

Portraits in Art

This lesson is intended for 3-5th grade but may be adapted for other age groups. It was designed for use with a selection of portraits. Portrait examples may come from teacher resources or the following Museums by Mail programs:

- *Mid-Century American Women at Work* (MBM 21)
 - *Portraits and their Artists* (MBM 31)
 - *Double Portraits* (MBM 32)
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Begin this lesson by looking at the art from a MBM exhibit (or other portrait examples). Spend at least 30 minutes looking at and discussing the artwork. Encourage students to express their thoughts on what they are seeing. The following questions will help the class discuss and look at the artwork.

The activities that follow will emphasize artistic choices including: **mood** and how that is conveyed using color, season, setting, etc.; **personality of the sitter** and how that is conveyed using color, props, setting, background, expressions, etc.; **composition** and how that affects the overall feeling of the portrait. Encourage students to discuss those specific ideas while looking at the portraits.

Included in this lesson: Portrait vocabulary words, examples of how subjects are posed, face proportion guidelines, Elements and Principles of Design.

Maine Learning Results achievements begin on page 10.

Portrait Questions-Talking

- Has anyone ever had his or her photograph taken? At school?
How long did that take?
How did you prepare for it?
Were you happy with the final results? Explain.
- Has anyone ever had his or her portrait made by an artist?
What did the artist use to make your portrait? Paint? Pencil?
- If you have had your portrait drawn or painted, how long did you have to sit for your portrait to be made?
How were you posed? Sitting? Standing? Leaning?
Did you change poses or stay in the same pose?
- If you have never had your portrait drawn or painted, how long do you *think* it would take?
- What things would a person consider when choosing an artist to create his or her portrait?
- What do you think about when you know that you are going to have your portrait made?
How would you dress?
What might you bring with you?
What will the setting be for your portrait?
Will you be sitting or standing?
Will you be alone, or will someone be in it with you?

Portrait Questions-Looking

- What might we discover about a person just by looking at his or her portrait?
- What do you think the person in this portrait wanted to communicate about him or herself?
- How does the relationship between artist and sitter change the outcome of the portrait?
- What kind of life do you think this person leads?
Does he or she work? If so, as what?
Are there any props that give clues about the sitter's profession or lifestyle?
- Is this a person you would like to meet?
Why, or why not?
- If the person in this portrait could speak to you, what do you think he or she would say?
- How does the portrait make you feel? Explain.
- Does this portrait tell you anything about the person's mood? Explain.
- Why did the artist choose the colors/composition/ background? What do you think those choices are trying to communicate about the subject?
- If you were to create a portrait of yourself what would you include or leave out? What kind of technique would you use? Where would you pose and how?

Portrait Vocabulary

Portrait A work of art that represents a specific person, a group of people, or an animal. Portraits usually show what a person looks like as well as revealing something about the subject's personality. Portraits can be made of any sculptural material or in any two-dimensional medium.

Portraiture The field of portrait making and portraits in general.

Self-Portrait A portrait an artist makes using himself or herself as its subject, typically drawn or painted from a reflection in a mirror.

Portraitist The person, or *artist*, creating the portrait.

Background The part of a picture or scene that appears to be farthest away from the viewer, usually nearest the horizon.

Foreground The area of a picture or field of vision, often at the bottom, that appears to be closest to the viewer.

Middle ground The part of an artwork that lies between the foreground (nearest to the viewer) and the background.

Prop A term borrowed from the theater usually referring to an object used to convey context.

Expression An attitude conveyed by the set of a person's facial features. Also, a quality of inner experience, the emotions of the artist (expressive qualities) communicated through emphasis and distortion

Literal qualities The realistic presentation of subject matter in an artwork; avoiding distortions, exaggerations, or embellishments.

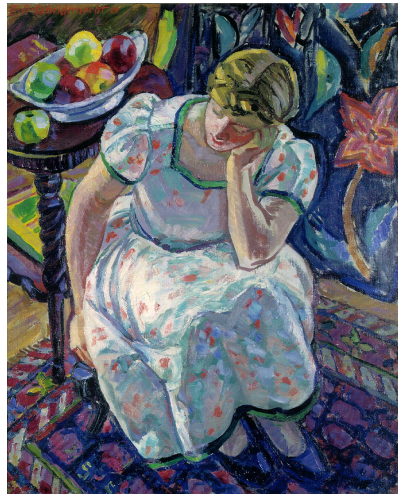
Represent To stand for; symbolize.

Symbolism The representation of things or ideas by means of symbols; symbols give meaning to a object, plant, or animal. For example, the two upright stones in the Zen Garden could symbolize a man and a woman standing on the shore of a river.

Sitter The subject; the person posing, or *sitting*, for a portrait.

Ways a subject is posed:

- **Profile** The side view of an object or person.
- **Full-length** The entire body of the subject is portrayed.
- **Full-face or frontal** The head-on view of a person or object.
- **Standing** The subject is standing, as opposed to sitting or lying.
- **Seated** The person is sitting on a chair or a similar object.



Activity 1

Props are often used in portraits to convey information about the sitter. Sometimes those props are *literal* (for example, holding a hockey stick in a self-portrait to show that you play hockey). Sometimes those props are *symbolic* (for example, including a lion to show that the sitter has courage, or putting a mask in your drawing to show that the sitter has many “faces,” or including a dog to symbolizes love and fidelity). List some things that you might include in a self-portrait to convey information about yourself. Try and list at least five things in each category.

Literal (Real) Props

Example: drawing yourself with glasses if you are actually wearing glasses.

Symbolic Props

Example: drawing yourself wearing glasses to make yourself look smart even if you don't wear glasses in real life.

Activity 2

Materials: 9x12 paper,
pencils with erasers
coloring medium (see below)

Students will draw and color self portraits or a portrait of a classmate. They may use any medium for color including colored pencil, paint, pastels, crayons, or markers. If students will be making self-portraits they will need mirrors.

At least 45 minutes should be allotted for this activity and follow-up discussion.

Step 1

If students will be drawing each other pair them up across from each other at a table. Be sure that each pair can see each other clearly and tell them that they must periodically give their partner "looking" time while they sit being observed.

Step 2

Discuss facial proportions explaining that the eyes and nose fall in the middle third of the face. Use the following diagram to demonstrate.

Step 3

Explain that students must meet certain criteria with their art. They must try and convey **mood** and **personality**, by choosing the setting/background which may include specific season or color choices, props, expressions, etc. The student must also consider **composition** and how that affects the overall perception of the subject.

Step 4

Students should now look quietly and study the subject's face. They should look carefully for several minutes before they draw and *continue* to look as they draw.

Have students draw the face shape first, and then place nose, eyes, and mouth. Explain that the nose is not a dot or a triangle; help them to understand its structure by drawing an example on the board.

Encourage them fill the page with more subject than background, setting, or props.

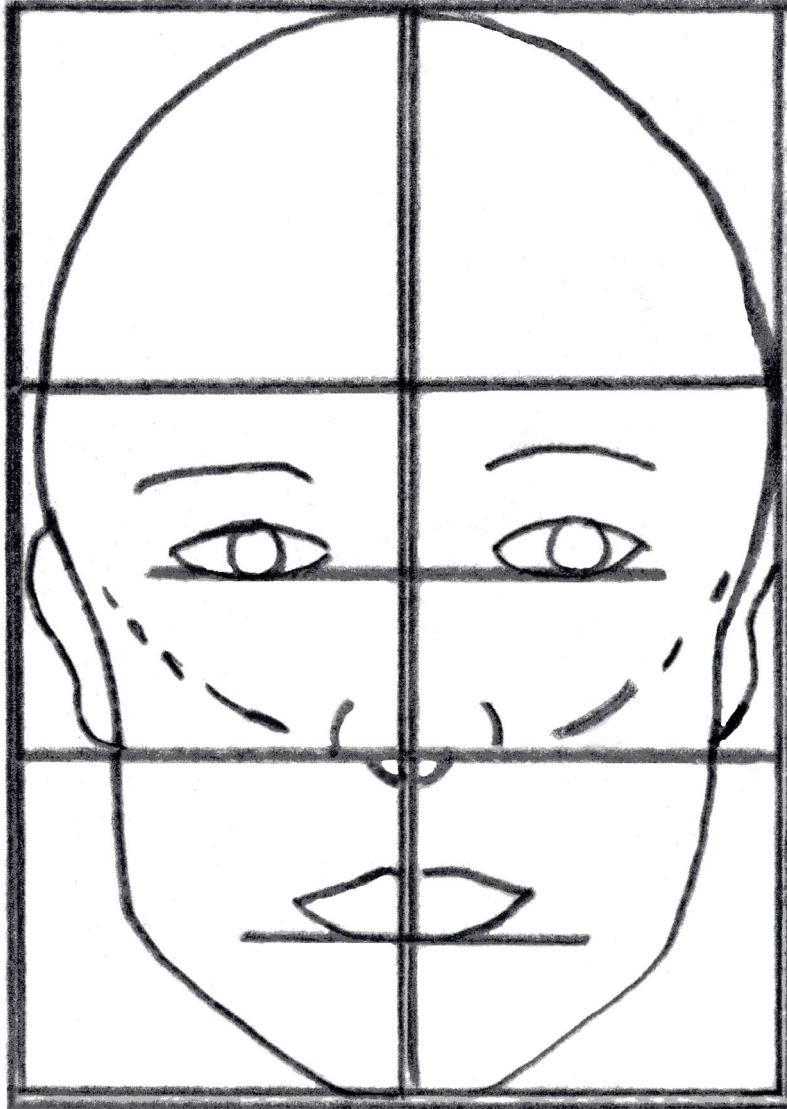
While students are drawing remind them to consider where they will place color later being particularly aware of how they will portray texture and skin color.

Step 5

Review individual drawings and once you are satisfied that they are fairly complete, students may begin the coloring process. Remind them to be thoughtful about colors and to not randomly put down color as if it is an afterthought. Remember that color is an important factor in the three criteria: mood, personality, and composition.

Step 6

Gather as a group to discuss the portraits. Have students talk about their work and explain their choices. Class members can be asked questions about specific pieces and what they see before the artist explains.



Face Proportion Guide

Elements of Art & Design

Light Either the sensation of light, a source of light, its illumination, the representation of it in a work of art, or awareness as if there were light on a subject.

Texture An element of art which refers to the surface quality or “feel” of an object, its smoothness, roughness, softness, etc. Textures may be actual or simulated. Actual textures can be felt with the fingers, while simulated textures are suggested by the way the artist has painted certain areas of a picture.

Shape An enclosed space defined and determined by other art elements such as line, color, value, and texture. In painting and drawing, shapes may take on the appearance of solid three-dimensional object even though they are limited to two dimensions.

Line A mark with length and direction(s). An element of art that refers to an identifiable path of a point moving in space. Types of line include: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, straight or ruled, curved, bent, angular, thin, thick or wide, interrupted (dotted, dashed, broken, etc.), blurred or fuzzy, controlled, freehand, parallel, hatching, meandering, and spiraling. Often it defines a space, and may create an outline or contour, define a silhouette; create patterns, or movement, and the illusion of mass or volume. It may be two-dimensional (as with pencil on paper) three-dimensional (as with wire) or implied (the edge of a shape or form).

Space An element of art that refers to the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within things. It can be described as two-dimensional or three-dimensional; as flat, shallow, or deep; as open or closed; and as positive or negative.

Color Produced when light strikes an object and then reflects back to the eyes.

It has three characteristics:

Hue refers to the name of a color, e.g. red, blue, yellow.

Intensity refers to the purity and strength of a color, e.g. bright red or dull red.

Value refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. Value is an especially important element in works of art when color is absent.

Principles of Art & Design

Balance The way in which the elements of art are arranged to create a feeling of stability in a work. It can be described as asymmetrical, radial, or symmetrical.

Emphasis The use of any technique that stresses or gives dominance to a single feature of an artwork. Artists often use emphasized elements to direct a viewer's attention to what they consider to be the most important aspects of a composition.

Harmony A way of combining elements of art in order to accent their similarities and join the aspects of a composition into a cohesive whole.

Movement Often implied, it can be achieved by arranging the elements of art in such a way that the viewer's eye is invited to jump rapidly or glide smoothly from one to the next.

Pattern The repetition of anything in order to create a design.

Rhythm A way of combining elements of art in order to produce the look and feel of movement, especially with a visual tempo or beat.

Proportion (or scale) refers to the relationships of the size of objects in a body of work. Proportion gives a sense of size perceived as a relationship of objects; from small to large.

Contrast The use of opposing elements, such as values, colors, forms, or lines, in proximity to produce an intensified effect in a work of art. Contrast can be used to create an area of emphasis.

Portraits in Art

Maine Learning Results: Career and Education Development Standards

A. Learning about Self-Knowledge and Interpersonal Relationships: Students identify, demonstrate, analyze, and evaluate self-knowledge related to interests, skills, work, and school; positive personal traits, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, habits of mind, and experiences that lead to success in school, work, and community; their ability to build and maintain a positive self-concept; and their ability to develop and recognize the positive interpersonal skills that effectively influence work and relationships with others.

A1 Self-Knowledge and Self-Concept

3-5

Students identify and demonstrate interests, skills, habits of mind, and experiences that build and maintain a positive self-concept.

A2 Beliefs and Behaviors that Lead to Success

3-5

Students make choices about and demonstrate behaviors that lead to success in schoolwork.

A3 Interpersonal Skills

3-5

Students identify decisions and demonstrate behaviors that reflect positive interpersonal skills and lead to success in school or community.

- a. Getting along with others.
- b. Respecting diversity.
- c. Working as a member of a team.
- d. Managing conflict.
- e. Accepting/giving/using constructive feedback.
- f. Accepting responsibility for personal behavior.
- g. Demonstrating ethical behavior.
- h. Following established rules/etiquette for observing/listening.
- i. Demonstrating safe behavior.
- j. Dealing with peer pressure.

Maine Learning Results: Visual Arts Standards

A. Disciplinary Literacy : Students show literacy in the art discipline by understanding and demonstrating concepts, skills, terminology, and process.

A1 Artist's Purpose

3-5

Students explain purposes for making art in different times and places, and the relationship to cultural traditions, personal expression, and communication of beliefs.

A2 Elements of Art and Principles of Design

3-5

Students describe features of composition.

- a. Describe Elements of Art: color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value.
- b. Describe Principles of Design including balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, and pattern.

A3 Media, Tools, Techniques, and Processes

3-5

Students describe a variety of media and associated tools, techniques, and processes, for multiple art forms and genres.

B. Creation, Performance, and Expression: Students create, express, and communicate through the art discipline.

B1 Media Skills

3-5

Students use a variety of media, tools, techniques, and processes to create original art works.

B2 Composition Skills

3-5

Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works including paintings, three-dimensional objects, drawings from imagination and real life, and a variety of other media and visual art forms.

B3 Making Meaning

3-5

Students create art works that communicate ideas, feelings, and meanings and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, techniques, and processes.

C. Creative Problem Solving: Students approach artistic problem-solving using multiple solutions and the creative process.

C1 Application of Creative Process

3-5

Students describe and apply steps of creative problem-solving.

- a. Identify problem.
- b. Define problem.
- c. Generate a variety of solutions.
- d. Implement solution(s).
- e. Evaluate solution(s).

D. Aesthetics and Criticism: Students describe analyze, interpret, and evaluate art (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts).

D1 Aesthetics and Criticism

3-5

Students describe and compare art forms.

- a. Describe and compare art forms by applying grade span appropriate arts concepts, terminology, skills, and processes as referenced in Standard A: Disciplinary Literacy.
- b. Ask questions about an art form to further understand the concepts, skills, and processes used to create/perform the work of art.
- c. Explain purposes for making art in different times and places, including cultural traditions, personal expression, and communication of beliefs.

E. Visual and Performing Arts Connections: Students understand the relationship among the arts, history and world culture; and they make connections among the arts and to other disciplines, to goal-setting, and to interpersonal interaction.

E5 Interpersonal Skills

3-5

Students identify and demonstrate the positive interpersonal skills necessary to get along with others and participate in the arts.

- a. Getting along with others.
- b. Respecting differences.
- c. Working as a team/ensemble.
- d. Managing conflict.
- e. Accepting/giving/using constructive feedback.
- f. Accepting responsibility for personal behavior.
- g. Demonstrating ethical behavior.
- h. Following established rules/etiquette for observing/listening to art.
- i. Demonstrating safe behavior.

Maine Learning Results: English Language Arts Standards

E. Listening and Speaking: Students listen to comprehend and speak to communicate effectively.

E1 Listening

3-5

Students apply active listening skills.

- a. Ask clarifying questions.
- b. Attend and respond appropriately to classmates and adults.
- c. Follow multi-step oral instructions.

E2 Speaking

3-5

Students use active speaking skills to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

- a. Explain ideas clearly and respond to questions with appropriate information.
- b. Speak using eye contact, clear enunciation, clear gestures for emphasis, and appropriate volume and rate.
- c. Share information summarized from reading, listening, or viewing and form a position on a topic, supporting the position with a variety of print and non-print sources.