

Language Arts

Write a letter to Anne Kirke or George Washington. Ask them questions about their lives, referring to details in the portraits.

Math

Weigh clothes and compare what a typical outfit weighs today to what Mrs. Kirke’s dress weighed. Costume historians estimate her dress weighed as much as a modern wedding gown, around five pounds.

History

Learn about the British monarchy, emphasizing its long history and its survival into modern times. Who is the queen today? Does she employ a “dresser?” Learn about the Revolutionary War and the part played by George Washington.