



*Make Picassos
out of your pupils
with this month's
exciting creative
topic on portraits*

On the FACE of it

What is a portrait? Essentially, a portrait is an image that represents an individual, whether they are rich and famous or an unnamed model posing for the artist. For centuries, portraits have provided us with valuable information about historical figures and some of the most memorable images in art history are portraits. Today, many artists continue to experiment with portraiture through a range of media, including photography, sculpture and ICT, and their work can be used to inspire your class to explore different approaches to creating portraits.

As children progress through Key Stage 2, some find the process of making portraits increasingly challenging. On these pages, you'll find a selection of activities that aim to enable children to develop confidence in their work, engage them with artists' portraits and develop skills that will allow them to use a range of media to create their own. The activities will also look at how the inclusion of specific details can bring a portrait to life, and how children can extend their work by experimenting with different styles and techniques. ▶

What can portraits tell us?

Introducing portraits

Children may bring to this project certain preconceived ideas about portraits, and allowing them time to share these ideas is a useful way of beginning the project. They may, for example, think that portraits must always be drawn as accurately as possible, or that they must be painted. They might assume that portraits can only tell us what somebody looks like, when in fact, artists often make portraits that tell us something about the sitter that goes far beyond their appearance.

Try using a search engine's 'Images' function to view images of artists' work that will challenge children's ideas about portraits. Frank Auerbach, for example, makes expressive, painterly portraits in which the sitter's features emerge from a mass of thick brushstrokes; Cindy Sherman creates strange 'film stills', while Chuck Close creates huge likenesses of his sitters by meticulously building up individual areas of abstract colour.

The art and the artist

Investigating artworks with children is a challenging and rewarding process, and the questions you ask the class at this stage are important. *How do you think this image has been made? What does the portrait tell us about the person? How do the decisions the artist has made while making the picture influence our responses to it?* Emphasise to children that you are not looking for 'right' or 'wrong' answers and that their ideas about the artworks are as important as those of anyone else.

Why do artists make portraits?

One question that should really prompt children to think is: *Why do artists make portraits?* Some children will appreciate the role portraits play in providing us with evidence of the past, while others may be able to draw a link between the formal portraits in a museum or gallery and the snapshots in their own family albums. One interesting question to explore with children is one of ownership of the artwork: *Is the artist the one in control of the appearance of the portrait, or does the sitter dictate terms?*

Painting the past

Many portraits provide the viewer with clues about the status or character of the sitter. For example, portraits dating from Tudor times feature a wealth of detail that can intrigue children and provides them with valuable evidence about the past. A visit to the collections of Tudor portraits in the National Gallery (www.nationalgallery.org.uk) or Tate Britain (www.tate.org.uk) will provide a wonderful selection of paintings for children to explore, while identifying a specific focus for children's attention can provide them with a 'way in' to the image.

Marcus Gheeraerts's *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* (c. 1595), which features a smiling woman dressed in a beautiful pearl-covered dress, for example, could be analysed purely for its aesthetic qualities, or for the evidence it provides about the time in which it was painted. The colours and textures of the woman's dress, with its thousands of pearls, will mesmerise children, but they may also be fascinated to learn that women were often painted while pregnant because of the high risks childbirth presented.

'Using artworks to generate questions can enable children to tackle some genuinely philosophical issues'

A portrait of youth

While many portraits record the lives of the rich and famous, *Head of a Girl* by Paula Modersohn-Becker (see right) is a modest painting with which children will quickly connect. Explain to the children that if it were a photograph, we might describe this image as a 'close up', as the face almost entirely fills the frame of the picture. As there are no real clues about the girl's

life beyond her features, we could choose to highlight the painting's more abstract qualities. Although the range of colours in the painting may be limited, the different tones of the skin, hair and background display a broad spectrum from light to dark. Ask the children to look at how several oval shapes are repeated; from the head and the face, to the neck of the girl's jumper, the curves around the eyes and the eyes themselves. Remind the children that successful observational drawing often comes from recognising regular or repeated shapes and recreating them on paper.

Taking a closer look

Discussing the details of a portrait can also influence children's approaches to making their own. The face in *Head of a Girl* is perfectly proportioned: notice how the eyes are placed halfway down the face, how the nose ends halfway between the eyes and the chin, and the mouth halfway between the nose and the chin. Notice, also, how one eye is looking directly at us, while the other is looking slightly to one side, as if the girl has been distracted from her task of posing. Although the girl is facing directly towards the viewer, remind children that it can be easier to draw a three-quarter view – 'full frontal' can often look awkward.

The questions we ask children about a piece of artwork need to be carefully selected in order to engage their curiosity: *What is this girl doing? What is she thinking? Do you ever enjoy sitting still? How can it help you to think?* Given the opportunity, children are able to formulate many thoughtful – and thought provoking – questions about artworks.

Pictures to get you thinking

Another interesting theme to explore is children's ideas of age. *Head of a Girl* is now more than 100 years old, and, while the sitter's youth is captured on canvas, she is no longer a young girl. Ask: *Can you imagine yourself in 100 years time? Will you still be the same person? Are the old people you know still the same people they were when they were children?* Using artworks to generate questions such as these can enable children to tackle some genuinely philosophical issues and to come up with some surprisingly thoughtful ideas. ▶

Making your own masterpieces

Draw what you see

Invite the children to create observational drawings of themselves (using mirrors) or their classmates. See pages 38–39 of the Sept '07 issue of *Junior Ed PLUS* for practical tips on drawing people (type 'model behaviour' into the 'Find a resource' search facility at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus). One problem that many children experience when they make drawings is that they want to draw what they think is there, rather than what they can actually see. Encourage them to look up at the subject of their artwork as much as possible. If children are painting a partner, ask the sitter to consider the following questions:

- How would you like to be represented in a portrait?
- Will you prefer to sit still or be engaged in activity?
- What expression will you show on your face?
- What objects do you want included in the painting to represent your interests?



Portraits and personalities

Offer the children a choice of paper and drawing materials and remind them of previous drawing techniques. Encourage them to make portraits that suggest personality and character: notice how certain details bring Kate's portrait of Claire to life (left), such as the use of chalk to pick out highlights in the eyes that look away to one side, the charcoal strokes that suggest hair and the smudges that suggest shadows. The way in which Claire's head is tilted slightly to one side suggests a thoughtful pose, and the smile on her lips is sensitively drawn.



Jack's portrait of his classmate, Dre (right), displays character as well as thoughtful observation. Notice how Jack has created different tones of colour for the face, the detail of the jumper knotted around the shoulders and the 'portrait within a portrait' on the desk.

Styles & techniques



Online extras!

For these, and lots more drawing activities, visit www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus and type 'drawing' into the search box.

1 Batik portraits

Batik is a 'resist' process that involves pouring thin lines of hot wax onto fabric before applying coloured dyes. Access to a wax kettle and a tjanting tool that allows a thin line of wax to drip evenly across the fabric is ideal. Fabric dye is then painted across the wax, which resists the dye and creates the image. When the dye is dry, the wax can be removed by ironing the fabric through newspaper. Experimenting with the process is great fun and children love the intensity of the colours produced by the dyes. Some teachers are understandably concerned about health and safety issues with batik, but small groups working under close supervision will minimise any risks of hot wax splashes.



2 Group portraits

This portrait was created from a selection of observational drawings of facial features made by several children. Some children can find the process of drawing each other nerve racking ('My nose isn't THAT big!') but when sections of drawings are collaged together to create an imaginary figure, any apprehensiveness quickly disappears and both artists and models love the results. Picasso famously experimented with combining different viewpoints within one image and his work continues to be an inspiration for artists, young and old.



3 ICT portraits

The process of altering digital images opens up a huge range of opportunities for experimenting with portraits. In this example, children painted on photocopied images of their faces first; the results were then scanned into the computer and manipulated using *Photoshop*®. By using the 'Adjustments' option under the 'Image' menu, children quickly explored different colour combinations, before copying and pasting to create repeat images. The children used examples of Andy Warhol's repeated portraits to inspire their work.



4 Collage portraits

Many children grow familiar with Van Gogh's masterpieces, yet few produce such a thoughtful response to his work as this collage. The swirling painted lines of the



original painting are represented by fabric and string to create an original interpretation of a familiar image, while the wide range of tones used within the narrow range of colours gives the collage an unusual complexity and depth.

5 Charcoal portraits

Many drawing lessons could be improved by allowing children access to a wider range of materials. Working in charcoal on sugar paper has allowed this Year 4 child to experiment with a range of marks and textures.



6 Magazine portraits

Assembling imaginary portraits from the features of unwitting celebrities cropped



from magazines is a simple and fun way of creating original artworks.

Children can either work individually or, preferably, collaborate on larger works that can gradually take shape in the corner of the classroom. Coat the finished pieces with a layer of thin PVA glue. ■

Robert Watts, Programme Convener for MA Art, Craft and Design Education at Roehampton University, London www.roehampton.ac.uk/pg/acd