THE FOUR JUSTICES: ME AND MY ROLE MODEL
Compiled by the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

TARGET GRADE LEVEL: K-5 in social studies, language arts, and visual arts classes

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

• Identify and analyze key components of a portrait and relate visual elements to relevant historical context and significance
• Analyze the portrait of the four female Supreme Courts justices with respect to their biography and significance.
• Apply what they’ve learned about portrait analysis and the four justices by creating their own portraits of themselves with their role models.

PORTRAIT:
The Four Justices by Nelson Shanks, oil on canvas, 2012

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

A major step in women’s struggle for equality came on March 3, 1879, when Belva Lockwood became the first woman to argue before the Supreme Court. In the 1940s, distinguished jurist Florence Allen was considered for the Court, but opposition, including from the sitting justices, precluded her nomination.

In 1981 Sandra Day O’Connor (born 1930) became the first woman to serve on the Court. O’Connor, a graduate of Stanford Law School, was serving on the Arizona Court of Appeals when President Ronald Reagan nominated her as an associate justice. O’Connor retired from the Court in 2006.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg (born 1933) graduated from Columbia Law School. She was serving on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia when President Bill Clinton nominated her as an associate justice of the Supreme Court in 1993.

Sonia Sotomayor (born 1954) received her J.D. from Yale Law School. She was serving on the United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, when President Barack Obama nominated her as an associate justice in 2009. She became the first Latino to sit on the Supreme Court.

Elena Kagan (born 1960) graduated from Harvard Law School. She was President Obama’s solicitor general when the president nominated her as an associate justice of the Supreme Court in 2010.

Nelson Shanks was commissioned to create this portrait to recognize the accomplishments of all four justices. He has drawn on the traditions of Dutch group portraiture for his composition, and the setting is based on interiors and a courtyard within the Supreme Court Building in Washington.
Lesson Procedures

Portrait Analysis
Show students the portrait *The Four Justices* by Nelson Shanks. Discuss and analyze the portrait using the following questions as a guide:

1. **Looking Questions:**
   - Describe what each sitter is wearing. How are their outfits similar and how are they different?
   - Describe the setting of this portrait. What do you see in the room? What do you see outside the window?
   - What objects do you see in the portrait? What is on the couch next to the seated women?
   - Describe the sitters’ pose. Are they standing? Sitting? How much of their bodies can you see? Where are their hands positioned?
   - Describe the sitters’ facial expressions. In what direction are they looking?

2. **Analysis Questions:**
   - What can you tell about the sitters’ jobs based on their clothing?
   - What can you determine about the setting of the portrait? Where might this be? Why might the artist have chosen this setting?
   - Why might the artist have chosen to include these objects in this portrait? How do they relate to the sitters?
   - Do all of the sitters look like they are close to each other in age? Do some of the women look older than others? If so, which?
   - Why might the artist have arranged the women in this particular pose, with some women sitting and some standing? What can we determine about the relationship between these women based on their pose?

Using the students’ analysis as a springboard, explain/discuss the following:
   - This is a portrait of the first four women to be appointed as Supreme Court justices.
   - The setting is based on the Supreme Court building in Washington DC.
   - The Supreme Court was established in 1789, but there wasn’t a female justice until 1981.
   - Briefly discuss why that might have been the case, making sure that students are aware of the gender discrimination that kept women off the Court for almost two centuries.
   - Since 1981, four women have been appointed, with three currently serving (on a bench of nine).
   - Point out which justice is which in the portrait and in what order they were appointed, and have students again consider the analysis question about why the artist chose to arrange the sitters in this particular pose.
   - Guide students towards the idea that the two seated justices (O’Connor and Ginsburg) represent the older pioneering generation that inspired and opened doors for the younger two justices (Kagan and Sotomayor, both standing).
Activity: Me and My Role Model

1. Building on the discussion of the sitters’ pose and their relation to each other, share the following quotes:
   [When O’Connor became the first woman on the Supreme Court, it was] "an inspiration to think that more could come and that opportunities for us could grow."
   Sonia Sotomayor, April 11, 2012, at an event marking the 30th anniversary of O’Connor’s confirmation

   “Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg paved the way for me and so many other women in my generation. Their pioneering lives have created boundless possibilities for women in the law. I thank them for their inspiration and also for the personal kindesses they have shown me.”
   Elana Kagan, June 28, 2010, in her opening statement at her confirmation hearing

2. Discuss with students what it means that Kagan and Sotomayor view Ginsburg and O’Connor as their role models. Then ask students to describe their own role models. These can be people that the students know personally, or they can be significant figures living or dead. Ask students why they chose these role models and how they are connected to them.

3. Have students create portraits of themselves with their role models. In their portraits, have them consider how the setting, clothing, objects, and, most importantly, pose, reflect the connection between them and their role models, and also why they chose that specific person as their role model.

Learning Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.1
With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.3
With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.1.1
Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.1.3
Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1
Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1
Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.2
Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1
Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7
Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2
Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3
Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.