

A History of Selfies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define portrait and self-portrait
- More than just a person – identify objects in a portrait and what they mean.
- Examine different portrait mediums and styles.

SUMMARY

Today we post selfies to Instagram, but what did we do before the dawn of social media and photography? Portraits – of course! Families will define portraits and explore their visual elements. Their museum visit will conclude with a look at different approaches to portraiture.

MUSEUM VISIT

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden—*Ai Weiwei: Trace*

ALTERNATIVES

Visit a local library, town hall, etc. that has portraits on view.

AGE 3-5 years

TOPICS OF EXPLORATION

Portrait styles and materials

Purposes of portraits

Elements of portraits

EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

OBJECT

Portraits and Legos

BOOK

Portraits—a First Discovery Art Book

PROJECT

Lego portrait inspired by *Ai Weiwei: Trace*

MATERIALS TO GATHER

- Prints & books
- Selfie stick
- Solid color backdrop
- Dress up clothes
- Objects
- Velcro facial features
- Mirrors
- Paint
- Paper
- Paintbrushes
- Random materials for portraits
- Glue
- Tray
- Real fruits & vegetables
- Sun hat
- Rocking horse
- Fancy dress
- Newspaper
- Big ziplocks for wet artwork

ITEMS TO PREPARE:

- Laminated image of *Summer (2)*
- Signs
- Extensions
- Fruit and vegetables

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

- **Selfie Station**—provide a selfie stick, dress up clothes & a solid color backdrop, and encourage families to dress up and choose objects to take a selfie with that will capture something about their personality.
- **Make that face!**—provide Velcro facial features and mirrors with felt on the back. Set up a variety of faces from artwork and encourage children to identify how the person is feeling and recreate the face with the facial features and with their own face.
- **Mirror Self Portraits**—In order to create a portrait, artists have to study their subject to make sure they are capturing them just right. Look at yourself in the mirror and paint your features directly on the mirror, then press a sheet of paper over the mirror and peel it off to reveal your self portrait print!
- **Arcimboldo Inspired Portrait**—provide cut up fruit, flowers, and leaves to create a portrait.
- **Literacy Station**—*Self-Portraits* by Peggy Roalf, *Faith Ringgold* by Robyn Montana Turner, *Portraits* by Steve McCurry, *Jazz ABZ: An A to Z Collection of Jazz Portraits* by Wynton Marsalis

WARM UP

- Hello song & introductions with portrait they made during choices if they would like to.
- Who knows what a selfie is? A selfie is a photo that you take of yourself, but before there were cameras, how do you think people recorded what they or their friends/family looked like? They created portraits.
- What is a portrait? Read [Portraits, A First Discovery Art Book](#). A portrait is an artistic representation of a person that not only shows the way they look physically, but also gives an idea about the person's personality and mood. Portraits tell a story about a person through the person's facial expression, clothes, background, colors, and objects in the portrait. The artist has a big job when they create a portrait—they have to think about the colors they'll use, the materials, whether they'll show the person's whole body, or just their face, if there will be a setting, etc.
- Let's take a closer look at a portrait to see how this works. Show *The Hobby Horse* by Robert Peckham and use paper to cover all but the girls' faces. Ask for observations—Is this a portrait? What can you tell me about these people? Are they looking at us? How do you think they're feeling? What else do you notice? Move the paper out so you can see more of the portrait including the clothes, and hobby horse. What else can you tell me about these people now? What are they doing? Where are they? What else is in the portrait? Based on what you've observed, create a story about the two children.
- As we saw in the book, portraits can look very different and be made of different materials. Let's head over to the Hirshhorn and see portraits made out of a material that you might surprise you.

MUSEUM GATHERING

- Before going into the exhibit space let families know that the portraits are on the ground. Remind them of museum manners, and that we need to keep the art safe by not touching the artwork. Tell them to spend a few minutes walking around the gallery space thinking about the materials used, the colors, facial expressions, shapes etc. Hand out a card with questions to think about.
- Gather families, and make a circle in which the families can see the artwork. I would suggest against a wall in the middle gallery (there are 3 total with 2 zones in each), but feel free to sit outside the space if it's too crowded.
- Ask families what they noticed. Some questions to use to facilitate the conversation: What did you see? Did something surprise you about the portraits? What facial expressions did you notice? Did one of the portraits stand out to you? Why? Did you see objects or a background in the portraits? Did you see the person's whole body or just part of their body?
- Introduce Ai Weiwei and discuss the portraits using the Ai Weiwei book.
- Hand out Lego canvases to families. Put out small Legos and allow children to create their own self portrait or portrait of someone else using Legos. Come back together and share portraits, encouraging families to take a photo since they won't be able to keep their Lego self-portraits.
- Reemphasize that portraits are not just a picture of a person, but tell a story about that person if we look closely at the facial expressions, colors, materials used, background and objects in the portrait.
- Sing goodbye and hand out extension. Invite families to stay longer at the exhibit and find a portrait or two that interests them. Encourage families to go home and find out more information about the person in the portrait together. If families are interested, so them one of your favorite portraits, explain why you like it and tell the person's story.

INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS

Portraits

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/port/hd_port.htm

- An artistic representation of a person that not only portrays the way they look physically, but also invokes the person's personality, profession and/or mood.
- Portraiture has been around since antiquity, especially ancient Rome and Greece where powerful people were represented in sculptures and on coins.
- Popularity of individualized portraits resurged during the renaissance.
- Portrait purposes:
 - Recording appearances
 - Social—miniatures were given as gifts
 - Portraits of rulers asserted their majesty in places from which they were absent
 - To record significant moments such as marriage or promotion

Ai Weiwei: Trace

- A collaborative artist project, *Ai Weiwei: Trace at Hirshhorn* features the East Coast debut of the monumental installation *Trace*, which portrays individuals from around the world whom the artist and various human rights groups consider to be activists, prisoners of conscience, and advocates of free speech. Each of these 176 portraits comprises thousands of plastic LEGO® bricks, assembled by hand and laid out on the floor. The work foregrounds Ai Weiwei's own experiences of incarceration, interrogation, and surveillance. In 2011, he was detained by the Chinese government for eighty-one days and then prohibited from traveling abroad until 2015. In 2012, the Hirshhorn opened Ai's first major US retrospective exhibition, [*Ai Weiwei: According to What?*](#), which he was unable to attend.

From: <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/collection/ai-weiwei-trace-hirshhorn/#detail=https%3A//hirshhorn.si.edu/bio/ai-weiwei-trace/>

- Images of all portraits and description: <https://www.for-site.org/project/ai-weiwei-alcatraz-trace/#list-top>
- Video about Ai Weiwei: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMTsodcAsVU&t=1s>
- "Lego is a language which everybody can appreciate and should be able to use ... according to their will, and that's what all freedom of expression is about." - Ai Weiwei from <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/13/462921776/lego-says-its-changing-its-policy-after-ai-weiwei-controversy>
- "They Love Freedom": Ai Weiwei on his Lego Portraits of Self Activists: <http://www.npr.org/2017/06/27/534597240/-they-love-freedom-ai-weiwei-on-his-lego-portraits-of-fellow-activists>

INFORMATION FOR CAREGIVERS

Resources

The Importance of Art in Child Development by Grace Hwang Lynch

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music-arts/the-importance-of-art-in-child-development/>

Carol Dweck Revisits the Growth Mindset by Carol Dweck

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/09/23/carol-dweck-revisits-the-growth-mindset.html>

Rationale

Through observation, careful looking, and discussion of art, young children develop their critical thinking and communication skills, which are vital for their later success in life and skill.

Providing multiple and varied exposures to the same concept helps make a concept more concrete and rich for children. Through careful looking of a more “traditional” portrait, with modern “non-traditional” portraits, children are provided with multiple touch points to form new knowledge.

Tips

Engage in inquiry as a family. When your child stops to look at something help facilitate the conversation by asking open-ended questions such as, what do you see? What colors do you notice? What shapes? What does this make you wonder? What predictions can you make? Through this discussion your child will practice observation, critical thinking, communication, experimentation, and more.

Encourage a healthy sense of self and self esteem by helping to build a growth mindset in your child. Someone with a growth mindset does not see their abilities as predetermined or set in stone, but instead something that can be developed through effort. Encourage your child when they get frustrated by praising their effort. When they get stuck tell them that the feeling of something being hard is the feeling of their brain growing. Through this encouragement, children will not see themselves as “not good at math or reading”, but will feel confident that their skills can grow through hard work and assistance.