

Reading Art Across the Curriculum: Gesture & Clothing

[Note: This is the second of four lessons introducing Reading Art Across the Curriculum. The first lesson on Facial Expression and Focal Point is [here](#).]

The third thing to notice any time you see a person in a work of art is the gesture. Say it with me. Gesture. Notice that as I am saying 'gesture' I am making a fist and swinging my arm up and across. Say the word and do the movement with me. Gesture. Try it again. Gesture. The gesture is the position of the person's body. We need to notice the hands, arms, legs, etc. and figure out what idea, action, emotion, or opinion that gesture is representing. The artist has a *choice* as to the position, pose, or action that he/she would like for the person to portray so we need to make sure we notice the gesture.



Let's now think about how you can communicate feelings and actions through your facial expression, focal point, and gesture. By the time I count to three, you will show an angry facial expression, focal point, and gesture. Think about what you'll do with your eyebrows, where you're looking, and what you're doing with your arms and hands. You can sit or stand, 1...2...3...Freeze! Make sure your face is angry. Make sure your body, your gesture, really shows how angry you are. How can your eyes and your focal point show that you are angry? Now relax. It takes a lot of energy to be angry!

This time we will communicate "excited". Think about what you'll do with *your facial expression, focal point, and gesture*. 1...2...3....make sure your face is excited, your eyes show excited, and your entire body communicates excited! Now relax. [repeat with other emotions such as disappointed, confident, etc]

Let's look at the gestures in a few different works of art. I am going to project an image on the screen. [Project [this image](#) by Wolfgang Volz.] Notice and remember his gesture. Notice the arms, hands, shoulders, legs, feet, shoulders. Notice every detail.



Let's put his gesture on our bodies. By the time I count to three, I will see that your arms are like his. Your hands are like his. Your shoulders, legs, and feet will be like his. You will freeze your body to have his gesture when I get to three. Here we go...1..2...3! Wow! I see that most of your gestures look just like his! Relax now. Let's talk about what you had to do with your bodies to have a matching gesture. We can't just say that he is "standing" because we stand in many different ways. In order to look like him we had to stand then put our feet more than shoulder-width apart, stand with a straight torso, arms out level to the side, palms forward and fingers slightly apart. When we are describing the gesture, we have to use all of those words! We can't just say he is standing because he could have been standing like this (stand with feet/legs together, arms crossed and slumped torso), which is a totally different gesture. [Continue to provide a few more examples, if needed.]

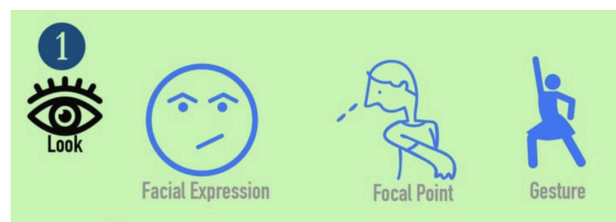
[Image 1](#)

[Image 2](#)

[Image 3](#)

Repeat the same process of “putting on the gestures” while also noticing the facial expression and focal point. Keep this quick, allowing only three seconds for them to get ready...show the portrait and tell students to freeze by the time you count to three. Once you get to three say “freeze” then quickly look around to describe what you’re seeing. Holding the pose takes energy, so describe a few things quickly. Instruct them to relax their bodies when you are ready to move forward. Typically, by the third image, students notice his facial expression and focal point successfully. They will also notice that he is sitting on the floor with his legs crossed and holding something. However, they often miss the details of how his left hand is holding the book and his right hand is turning the page. Show them the portrait again and provide five seconds to make revisions so they look just like the boy. You can also add that his right leg is crossing the left to be really specific!]

We now know **three** things to notice any time we see a portrait- a person, or people in a work of art. Let’s combine the three words and the movements that we have learned so far. We will begin with facial expression. *Facial expression* (use hand to circle around the face). *Focal point* (bring fingers right beside the eyes then outstretch your arms). *Gesture* (make a fist and swing arm up and across the chest and shoulder). Repeat the three words and gestures multiple times in a rhythmic chant-like way while varying the way you say it (e.g., fast/slow, only gestures/no words, only words/no gestures, high pitch voice/low pitch voice) Take 30 seconds with your partner to discuss the different gestures you see in the projected images. A discussion of what students talked about with their partners is typically not needed.



The **fourth** thing to notice anytime you see a person, or people in a work of art is the clothing. Let’s say that word together. Clothing. Notice as I am saying the word clothing, I am also pinching the clothing on each of our shoulders to help us remember to notice what the person is wearing. Let’s put the word and the movement together. Clothing. Let’s do it again. Clothing. The clothing that a person wears also gives us clues about a person. It can inform us of the person’s place in society, the time period in which he/she lived, interests, personality, occupation, the time of year in which the art was made, etc. The artist has a choice as to what the person is wearing, so we need to make sure we notice his/her choices.

Let’s look at [this painting](#) again. We can see he is wearing white tennis shoes, blue jeans, and a red, white, and blue horizontally striped, short sleeve shirt. Notice all these details! I can’t just say he is wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Many of you wear jeans and T-shirts, but your clothing doesn’t look like what the boy in the picture is wearing.

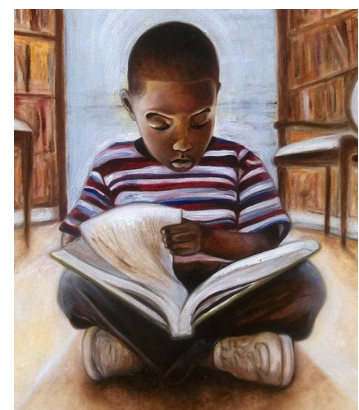
Let’s practice reading art:

[Image 1](#)

[Image 2](#)

[Image 3](#)

[Image 4](#)



"What's going on in this portrait? What is it mainly about? What is the artist teaching or communicating with facial expression, focal point, gesture and clothing? What do you notice or wonder?" [students chose which question to answer-not all four]

To practice compare/contrast, project this [comparison](#), and ask, "What is the same, and what is different?" There is a lot to read in their facial expressions, focal point, gesture, and clothing.



Next lesson: [Setting](#)