

# Young Portrait Explorers:

## Roger Shimomura



**Learning Objective:** Learn about artist Roger Shimomura and how he uses his paintings to express his **identity** (what makes someone unique).

### Portrait Discussion:

**Scale:** Let your eyes wander across this painting. This self-portrait of Roger Shimomura is made up of 3 canvas panels. Each panel measuring 6ft by 4ft! From end to end, the entire painting is 12 feet across!

**Pose:** Look closely at the people in this self-portrait by Roger Shimomura. Can you spot the man standing tall with his hands on his hips and one knee bent? That is Roger Shimomura! Can you stand like him? How do you feel? Take a look at the other men in this painting. Are they standing or sitting? What are they doing with their hands? Do you see the **oars** (a pole with a flat blade used to row or steer a boat) that they are holding?

**Facial Expression:** Take a look at the facial expressions in this portrait. How many different expressions can you spot in these faces? Are they smiling or frowning? Do you think they look happy or upset? Use your pointer finger to trace the facial expression of the man at the front of the boat (farthest to the left). Is his expression the same or different from Roger Shimomura's?

**Clothing:** Can you spot the different patterns and colors of the clothing in this painting? The men who are paddling the boat are wearing **kimonos** (or the traditional Japanese loose robes with wide sleeves), which were often worn by **samurais** (or important men in the Japanese military). Roger Shimomura's Japanese **heritage** (family history) made him feel proud, but it also made him feel different than other Americans. Did you notice that Shimomura has not painted himself in a kimono? What is Shimomura wearing? In his art, Shimomura often features himself dressed like well-known people. In this self-portrait, Roger Shimomura dresses up as **George Washington**, the first president of the United States. In another self-portrait he dresses up as Superman! Have you ever dressed up as someone else?

**Setting:** What do you see in the background of this painting? Shimomura paints himself and the other men on a boat. Where do you think they might be going? Do you see the clouds and rain behind the boat? Roger Shimomura has painted himself crossing the San Francisco Harbor, where Angel Island is located. **Angel Island** is where his family and many other Asian Americans first arrived in the United States.

**Historical Context:** *Artist Roger Shimomura was born in the United States to Japanese parents. Throughout his life, many fellow Americans made him feel different and out of place because of his Japanese heritage. During World War II, even the U.S. government thought Asian Americans were not only different but also dangerous. Shimomura and his family, along with many other Asian Americans, were placed in **internment** or **incarceration camps** (places where Asian Americans were forced to live for a period of time). Shimomura's art focuses on the experiences of Asian Americans and the challenges of being "different" in the United States. Have you ever felt different or out of place?*

**Related Children's Books:** *Kapow!* by George O'Connor

### Activity: Dressing-Up

#### Materials:

A costume or a piece of clothing that is not your own

Instructions: Roger Shimomura dresses up like other people to see how he might be similar and/or different from them. Stand in front of a mirror and name three things that make you, you. Are you tall? Do you like wearing the color purple? Now put on your costume or

piece of clothing. Which parts of you have changed? Feel free to draw yourself as you, and then draw yourself as someone else. Which version of you do feel most comfortable with?





*Shimomura Crossing the Delaware* by Roger Shimomura, acrylic on canvas, 2010. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Raymond L. Ocampo Jr., Sandra Olesky Ocampo, and Robert P. Ocampo. © Roger Shimomura

Find the portrait on our website, here: [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.2012.71](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2012.71)