

Faces and Places

The National Portrait Gallery holds the most extensive collection of portraits in the world, featuring images from the 1500s to the present day. The portraits tell the stories of people who have had an impact on British society, history and culture and showcase the wide range of art forms that artists use to depict people.

The Faces and Places resource for schools is an opportunity to investigate this world-class collection of portraits in your classroom. Through a range of open-ended, adaptable activities for all key stages, you and your pupils will discover inspiring people connected to your local area and explore what portraiture can reveal about ourselves, each other, our locality and our past and present.

Faces and Places is designed to support cross-curricular teaching with a focus on Art & Design and History. Through adaptable enquiries, you will explore local history and connections, develop pupils' visual literacy and critical thinking skills, teach the rich diversity of British history and encourage making, research and exhibition skills.

Guidance

Each topic includes an initial question, key words, suggested activities, and an extension activity. Ask your class the question at the beginning of the topic, using the key words to encourage a rich, philosophical discussion.

Following on from the discussion, your lesson might develop through:

- Working directly with the suggested activities, adapting them to suit the age range and ability of your class
- Creating your own activity plan based on the suggested activities
- Tasking your class with planning activities, enabling them to develop their thinking and ideas in self-directed and creative ways
- Using the warm up activities and postcards to introduce portraiture as a theme

Postcards

Use the ten portrait postcards like a deck of cards and ask your class to select one.

Ask the class to study the compositional details of the image (what are the different elements in the portrait and how are they arranged?). Then ask your class to answer the ‘What is the message?’ question on the back of the postcard. This can be repeated using another postcard in small groups or as a whole class.

Portraits

Ask your class to display all ten portraits and choose either the wild card or smart card. Task your class with discussing and answering the questions on the card they have chosen. If the class chooses the smart card, there is also a research activity to explore.

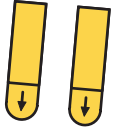




Exhibition making

Included in the resource box are curating tools to display the portraits as pop-up exhibitions. The materials can be re-used to display the portraits in more than one location and formation.

Each portrait has a fold out support on the back, so it can be displayed upright or flattened to attach the portrait to a wall. Use the spirit level to make sure your portraits are straight when mounting on the wall.



Think about your audience. What do you want the main message to be for people who see your display? Will you have labels? What will you title your exhibition? Will you play music or sound? Experiment! Allow time for discussion and collaboration to decide the order and formation of your display.

Use the activities to research and explore the portraits – this will provide ideas for your exhibition.

Warm up activities

Use these activities before starting the topics to get to know the ten portraits included in the box. Record notes from this discussion.

- Start the session by looking at all ten of the portraits.
- Is there anyone your class recognises?
- What do we already know about them?
- What can we find out about them from looking at their portrait?
- What would the class like to find out about them?
- Think about what a portrait is. For example 'a document recording a moment in time', 'an intentional recording of a person'. See how these apply to the ten portraits in the box.
- Think of the different ways we make portraits of ourselves and each other. Which techniques and media are included in the ten portraits in the box?

Topic 1: The Personal

Question: Why do we document who we are?

In this topic pupils will explore drawing from life and photographs as well as ideas around identity and future aspirations.

Key words: representation; identity; memory

- Organise your class into pairs. Ask them to make a pencil drawing of their partner without lifting the pencil from the paper or looking at what they are drawing.
- During the activity the pair can take it in turns to ask each other these questions: 'describe yourself in three words'; 'how do other people describe you'; 'how do you imagine you will be different in 10 years from now'. Note down the answers.
- Ask each pair to compare their drawings describing what they have captured about their partner in the portrait.
- Experiment with different drawing techniques. Think about how expression and pose as well as use of props and text might communicate more about who we are.
- As well as drawing from 'life' you can also draw from photographs. Ask your class to bring in a photograph of themselves or use photographs you have in school, and in pairs draw their partner's photograph. How does this differ from drawing from life?

Extension Activity

Task your class with curating an exhibition of their drawings and/or photographs. Take time to decide how to group the artworks and which accompanying information you want to include. For example, you could include the answers to the three questions asked during the drawing activity. Discuss how it felt to be documented in this freestyle way and consider including this information.

Create a photography portrait project to incorporate the ideas explored through the three questions in the drawing activity. Use props to create a narrative. Think about how to show personality, interests, cultural heritage and connections to the local area. Look at the portraits in the box for inspiration!

Topic 2: The Local

Question: What does it mean to be a hero?

In this topic pupils will explore local history and consider who our local heroes are in the present day, and how we choose to remember them. (Hero is used as a gender-neutral word.)

Key words: citizenship; achievement; pride

- Task your class with finding out more about the people featured in the ten portraits (use the information on the postcards to start with), how does it feel to know they are connected through the borough?
- With each portrait consider if they are well known in the local area and, if so, are they commemorated in some way?

- Do the sitters embody the ‘hero’ characteristics discussed in the topic question? Think about how their achievements or life story relate to the pupils’ lives.
- How does the borough shape the people who live there? What makes it special?
- Ask your class how they make a difference in their neighbourhood now, and how they might in the future. What they are proud of?
- Ask your class how they would like to be remembered in the future. Invite the group to plan out their own individual ‘hero’ portraits for the borough. Use the answers to the questions above to tell a story in the portrait; this might be through drawing, painting, photography and/or writing or poetry.
- Alternatively, ask your class to identify their favourite superhero and list what makes that character special. Find connections between their superhero’s characteristics and the people in the ten portraits, e.g. kindness and helping others.

Extension Activity

Ask your class to identify local heroes who make a difference to the borough. Task the class with creating a collage portrait from found images and materials e.g. photographs from magazines and newspapers, coloured paper etc.

Topic 2: The Local (part 2)

Continuing with the theme of the local, this activity explores who our local heroes are in the community and how we can record their lives.

- To think further about the local area, ask your class to note down what they like about where they live, how it feels like home, what makes it unique.
- Ask your group who they think makes a positive difference in their local area. This can be someone in their family, school, community, neighbourhood etc. How have they made a difference and how are they connected to the local area?
- Task your class with planning an interview with their community hero. Think of some questions to find out more about this person’s life, and how the local area might have changed over time. Use the questions above as a guide. The interview can be recorded as an oral history or the answers written down.
- Task your class to plan a portrait of their community hero as a photograph or drawing. If making a photographic portrait, they can use a camera, phone or tablet. Think about the best location for the portrait telling a story of the person. This could be outside including a local landmark or building, or where they live or work. Try to find a location that holds relevance for them in the local area. Look at the portraits in the box for inspiration!

Extension Activity

Bring together the work created to form a display at school celebrating the local community. Think about how to connect the interviews with the portraits. Consider including portraits from the box where there are connections.

Topic 3: The Cultural

Question: How do artists communicate stories and experiences?

In this topic pupils will explore how artists collaborate with the sitter (person in the portrait) and make creative choices to make portraits and tell stories.

Key words: creativity; collaboration; perspective

- In small groups select two of the portraits. Ask the groups to look closely at the portraits. How is the portrait made? – drawing, painting, photograph, sculpture. Research how the artists who made the portraits create their work.
- Think about the relationship between the artist and sitter. Imagine a conversation between them in the making of the portrait. Think about how they made decisions (props/background/location). Who is in control of the ideas in the image?
- Consider if the artist is trying to convey a message about the sitter. Think about who is being represented and what they are representing. Does the image represent a particular cultural perspective? Does this influence how we experience the portrait? Does the image represent one person or wider group or people?
- Ask each group to share their ideas discussing the reasons for their responses.

Extension Activity

Develop a project for your class to experiment making portraits of each other, give them the opportunity to be the sitter and the artist. Encourage the use of various creative styles: sculpture, painting, photography. You could organise a visit to local public art works or monuments to examine how portraits of important people have been created, and become part of the cultural landscape (e.g. murals, statues, plaques).

Topic 4: The Social

Question: How do we make society work?

In this topic pupils will investigate people who have influenced British society and created change, and how portraits can communicate their lives and ideas.

Key words: values; equality; co-operation

- Work together as a class to arrange the ten portraits in the box in date order. Ask the class to see if the images reflect particular time periods, and if they can identify any time periods missing. Research the ten portraits to find out how these people have impacted British society and created change.
- Using the National Portrait Gallery's Collection www.npg.org.uk/collections/ and your local history archive, search for more people to add to the ten portraits in the resource – people who have influenced British society in important and lasting ways. Research people from the local area. You could create a timeline to consider how the UK has changed since the National Portrait Gallery was set up in 1856. Think about the narrative you are telling, and how the portraits might illustrate important events and social issues.

- Alternatively, focus on one portrait and use this image to develop an activity with your class, which explores the historical period the person lives/lived in. Use the key words to develop an understanding of the time period. What does the portrait tell us about this period in time? Imagine what life was like for them. Sometimes people who have become famous for their talent then use their platform to campaign for social change, is this the case for the person in the portrait?

Extension Activity

Look at the portraits you have added. Are there any people missing? What are the reasons some people are excluded from the dominant narrative of British history? Consider how factors such as gender, class and race impact the stories and voices of people in history.

Task your class with devising a visual and/or written presentation they could give to another class about the Collection and what it reveals about British society. Consider how the Collection has changed over time and how this has affected the range of people included.

Topic 5: The Political

Question: Who decides what matters?

In this topic pupils will explore people campaigning for change and causes that are important in the present day.

Key words: activism; campaigning; leadership; cause

- Task your class with doing online research about a current important cause and the people leading the related debates and/or events. Ask them to research one key name and find out if this person is part of the National Portrait Gallery's Collection.
- If the person is in the Collection www.npg.org.uk/collections/, ask your class to read out the information listed about the person and then discuss together what else would be important to add to the description, thinking about the ways they themselves would stand up for this cause.
- If the person is not in the Collection, ask your class to write a pitch to the National Portrait Gallery to consider including the person, saying why they are important to them, and which artist they think would make the portrait.
- Alternatively, you could start with asking your class about the people that matter to them: their family, friends, teachers, neighbours, etc. and task them with drawing images of these people and adding a sentence about why they are important.

Extension Activity

Task your class with imagining they have been commissioned to make a portrait of themselves as a key campaigning figure to be added to the Collection in the future. Using the ten portraits from the resource box as reference, ask them to identify compositional elements that would ensure their portrait gets the important messages across. Then task you class with producing a series of images with themselves as the sitters and artists.

National
Portrait
Gallery

Faces+
Places

npg.org.uk/facesandplaces

npg.org.uk/collections

This resource was written by artist and writer Maria Amidu
with Francesca Laws, Schools Programme Manager.

For more information on our Schools Programme visit:
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Made possible with

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