

Biography and Portraiture

Lesson Overview:

Students will examine the terms “biography” and “portraiture” and determine the relationship between the two. They will then create a portrait based on a brief biographical writing assignment completed by a peer in the class.

Length of Lesson: One or two class periods

Objectives:

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- ✓ Cite the similarities and differences between portraiture and biography
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of ascertaining biographical information from a portrait

Key Words:

Biography: An account of a person’s life that is written, composed, or produced by another.

Portrait: A likeness of a person, especially one showing the face, that is created by a painter or photographer, for example.

Autobiography: The biography of a person, written by that person.

Self-portrait: A pictorial or literary portrait of a person, created by that person.

Iconography: The pictorial illustration of a subject.

Symbolism: The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

Symbol: An image or sign that represents something else, because of convention, association, or resemblance.

Hypothesis: A tentative explanation for an observation, phenomenon, or scientific problem that can be tested by further investigation.

Supplies:

- 11 x 14-inch paper
- Markers, colored pencils, or oil pastels

Instructional Plan:

Warm-Up:

Learning to Look: “What do You See?”

Choose portraits in the Gallery’s collection or in the Portrait Competition section of the website based on your curriculum study.

- Define the terms “iconography” and “symbol” prior to this activity.
- Have a whole group discussion about the portrait: Ask each person in the classroom to name something they see in the portrait, saying, *I see a _____.* *What do you see?* Each person must name the previous observations and add a new one. *I see a _____ and a _____. What do you see?*
- Students will find and record the symbols in the portrait. Ask the students what they think the symbols stand for.

- Students will make a hypothesis about the use and meaning of an object pictured in a portrait.
- Have students conduct research to support or refute the hypothesis.

Activity Discussion:

- Students will first define biography, autobiography, portrait, and self-portrait. They will then discuss the similarities and differences between biography/autobiography and portrait/self-portrait.
- Have each student write down two adjectives that describe and define themselves. Write these words on the blackboard for the students to use in the activity.

Activity Instructions:

- Students should write an unsigned half-page description of themselves. They should include descriptive words as well as autobiographical information in their writing.
- Have students swap the descriptions with classmates.
- Students should then visually interpret the new description they have received.
- The class will then match names with corresponding drawn portraits.

Extension:

- Have students pair up.
- Each student should create a self-portrait.
- Each student will write a short biography about his or her partner, using the following two sources of information:
 - The partner's self-portrait
 - A short interview conducted by each partner

Wrap-up:

Students will discuss what they have learned from this lesson.

Assessment:

Work should be assessed on the following criteria:

- Participation in class discussions
- Written description of himself or herself
- Creation of the portrait based on written descriptions