Citizenship and the Arts

Citizenship through portraiture, film, photography, music and murals.

Also features on GCSE, active citizenship, debate and Prevent.
Who’s Been Framed? Exploring Citizenship through Portraiture

This article arises from a pilot project developed by Gavin Baldwin who leads the PGCE Citizenship Course at Middlesex University and Pippa Couch the Schools’ Programmes Manager at the National Portrait Gallery to develop approaches to Citizenship Education through the study of Portraiture.

The Gallery is an ideal site for exploring critically... what constitutes 'individual achievement' or a contribution to British history and culture' and ultimately for asking what it is to be British. Exploring portraits of 'significant' citizens in the National Portrait Gallery, or similar collections, in the classroom can help inform us about our society and our place within it.

How do you read a portrait through a Citizenship lens? How can you read the Gallery (or a collection of portraits) as a Citizenship Experience? What can Portraiture tell us about the communities in which we live? How can this be Active Citizenship?

These questions guided the development of an action research day for PGCE Citizenship students and NPG gallery educators to develop an approach to 'Portraiture for Citizenship' for use in schools. We decided on three Citizenship themes that we thought to 'Portraiture for Citizenship' for use in schools. We decided on three Citizenship themes that we thought would illustrate their theme. Groups then explored the Gallery looking for examples of portraits that would illustrate their theme. Groups considered the relationships and conversations that are created between portraits within the gallery, the juxtaposition of images and the impact of biography on interpretation. This gave them the opportunity to engage critically with the Gallery’s display and curatorial selection, considering who ‘is collected and displayed’ and asking ‘which types of people are missing’ in relation to their particular theme. The students then considered how their trail could lead to a suggestion about whose portrait might be chosen to fill this gap. This could be someone of national significance or someone from their own experience/community. Students can consider how the visual language ‘pose, gaze, expression, setting, objects’ of their ‘additional portrait’ might create a dialogue with other images in their selection. The trails were then shared enabling discussion and further identification of citizenship issues. Students considered the ways in which their interpretations of the visual image were influenced and possibly altered by further biographical information. The ‘design a trail’ activity opens up further discussion looking at the Collection through the lens of the Gallery’s collecting policy prompting students to consider whether their community and their identities are represented asking ‘Who should be displayed?’ and ‘Who decides?’

The act of viewing portraits is a familiar activity that allows us to reflect on the person portrayed. In this way – revealing both information about the identity of the sitter and that of the viewer – portraits make ideal material for exploring issues of identity and community in the classroom.

Since 1856, the National Portrait Gallery in London has collected portrait painting from all over the world. For the Gallery’s founding fathers in the mid-Victorian period the recognition of individual achievement was particularly important. All those whose likenesses appear in the Collection have, in the Gallery’s phrase, ‘contributed to British history and culture’. The Gallery now acquires portraits from the life in all media of the most eminent persons in British history from the earliest times to the present day aiming to display ‘portraits of the Nation’s great men and women’ and ‘to act as a national focus for the study and understanding of portraits and portraiture’. The Gallery has an active commissioning programme – the most recent addition to the Collection being a sculpture of Sir Tim Berners-Lee, computer scientist and inventor of the World Wide Web.

The Gallery is also, for these reasons an ideal site for exploring critically what it is to be part of a wider community identity, for considering what constitutes ‘individual achievement’ or a ‘contribution to British history and culture’ and ultimately for asking what it is to be British. Exploring portraits of ‘significant’ citizens in the National Portrait Gallery, or similar collections, in the classroom can help inform us about our society and our place within it.

To develop these ideas further we undertook the following project, which we saw as part pilot and further discussion looking at the Collection through the lens of the Gallery’s collecting policy prompting the juxtaposition of images and the impact of biography on interpretation. This gave them the opportunity to engage critically with the Gallery’s display and curatorial selection, considering who ‘is collected and displayed’ and asking ‘which types of people are missing’ in relation to their particular theme. The students then considered how their trail could lead to a suggestion about whose portrait might be chosen to fill this gap. This could be someone of national significance or someone from their own experience/community. Students can consider how the visual language ‘pose, gaze, expression, setting, objects’ of their ‘additional portrait’ might create a dialogue with other images in their selection. The trails were then shared enabling discussion and further identification of citizenship issues. Students considered the ways in which their interpretations of the visual image were influenced and possibly altered by further biographical information. The ‘design a trail’ activity opens up further discussion looking at the Collection through the lens of the Gallery’s collecting policy prompting students to consider whether their community and their identities are represented asking ‘Who should be displayed?’ and ‘Who decides?’

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The Creative Connections project raises a wealth of Citizenship issues about politics, place and community identity such as ethnic diversity, the contribution of migrants to local communities and the developing role of women. It allows students to consider the ongoing impact and legacy of these people’s contributions to their local communities.

and the developing role of women, led to the consideration of the ongoing impact / legacy of these displays and their contribution to their local communities. In school, this could be further developed by students selecting local contemporary figures who they see as being significant to their lives and who have ‘contributed’ to British history and culture. (See Fig 4)

Resource material from the Creative Connections project is available online here: www.npg.org.uk/whatson/creativeconnections/explore/camden.php

How can this be Active Citizenship? The selection of community figures for a local identity exploration might be considered active citizenship. This is particularly the case when a portrait does not exist in a national or local collection and can therefore form the focus of a campaign for its inclusion. This has recently been the case on the creative connections project. Through looking at local archives students are able to determine and explore lesser known links to their community from a citizenship perspective. The portraits of Noor Khan (see Fig 6) and Footballer Paul Canoville (see Fig 5) were recently acquired by the National Portrait Gallery for display in the Reference Collection following interest generated by the Creative Connections participants.

Once significant sitters have been chosen by young people to represent political advancement and social improvement in their neighbourhood they could identify current themes affecting their local community that arise from sitters biographies.

• Predetermined ‘tour’ highlighting key people associated to a theme: ‘Collections > Visit the collection > Take a tour’

• Connection to place or continent: ‘Collections > Explore People and Places’

Alternatively teachers can preselect a variety of portraits for students to curate. All the portraits listed in this article can be searched for on the National Portrait Gallery website by the NPG number listed in this article.

Taking inspiration from active citizens from the past students can propose projects to benefit their community. To further inspire them they could question how a portrait might help them think as an active citizen. What personal characteristics enabled sitters to make an impact on their community (persuasiveness, tenacity, independence of thought, confidence, determination, understanding the context of their situation) and how have these been conveyed in the portraits themselves?

Young people could then make alliances with local campaigners concerned with the same issues and make portraits of them that depict their campaigning characteristics and represent the way that they do. Finally young people could make portraits of themselves each other or their groups developing the same ideas as a record of their campaign and the themes that arise from it. Working with your art department / contemporary artists provides a creative way for students to unlock and explore citizenship issues.

Students can consider the active role that portraits play in maintaining the legacy of a key individual’s contribution to their community and can discuss the importance of memory / memorial in citizenship contexts.

The project has given us the opportunity to develop approaches to unlock the potential of teaching Citizenship through portraits and portraiture making. It has also been a very successful example of institutional co-operation between the National Portrait Gallery and Middlesex University, and of the success of mixing learners with very different expertise. What has worked for PGCE students and gallery educators can clearly work for younger people as a powerful way of experiencing the dynamic relationship of the political and the creative.
Theme
Figure 1

Dizzee Rascal
Bio
Dylan Kwabena Mills has Ghanaian and Nigerian heritage and grew up in a high-rise estate in Bow, East London and was named ‘rascal’ by his teachers. He began rapping in the UK garage style and was encouraged to develop his musical talents by his teacher Tim Smith who let him use the computer at the back of the classroom. In 2003, aged 19, Dizzee won the Mercury Music Prize for his debut album. His critically-acclaimed follow up work, was awarded gold and platinum discs.

Questions
What are the most important objects in the image?
Why might the artist have included them?
How does the setting of the image influence our reading of the objects and the sitter?

Johnson Gideon Beharry
Bio
Lance Corporal Beharry is the first living British person, since 1965, to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain’s highest award for gallantry. Born in Grenada, he joined the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment in 2001. He was posted to Iraq in 2004, where he saved the lives of 30 soldiers while under enemy fire. Serious head injuries sustained in Iraq have prevented him from returning to active service. His autobiography, The Barefoot Soldier, was published in 2006.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
How has the artist shown this?
What do you think the sitter might be thinking? Why do you think this?

Ken Livingstone
Bio
Livingstone became the first elected Mayor of London in 2000, serving for two terms and was instrumental in London’s appointment as host city of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. He also initiated an extensive upgrade of London’s public transport system, and was praised for his response to terrorist attacks in the city in 2005. Between 1981 and 1986 he led the Greater London Council and was a staunch opponent of the Conservative Government, being dubbed ‘Red Ken’ by the press.

Questions
What kind of politician do you think Ken Livingstone is from this portrait?
How has the artist portrayed this?
How is his power as an influential politician of the left and former Mayor of London represented?

Lily Allen
Bio
Singer-songwriter Allen was born in Hammersmith, London to actor Keith Allen and film producer Alison Owen. Her first album Alright Still (2006) was produced by Mark Ronson, Allen’s second album It’s Not Me, It’s You (2009) led to her being awarded the Brit award for Best British Solo Female in February 2010.

Questions
What do the sitter’s stance and dress say about her?
How does the blank background contribute to the overall impression of the sitter?
What aspect of British culture does the image represent?

Figure 3 Community, Diversity, Power

Camila Batmanghelidjh
Iranian-born psychotherapist and charity leader; In 1996 Batmanghelidjh founded the charity Kids Company, which provides support to vulnerable children and young people. The charity reaches 36,000 children a year and has so far raised over £100 million.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
What might this image tell us about his life’s work?
How does the setting of the image influence our reading of the objects and the sitter?

Chevalier d’Eon
D’Eon had a successful career as a soldier, diplomat and spy before publicly changing gender. He first came to London in 1763 to negotiate peace for France at the end of the Seven Years War. D’Eon subsequently came back to Britain as a woman in 1785, gaining renown for her fencing demonstrations. No transvestite or transsexual until the late twentieth century has enjoyed such public recognition and acceptance.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
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Sir John Fielding
Sir John Fielding, blinded at the age of 19 in a navy accident, was a magistrate and social reformer who worked to raise standards of honesty and competence amongst those engaged in the administration of justice. He carried through his ideas on the prevention of robbery and campaigned to provide employment for disturbed youths. He was knighted in 1761.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
What might this image tell us about his life’s work?
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Queen Elizabeth I
(‘The Ditchley Portrait’)
Known as the ‘Ditchley Portrait’, this painting was produced for Sir Henry Lee. It probably commemorates a symbolic entertainment which Lee organised for the Queen in September 1592, which may have been held in the grounds of Lee’s house at Ditchley, near Oxford. The entertainment marked the Queen’s forgiveness of Lee for having displeased the Queen by living with his mistress. The portrait shows Elizabeth standing on the globe of the world, with her feet on Oxfordshire.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
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Shami Chakrabarti
Director of human rights pressure group Liberty since 2003. Chakrabarti is a recognised expert and spokesperson on the UK’s anti-terrorism laws and has published numerous pieces on civil liberties issues.

Questions
What might this man have done to be in the National Portrait Gallery Collection?
What might this image tell us about his life’s work?
How does the setting of the image influence our reading of the objects and the sitter?
### Theme

#### Figure 4 Creative Connections

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**Noor Khan**

**Secret Agent**

**Did you know?**

Khan was the first female radio operator to be sent to France in the Second World War as part of a sabotage force called the Special Operations Executive.

**Camden Connection:** Khan lived in Bloomsbury as a child. In 2012 a sculpture to remember her by was installed in nearby Gordon Square.

**Biography:**

Khan was born in Moscow to an Indian father and an American mother and was raised in France and Britain. She joined the British Army and supported the work of the French Resistance. She was captured by the German Army in 1944 and executed. In 1949 she was awarded the George Cross.

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**David Pitt Baron Pitt of Hampstead (1913–94)**

**Parliamentarian**

**Did you know?**

Pitt helped found the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in 1964 with advice from Dr Martin Luther King.

**Camden Connection:**

Pitt had a medical practice in the Euston area. He was made Baron Pitt of Hampstead in 1975.

**Biography:**

Born in Grenada, Pitt won a scholarship to study medicine in Edinburgh. He returned to Britain and established a medical practice servicing the local Caribbean community. Pitt became a spokesperson for migrant rights and was selected as the Labour candidate for Hampstead in the 1957 election. Pitt sat in the House of Lords from 1975 and was the longest serving black Parliamentarian.

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**Marie Stopes**

**Campaigner**

**Did you know?**

Today the Marie Stopes organisation provides reproductive and sexual health services around the world.

**Camden Connection:**

Stopes studied botany and geology at University College London, Bloomsbury and opened her first clinic in Upper Holloway.

**Biography:**

Author of the best-selling books *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood* (1918), Stopes brought the question of family planning into the public arena. She opened several birth control clinics in England. By 1930 she had joined forces with other family planning organisations to form the National Birth Control Council, later to become the Family Planning Association. Marie Stopes photographed with her son.