

## Young Portrait Explorers: Edward O. Wilson



**Learning Objective:** Explore nature in the portrait of Edward O. Wilson, or E. O. Wilson, and be a scientist as you examine the natural world around you.

### **Portrait Discussion:**

Look at the painting of Wilson by Jennie Summerall. Spend 30 seconds letting your eyes wander from top to bottom and all through the center of the portrait.

**Objects:** As you look closely, do you see any surprising details? Edward O. Wilson is surrounded by bugs! What **species** (specific types or families) of bugs do you see? Artists often include clues about people's stories in portraits. In Wilson's portrait, the clues are bugs. Why do you think the artist included so many species?

**Facial Expression:** What emotions do you see in his face? How does he feel about having bugs crawling around – and even on – him? How would you feel? What face would you make if you were surrounded by bugs?

**Pose:** Some people might want to run away from so many bugs, but Wilson holds still. How is he posed? Can you kneel like he does? Be sure to hold an imaginary stick so the ants can crawl on your hands! Would you pose holding a stick of ants? If ants make you nervous, what would you hold instead?

**Setting:** The **setting** refers to the place where the portrait happens. Imagine you could jump into this setting. Would it be warm or cold? Would the air feel humid or dry? What other things might you touch, hear or smell? Notice the sunlight around him, his rolled sleeves, and the bright colors of green in the plants. Why do you think the artist painted Wilson in nature, instead of in a laboratory conducting experiments or in his office writing books about his discoveries?

**Historical Context:** *Since his childhood, Edward O. Wilson wanted to be an **entomologist**, or a scientist who studies insects. He wrote, "Most children have a bug period. I never grew out of mine." He has dedicated his life to studying ants and the connection between human and ant behavior. A childhood accident left Wilson blind in one eye, which led him to observe things from up close. He said, "Look closely at nature. Every species is a masterpiece."*

### **Related Children's Books:**

*I Like Bugs* by Margaret Wise Brown

*Ant Cities* by Arthur Dorros

*The Boy Who Loved Ants: Edward O. Wilson* by Sara van Dyck

### **Activity: Naturescope and Scavenger Hunt**

#### **Materials:**

Empty toilet paper or paper towel roll

Markers

Pencil and paper/notebook

#### **Instruction:**

Decorate your paper roll with markers, stickers, whatever you want. This will be your naturescope – like a microscope that helps you see nature.

Scavenger hunt steps:

- Hold the naturescope to your eye
- Look out a window, out your front door, in your yard, or even in a book

Find the following things:

- Two kinds of bugs
- Four kinds of leaves
- The colors blue, yellow, red, and orange
- A home for something other than people

Record your findings in your notebook, either by writing them down or sketching, like a scientist.



*Edward O. Wilson* by Jennie Summerall, oil on canvas, 2006. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. © 2006 Jennie Summerall

Find the portrait on our website, here: [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.2007.4](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2007.4)