



Visiting the National Portrait Gallery with your students?

The National Portrait Gallery tells the story of America through the Individuals who have shaped our country and our culture.

There are many ways to explore the lives of presidents, activists, renegades, artists, writers, and other Americans who have a place in our national story. Our student programs enable young people to engage with these individuals and their stories through our inquiry-based gallery experiences. Along the way, we hope students are inspired to reflect on their own story too.

Through analysis of the visual elements of portraiture, students explore biography, art, and the American experience. Each standards-based, themed student program is facilitated by specially trained gallery educators and complements curricula in art, history, social studies, and language arts. To prepare your students for their visit, students should look at and explore visual clues found in portraits in order to begin to read them.

Below, you will find key terms, links to our Portrait Spotlights and Search Collections pages, and questions to pose using our Elements of Portrayal Guide. The questions can be adapted to meet your needs. You can *read* several portraits or just one prior to your visit.

Key Terms

Portrait: A likeness or image of a person that is created by an artist.

Image: A picture of something or someone.

Sitter/Subject: The person or people who are in a portrait.

Symbol: Something representing something else by association; objects, characters, or other concrete representations of abstract ideas, concepts, or events

Medium: Materials used to create a portrait.

Links

Search Collections:

<http://npg.si.edu/portraits>

Portrait Spotlight:

<http://npg.si.edu/teachers/classroom-resources>

Reading Portraiture Guide for Educators:

<http://npg.si.edu/learn/classroom-resource/reading-portraiture-guide-educators>.

The Elements of Portrayal

The Elements of Portrayal provide the foundation by which we engage with works of art. Initiate the conversation by having students identify the various elements of portrayal in a portrait, using the questions below. How do we bring these elements together to tell the story of a sitter?

Facial expression: Use adjectives to describe the sitter's facial expression. What emotion(s) does this expression convey?

Pose: Describe the sitter's pose. What is the artist trying to say about the sitter?

Clothing: What clothing is the sitter wearing? What might clothing tell us about the sitter's profession, personality, social status, or place in history?

Hairstyle: Describe the sitter's hairstyle. Why would hairstyle be an important element of a portrait?

Setting: What is the setting of the portrait? What might the setting tell us about the sitter? Consider if the setting is real or imagined.

Objects: What objects are in the portrait? Objects function as symbols. What might they be telling us about the sitter?

Color: What is color conveying in this image? How does color set the tone and mood of the portrait?

Medium: What medium was used to create the portrait? Why is medium important as we read portraiture?

Scale: What effect does the size of this portrait have on the way we view the sitter?

Artistic style: How does this artist's particular style tell us something about the sitter?

Other questions to consider:

- Why was the portrait created? What purpose did it serve?
- What does the portrait say about American life at the time it was created?



Museum Manners

We know that students look forward to visiting the museum, an experience often unique to their normal routine. We have a few basic behavior guidelines. Reviewing them beforehand will ensure a smoother visit for all.

Please Do:

- Ask questions
- Interact with the Gallery Educator
- Walk, look, and listen
- Stay more than an arm's length from walls, pedestals, columns

Please Don't:

- Touch
- Yell
- Run
- Wander away from the group

