

Portraits - Introductory Activities for Pupils

The following activities encourage close observation of a portrait, and can be done in a gallery or classroom setting. Each takes between 10 – 15 minutes.

The Title Challenge

Pretend that the title for the portrait has been lost in transit. Working in pairs children can create new titles and the class can vote for their favourite.

Speech and Thought Bubbles

In pairs, allow pupils to complete captions. This works really well with group portraits and could be developed further into creative writing or role play.

The Portrait Comes to Life

This game needs a brave teacher/pupil to dress up as the sitter! Working in pairs or small groups, pupils devise a list of questions for the sitter. This role play approach can be combined with internet research to discover background information such as historical context.

What if...

Explore the significance of props and background features in a portrait. Provide your class with a title to respond to i.e. 'The Parker Family' or 'Major Jones after the Battle'. You can choose to do this through role play and props, or allow the pupils to sketch their responses. Discuss the varying features chosen, including the props, pose and setting, and how each responded to the task.

Through Rose Tinted Glasses

Download the flashcards from this site and provide pupils with a range of subtle and bold coloured acetates to use as an overlay. How do the varying colours affect their reading of the sitter and the portraits? What do different colours represent, and can you think of examples where colours are used to signify something (for example; red for danger on road signs, yellow and black as warnings in the insect world, white for the dove of peace.) Symbolic colours are used frequently in advertising, and if you wish to explore this theme further encourage pupils to bring magazine adverts and packaging into class to discuss what might be the hidden messages.