

# Symbolic Self-portrait

Primary: (ages 7 – 11)

Visual arts

Students will explore self-portraiture and representing themselves through the use of symbols. Instead of drawing themselves, students will choose objects that represent them and put them together so that they make up a face or figure. Students will be given the opportunity to look at self-portraiture in a new way and will be provided with an interesting outlet of self-expression.

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**Time allocation**      About 4-5 lesson periods

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**Subject content**      Express self through visual arts  
Create self-portrait using personally relevant symbols and objects  
Play with textures, images, and 2D/3D  
Become comfortable evaluating and reviewing visual arts work

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**Creativity and critical thinking**      This unit has a **creativity** and **critical thinking** focus:

- Make connections and use symbols
- Play with unusual ideas and consider different perspectives
- Reflect on strengths, weaknesses, and affordances of different kinds of self-portraiture

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**Other skills**      Communication

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**Key words**      self-portraiture; symbolism; representation; interpretation

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## Products and processes to assess

Students discuss, produce, and present a personal and novel artistic output that represents their identity. At the highest levels of achievement their work process demonstrates willingness to explore a variety of ideas, see and communicate connections between objects, images, and their own life, and use symbols effectively. Students consider different ways of representing themselves, appraise and justify their artistic choices, and show awareness that there can be different perspectives on how and why self-portraits are created and what they say about their subjects.

## Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce as many modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Teacher starts by discussing things that are important to them and a part of their personality (for example, traveling, gardening, art, etc.).</p> <p>Students then have 5 minutes to think about 10 things that are important to them.</p> <p>Teacher facilitates class discussion on what symbols can be used to represent these important things that each student came up with, and may talk about and use examples from their own list (for example if traveling is a big part of your life, a suitcase can be used to represent this).</p> <p>Each student draws their name in bubble letters, around their name they sketch 5 symbols that are important to them and part of their personality.</p>	<p>Communicating about self through visual arts representation</p> <p>Understanding that objects can be used as symbols to represent something else</p> <p>Developing technical sketching skills</p>	<p>Making connections between their identity and objects</p> <p>Generating ideas for symbols that represent their identity</p>
2	Lesson period 2	<p>Teacher begins by reviewing the assignment from previous class and then introduces topic of self-portraiture and opens a discussion about what is a self-portrait. Using examples the teacher demonstrates successful self-portraits. As appropriate, the teacher may decide to highlight different materials, techniques, uses of colours etc. in the work of other artists to give students a grounding in the possibilities available.</p> <p>Teacher explains that students will now work on combining their symbols and self-portrait techniques into one image to represent themselves.</p>	<p>Learning about techniques in self-portraiture</p> <p>Developing technical skills as they produce their piece</p>	<p>Identifying assumptions and conventions in self-portraiture</p> <p>Envisioning and producing a piece of visual art</p>
3	Lesson period 3 This can be extended into lesson period 4 as necessary	<p>Students work on creating their image, teacher walks around and assists as necessary.</p> <p>Teacher encourages students to evaluate their own work throughout the project and make necessary changes. If further time available, teacher may ask students to produce a written piece reflecting on the choices they've made for their self-portrait.</p>	<p>Evaluating progress and learning not be afraid to make changes to improve artistic output</p>	<p>Generating ideas and creating visual art with expressive qualities</p> <p>Appraising their own work</p>
4	Lesson period 4. This could be extended into a	<p>Students volunteer to present their finished product, and receive feedback from their peers about what was successful and what was not successful.</p>	<p>Communicating and reviewing final artistic output and discussing</p>	<p>Explaining strengths and weaknesses of chosen solutions for one's and peers'</p>

fifth lesson period if  
necesarr

As a final reflection activity, students could be asked to compare their symbolic self-portraits to other more conventional self-portraits (e.g. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Which represents the person better and why? What did each artist want to say about themselves and how did they achieve this?) Depending on class level, curriculum, time available, and context, this could be extended to an introduction of realism, symbolism, expressionism etc.

what worked and what  
didn't

Introduction to debates  
re: representation in art  
and different artistic  
movements

personal pieces of visual art

Questioning assumptions and  
conventions, considering  
several perspectives, and  
reflecting on chosen  
expressive choices relative to  
alternatives

## Resources and examples for inspiration

### Web and print

- Example images of self-portraits that relate to current curriculum.

### Other

- Graphite
- Erasers
- 12" by 18" white drawing paper

### Opportunities to adapt, extend, and enrich

- Students could also be given the option of making sculptures with different materials and compare self-portraits made in different formats
- Finished pieces could be hung in a gallery and students take part in a gallery walk, and be tasked with guessing which student produced which self-portrait
- This could form part of a larger unit on identity for personal, social, and health education. Students could, for e.g., be asked to produce a series of artistic works on how other people see them, how they see themselves, how they might be in the future, representing different feelings etc.
- The class could discuss the difference between self-portrait and portrait and be asked to produce portraits of each other.
- Links can be made to other curriculum subjects by exploring the portraits, lives, and work/inventions, fashion etc. of famous historical figures. Portraits of historical figures can be found at <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/explore/>
- The theme of art and representation could be developed by looking at artistic movements such as cubism etc.

**Creativity and critical thinking  
rubric for visual arts**

- Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	<b>CREATIVITY</b> Coming up with new ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b> Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>
<b>INQUIRING</b>	Make connections to other visual arts concepts and media or to conceptual ideas in other disciplines	1,2	Identify and question assumptions and conventional rules in a piece of visual art (content, style, technique, colour, composition, etc.)	2,4
<b>IMAGINING</b>	Play with unusual and radical visual arts ideas when preparing or creating a piece of visual art	1-4	Consider several perspectives on the content, technique or expression of a piece of visual arts	1,4
<b>DOING</b>	Create visual art that shows expressive qualities or personally novel ways to engage a subject matter	1-4	Explain both strengths and limitations of a piece of visual arts justified by aesthetic, logical and possibly other criteria	2,4
<b>REFLECTING</b>	Reflect on steps taken in creating a piece of visual art and on its novelty compared to conventions	2,4	Reflect on the chosen expressive choices of a visual arts piece relative to possible alternatives	4