Portraits as Biographies

Respond

Standard 5: Students will reflect on and assess the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

8th grade Honors Art
Evidence Description

• This collection focuses on the growth of written response to artwork. The unit of instruction was about analyzing portraits as biographies.
• Point A objective (before instruction): The student will analyze a portrait. (This was a pre-assessment, so I did not give any further instruction). This was completed at the beginning of October.
• Point B objective (after instruction): The student will analyze a portrait. (Students were given prior instruction on how to analyze a portrait according to facial expression, focal point, clothing, gesture, setting, and objects. The students were also given the prompts “When I see ___ I think/wonder/feel ____,” as well as “When I see _____ I think/wonder/feel _____” in order to make predictions about the subject of the portrait in their analysis. (This was completed in mid October).
• Point C objective (independent practice): Using the information learned about how to analyze a portrait, the student will create a portrait of a family member or friend. Choose the facial expression, focal point, clothing, gesture, setting, and objects to create a biography of your chosen subject. Write an analysis of your portrait. (This was completed in January).
Emerging Student

There is a woman, who is holding what looks like a tiny tower, but I’m pretty sure that is some type of landmark. She doesn’t look young.

Point A (Pre-Assessment): Student Analysis of Portrait Above

There is a Native American man. He has a smug facial expression. The focal point is straight forward. The setting is split between the tribe ground and British land. He is wearing Native American chief clothing. The objects in the picture are a peace treaty, necklace, scarf, flag, dove, and hawk. When I see the headdress on him, it makes me think that he is someone important like a chief or leader. When I see the dove, it makes me feel at peace, or the situation has something to do with being peaceful. When I see the treaty in flames, it makes me wonder if the tribe didn’t want peace with whoever they signed the treaty with. I feel there is a war going on because I see what looks like Native Americans lining up for attack.

Point B (After Instruction): Student Analysis of Portrait Above

Emerging Student
I created a portrait of my cousin Karen. Karen is a shy person unless you get to know her well, then she’s not as shy. She’s generally a calm person and doesn’t like too much attention. Karen is someone very close to me not just because she is my cousin, its because we know each other really well and we have a strong bond like she’s my sister.

I chose to have her make a calm expression with a small smile. She’s looking to the side because normally shy people look to the side or they look down instead of looking directly at you and Karen’s a shy person so I had her do that. She’s wearing a striped shirt since has so many striped shirts. In the portrait she has daisies surrounding her because they’re her favorite flowers. I chose to make the space behind the daisies blue because the walls of her bedroom are blue and it is a cool color that reminds me of her.”
A young girl with a smirk on her face is holding a gold box type object in her right hand. She has a brown, white, and black sweater on and a long red beaded necklace. She also has on a white head band and black earrings. Her lips are extremely red and her eyes extremely dark.

A Native American man has a vengeful smirk on his face. He is looking straight forward. The setting includes a tree, a farm, British campground, the sky, war, and fire. The man is wearing Native American tribal clothing. The objects include a treaty, birds, flag, and scarf. When I see the treaty on fire, it makes me think that a treaty has been broken. I think this happened long ago because I see the British and Native Americans fighting. I feel that the picture is split in the middle because I see a peaceful side and a violent side. I think he is an important figure in Native American history, and was once happy and peaceful and now is sad in a violent war.
“I created a portrait of my grandpa as a biography. My grandpa is a perky and funny man whose smile can light up a room. He’s quite intelligent as well with many skills. He loves many things including his car, his dog, and he drinks coke all the time.

In the drawing Grandpa is smiling like always and feeding his dog Lily coke. His shirt says “Garage Guru.” Around him there is a chair he is sitting in, his dog, and his car. All of these things he loves and enjoys. The portrait is done in the style of a caricature and colored in bright marker ink. The lines are bold like his personality.”
Advanced Student

Point A (Pre-Assessment): Student Analysis of Portrait Above

“This portrait is of a woman. Her clothes and the item she is holding seem to be dated so this portrait must be from a long time ago. The golden box in her hand might represent royalty. The cut off item to the right looks like a model of a baby with clothes draped over it. The clothes look like those of a rich person. I suspect she might be a seamstress for royalty.”

Point B (After Instruction): Student Analysis of Portrait Above

“The portrait shows a Native American man looking straight forward with a slightly serious expression. The setting appears to be split between peaceful Native American land and a British fort. He is wearing a headdress and clothes of a leader or chief. There is a piece of cloth, a dove, eagle, and a treaty burning. When I see an eagle, it makes me think a war is going on. The fire makes me feel that there has been violence. When I see the silhouettes of the Native Americans in the background, it makes me wonder if they are preparing for attack. I think the British are fighting the Native Americans because I see a treaty that is burning. I wonder if the man is important because I see an important looking headdress and necklace on him, with face paint that might represent a chief. It looks like he is leading the Native Americans into war with the British.”
“For my biography, I did a portrait of my mom. My mom is a strong, independent woman of three children. She tends to be quiet and shy in an unfamiliar surrounding, but opens up easily and can be talkative around her friends and family. In both the morning and night, my mom can be seen with coffee or book in her hand, a cat in her lap. Also, my mom is a very creative person who loves to craft, especially in her scrapbook. She looks out for others and is a very kind, smart soul.

For the focal point and gesture, my mom is looking to the side, and for the facial expression her eyebrows raised and mouth slightly opened, as if her name was called. She’s wearing a robe and pajamas, preparing for bed. For the setting my mom is sitting in her chair found in her bedroom, since she usually sits there in the evening. My mom loves to read, and when she’s reading, a cat is usually sitting with her, so two objects I included in her portrait are a book and her favorite cat. Also, to signify she has children, I drew two toys around her chair. I chose chalk pastel as my medium, because like it, my mom is soft and gentle. But at the same time, I used bright colors since she is happy and vibrant.”
Growth Rationale

• Students grew considerably in their ability to analyze portraits as biographies. Students started with simple descriptions and moved to detailed analysis with predictions of the individuals in the portraits.

• Students then internalized the information of the components of analyzing portraits to then create a portrait of a family member or loved one as a biography. A written analysis of that portrait was also created. This shows higher-level thinking and meta-cognitive processing. This is an honors level 8th grade art class.