

Illinois State Museum – MuseumLink Art Heartfelt/Handmade Activities: Portrait Painting

Purpose: To help the students understand how the self-trained artist painted portraits for clients in the nineteenth century.

Illinois State museum Web site used:

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/vrmuseum/muslink/art/htmls/hh.html>

Objectives: After viewing the portraits in the 19th Century Folk Art Gallery, and studying middle class life in nineteenth-century Illinois, the students will interview a client (role playing) about the type of portrait he or she wants to order and then create a simple individual portrait of a client or a miniature portrait.



Grade Levels: 3-8

Time Required: two 50-minute periods

Materials: sketch paper
pencil
brushes
paints
water bowls
palettes
mats and frames

Motivation:

- Discuss in class the portraits in the online unit and other nineteenth-century portraits.
- Talk about the composition, the details, the backgrounds. Are they realistic, grand, classical, simple? Why? How? Where were the portraits hung? What purposes did they serve? Did people want their favorite objects in their portraits? Did they wear special clothes for the painting?
- Discuss or demonstrate how an artist would interview a prospective client, and how a client would interview a prospective artist. What things must be made clear before work begins? [What kind of portrait it is, who (and how much of each person) is in the painting, how they should be dressed, what objects are included, where the people are set (indoors, outdoors), what type of background they want or is possible for the painter to do (e.g., idealized landscape, drapery, solid color wall)].
- Instruct each artist and interviewer (taking turns) to come to a price and conditions for the painting. Is room and board included if the artist is to stay in the home? How long must the subject sit and how many times? Will the artists sketch, then go to his/her studio to paint? Does the price include the cost of materials? A written record or receipt could be a contract.

Procedure:

- Students will pair up. They will take turns interviewing each other and come up with two agreements for the painting of the portraits. Each student will have a contract (receipt) at the end of the interview, with price and specifications.
- Each student in the pair will pose for the other during the sketching stage. Then the artists will paint the portrait, following the agreed upon specifications of colors, dress, background, etc.
- The subject can bring a special object(s) to include in the portrait (jewelry, toy, book, model, equipment). If time is limited for each sitting, students could take a photo of their subject with a Polaroid and work from it. This eliminates any embarrassment that face-to-face painting may trigger, although the immediacy of the live model is lost.
- The finished painting needs a mat or frame. Sheldon Peck offered faux-wood grain frames painted on the canvas. More elaborate frames included molded gilt plaster and oval frames. Either the artist or the subject may be in charge of the framing (and its budget).

Publication and Closure: The finished portraits are hung up with identifying labels. The artist of each can make a short statement on how s/he made the painting, and the subject of each can role play by making a short statement of where the portrait is going in his/her house, and what it means to him/her/the family.

Assessment: The painting will be complete, with the subject's face and torso, clothing details, and background. The agreement between artist and sitter will be in writing and show price and conditions of production.

Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards addressed:**Visual Arts:**

Early Elementary: 25.A.1d: Identify the elements of line, shape, space, color, and texture; the principles of repetition and pattern; and the expressive qualities of mood, emotion, and pictorial representation.

27.A.1a: Identify the distinctive roles of artists and audiences.

Middle School: 27.A.3a: Identify and describe careers and jobs in the arts and how they contribute to the world of work. (also compare roles of portrait painters through history until today)