

Who Do You See?

Lesson Overview:

Students will learn to interpret portraiture through feelings and emotions. They will discuss the identifiable emotions of the sitter, as well as the emotions of the student reacting to the portrait. Students will then create a mask that reflects their emotional identity.

Length of Lesson: Two class periods

Objectives:

After completing this lesson, students will be better able to:

- ✓ Identify emotions in visual media
- ✓ Analyze themselves through writing
- ✓ Reflect on their own identity through the creation of masks

Key Words:

Emotion: A mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling.

Identity: The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.

Supplies:

- Personal Inventory Sheet
- “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar
- [Papier-mâché](#) mask forms for each student
- Digital camera
- Adobe Photoshop software or other software that allows for manipulation of an image

Background Information for Teachers:

"We Wear the Mask" is probably Dunbar's most famous piece of poetry. The author is writing about the "mask" that human beings wear in front of other human beings to disguise any pain, sadness, or turmoil that they may be going through at the time. Dunbar is saying that humans often are not honest with those around them about their feelings because it is easier to make them believe everything is okay, and how true he is! He is also stating in the third stanza that we call on God when no one else is looking and we are in pain, but we would rather let the world see us smile. . . . we would rather wear the mask.

- From <http://www.uncp.edu/home/canada/work/canam/dunbar.htm>

Instructional Plan:

Warm-Up:

Learning to Feel

Choose a number of portraits in the Gallery's collection or in the Portrait Competition section of the website based on your curriculum study.

- The teacher will write adjectives on index cards that describe emotions or symbols seen or felt in the portrait.

- Instructions to students: *Every time we encounter a piece of art that captures the word or image on your card, hold it in the air and we'll discuss it.*
- Follow-up questions:
 - How do you think the sitter feels?
 - What emotions do you feel when looking at the portrait?
 - What personal qualities do you attribute to the sitter based on the portrait?
 - What words best describe how the sitter looks in the portrait? (examples include pensive, sad, frightened, proud)

Activity Discussion:

- Have students complete the Personal Inventory Sheet.
- Define identity as a class.
- Discuss the poem “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar.
- Ask these questions of the students:
 - Why is this poem an important statement?
 - What is Dunbar trying to say?
 - What is the poem’s significance?
 - How does this poem relate to you?
 - Do you wear a mask? When? Why?
 - How will this poem affect your mask creation?

Activity Instructions:

- Have students create a self-portrait, using their completed Personal Inventory Sheets as a guide.
- Each student’s mask should be embellished in such a way as to reflect his or her character. (For more information on using symbols, see the lesson “Functions of Portraiture.”)
- For a more detailed mask, students can use the exterior of the mask to describe their own exterior—the person they portray to the world. The interior of the mask can describe the person many do not see. This can include hopes and dreams.
- Each student will write a label of 100–150 words explaining his or her mask.

Extension:

- Take a photograph of each student using a digital camera.
- Have the students use photo software to manipulate their portrait in order to describe an emotional state you assign to them. (Examples include, happy, confused, sad, angry, surprised, and sullen.)
- Have the student will write a story (you decide the length) that explains the emotional state reflected in the photograph.

Wrap-up:

Students will discuss what they have learned from this lesson.

Assessment:

Work should be assessed on the following criteria:

- Participation in class discussions
- Creation of a thought-provoking mask that reflects the artist



Smithsonian
*Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture*
National Portrait Gallery

Personal Inventory Sheet

Complete the following about yourself.

1. Who has had the most positive influence on you?
2. Give a name to the era we live in today (examples include the Hip-Hop Era, the Violent Generation, the New Baby Boomers, the Anti-Depression Era).
3. List your favorite words.
4. List the color(s) that represent you (not necessarily your favorite color).
5. Draw a line that represents you (examples include a squiggle, a wavy line, a bold straight line, a thin short line, an EKG line, an angled line).
6. Name your hobby.
7. What would you die for?
8. Name your greatest contribution, or the thing you've done that makes you most proud.
9. Free choice—list anything interesting about you!
10. If you had a tattoo, what would it be?
11. Name a texture or textile that represents you (examples include silk, wool, cotton, or burlap).
12. Identify two personal qualities you possess. Choose from perseverance, industriousness, proficiency, assertiveness, ingenuity, aptitude, courage, or persuasiveness.