



Approaching Portraiture: The Character on the Page and on the Canvas

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Introduction

My grandmother lived to age 97. She was the youngest girl of six children. Born in Perguia, Italy, she was beautiful in every way. To this day I have a kind of romantic, dreamy, nostalgic vision of the things that happened to her during her life. I have an idealized image of her life in a small hillside town in Tuscany, her immigration to the United States as a twelve-year-old girl, and the 'scandalous' courtship with my grandfather. I sometimes think of her life as if it were a grand and wonderful story.

There is a beautiful photograph I have of her in which she is sitting on the stoop of the house my father was born and raised in, surrounded by some sort of blooming tree, smiling directly into the camera. I can spend hours on end looking at that picture. Of course I am aware of much of her personal history that in fact, brought her to that stoop; but staring at that image I can't help but wonder about the stories I don't know. I suppose that's part of the ambiguity of pictures. We can look at them knowingly as we recollect what we know, but there is an ever-lingering mystery about what we do not. And I think this is precisely the point where my idea for this unit begins.

A portrait can contain a myriad stories. This unit is designed to explore the characters in our world, both real and imaginary, in an attempt to deepen our understanding of history and in some cases, bring us literally face to face with those who have lived, loved, and died. It is my hope that this unit also brings into question for my students other concepts for understanding the function of art in our world. Is it *l'art pour l'art*, or must art serve a more severe moral or didactic purpose? Where does portraiture fit within this quandary? Clearly, portraiture preserves for us features and expression. Most of us are as familiar with Albert Einstein's wild white head of hair as we are with his influence on the modern scientific community. What else can it do? Portraits can/have preserved the wealth and personality of kings, the costumes of Pharaohs and Sultans, and of heroes whose swords have slain dragons. Portraits allow us to discover and interpret a seen and an unseen story.

Portraiture exists in history as a way of memorializing, but in the case of the ancient Egyptians, an added value was the practical matter of serving as a vessel for the 'Ka' (the soul or spirit of a person) to pass through. The portrait can have a very pragmatic function, to achieve a specific result. Think, for example, of religious art (like devotional items or pictures of saints intended to be used in religious acts) and print ads

(intended to sell a product rely). In all cases, it may be wise to consider carefully who dictates those desired results. The patrons of much of the early Christian art produced were careful to select images that would help teach a mostly illiterate population about a kind of faith where salvation was the rule rather than a much later, Gothic theme of judgment. In the case of print ads there are an overwhelming amount of images and themes to select from. The '*campaign for real beauty*' from the makers of Dove soap comes to mind. Here we see portraits of 'real' women as seen and defined by the advertisers. On the one hand, they are providing us an alternative definition of beauty and seeking to unite women through this shared concept of "real beauty," but is this not also a construct for the company's own corporate benefit?

In this unit we will focus on the mystery of trying to understand characters in literature and apply some of the methods we develop to create portraits in the visual arts. I believe there are some intrinsically natural and subtle ways we respond to characters in literature and that we recreate some of those same instincts when we look portraits. This unit is intended to help weave together these two kinds of study and ultimately produce the kind of portrait that allows for that mystery to be revealed with the subtlety that the written word so often creates.

How exactly do we come to know and interpret literary characters? When we look at portraits, there is generally a recognition and familiarity of self: a sense that in some way the person whom we are looking at may be like us. As in the beautiful picture of my grandmother, physical appearance, environment, and symbols are all things that we can physically see that provide clues to her identity. How do we 'see' those same familiar and physical clues in literary characters? Analyzing metaphors, tone, identity, place, and point of view is common practice in beginning to think about how we approach character studies in literature. When we read literature we often identify characters that are 'like us' in any number of ways. This can take us on a broad path of understanding ourselves and others if we consider closely the various devices the author may have (very cleverly) used to set this up. How do we best explore this mystery of what we know about a character and what we do not?

Artists creating portraits must be able to move back and forth cognitively from the obvious physical characteristics to more abstract conclusions about what is observed (strength, intelligence, insecurity); and back again to the detailed observations that yield the abstraction (strained muscles, furrowed brow, slouching posture). It will be the goal of each assignment within this unit to capture (and communicate) the essences of a character students have met in a literary work through a drawing or painting.

We can look at contemporary portraits as well as portraits throughout history and begin to understand what ideals people wanted to share. Patrons commissioned portraits that reflected personal beliefs and cultural traditions as well as contemporary social, economic, and political interests. Our interpretation of the image is based on details given to us through the artist's hand. We grasp the basic idea or nature of an individual not only in the physical gesture portrayed, but also in the subtle details, the finer aspects of expression that might give us a deeper insight into the person. A wayward glance or direct gaze, the setting or props used, can be indicators along with the artist's manipulation of contrast, line, and color. Students will be reviewing these elements and principles of art as they are used by the artist and, in a series of studio activities, produce their own interpretation of how they can manipulate them to communicate these ideas of character to the viewer.

Background

I teach in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public school system, which is the nineteenth largest district in the nation with a population of almost 130,000 students. I teach studio art and art history in a school located in the Northeast learning community, with a population of roughly 2100 students, grade 9-12. My students come from fairly diverse backgrounds with approximately 55% receiving free or reduced lunch.

I teach a variety of courses within the visual arts department (as well as various levels within the studio art classes which include drawing/sculpture/2-D design). Most consistently I teach upper level honors students as well as Advanced Placement students. This unit is designed to be taught with my Art III Honors and Advanced Placement (or Art IV) drawing class. The prerequisite for either of these classes is Art I and II, and as additional design, sculpture, or photography class would be recommended. This is because those courses have laid the foundation for the more concept-based approach taught in the advanced classes.

Building basic art skills in levels I and II allows students to be exposed to a variety of materials and techniques in a more general and experimental way. The content standard for both these courses describes how the use of a variety of materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses. For the proficient and advanced standard (to whom this unit is directed), students are expected to conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how they are best able to communicate their ideas in relation to the media, techniques, and processes they choose. The products created as a result of this unit of study will make use of a variety of materials (i.e. Dry media such as charcoal, chalks, and pastels; and later in the unit students will have the choice of acrylic paint and mixed media). Students' ability to articulate and defend their choice of media and its application will be part of the assessment process / critique.

Objectives

A portraiture unit is particularly relevant for students in high school. Developmentally they are at a point that almost all of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are driven by the search for a personal identity. "Who am I?" "What am I capable of?" "What is my place in the world?" Making use of the range of characters available in English literature, from the noble to the despicable, can take us beyond our limited experience of life to show us the lives of other people at other times. These stories can stir us intellectually and emotionally, and deepen our understanding of our history, our society, and our own individual lives. It is through their characters that authors convey their insights into human nature. Using literature in visual arts classes in this context of self-discovery, I hope to help students make the connections to understanding themselves and others. Seeing such similarities can help us to understand and accept others.

For the purpose of this unit, students are going to be looking closely at the physical aspects of the muscles and how they change the contours of the face as they attempt to show different emotions clearly on the portraits of the various characters they create. In particular, students will be introduced to the work of the seventeenth-century French artist Charles LeBrun along with other historically significant portrait studies from artists such as Leonardo daVinci. Students will also be introduced to the work of a contemporary psychologist, Paul Ekman, whose international studies on human facial expressions are not only fascinating, but for the

purpose of this unit, clearly outline the muscle movements in the face as they respond and react to various emotions.

The inevitable challenge in working with teenagers and visual images is to move beyond the trite. The tendency for cliché when responding to the questions about self is pretty universal. This of course is a difficult matter to discern. My response to the image of a young girl with a single tear rolling down her cheek towards a heart that has been torn in two is very different from that of my students. I dare not claim superiority or for that matter, haughtiness - quite the contrary. In David Bayles book, *Art and Fear*, I am reminded that "virtually all artists spend some of their time producing work that no one else much cares about. ...the function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you about the small fraction of your artwork that soars." ¹ The artist Paul McCarthy speaks to this idea as well in an interview from the PBS series, *Art 21*. As he puts it, "...the responsibility is to the work." No doubt, art making is hard. To be inspired, to create innovative marks on a page, and to confront personal censure are difficult challenges for artists and teachers alike. It is my hope that this unit provides students with options they may have otherwise not considered when it comes to creating portraits.

One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even failed works are essential. It is my intention that this unit will start on the first day of school. I am reminded before I begin, that though there may initially be times a which the work is seemingly less polished or developed, it will continue to gain strength, depth, and breadth as we move through the unit. Intrinsicly, I am a not a product oriented teacher. Process, and the development of students' visual language through experimentation and invention, is my 'modus opperindi'!

Strategies

This unit has been planned with the intention that it will begin on the first day of school and last for approximately three to four weeks. This unit will build on simple concepts through the selection of art, literature, and materials and scaffold to more complex works as we progress. For the sake of clarity and organization, I will identify these parts as early, middle, and high.

Analyzing the Face

The face is such an extraordinarily efficient instrument of communication. But are there rules that govern the way we all interpret facial expressions? What are those rules? And are they the same for everyone? Charles LeBrun, a seventeenth century French painter engaged in the visual study of character (as well as a person's likeness). In tandem with these visual studies, LeBrun studies the writings of philosophers such as Rene Descartes, who writes extensively on emotions. ² I will introduce my students to a series of the sketches of LeBrun's portraits and discuss the contours of the face as it changes expression, and as a review of line quality, a technique that will be addressed in each drawing exercise they will be asked to complete.

To support this seventeenth-century work in the modern context, I will be taking my students to the computer lab in order to introduce the work of Paul Ekman. In the nineteen-sixties, the psychologist became interested in the study of facial expressions in an attempt to answer some of the questions I've alluded to in the last paragraph. His studies took him around the world, talking to different people from different cultures and

showing them photographs of men and women making a variety of distinctive faces. Everywhere he went, people agreed on what those expressions meant. He set up a 'lab' in San Francisco and began to study every crevice and contour of human expression. The lab set out to construct an *Atlas* of the face, "which would depict photographically each of these universal facial expressions of emotion ³ . The studies made use of spontaneous facial expressions that naturally occur when a person does not deliberately try to show an emotion on his or her face.

Ekman's research, along with an interactive web site that explores these subtle and distinct changes will be used as part of a warm-up activity for this unit. In his book, he has broken down eight different facial expressions of emotion. These expressions are clearly defined and the resulting changes in the muscles of our face are fully explained. There is consideration for the variables that can occur in regard to the judgments people make about emotions. Ekman writes

The first focus is on what the feelings look like, in other people's faces and in your own. Photographs show the facial blueprints of the major emotions...registered by the changes in the forehead, eyebrows, eyelids, cheeks, nose, lips, and chin...You can use this information about the blueprints of facial expressing to better understand the feelings of others. Or you can use the face to become more aware of what your face is telling you about how you feel and what your face is telling you about others. ⁴

Analyzing the Text

Each lesson within the unit will begin with select readings. Students may be apprehensive, perhaps even a bit rebellious, when they find out that this unit actually involves reading in art class (and with the possibility of even some outside reading). Because of this, I have chosen to start with children's stories. Like some of the gesture drawing exercises I do as warm-up activities, the choice of children's books is intended to build confidence early on. My hope is that by returning to some of their favorite children's characters, they will be more confident to take on the role of literary critic. We will progress from children's stories to poetry, and then to short stories. The art materials and techniques will progress to a higher level of complexity as well. Proficiency will be demonstrated when students are able to explain their choices of material and technique as it relates to the characters they have selected. From there we will continue to work with prose and add short stories of mystery and intrigue. And again, the materials and techniques will become more complex as will the layers of reference including concepts of time and place. Students will more closely examine the often subtle techniques artists use to move back and forth cognitively from the external physical characteristics to more abstract conclusions about what is observed (strength, intelligence, insecurity); and back again to the detailed observations that yield the abstraction (strained muscles, furrowed brow, slouching posture).

I will use a number of reading strategies to engage each student in recognizing character. 1. Think about what you want to know. Before you read anything, ask yourself why you're reading it. Are you reading with a purpose, or just for pleasure? What do you want to know after you've read it? 2. Reading actively. When you are reading, it helps if you practice 'active reading' by highlighting or underlining key information. Take notes as you read. 3. Visualization. Look for choice words that make use of sensory images such as exaggeration.

Getting Started on Portraits

As a way of introducing the concept of approaching character to my students on the first day of school, and as a way for the class to get to know each other quickly, the class will play the game, "Who are you?" This game is a classic icebreaker that relies on the student's ability to think quickly and deeply about his or her own

character and the character of his or her partner. In groups of two, one student repeats the line "who are you" to their partner for a full minute. The partner answers with one word or short phrase answers. One minute for each person ends up feeling like a very long time; however, the length pushes us all to dig deeper for a response that exposes the many facets of ourselves.

The goal of the activity is to identify and recognize the various internal and external characteristics of the individuals in the class. Although this particular group of students may know each other from their previous art class, they tend to know very little about each other's outside lives. Following the first round of "Who are you", partners reverse their original roles and either ask or answer the same question. As the rounds of questioning are completed, volunteers will then 'present' their new friends to the class. The twist here is that the person they are introducing must be standing behind them. They will be asked to describe three internal characteristics (what they learned from the verbal communication) and three external characteristics (remember, they can't see the person - what can they remember about the physical characteristics).

Students will be continually and consistently exposed to portraits from artists throughout history. Creating a strand of artists throughout the unit, students will be able to assimilate the idea of internal and external characteristics of an individual based on the visual clues the artist provides. For example, Diane Arbus is a photographer known for her portraits of people generally on the outside of what is considered the 'norm' (giants, dwarfs, transvestites, and circus performers were some of her best known subjects). Her subjects were looked at as deviant or marginal because of those differences, yet her photographs situate us somewhere between complicity and awe. I will begin by using Arbus's 1962 photograph, *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.* The game of "who are you" will continue as we ask that question of the image projected.

Extending the framework of the game, I will lead students in a discussion that will help them to begin to consider ideas about the function of art (specifically portraits) that I discussed in the introduction of this unit. What external factors did Diane Arbus select to reveal to us something about that person? What conclusions can we make about that person in the portrait based on those selections? What conclusions can we make about the function of the work? Why?

I think it is important here to discuss to some degree the subjectivity of the responses to these questions. Inevitably, hopefully, there will be variety of responses! We can then discuss the idea of point of view, a comprehension strategy that students will be asked to manage more directly with the subsequent literary component to this activity.

Analyzing the Artists' Work

There are of course a vast number of portrait artists that can be used for this unit's different activity and discussions. I have begun to develop a power point presentation for this unit that introduces artists from a variety of historic and stylistic periods. This presentation will be constantly and continuously changing. It will be part of the (analysis) assessment of the unit that students will be able to discuss the 'strands' between these different portrait artists as we make use of the ideas we develop throughout the various stages. They will be used with the other lessons within this unit as this scaffolding approach allows us to look at the same work again and again, as we begin to understand the many layers in both art and literature.

The following three artists were selected to help guide the reader with what might be helpful in trying to navigate the enormous amount of portrait works available online. (See Appendix A for a more extensive list.) I have selected these artists with consideration for their diversity in: physical characteristics, theme, time and

place, style, technique, and material. Kehinde Wiley's highly realistic portraits place contemporary, unnamed African American men in heroic poses. Through his use of appropriation, his canvases transform the way we think about the old and new, race, and masculinity. I have specifically chosen Wiley's *Triple Portrait of Charles I*, 2007.

Laylah Ali's cartoon style work initially charms and disarms the viewer, drawing us into a world filled with tension and mystery. Her most famous and longest-running series of paintings depicts the brown-skinned and gender-neutral 'Greenheads', run through themes of group and individual identity, politics and power, race, and social class. A wonderful and brief interview of her is available through the PBS series Art21 in which she talks about the process of creating the works. It would be beneficial to use this interview early on while discussing the ideas of why process is so important. I have selected an *Untitled* work from 2000 which shows three characters who have been hanged to death, while one other criminal-looking character is being forced to observe.

My final choice may seem out of place in this otherwise contemporary selection. Making use of Leonardo daVinci's sketches and paintings within this more contemporary group might actually help my students better understand the value of practice and planning (the number and kinds of sketches he did in planning his final works are plentiful) as well as his influence on artists like Kehinde Wiley. The work selected for this introduction activity is a study for a *Portrait of a Man*, 1482. Leonardo is of course the iconic Renaissance man, bringing us some of the most famous portraits in our history. The naive art lover may be completely unaware of the vast sketchbooks he left behind. The books reveal his passion for drawing and as he said, "The noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding." ⁵ The curiosity of daVinci took him in many directions. Most valuable to an art instructor, trying to teach the importance of careful observation, are the remarkable volumes of his notes representing an amazing variety of topics. Always using this method of scientific inquiry-close observation, repeated testing of the observed- his portraits in particular reveal an acute sense of the subtle and extraordinary ranges of the human condition.

As an independent follow-up assignment, students will be asked to select a portrait from our art history text. Based on the type of inquiry discussions we had with each of the artist work listed above, they will write a first person narrative ("who are you") about their subject. They must include a detailed description about what artistic elements they see the artist has used to help develop or influence their own ideas about character seen in the image. Using a viewfinder or cropping tool, students will draw three detailed sketches of areas they felt were most revealing of character.

Early

The following activity will be a study of character through the use of children's books. *Slovenly Betsy*, by Dr. Henry Hoffman was originally published in 1911. It contains a number of short stories that offer a series of tales on morality intended to teach such ideas as the values of cleanliness and the folly of pride. We will review the reading strategies listed earlier before we begin these stories. Each story will be read to the class and then students will break into groups in which they will review and discuss in detail what the characters' appearance may be and why.

In order to help students find the verbal clues in the text, I will model the kinds of questions they can begin to ask each other. What is physical and psychological description of the character? What are his or her personality and traits? The next thing we have to look for is the environment in which the character lives. What is the setting? How is the character related to the environment and other people around him or her? Is

there any comparison or contrast between the character and the environment? Does the character have any motive? Find out what drives the character or if he or she has any motivations. Are there any flaws to the character? What is the psychological makeup of the character? Who is speaking – from what point of view is the story written?

What are the clues or indicators that lead you to that conclusion? How did the characters express themselves that may have lead to that conclusion? Each group will be asked to present their ideas to the class.

The illustrations in this book are examples of literalization of, for example, "crying one's eyes out", in the case of *The Cry-Baby*. I am going to give students copies of the text with blank spaces where the illustrations exist. It will be the task of each student to create the illustrations within that space. The studio art objectives for portraiture will be reviewed and students will consider– how did the artists we discuss achieve the difficult task of moving from the obvious physical characteristics too more abstract conclusions about what is observed?

The work with *Slovenly Betsy* is designed as group work/problem solving (though individual drawings are the expected outcome), as a way to introduce the kinds of questions that we will look at in our attempt to understand characters in literature. I have selected some other classic children's stories to extend this 'early' series of readings and resulting portraits. Most any character driven story will suffice here though I have chosen Aesop's Fables because they continue in the vein of simple and short tales of morality. In most fables, animals speak and are given human characteristics, though there are a number of great options that include human characters. *The Bald Man and the Fly*, *The Milkmaid and her Pail*, *The Miser and his Gold*, and *The Young Thief and his Mother* are examples of some of the stories that students might use in the first lesson described below (see Lesson One).

Middle

Ecphrastic poetry is poetry that is directed to particular works of art. Described as "...the oldest type of writing about art in the West....it was created by the Greeks." ⁶ The rhetorical form changed a bit during the Italian Renaissance when artists made visual works based on the written descriptions of art that had never existed. Sandro Botticelli's 1494-5, *Calumny of Apelles* is just such an example.

John Hollander describes the idea that to a certain degree, "the poem is always describing or addressing or speaking for, or out of, a notional work of art of its own." ⁷ Historically, these poems address the objects with regard to narrative. In more modern poetry, the poet ascribes some kind of responsibility to the work of art as it implies some latent or hidden narrative or agenda.

I will introduce the use of poetry with a series of warm-up activities that will help students become acquainted with the unique characteristics of writing and reading poetry (for writing, see Lesson Two below). I've created some brief and simplified reading strategies for this section of the unit. These additional strategies will show students how they can adjust their reading behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and reading purposes. 1. An interpretation of a poem (or work of art) is valid when the framework of the poem itself supports it. 2. Poetry requires a higher degree of participation (Interpretations must be rooted in textual/visual clues embedded in the work and not just pulled from thin air.) 3. An image is a word that imaginatively appeals to the senses – keeping in mind all of the senses.

There are a number of publications of ecphrastic poetry that would be appropriate for high school students. These will be listed in the appendix, but for this unit, I am going to make use of *Words for Images A Gallery of Poems*, edited by John Hollander and Joanna Weber. The artwork in this book is predominantly modern and

most of the artists will be familiar to my students. They will be shown a series of artworks from this book when we, together, begin to analyze the poem. I will introduce this ecphrastic poetry by first showing the photograph, *Lexington Avenue Subway, 1941* by Walker Evans. Together, we will read the poem written by J.D. McClatchy of the same title. Both the photograph and the poem dive deeply into heart of the character through the literary visual art devices discussed earlier (i.e. tone, place, contrast).

Once I believe students have a clear understanding of the framework of ecphrastic poetry, I will pair them in groups, as they will be asked to analyze the Langston Hughes poem, "Mother to Son". The visual inferences are plentiful and there is a strong sense of voice within the poem. Using the same format as I have set-up in the 'early' section of this unit, groups of students will discuss in detail the imagery that is revealed to them in this work. What are the physical and psychological descriptions of the character? What are his or her personality and traits? The next thing we have to look for is the environment in which the character lives. What is the setting? How is the character related to the environment and other people around him or her? Is there any comparison or contrast between the character and the environment? Does the character have any motive? Find out what drives the character or if he or she has any motivations. Are there any flaws to the character? What is the psychological makeup of the character? Who is speaking – from what point of view is the story written? What are the clues or indicators that led you to that conclusion? How did the characters express themselves that may have led to that conclusion? Each group will be asked to present their ideas to the class.

Students will be asked to create a portrait of one of the characters in this poem. They will be given their choice of material based on what they feels will best suit the vision they have for the image. Materials such as collage, charcoal, chalk, pastels, and color pencil will allow for enough variety of interpretation without the final products looking so much like a teacher driven assignment.

High

The mystery of trying to understand characters in literature is in part solved by our ability to relate to human emotions that are revealed in the works. Stories that have us on the edge of our seat and deal with strong psychological drama are especially compelling to high school students. "Adolescence can be a time of tremendous emotional swings...Emotions are strong and seemingly close to the surface...so how can we help our students deal with their own emotions?"⁸ What we can do as teachers is help our students who are struggling by allowing stories to serve as portals to help them see others' struggles. "Students prefer books with heightened suspense and excitement...Mystery is one genre that has cross-gender appeal."⁹ Many of the psychological thrillers that Edgar Allen Poe has written tie in with those common human emotions of fear, sadness, regret, loneliness, anticipation and helplessness.

"...And the man was tall and stately in form, and was wrapped up from his shoulders to his feet in the toga of old Rome. And the outlines of his figure were indistinct — but his features were the features of a deity; for the mantle of the night, and of the mist, and of the moon, and of the dew, had left uncovered the features of his face. And his brow was lofty with thought, and his eye wild with care; and, in the few furrows upon his cheek I read the fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude."¹⁰

I have selected a few of Poe's short stories for this last portion of this unit. *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and *The Raven* are mysterious and suspenseful stories that have characters rich in both visual references and psychological drama. Because the language Poe uses may be more difficult to understand,

students will follow each of the stories as they are read aloud by a variety of actors. I found many options for these oral narratives with just an open Internet search. They will not be provided any visual references (illustrations) but will be given the similar handout for 'understanding the character' as provided in the early and middle sections of this unit. Character study questions such as, 'Who am I?' What is physical and psychological description of the character? What are his or her personality and traits? The next thing we have to look for is the environment in which the character lives. What is the setting? How is the character related to the environment and other people around him or her. Is there any comparison or contrast between the character and the environment? Does the character have any motive? Find out what drives the character or if he or she has any motivations. Are there any flaws to the character? What is the psychological makeup of the character? Who is speaking – from what point of view is the story written? What are the clues or indicators that lead you to that conclusion? How did the characters express themselves that may have lead to that conclusion?

With a partner, students will analyze a selected character by reading the work (popcorn style) and briefly summarizing the following elements: Plot – a brief summary of the piece. Setting – describe the setting. What words or phrases help paint the picture? Character – see notes from reading. Perspective – Who is the narrator? How does this affect the piece?

Based on their findings, students will independently create a series of sketches that will be the planning source for their final painting. As the tiered readings have become more complex throughout this unit, the materials and techniques will become more complex as will the layers of reference including concepts of time and place. Students will more closely examine the often subtle techniques artists use to move back and forth cognitively from the external physical characteristics to more abstract conclusions about what is observed (strength, intelligence, insecurity); and back again to the detailed observations that yield the abstraction (strained muscles, furrowed brow, slouching posture). We will continue to look at our strand(s) of artists when referencing such subtleties.

Unlike the other portraits, the work here will include a more detailed analysis of color, tone, contrast and technique. The portraits will be reflective of the culmination of ideas studied throughout the unit and will be completed using acrylic paint on canvas. The planning sketches will serve as techniques sheets as students will be introduced to and practice a number of painting techniques including under painting, color blending, and palette knife painting. Students will present their portrait in a gallery setting. The character analysis will accompany the final painting and also serve as a formative assessment piece.

Lessons

1. Portrait studies from *Aesop's Fables*.

Objectives:

Student will be introduced to Aesop and his 5th century fables through a brief historical introduction.

Students will review and practice basic line drawing techniques using either ebony pencil, markers, charcoal, or conte sticks.

Students will interpret a character's identity in literature through a series of readings and identify/interpret the physical characteristics (particularly the face and its expressive gestures) of that character based on this understanding.

Students will create final 18"x24" (contour, continuous line, or gesture) drawing using any of the materials listed above.

Students will explain their choice of media and technique as to how that choice best communicates their idea of the character.

Activity:

Day one: A famous portrait statue of Aesop will be projected as I introduce the history of the stories we will be reading in class. Students will be given a handout that will have printed selected fables along with a series of question and room for sketches and note taking. Volunteers will be asked to read the fables aloud as the rest of the class takes notes using the guided questions provided for 'understanding the character'. Students will then select one of the characters to study more closely. Expanding on their notes, they will be asked to create a series of practice drawings that explore the various physical characteristics of the selected character (reference LeBrun and daVinci drawings here). They will be asked to experiment with all the drawing materials offered and consider the potential each has to best communicate the nature of the chosen character; individual critiques and discussions with teacher regarding these choices occur as students work. Day two: Students will select one of their practice drawings to share with the class. Critique will be guided towards the material selection and its potential to communicate. Students will have a full studio day to complete this drawing.

Selected Fables:

The Bald Man and the Fly The Milkmaid and her Pail The Miser and his Gold The Young Thief and his Mother The Old Man and Death

Understanding the character

'Who am I?'

What is physical and psychological description of the character? What is his or her personality and traits? The next thing we have to look for is the environment in which the character lives. What is the setting? How is the character related to the environment and other people around him or her. Is there any comparison or contrast between the character and the environment? Does the character have any motive? Find out what drives the character or if he or she has any motivations. Are there any flaws to the character? What is the psychological makeup of the character? Who is speaking - from what point of view is the story written? What are the clues or indicators that lead you to that conclusion? How did the characters express themselves that may have lead to that conclusion?

Extensions:

Create a series of illustrations using the portrait of the character developed in this lesson that sequentially tells the story of the fable as it unfolds.

Or

Create an illustration that would serve as a book cover for the fables.

Assessment

Students will present their portrait in a gallery crawl setting. Provided with two 'post-it' cards, students will stick note on other portraits answering the questions: what is successful and what could be improved. A formal written critique on their own work will also be submitted. This writing will include a character analysis, an explanation of materials chosen, and the justification for their choice of technique and composition.

2. "Where I'm from" A poem by George Ella Lyon. Collage self-portrait.

Objectives:

Identify the unique characteristics of the poetry genre.

Students will experience the creative writing process by developing two pieces of writing using the writing skills of rhythm, rhyming, and descriptive vocabulary.

Understand the vocabulary used in the selected poem.

Learn about the collage techniques of the Harlem Renaissance artist, Romare Bearden.

Activity

Ask: How are poems different from stories? Together we will read the poem, *Where I'm from*. A guided discussion will follow. We will start with what it is they now know about the author of the poem, based on what they have read. Who is speaking - from whose point of view is the poem written? Ask volunteers to contribute their ideas to a mind-map on the board. What is the rhythm of this particular poem? How does the character incorporate place, setting, and mood into the poem? How is the character related to the environment and other people around him or her? Is there any comparison or contrast between the character and the environment? Following the format of this poem, student will write their own *Where I'm from* poem and create an accompanying self portrait using collage materials and techniques similar to that of Romare Bearden. (see lesson number three for more details on suggested techniques and materials)

After completing the work with the Langston Hughes poem, "Mother to Son" (from the middle sections of *Strategies*), which includes a character study and an accompanying portrait; students will be asked to complete a *Where I'm from* poem as the voice the person in the portrait. This poem will accompany the final portrait in the gallery exhibition that culminates at the end of this unit.

3. Collage portraits. Techniques and materials.

A collage may include newspaper clippings, ribbons, bits of colored or hand-made papers, portions of other artwork, photographs and other found objects, glued to a piece of paper or canvas. The origins of collage can be traced back hundreds of years, but this technique made a dramatic reappearance in the early 20th century as an art form of novelty. The term *collage* derives from the French "colle" meaning "glue". This term was coined by both Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in the beginning of the 20th century when collage became a distinctive part of modern art. ¹¹

For this project, I am suggesting that a photomontage, or collage made from photographs, is taught. It is

particularly important to discuss the topic of copy right when making photomontages. As a general rule, I tell my students that any image made by someone else, must be altered seventy-five percent or more. This is not too difficult when the process of creating a photomontage is cutting and joining a number of other photographs to create the final work.

I will be showing the work of Romare Bearden to my students when introducing this technique to them. In the late 1960's, Bearden began to experiment with the clippings from magazines (which in and of itself was a new medium as glossy magazines were fairly new ¹²) as scraps to incorporate images of modernity in his works. His exhibition in 1964 called Projections was where he formally introduced his new collage style. These are generally considered his best works.

On a masonite board (prevents warping when wet), lay a clear acrylic gel and squeegee across the surface. Lay collage images on top, put more gel over the images and then squeegee it perfectly flat from the center outwards. A wet squeegee will have less friction and reduce the risk of tearing the media. If you make use of printed material that may smear (toner copies or Xerox), use a spray fixative (hairspray works well!) before applying the top layer of gel medium.

Endnotes

1. *Art and fear* pg. 5
2. http://www.philipmould.com/works_for_sale/categories/old_masters/mn0467_Portrait_of_a_Boy,_Charles_Le_Brun
3. pg 28 *Unmasking the Face : A Guide to recognizing emotions from facial expressions*. Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen.
4. Ibid
5. <http://www.mos.org/leonardo/scientist.html>
6. <http://www.writingaboutart.org/pages/ekphrasis.html> - Marjorie Munsterberg
7. Ibid
8. *Making the Match: The right book for the right reader at the right time. Grade 4-12*. Teri S. Lesesne 2005 Stenhouse Publishers
9. Ibid
10. "Silence - a Fable" by Edgar Allan Poe
11. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collage>
12. <http://www.beardenfoundation.org/index2.shtml>

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Appendix A

Suggested artist

Ali, Laylah - illustrations, paintings

Arbus, Diane - Photographer

Bearden, Romare - Harlem Renaissance artists, collage techniques

da Vinci, Leonardo – Renaissance artist

Eakins, Thomas

LeBrun, Charles – Particularly his sketches of people

Modigliani, Amedeo

Reynolds, Joshua

Wiley, Kehinde – contemporary portrait artist

Resources

The National Portrait Gallery

The Academy of American Poets

The Library of Congress – American Memory Collection

The J. Paul Getty Museum

Implementing District Standards

Grades 9–12 Proficient

Historical and Cultural Context

Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

Aesthetic Valuing

Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

Compare the ways in which the meaning of a specific work of art has been affected over time because of changes in interpretation and context.

Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.

Grades 9–12 Advanced

Artistic Perception

Research two periods of painting, sculpture, film, or other media and discuss their similarities and differences, using the language of the visual arts.

Aesthetic Valuing

Describe the relationship involving the art maker (artist), the making (process), the artwork (product), and the viewer.

Connections, Relationships, and Applications

Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.

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