

Teachers' Notes

THE TUDORS

(Rooms 1 – 3)

Portraits as Historical Evidence

These guided discussion notes reflect the way in which the National Portrait Gallery Learning Department works when using portraits as historical sources, with pupils of all ages. As far as possible, pupils are encouraged through questioning to observe in detail and to form their own hypotheses; a small amount of information is fed into the discussion at appropriate points to deepen their observations.

These notes therefore consist of a series of questions, with suggested answers; where there is information to add this is shown in a box. The questions, perhaps slightly rephrased, would be suitable for pupils at both primary and secondary level; what will differ is the sophistication of the answers. The information will need rephrasing for younger pupils and it may be necessary to probe by adding extra questions to get the full interpretation of the picture. **Please note we cannot guarantee that all of the portraits in these notes will be on display at the time of your visit.**

Please see www.npg.org.uk/learning/digital for these and other online resources. Other guided discussions in this series of online Teachers' Notes include:

- Stuarts
- Georgians
- Regency
- Victorians
- Twentieth Century and Contemporary

These guided discussions can be used either when visiting the Gallery on a self-directed visit or in the classroom using images from the Gallery's website, www.npg.org.uk/collections.

All self directed visits to the Gallery must be booked in advance by telephone on 020 7312 2483. If you wish to support your visit with the use of Teachers' Notes please book in advance, stating which notes you wish to use in order for us to check that the appropriate Gallery rooms are available at the time of your visit.

SIR THOMAS MORE, HIS FATHER, HIS HOUSEHOLD AND DESCENDANTS

by Rowland Lockey, after Hans Holbein the Younger
oil on canvas, 1593
89 1/2 in. x 130 in. (2274 mm x 3302 mm)
Bequeathed by Emslie John Horniman, 1935
Primary Collection
NPG 2765



In real life this portrait is very large - more than two metres high and over three metres wide - what would it have been painted on?

Canvas - it would be virtually impossible to have had a wooden panel this size

Do you think that a single piece of canvas this size could have been woven in Tudor times?

No, it had to be joined

What kind of paint was used?

Oil paint

How has Thomas More (second man from left) been made to stand out?

Gold chain

What shows that he served Henry VIII?

Tudor rose on the chain

How is the fabric of his clothes different from the fabric of the robes worn by his father, sitting next to him?

Thomas More wears velvet, seen most clearly on his sleeves; his father was a judge and judicial robes were woollen

The people around Thomas More are wearing clothes from the time of Henry VIII; which monarch do you associate with

the clothes of the four people to the right of the picture?

Elizabeth I

What is distinctively Elizabethan about these clothes?

Ruffs

In which reign, therefore, would you say that this picture was painted?

Elizabeth I

How did the artist put in the figures from Henry VIII's reign?

By copying an earlier picture

It is possible to tell, simply from looking at the people from the time of Henry VIII, that their position has been moved around and that this is not just a direct copy of Holbein's group. Look at Elizabeth Dauncy (standing behind her sisters looking to her left). She would appear very odd if she were placed close to the edge of the picture, staring out of it.

Where would be a more sensible place to put her, in this pose, among her family?

The obvious place for her would be beside Sir John More - who wears bright red - where she would give a clear edge to the group and would look across, rather than away from, her family. This is, in fact, where she was in Holbein's painting.

What tells you that the Elizabethan Mores were Roman Catholics, like Thomas More?

Maria More's crucifix

Why did the Elizabethan Mores want their ancestor Thomas More in the picture?

Because he was famous, to show their descent from him

The girl on the left, Ann Cresacre More, comes again in the painting - where do you think she is?

In the portrait on the wall behind them

Looking at her in the portrait on the wall, what can you tell has happened to her husband?

She is a widow, so he has died

She was 15 or 16 when she was painted in the original picture - why do you think she was shown twice?

To show her as a woman, as well as a girl

What interests do the More family have from the evidence of this picture?

Music, reading, flowers, portraits, heraldry

What evidence is there that they were interested in technology?

The clock, which we might take for granted but was technologically advanced

What does the picture tell us about the More's way of life?

Comfortable and rich - carved furniture, velvet hangings, grand clothes, jewellery, etc.

What were the main characteristics of life in the More household, as shown in the picture?

Closeness, education of women, peace and calm

HENRY VII

by Unknown artist
oil on panel, arched top, 1505
16 3/4 in. x 12 in. (425 mm x 305 mm)
Purchased, 1876
Primary Collection
NPG 416



How were portraits used to help arrange royal marriages in Tudor times?

Discussion might cover Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves painted by Holbein

This portrait of Henry VII played a part in a marriage negotiation. As the inscription records, it was painted on 20 October 1505 by order of Herman Rinck, agent of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. Henry hoped to marry Maximilian's daughter Margaret, the widowed Duchess of Savoy, as his second wife, and the portrait of Henry was sent to her in exchange for two portraits of herself. Margaret kept the painting until her death.

When Margaret received the painting, do you think it made her want to marry Henry?

No, probably not

FOCUS ON HOW HENRY IS PRESENTED

What is he holding?

A pink rose

Why?

Symbol of the House of Tudor; symbol of love as he is trying to woo Margaret

What is he wearing round his neck?

Gold chain with a sheep on it

It is the order of the Golden Fleece, a European decoration presented to Henry by the Emperor.

Why?

To show he is wealthy and to present himself as a European, rather than an English monarch, as he is trying to arrange a European marriage for himself with the Emperor's daughter

How else does he show his wealth?

Rich fabric on his gown, fur

FOCUS ON THE STYLE OF THE PAINTING

Why does he seem to be looking through a window?

Sky blue background, shape of picture, hands resting on the sill - this is a North European convention in portraiture

What is this portrait painted on?

Wooden panel

What type of paint has been used?

Oil paint

Thinking about the circumstances in which this picture was produced would you say that it is likely to be flattering portrait of Henry or a realistic one?

Realistic - the artist is working for Margaret not Henry, and Margaret wants to know what Henry looks like

HENRY VIII AND HENRY VII

by Hans Holbein the Younger
ink and watercolour, circa 1536-1537
101 1/2 in. x 54 in. (2578 mm x 1372 mm)
Accepted in lieu of tax by H.M. Government
and allocated to the Gallery, 1957
Primary Collection
NPG 4027



Who are these two people?

Henry VIII and Henry VII

Whom do you recognise more easily?

Most people would say Henry VIII

When you picture Henry VIII in your mind, does he look like this but in colour?

A lot of people do think of Henry VIII as looking like this. This is the image that the artist Hans Holbein created for Henry and it shows Henry as he wanted to be seen and remembered. It was similar to creating an advertisement today.

FOCUS ON HENRY VII

Holbein presents Henry VII as a typical renaissance monarch. Henry VII was of course dead long before Holbein came to England but he probably used the tomb sculpture in Westminster Abbey as his model for Henry, itself a flattering representation.

Compare this portrait with the Henry VII portrait of 1505, the previous portrait in these notes

Compare the nose on both portraits.
The 1505 has a thin, hooked nose; in the Holbein it is wider and more dignified

Compare the eyes.
Smaller in the 1505 than the Holbein

Compare the hair.
Wispier in the 1505

Compare the shape of the face.
Very pronounced cheekbones in the 1505; fuller in the Holbein

Compare the lips.
Very thin in the 1505

Compare the general differences.
Younger and more handsome in the Holbein than in the 1505

The Holbein is a good example of flattery in Tudor portraiture; the vast majority of Tudor portraits flatter the sitter. Another way to detect flattery is to compare the painted portrait with a written description of the sitter, though obviously writing can be biased too. Here is a description of Henry VII from Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, which Henry commissioned in 1505.

'His figure was slim but well built and strong; in height he was above average. Extremely attractive in appearance, his face was cheerful, especially when he was speaking. He had small, blue eyes, a few poor black-stained teeth. His hair was thin and white: his complexion sallow.'

FOCUS ON HENRY VIII

Did Henry really look like this?

Introduce the idea of flattery

How do the clothes he wears help to flatter Henry's figure?

Wide shoulders to balance large stomach

To study the flattery involved with Henry VIII also look at the discussion about the 1505 portrait of Henry VII.

What messages about himself is Henry VIII giving us in the picture?

Wealth; strength; power/authority; masculinity/virility

How does this picture give us these messages?

Wealth - ornate clothes, jewels, elaborate background; Strength - size, pose, dagger; Power/Authority - facial expression, pose, positioning of Henry VIII in front of his father and in the foreground of the picture; Masculinity/Virility - size, codpiece

Get a pupil to stand in the same position as Henry VIII to show how the pose accentuates the size and strength of the figure.

FOCUS ON HOW THIS PICTURE WAS MADE

This picture is drawn with ink with a light coat of water-colour - what do you think it is drawn on?

Paper - although you can only tell this from the original, most people guess correctly from general knowledge

Do you think they could make a piece of paper this big in Tudor times?

No, several pieces are glued together

This is a preparatory drawing, called a cartoon, for a wall painting in Henry's palace in Whitehall - the finished wall painting was in colour. The wall painting was destroyed in a fire in 1698 and only part of the cartoon has survived.

How could you transfer a drawing like this on to a wall? - The drawing on the wall must be the same size and the same way round as the cartoon; it is too slow simply to copy it and the cartoon was not stuck to the wall.

CLUE - all the lines on the cartoon have lots of small holes pricked through them.

The cartoon was held against the wall and chalk or charcoal was rubbed through the holes to create a 'dot to dot' picture - the dots were then joined to recreate the image

This technique is called pouncing and was frequently used in Tudor portraiture to make copies. This is the only genuine drawing by Holbein of Henry VIII to have survived. There is only one authentic oil painting of Henry by Holbein, now in a private collection in Madrid; there are lots of other pictures of Henry VIII but none are definitely by Holbein.

How long would you guess it took to complete the whole process, from starting the cartoon to finishing the wall painting?

Maybe about as much as a year

FOCUS ON THE MISSING PART

Does the cartoon look as though it is complete? - look particularly at the position of Henry VII at the edge of it.

No, part is missing beside Henry VII

Henry VII had his wife Elizabeth of York beside him; Henry VIII had the wife he was married to when the cartoon was started, who later gave birth to the child that Henry really wanted, unlike the rest of his wives - who was she?

Jane Seymour, the mother of his son and heir

In the frieze at the top, a merman and a mermaid hold a shield with the initials H and J and a lover's knot - what names do you think they stand for?

Henry and Jane

By the time the wall painting was finished three of the four people were dead - how did Holbein include them?

Jane Seymour from a portrait he had already painted. Henry VII and Elizabeth of York probably from their tomb in Westminster Abbey - Elizabeth of York's tomb sculpture was itself made from a painting

What is the picture all about?

Tudor family, dynasty

ANNE BOLEYN

by Unknown artist
oil on panel, late 16th century (circa 1533-1536)
21 3/8 in. x 16 3/8 in. (543 mm x 416 mm)
Purchased, 1882
Primary Collection
NPG 668



How do you know that this is Anne Boleyn?

'B' jewel around her neck, writing at top of picture

What language do you think this is written in?

Latin

Why do you think the painter chose Latin to write in?

To show she was important. Any foreign visitor would be able to read it

What type of jewel do you think she likes?

Pearls

Look carefully at one pearl and describe how it has been painted to make it look spherical.

It is not just a white blot. The circle is basically grey with a white spot and white rim where the light hits it

A foreigner described her as 'not one of the handsomest women in the world; she is of middling stature, swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised ... eyes which are black and beautiful.' How does this description match her portrait?

Not particularly closely, though her neck looks long. She is not very beautiful according to fashions today

Describe her skin colour in the portrait.

Pale, white

Why has the artist not shown her dark complexion in the portrait?

Not fashionable - the artist will have flattered Anne by giving her a paler skin

Why was it fashionable to be this colour?

It distinguished people who had to work in the open air from people who did not need to work for a living

What are her sleeves made of?

Velvet and fur

What does this show?

That she is rich

Which would you say this painter was better at - making her look like a living person or showing details of costume?

Probably costume. There is no sense from this portrait of the liveliness which so attracted Henry VIII

This picture was painted in the late sixteenth century as part of a set of English kings and queens. Which other people from Tudor times do you think would have been in the set?

Probably Henry VII, Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon, Jane Seymour, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I - probably not the other wives of Henry VIII as they did not have children and probably not Philip of Spain because he was so unpopular)

ELIZABETH I

(The Coronation Portrait)

by Unknown artist
oil on panel, late 16th - early 17th century
(circa 1559)
50 1/8 in. x 39 1/4 in. (1273 mm x 997
mm)
Purchased, 1978
Primary Collection
NPG 5175



What event is the picture celebrating?

The coronation of Elizabeth I

How do you know she is a queen?

Crown, orb, sceptre

What else makes her look regal?

Gold clothes, ermine fur, jewels

What shows which country/countries she claim to rule?

Tudor roses on dress for England and Wales. Also fleurs-de-lis which stakes her claim for France - of course this is only a claim, as her sister Mary lost England's last French possession, Calais

Could she really have been this thin?

No

So why has she been painted this thin?

Flattery - it was fashionable to be thin

How do you think her bodice was made to push her into this shape?

It would have had bone, steel or wooden sticks inside

How would this have felt?

Extremely uncomfortable

What is she wearing around her neck?

A ruff

What would that have done to her movements?

Restricts turning her head

What is the dress fabric made of?

Gold and silver thread, fur lining

How would this have felt to wear?

Hot, heavy, hard to move

Do you think she would have worn clothes like this every day?

No, it would be too unpleasant. Much of the time she wore a dressing gown

It seems odd that the Queen should choose to make herself so uncomfortable - why did she do it?

To look grand, to be fashionable

Often when something is fashionable there are important messages lying behind that fashion; for example, what would happen if Elizabeth dropped a glove?

A servant would pick it up - she could not possibly bend down herself, the clothes tell you that she does not need to move herself, as servants will wait on her

How does the colour of her face strike you?

Very pale, white, possibly ill-looking

How did she make her face this colour?

Powder, either made of eggshells or white lead

Go to the far corners of her eyebrows and go up to her forehead - what colour do you see?

Bluish grey

What do you have in your skin that is that colour?

Veins

If her face is covered with powder, how do you think you could see the veins?

Painted onto her face on top of her makeup

What does she want to suggest her skin is like if you can see the veins?

See-through, transparent

Does this all sound beautiful to you?

No, we tend to find it all rather unpleasant

Again, her skin colour is giving a message about her way of life; what makes white skin tan?

Sunlight

So what is she saying by being unpleasant?

That she does not go into the sunlight

How can she avoid the sunshine?

By sending servants to get things for her

How does this compare with most of her subjects?

Many people were involved in agriculture in Tudor England and were very tanned

In what position is her face?

Full-face - this is very unusual in Tudor portraiture and was done because the coinage was made from this image

How is her hair done?

Long and loose - the traditional style of hair for a Queen's coronation

How old does she look?

Guesses usually fall in the range 14 to 21; she is actually 26 but looks younger because of her long hair

ELIZABETH I

(The Ditchley Portrait)

by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger
oil on canvas, circa 1592
95 in. x 60 in. (2413 mm x 1524 mm)
Bequeathed by Harold Lee-Dillon, 17th
Viscount Dillon, 1932
Primary Collection
NPG 2561



FOCUS ON HER FACE

How old do you think she is?

She is actually 59; people often guess that she is much younger than this

How has the painter made her seem younger?

Hair colour, lack of wrinkles

Are there any signs of ageing?

Bags under the eyes, a few fine lines

Why might she have wanted to look younger than she really was?

Personal vanity; also political reasons - she controls her court through the fiction that her courtiers are all in love with her; dangerous to appear old and weak as this might have encouraged challenges from younger claimants to the throne

Why is her hair this colour?

It is a wig

What is odd about her mouth and why?

It is very small, she has lost her teeth

NOW LOOK AT THE BACKGROUND

What is under her feet?

A map of England

Why?

She rules it

What is the map on?

A globe

Why?

Claiming Imperial powers; refers to her status as a ruler

What can you see in the sea?

Ships and sea monsters

Why might they be there?

Possible reference to the Armada, to exploration; also a conventional map decoration at that time

Describe the weather in this picture.

Storms to the right, sunshine to the left

Which way is Elizabeth facing?

Towards the sunny side

What might the weather be saying about Elizabeth's reign?

She has brought her country through difficult times - such as the Armada - to its present happy state

FOCUS ON HER BODY AND CLOTHES

Is there any other obvious sign of flattery in this portrait?

The waist is unnaturally thin

What is the significance of the colour of her dress?

Younger pupils might say when long white dresses are worn today. Idea of virginity/purity - like a wedding dress - might then consider who or what she is married to - the country under her feet

What has been used to decorate her dress?

Pearls, gold, jewels - a dress like this would be extremely costly – maybe around half a million pounds at today's prices

What has she got pinned to her ruff and why?

A pink rose which is a symbol of beauty and of the house of Tudor

What is she holding in her hands?

Fan in her right hand; gloves in her left

Can you link these with the weather in the picture?

Fan for sunny weather; gloves for stormy weather

Would it be comfortable to wear a dress like this?

No - she is wearing her 'best' clothes for a portrait, as we might do today for a photograph; she often actually wore a looser robe like a dressing gown

Why is Elizabeth's skirt this shape?

Farthingale underneath it symbolizing wide hips for child-bearing

If you met her in this dress would you be able to see her feet?

No

Why has the painter shown her feet in this portrait?

Clue: think what she is standing on. To show her at a particular place on the map

Elizabeth is standing on Ditchley, the house of her courtier, Sir Henry Lee. This picture, known as the Ditchley portrait was painted for Sir Henry Lee, the Queen's champion from 1559-1590 and commemorates Elizabeth's visit to Lee's house at Ditchley near Oxford in September 1592. Henry had incurred Elizabeth's anger by taking a mistress, Anne Vavasour. The Queen's visit to Ditchley in 1592 was a sign that she had forgiven Lee for his love of Anne.

Can you interpret the weather in this portrait in the light of the Queen's displeasure with Lee over Anne Vavasour and her subsequent forgiveness of him?

Storms for the quarrel, sunshine for forgiveness

FOCUS ON THE PAINTING ITSELF

What is this portrait painted on?

On canvas using oil paint

Are you seeing the whole portrait as it was originally painted?

No, the edges have been cut down - this is especially clear along the right edge where part of the writing is missing

Why might this have been done?

To fit the portrait into a smaller space

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

by Unknown artist
oil on panel, circa 1580
71 3/8 in. x 44 1/2 in. (1813 mm x 1130 mm)
Purchased, 1957
Primary Collection
NPG 4032



What is Drake famous for?

Voyage around the world, fighting the Armada. He became rich from plundering foreign ships

This picture was painted before the Armada but after his voyage around the world; how is his famous voyage shown in the portrait?

By his hand on the globe

Can you see any parts of the world on the globe?

The continent of Africa is under his thumb, with Europe above it and India half-way across. The globe is upside down - globes were still uncommon in

Elizabethan times so it is possible that the artist got muddled and painted the globe upside down by mistake

How does he show that he is rich?

He is wearing a fine suit with fashionable slashing on the doublet and sleeves of his shirt, and a ruff. There is a coat of arms. He had a large portrait painted

How does he show that he is a fighting man?

He has a long sword and a dagger on the other side

Would he have dressed like this when he was travelling and exploring?

Unlikely, except for the sword

Why is he wearing two pairs of shoes?

The dark pair are protective slippers over his smart indoor shoes

Look at the crest above the coat of arms. What can you see?

There is a hand coming out of a cloud, holding strings that are attached to a ship on top of a globe

Whose ship is it?

Drake's

What language is on the coat of arms?

Latin, "sic parvis magna". It means "greatness out of small things". His origins were humble, and he became rich and powerful. he was given the coat of arms when he was knighted

Why do you think it is in Latin?

Latin was the language of educated Europeans. We still use it for mottoes. Has your school got one?

Whose hand is it?

It is God's hand

What does the crest mean?

Drake's ship and his voyage have divine guidance

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

attributed to John Taylor
oil on canvas, feigned oval, circa 1610
21 3/4 in. x 17 1/4 in. (552 mm x 438 mm)
Given by Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of
Ellesmere, 1856
Primary Collection
NPG 1



Why is William Shakespeare famous?
For writing the best-known plays in the English language

COMPARE WITH SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

How is the size of his picture different from Drake's portrait?
Much smaller, only head and shoulders

How are Shakespeare's clothes different from Drake's?
Much simpler, plain colours, no ruff

Can you suggest why this might be?
Shakespeare was far less rich than Drake

Why doesn't Shakespeare have a coat of arms like Drake?
Because he was not knighted

Can you think why not?

Because the Elizabethans didn't think being a playwright was important enough to reward publicly - unlike today

FOCUS ON SHAKESPEARE'S PORTRAIT

What jewellery is Shakespeare wearing?
An earring

Why do you think this is?
Probably because it was fashionable for Elizabethan men

Look at the two white drawstrings from Shakespeare's collar; what is odd about the one on the left, as you look at them? It comes down from Shakespeare beard, rather than, as it should do, from his collar

What might this tell you about the painter of this portrait?
He was not a very skilful artist

Why didn't Shakespeare get a better artist to paint him?
Because he couldn't afford it

This picture was the first to enter the National Portrait Gallery Collection. Why do you think the National Portrait Gallery wanted to collect this portrait before any other people's pictures?
Because Shakespeare became so famous. After he died people began to admire his plays even more and wanted to have portraits of him

Now there are lots of inauthentic 'portraits' of Shakespeare in circulation but this is the only one with any reasonable claim to have been painted *from life*.