

7 Ways to Look at a Portrait

1. **Look closely** at this portrait for a minute. Talk to the person next to you about what you see. Now, roll this worksheet into a tube. Use it like a telescope to focus on one small part of this portrait. What new things did you notice? Share them with the person next to you.

2. Write down one **question** you have about this portrait.

3. On the back of this worksheet, **make a drawing** of this portrait. You only have one minute. Use the whole page! (If the portrait is horizontal, turn your paper so that it is horizontal.)

4. Now, finish your drawing using **words** instead of lines. Wherever you would put a line, write what you see or feel. Use descriptive words, questions, or whatever comes to mind.

5. Turn to the person next to you again and **read exactly** what you wrote on your drawing.

6. Once your whole class has finished sharing, your teacher will read the wall label and explain what it says.

Was your question above answered?
What new questions do you have?

7. Come together as a class to discuss this portrait.

Staff picks



left: *LL Cool J* by Kehinde Wiley, oil on canvas, 2005; Lent by LL Cool J © Kehinde Wiley
right: *John F. Kennedy* by Elaine de Kooning, oil on canvas, 1963; © Elaine de Kooning Trust

Claim–Support–Question

This thinking routine helps students develop thoughtful interpretations by encouraging them to reason with evidence.

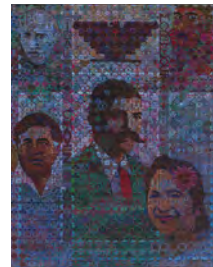
Portrait Title/Artist: _____

Make a **claim** about the portrait (an interpretation of some aspect of the image).

What is the **support** for your claim (things you see, feel, and know that support your claim)?

Ask a **question** related to your initial claim. What hasn't been explained yet? If you are in the gallery with someone else, share your question with that person.

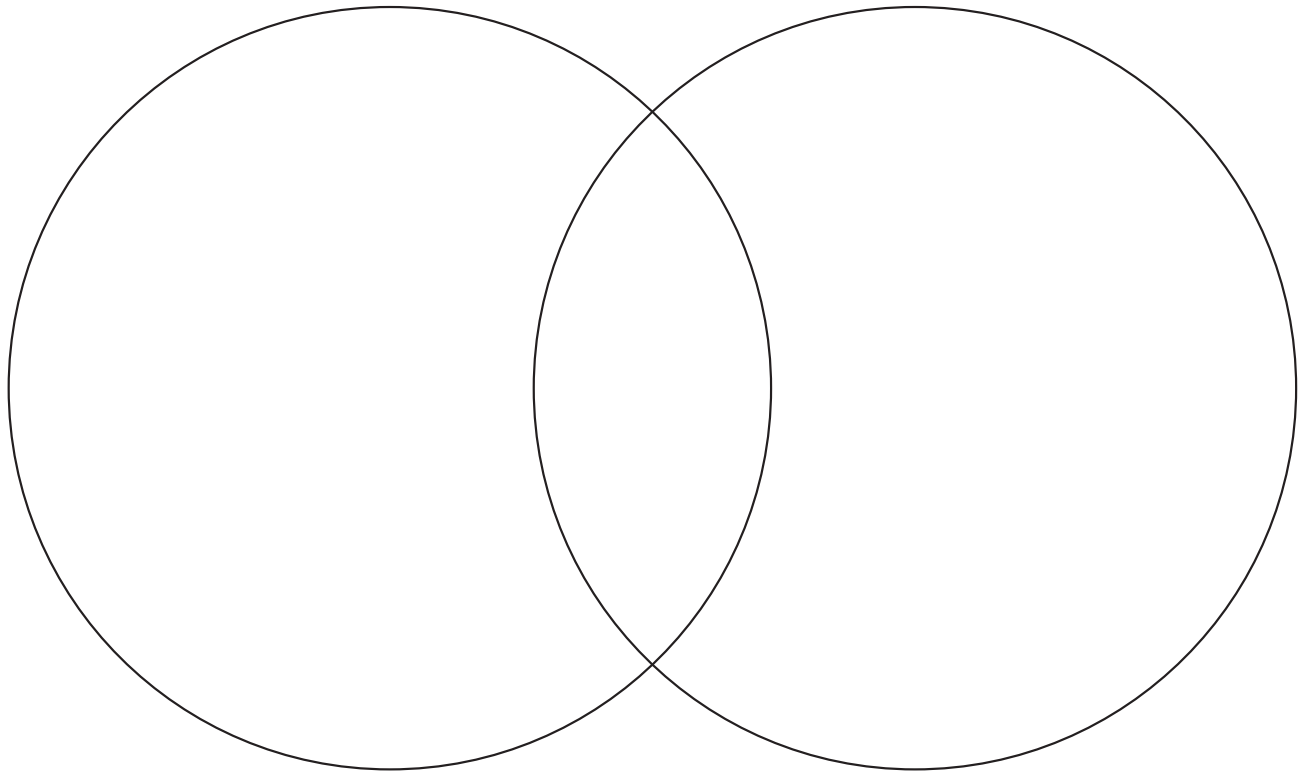
Staff picks



left: *The Return to Astlan* by Alfredo Arreguin; oil on canvas, 2010, gift of Felix Arreguin Velez and Catalina Toledo de Arreguin
right: *Rosa Parks* by Marshall Rumbaugh, painted limewood, 1983

Compare and Contrast

Look at two portraits of the same sitter or two portraits created during the same era or two different eras. What is the same? What is different? Use the Venn diagram to record your observations.



Pocahontas



Abraham Lincoln



Anne Catharine
Hoof Green



Sarah
Seaton

Staff picks:

Compare and Contrast Top Hat

Choose 2 portraits in the same gallery and complete the Top Hat below.

Artist: _____ Title: _____ Media: _____ Year: _____ Size: _____	Questions:	Artist: _____ Title: _____ Media: _____ Year: _____ Size: _____
	What do you see?	
	What is the setting?	
	What is the subject?	
	What is the subject wearing?	
	How is the subject posing? Why do you think this?	
FG: MG: BG:	What is in the foreground, middle ground, background?	FG: MG: BG:
1. 2.	List 2 Elements of Art that you see in this portrait.	1. 2.
	List 1 Principle of Design you see in this portrait.	
	Describe the mood evoked in this portrait.	

- Answer: Why did you choose these 2 artworks to compare and contrast?

- Draw an example of each of the art works in the space below (or on the back of this sheet).

Compelling Portraits

Find a portrait that fascinates you, that “tickles your fancy.”

Art Work’s Information:

Artist: _____ Title: _____

Date: _____ Media/Medium: _____ Size: _____

- **Describe:** Provide a pure description of what you see **without** value judgements, analysis, or interpretation. What do you see?

- **Analyze:** Determine what the elements of the portrait suggest, and decide why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas. How is the artwork organized? Use the Elements of Art & Principles of Design vocabulary.

- **Interpret:** Connections can be created between experiences and art. How do you personally connect to this portrait? What does it mean to you? Use complete sentences.

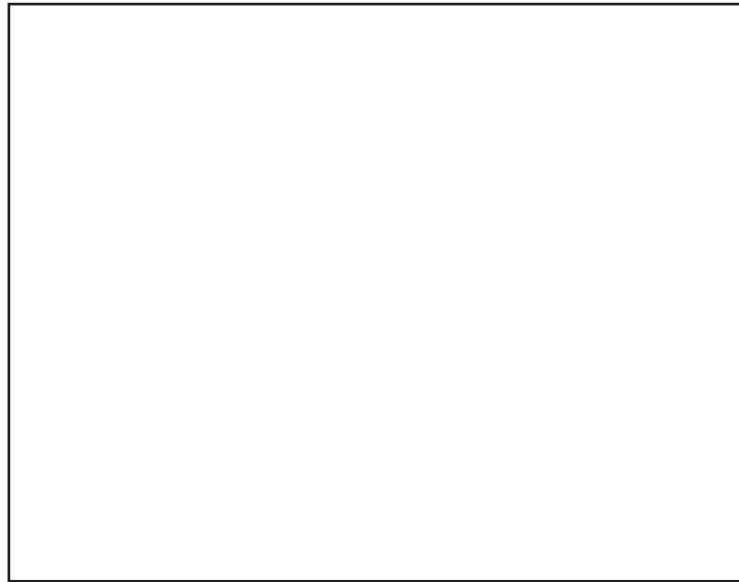
- **Evaluate:** Is the artwork successful? Why do you think it is or is not successful? Use complete sentences.

- **Concept Statement:** Describe in your own words the artwork’s overall meaning and reason for existing (BIG IDEA).

- Draw an example of the art work in the space below (or on the back of this paper).

Jump In!

Find a portrait. If you could jump into this portrait, where would you like to be? How large or small would you like to be? Draw yourself and where you jumped into in the box below.



Portrait Title/Artist: _____

In this spot, I smell... _____

I hear... _____

I feel... _____

I see... _____

I taste... _____

I imagine... _____

I wonder... _____

Staff picks



Ulysses S. Grant, Ole Peter Hansen Balling, oil on canvas, 1865



Edward O. Wilson, Jennie Summerall, oil on canvas, 2006
© 2006 Jennie Summerall

Seeds for Storytelling

Choose an artwork. If you were able to step inside the artwork, tell me . . .

- Artist: _____
- Title: _____
- Media: _____
- Year: _____
- Size: _____

What is going on around you in this artwork?

Why are you in this artwork?
How do you feel?

Where are you in this artwork?

If you were to change something in this artwork, what would it be?

What are you doing in this artwork?

Who are you in this artwork?

• What do you:		
See?		Smell?
Hear?		Feel?
Taste?		

See–Think–Wonder

A fantastic routine to start with – works with any portrait!

1. What do you see? Take time to look closely.

I see . . .

2. What do you think is happening in this portrait:

I think . . .

3. What do you wonder about this portrait?

I wonder . . .

Staff picks for this routine:



George Washington



Mary McLeod Bethune

Think–Puzzle–Explore

What do you think is going on in this portrait? List your responses below.

- _____
- _____
- _____

How does this portrait puzzle you? What do you have about this portrait? List questions or puzzles you have about this portrait:

- _____
- _____
- _____

What does this portrait make you want to learn about, or explore?

Staff picks



right: *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* by David Lenz, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2009
left: *Edward O. Wilson* by Jennie Summerall, oil on canvas, 2006
© 2006 Jennie Summerall

Unveiling Stories

This close-looking activity allows the viewer to uncover the many layers of meaning in an artwork.

What is the visible story or overarching theme of the image?

What is the human story or the person-centered experience in this image?

What is the world story? What global issues of today can we connect to this image?

Read the wall label. With that information, what is the new story?

What is the untold story? What are the important absences of the story? What could be happening beyond the frame of this portrait?

Staff picks



left: *Shimomura Corssing the Delaware* by Roger Shimomura; acrylic on canvas, 2010, gift of Raymond L. Ocampo Jr., Sandra Oleksy Ocampo, and Robert P. Ocampo © Roger Shimomura
right: *Treaty of Versailles* by John Christen Johansen, oil on canvas, 1919, gift of an anonymous donor, 1926

Six-Word Memoir

The memoir should teach the reader about the sitter's contributions, significance, era, appearance, emotions, or actions. This exercise helps students express their ideas succinctly and encourages them to be precise with their word choice.

Sitter _____ Artist _____

Looking at the portrait, write as many words and short phrases as you can think of to describe your interpretations of the following:

Expression:

Pose:

Clothing:

Setting:

Objects:

Other words, phrases, thoughts, feelings, ideas:

Writing a Six-Word Memoir

What words feel most important to you in teaching others about the sitter and the portrait?

Organize your words to create at least five different six-word memoirs.

Circle your favorite six-word memoir. Why is it your favorite?

Staff picks



left: *Dempsey-Willard Fight*, James Montgomery Flagg, 1944 © Cathy O'Brien
right: *Cupcake Katy* by Will Cotton, oil on linen, 2010, gift of the James F. Dicke Family © Will Cotton

Timeline

Find portraits that interest you in each of the time periods. Record information for each portrait chosen in the timeline according to the life dates of the sitter/subject. In the space provided, write the name of the sitter/subject and describe how their time period is represented in the portrait you have chosen.

● 1500–1599	_____
● 1600–1699	_____
● 1700–1799	_____
● 1800–1899	_____
● 1900–1999	_____
● 2000–present	_____

Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery

Self-Guide Reflection

1. What did you observe while at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery?

2. What is one thing that you learned?

3. How was your experience in the National Portrait Gallery surprising?

4. What did you wonder about during your trip to the National Portrait Gallery?

5. If you could go back to the National Portrait Gallery tomorrow, what would you do differently?
What would you see again?
