

READING PORTRAITS

Objective:

Students will learn to 'read' portraits by learning strategies to observe, interpret, infer, and inquire about portraits and the stories they tell. Students will develop the story of one or more portraits.

Intro:

What is the "story" of this portrait? What is happening? What evidence from the portrait can you cite to justify your response?



*Drama club rehearsal at the Juba One Girls' Primary School in Juba, South Sudan
by Phil Hatcher-Moore*

Photographs tell a story. The Facial Expressions, Focal Points, Gesture, Clothing, Setting, and Objects present in a photograph all contribute to its narrative and meaning. Even photographs that do not include persons (such as a landscape or abstract photograph) can tell a story. These stories become more clear when students "learn to look".

Portrait Vocabulary:

Portrait: *A likeness or image of a person that is created by an artist*

Sitter: *The person or people who are in a portrait*

READING PORTRAITS

Symbol: *Something representing something else by association; objects, characters, or other concrete representations of an abstract idea, concept, or event*

🔍 Learning to Look Strategies:

- Thirty-second Look
 - Have students look at a portrait for thirty seconds. Then have them turn away from the image. Conduct a conversation with students, asking only visual questions, such as, "Describe the setting" and "What objects can be seen in the portrait?"
 - When the students turn back to the image, ask analytical questions, considering why the visual elements are included in the portrait.
- What do you see?
 - Ask each student to name something they see in the portrait:
 - "I see _____. What do you see?"
 - Each student must name the previous observation and add a new one.
 - Have each student make a hypothesis about the use and meaning of objects in the portrait.
- What am I thinking?
 - Have students consider what the sitter might be thinking as they are sitting for the portrait.
 - What might the sitter be getting ready to say?
- What would you ask the sitter/artist?
 - Ask students, "What question(s) would you ask the artist or sitter?"
 - Have students imagine a story between the artist and sitter.
- What do you wonder?
 - Ask students, "What do you wonder about this portrait?"
 - Students may respond to other students with their own opinions
- Compare and contrast:
 - Compare and contrast 2 portraits of the same individual, or, compare and contrast different portraits

🔍 Lenses for reading portraits:

Symbolic: *Choices made by artists represent a symbolic metaphorical meaning*

Biographic: *Portraits contain biographical and historical information*

Artistic: *Artist use different media and techniques to communicate their ideas*

READING PORTRAITS

Reading portraits:

- Portraits are works of art about a person or persons, can be stories about the person, and can be made using many different media, in many different styles, and represent many time periods and cultures
- 6 Elements of a Portrait:
 - Facial Expression:
 - The feelings communicated on a person's face
 - Focal Point:
 - The direction of where the sitter's eyes are looking, what the sitter seems to be focused on
 - Gesture:
 - The position of the sitter's body including hands, arms, legs, etc.
 - Clothing:
 - The clothing that a person wears gives us clues about a person's place in society, the time period in which they lived, interests, occupation, and time of year the portrait was created
 - Setting:
 - Where and when the portrait takes place
 - Objects:
 - Objects in a portrait are often symbolic and include jewelry, furniture, tools, books, or anything else that is a symbol of the sitter's life
 - Additional Elements to observe:
 - Quantity of objects, size of portrait/objects/sitter/etc., use of color (or lack thereof)



Story of a Portrait:

- Students will 'read' 1 or more portraits and develop a story based upon the evidence that they observe in the portrait
 - Students will use strategies learned from 'Learning to Look' and 'Reading Portraits'
 - Students may work solo or with a partner

READING PORTRAITS

Art Vocabulary:

Balance: *Arranging art elements in an artwork to so no one part overpowers any other part*

Color: *Reflected light made up of Hue (color name), Value (lightness or darkness of Hue), Intensity (brightness or dullness of Hue)*

Emphasis: *Making an element of art or object in a work stand out*

Form: *An object with three dimensions*

Harmony: *Combining similar art elements to create a pleasing appearance*

Line: *A continuous mark made on some surface by a moving point; Horizontal, Vertical, Diagonal, Curved, Zigzag*

Movement: *Creating the look and feeling of action to guide a viewer's eye throughout a work of art*

Pattern: *A two-dimensional decorative effect achieved through repetition of colors, lines, shapes, and /or textures*

Proportion: *The relationship of certain elements to the whole and to each other*

Rhythm: *Repeating an Element of art to make a work seem active or to suggest vibration*

Shape: *An area clearly set off by one or more of the other Elements of Art; Geometric, Organic*

Space: *The real or implied distance between, around, above, below, and with objects*

Texture: *The way an art object or element feels or appears to feel*

Unity: *A look and feel of completeness in a work of art*

Variety: *Combining art Elements with slight changes to increase visual interest*

READING PORTRAITS

Art Standards:

Responding: *Perceive and analyze artistic work (A.S. #7)*

Responding: *Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work (A.S. #8)*

Connecting: *Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding (A.S. #11)*

Notes:

- This lesson was adapted from [*"Reading Portraiture" Guide for Educators*](#) from the National Portrait Gallery and [*The Power of Pictures: Reading Portraits as Biographies*](#) with Melanie Rick from Focus 5, Inc.