

Self-Representation is the Message, the Message is Power.

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This unit will explore how the legacy of black self-representation via portraiture can offer students a Black gaze and inform and empower the images students create. It will leverage the richness and depth of this visual impact to surround students, regardless of their race and ethnicity, with beautiful, vigorous, varied, and expressive self-representations of people of color. It will offer a critical visual vocabulary, cognitive structures and discussion frameworks for viewing art. The unit will enable students to actively and intentionally represent themselves in the ways they choose—both visually via photography and in print.

The agency of self-representation within a Black gaze serves as a form of resistance to white supremacy and claims the freedom and power of not just being seen, but—more importantly—of being the one who does the seeing (Campt, 2021). Through self-portraiture and ekphrastic writing, this unit will allow students to add themselves to the body of work representing what people who look like them can look like, say and be, and in so doing, offer them a means to widen the aperture on who gets to see and bring into being new possibilities and paths for their own existence.

Keywords:

Portraiture, self-portraits, self-representation, Black gaze, Black artists, artists of color, ekphrastic writing, personal narratives, visual vocabulary, empowerment, poetry, portfolios, Frederick Douglass

Unit Content

Rationale

This unit is named after Arthur Jafa's film, *Love is the Message, the Message is Death*, but it could just as easily have been named *Self-representation is the Message, the Message is Resistance*, or *Change*, or *Freedom* (Jafa, 2017). This is because the representations we see, especially of people who look like us, shape our perception of what is real. These representations define our universe of options for who, what and how we can exist in the world. Representations that reinforce stereotypes limit our options, while those that defy, expand or operate without regard to these stereotypes can radically enlarge our understanding of what is possible.

The cultivation of a Black gaze in art, writing and speaking offers more than mere representations of Blackness; it offers a fundamental paradigm shift to a Black framework of representation (Campt, 2021). The agency of self-representation within a Black gaze serves as a form of resistance to white supremacy and claims the freedom and power of not just being seen, but—more importantly—of being the one who does the seeing (Campt, 2021).

As an Korean-American adoptee to a white family and an avid reader as a child, I grew up heavily white-identified because the representations I saw in children’s literature, as well as movies, TV, popular culture and media were overwhelmingly white (Huyck, Park Dahlen, 2019). I struggled, and still struggle, with the “measuring tape” and “double consciousness” described by W. E. B. DuBois (DuBois, 1903) and liberating myself from the white gaze, as described by Toni Morrison. This personal level of white-identification has impacted every area of my life and made my still evolving journey to self-actualization ever longer and more arduous. However, learning about how artists, authors and scholars are conceptualizing and deploying a Black gaze has helped.

Further, questions around identity formation, representation, change and voice prove extremely relevant to my students, who are diverse in terms of their races, cultures, home languages spoken and abilities. As their teacher, I want to support my students in understanding their identities as fluid, dynamic and intersectional, as opposed to fixed and categorized by a label, and offer them an understanding of and opportunities for expression, voice and self-representation. Via this unit, I aim to offer my students a Black gaze to help ensure they do not grow up white-identified by default, and to provide them with avenues for merging and/or contending with that double consciousness.

This unit will explore how self-portraiture might allow students to show themselves on their own terms and how the legacy of black self-representation via portraiture might inform and empower the images students create. It will leverage the richness and depth of this visual impact to surround students, regardless of their race and ethnicity, with beautiful, vigorous, varied, and expressive self-representations of people of color. It will offer a critical visual vocabulary, cognitive structures and discussion frameworks for viewing art: a language, a lens and a forum for making and sharing their own judgments about representation they see.

Finally, the unit will enable students to actively and intentionally represent themselves in the ways they choose—both visually via photography and in print. It will allow them to add themselves to the body of work representing what people who look like them can look like, say and be, and in so doing, offer them a means to widen the aperture on who gets to see and bring into being new possibilities and paths for their own existence.

By showing, speaking and writing themselves as they feel they truly are—in ways that encompass the complexity of their whole selves and anticipate change over time—my students can use self-representation as a way to access resistance, change and freedom. For my students as well as myself, self-representation is power.

Essential Questions

My curriculum unit seeks to address these essential questions:

1. How can pre-literate students investigate the nuances of self-portraits as examples of Black Visual Culture and learn to “read,” discuss and respond to these visual texts?
2. How can students employ the forms of self-portraiture and ekphrastic writing to express their own identities and create a dialogue with representations they see?
3. How can the legacy of black self-representation via portraiture inform and empower my students to conceive of their own identities as dynamic, fluid and intersectional?

Background / Essential Understandings

1. How can pre-literate students investigate the nuances of self-portraits as examples of Black Visual Culture and learn to “read,” discuss and respond to these visual texts?

Portraiture, especially self-portraiture and Frederick Douglass’ “picture-making,” offers an opportunity for people, including my students, to show themselves as they wish to be seen and thereby control the representations of themselves: to become subject as well as object. Douglass sat for his first portrait from 1841, just three years after he escaped from slavery, and sat for his portrait so many times throughout his life that he “became the most photographed American of the nineteenth century” (Stauffer, 2015). He prized photography for “the multitude, variety, perfection, and cheapness of its pictures” and the democratizing effect of “the humblest servant girl” and “the farmer boy” being able to possess images of themselves, an “expensive luxury” that was previously reserved only for royalty and the very rich (Douglass, 1865).

Douglass trusted photography for its ability to offer an unmitigated representation of the subject: “the camera, unlike an engraving or painting, represented them accurately,” whereas a white artist, “could not create ‘impartial’ likenesses because of their preconceived notions of what African Americans looked like” (Stauffer, 2015). In fact, Douglass argued that “It seems to us next to impossible for white men to take likenesses of black men, without most grossly exaggerating their distinctive features” (Douglass, 1865). The racism and bias inherent in the white gaze made it impossible for

white artists to render objective or accurate representations of Black people because of the dehumanizing and racist stereotypes they held.

The power of portraiture and self-portraiture to convey certain emotions, expressions and understandings can be seen in the intentional decisions of the artist (and/or subject) regarding the use of background, props, clothing, body language, facial expressions, hair and hairstyles and lighting. A three-part study of the portraits of Frederick Douglass, Kehinde Wiley and Zanele Muholi, as well as portraits by artists of color from other racial and ethnic groups, over the course of the year (beginning, middle and end) offers students an opportunity to see, notice, wonder and viscerally experience the power and impact of such choices on these portraits.

Although my 1st grade students are 6 and 7 years old, using visual representations offers benefits and possibilities to impact my young students where and when they might not be able to access traditional, written texts. Also, given how striking these images are, they can leave even stronger impressions.

The esteemed and prolific artist and scholar Deborah Willis describes the formative experience of encountering Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes' photobook, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*, in the library at age 7 (DeCarava, 2018). She says:

“We had to pick a library book every week growing up, and I just discovered that book visually. I saw it on the shelf and I took it home. I was so fascinated with the beauty of the light in the photographs. I could see that the lighting and the woman were so beautiful. The bare bulbs in the kitchen. It was intimate; it looked like love. That's how I grew up, with my family. It was always about love” (Embser, 2020).

That love, affirmation, self-representation, and the quotidian beauty of the photographs Willis saw in the photobook—accessible through the visual format of portraiture—forms the basis of this unit. Regardless of students' race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, native language, school readiness or level of literacy, these portraits will speak to students in a visual language they all can understand.

The impact of intentionally presenting and creating a vibrant, visual culture in my classroom that affirms students of color cannot be understated, as many of my students arrive in my 1st grade classroom pre-literate and many are multilingual learners. For pre-readers, the potential impact of the images they see is magnified because they can deeply access visual texts via overall impressions, formal aesthetics and specific details, where they might not be able to access written texts and/or texts in English at all. My young students are highly attuned to and impressionable based on the visual representations they see, especially whether the quorum of these visual representations confirms diversity, heritage, difference and beauty, and whether it reinforces stereotypes or challenges them.

In addition to showing students the portraits and noticing whatever visceral responses, facial expressions and native language or vocabulary they already have available to engage with these portraits, teaching students the vocabulary of art and portraiture offers them the tools to analyze the presented self-portraits and be able to describe, discuss and interact with them on a deeper level. Metacognitive structures such as “compare and contrast” and “notice and wonder” will also be used to offer students an opportunity to discuss and respond to the visual texts in a structured way (NCTM, 2022). Verbal discussion and cooperative learning techniques such as “turn and talk” to a partner, “think, pair, share,” small-group and whole group discussions will be used to enable students to respond to the portraits in a variety of ways that are not dependent on their mastery of reading and writing skills.

After viewing and discussing these portraits, this unit will extend student learning into critical analysis of the author’s purpose, a key goal of literacy in 1st grade and beyond, so students can consider why the author might have made certain choices in their portraits. For example, classroom discussion in this unit might examine why might Frederick Douglass chose not to smile in his portraits, why Kehinde Wiley chooses elaborate, ornate, naturalistic backgrounds for his portraits, or why Yayoi Kusama chose dots or certain color palates to create her self-portraits.

Whatever their level of literacy and native language, our visual study of Black portraiture will expose students to specific images of Black self-representation by important artists and thinkers, which are intentionally and critically aimed at subverting the racist hegemony of the times, illuminating and confronting racist stereotypes and rendering blackness and intersectionality visible on their own terms, outside the purview of the white gaze.

2. How can students employ the forms of self-portraiture and ekphrastic writing to express their own identities and create a dialogue with representations they see?

With the examples of self-portraiture and portraiture by these artists, as well as the vocabulary, cognitive structures and interrogation of author’s purpose facilitated by this unit’s content, students may be empowered not only to make use of these intentional choices to represent themselves more fully and completely in their portraits throughout time, but also to cultivate their own Black gaze.

In much the same way that artists such as Hank Willis Thomas, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems and Kehinde Wilde mine the archive and appropriate what they find for purposes of their own expression, this unit will put my students in conversation with the representations in these portraits. They will write ekphrastic poetry or narratives based on a portrait they are especially struck by, and write ekphrastic poetry and personal narratives based on the self-portraits they create. The use of ekphrastic poetry and

ekphrastic writing, as employed by poet Natasha Trethewey, allows a writer to comment on, subvert and otherwise join a conversation with a work of art they are viewing.

Jumping off from the facilitated classroom conversations and partner or small group discussions we have had about the portraits presented, the unit will continue by using poetry, song, spoken word and dialogue or narration to put my students in conversation with these visual representations. In this way, they will be able to learn about, elaborate on, engage with and learn to turn a critical eye toward representations they see, whether it be a picture of someone who looks like them in a text, noticing a lack of characters who look like them in text, stereotypical representations of people like them or others, culturally relevant art (such as the portraits presented in the unit), or their own self-representations via self-portraiture.

Using ekphrastic writings (or pictures, or spoken word and narration, depending on the literacy level and languages spoken by each student) will enable students to engage more deeply with the art they see. It puts them in conversation with these images so they are more fully able to respond, react and speak for themselves. For example, students could write poems based on their choice of images presented to the whole group, they can write captions for the pictures they see or pretend to be the person featured in the portrait and imagine what words that person might say. Also, they can write personal narratives and poems that go along with their own self-portraits. Personal narratives constitute an essential 1st grade writing strand in the Common Core Curriculum Standards, and poetry and song are wonderful ways to spark creative participation and production from students at all literacy levels.

3. How can the legacy of black self-representation via portraiture inform and empower my students to conceive of their own identities as dynamic, fluid and intersectional, and empower my students to take control of how they are represented?

A significant barrier to more numerous, nuanced, accurate and varied representations of a wide variety of people in children's literature are the gate-keepers in publishing, such as editors, publishers and agents who are predominantly white women and most often green-light narratives that resonate with their personal experience and/or center characters like them (Elliott, 2022). This issue mirrors the concerns Frederick Douglass had regarding the slave narrative, which needed a certificate of authenticity from a white abolitionist, and the necessity of white patronage during the Harlem Renaissance: art produced by Black artists has historically been mediated and directed by a white person in power (Woubshet, 2022).

For Douglass, one way to circumvent this issue was via the objectivity of photography (Stauffer, 2015). For Arthur Jafa, it is going straight to source material created for and by Black people via videos that have been posted online (Campt, 2021).

For author Zetta Elliott, self-publishing has allowed her to produce exactly the art, images, narratives and representations she wants, unmitigated by any other forces and without being subjected to the white gaze (Elliott, 2022). Also, other forms have sometimes been able to offer truer, more nuanced and fuller representations of blackness, such as Jafa's use of video or the multimedia MOMA website dedicated to Jacob Lawrence's Great Migration series, so offering my students various forms and modes of expression might facilitate a fuller sense of self-expression as we study, discuss, respond to, and create our own self-portraits.

Throughout the year, as students learn the vocabulary of self-portraiture and consider how the artists we are studying intentionally make use of various aspects of self-portraiture, such as background, clothing, facial expressions and body language, props, other people included in the portraits, color schemes or black and white images, their self-portraits will also become more nuanced and they will be more able to express themselves on their own terms through these portraits. Comparing the sparse backgrounds and uniform clothing of Frederick Douglass' portraits, for example, to the ornate naturalistic backgrounds and contemporary clothing and props utilized by Kehinde Wiley, to the black and white images of Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* will offer students a wide variety of options for how to construct their own self-portraits. Looking at the way artist Huang Yan uses people's bodies and faces as canvases for his traditionally Chinese naturalistic and landscape scenes will offer students plenty to reflect on and discuss (Yan, 2022).

Additionally, as we explore the concepts of internal and external characteristics, the arresting series, *Mother, Daughter and Doll* by Boushra Almutawakel, will offer an opportunity to reflect on the ways we present ourselves in public versus in private, as well as what various public and private spheres we inhabit (Almutawakel, 2018). These conversations will prompt students to consider their ongoing navigation of what aspects of their personality or who they truly are they feel can be seen publicly, versus those they must keep covered and why.

Finally, self-portraiture can offer a crucial perspective on how people change over time. This constituted one of the keys to Frederick Douglass' visual argument that he was, in fact, a human being, when the overwhelming opinion at the time was that he was not. Stauffer writes that Douglass "repudiated the idea of a fixed self. He imagined the self as continually evolving, in a state of constant flux, which exploded the very foundations of both slavery and racism" (2015). Camp echoes this idea when she says that "Black flow is creating a radical Black gaze" (2021). The hegemony of racism and white supremacy depends on people being stationary and fixed, with some created inherently and eternally more worthy or more human than others. A Black gaze posits that we all change and evolve continually, something Douglass endeavored to show by sitting for portraits for more than half a century. As he intentionally showed himself aging and changing through time, he proved his dignity and humanity (Stauffer, 2015)

By examining the self-portraits of Douglass and Yayoi Kusama, we will consider how people change over the course of time, as well as how and why they may capture this change via self-portraiture. Creating our own self-portraits, especially over the course of time (such as from the beginning to the middle to the end of the school year), would offer students a chance to see themselves changing over time. Having students accompany their self-portraits with a personal narrative written at these intervals would allow them to see their writing abilities grow over time as well. These activities, taken with student learning about the intentional decisions made through portraiture, would thereby support the idea of their identities as unique, intersectional and changeable, their intelligence as malleable and their potential as limitless.

Learning Objectives

Overall, the unit objectives fall into three main categories including reading a visual text, responding to a text and understanding their own identity.

In terms of reading a visual text, students will be able to use artistic vocabulary to discuss a text; critically read a visual text, including noticing details and asking questions; compare and contrast two texts based on similarities and differences; and draw conclusions about the author's purpose of a text or body of texts based on observations. Students will be able to respond to a visual text by creating their own self-portraits intentionally using vocabulary, ideas and aspects of self-portraits we have studied and writing personal narratives or poems in response to artwork they are presented with, as well as their own artwork. Student objectives for understanding their identity include distinguishing between internal and external characteristics in order to understand that their identity is composed of both, and noticing change over time in characters, artists and themselves.

Teaching Strategies

Visual Resources

Because this unit is based on what we can learn from the self-portraits of important artists and thinkers, the visceral responses of students to seeing these works of art, and the ability of these images to expand children's understanding of the world and their identities within it, the visual resources used in the unit are key. The unit content can be taught based on images and information that is widely available online and linked in the appendix section. The self-portraits should be presented on a smartboard or large presentation screen for maximum impact.

Bear in mind that even if students are not able to respond to the artworks verbally or in writing, their visual absorption of the images is making an impression. Additionally, students would benefit from having independent access to the materials. Teachers can do

this by sharing the visuals with students electronically via folders in a google classroom, supplementing the lessons and presentations with additional classroom resources, such as photobooks by Deborah Willis, Kehinde Wiley, Zanele Muholi, many of which are available via public libraries, and/or hanging large prints of portraits up in the classroom, which can be referenced and explicitly taught.

Explicit Vocabulary

For this unit, explicitly teaching the vocabulary of self-portraits and art analysis proves vital because it gives pre-literate students language to build a visual literacy and become critical visual thinkers. The vocabulary facilitates students' critical thinking because it provides a schema with which students can "read" visual material, discuss what they notice and wonder, and employ specific visual techniques when creating their own images. The vocabulary not only enables them to articulate their innate responses to the portraits in ways others can understand, but also creates possibilities and new mental structures within which they can expand their learning.

The unit vocabulary could be introduced by making a connection to portraits students have posed for themselves, such as school pictures, family pictures and selfies. This discussion can extend into asking students what they considered when creating those portraits and labeling a simple drawing of a portrait on an anchor chart with what students already know. Key terms include: background and foreground, clothing, facial expressions, body language, pose or gestures, props, other people included in the portraits (figures), composition, color, light and shadow.

Because the concept of self-portraiture is key to this unit's exploration of self-representation, teachers should also delve into the concept of subject versus artist/photographer and foster discussion on what it means or what may happen if the subject and artist are not the same, and what it means if they are. This vocabulary development will lay the groundwork for the unit's essential understandings.

Metacognitive Structures

In addition to introducing new vocabulary, a few metacognitive structures will allow students to delve deeply into an understanding, discussion and construction of self-portraiture. These metacognitive structures include noticing and wondering, comparing and contrasting, and drawing conclusions supported by evidence.

Upon viewing a self-portrait, students can use the notice and wonder structure, along with their new vocabulary terms, to make observations about the portraits and ask questions. This structure helps students begin the process of interrogating why the artist made specific decisions and builds toward an understanding of the artist's purpose.

Students can also compare and contrast multiple images to observe and consider the effect of an artist's decisions in the portrait. For example, teachers could show Kehinde Wiley's portraits and Frederick Douglass' portraits and prompt students to contrast them in terms of backgrounds, clothing and props, then question and consider why the artist might have made those choices. Comparing and contrasting also allows students to hone in on changes over time. For example, students can look at self-portraits from Frederick Douglass or the artist Yayoi Kusama at three different points in their lives to investigate how their physical features, as well as the ways they present themselves change or stay constant. As an exercise, comparing and contrasting is versatile and nearly universal; it could be done within or across any of the artists listed in the appendix.

Finally, students can use evidence from the visual texts to support their assertions or conclusions about what they think the artist intended and why. This mental structure and skill undergirds much of the work that students and scholars do and is a Common Core Literacy Standard for Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS, 2022). As students engage deeply with the visual texts, teachers can encourage students to go further by drawing their own conclusions about what the artist was trying to do or say in the portrait and why. Students can then support their conclusions using visual evidence from the portrait.

These structures should be explicitly taught and directed at first, but the responsibility for naming and employing them should be gradually released to students throughout the year. The intention is that by practicing these metacognitive structures explicitly over time, students will internalize them and be able to reach for them when analyzing other works of art, pieces or literature and events in the world.

Discussion Frameworks

Frameworks for discussion in this unit are based on best practices of cooperative learning and include whole group discussion, turn and talk, and think, pair and share. These frameworks will enable all children to engage with the material despite their literacy or language status. Care can be taken to ensure that students are grouped diversely and include a variety of group sizes to support learners at all levels, for example, using a triad instead of a dyad for students who are multilingual learners.

Ekphrastic Writing

Ekphrastic writing is writing that responds to a work of art. Though the form traditionally included a lengthy and detailed description of the work being commented upon, its modern application focuses more on reinterpreting and layering meanings onto the original artwork (Academy of American Poets, 2022).

For this unit, students will use ekphrastic writing in various forms to respond to the self-portraits they have seen as well as their own self-portraits. Ekphrastic writing empowers students to speak and puts them in conversation with the art they see. It also allows them to interpret, imagine, extend and complicate these images through their words of response. To facilitate participation by young and diverse learners, these responses can be written or verbal (either scribed or perhaps captured as audio recordings) and can take multiple forms, such as poetry, spoken word, or captions of portraits they see.

Students will also write ekphrastically about the self-portraits they create, which presents the opportunity for students to focus first on the choices they make as subject and artist in the self-portrait, instead of, say, creating a picture to accompany a story they have already written. Using ekphrastic writings (or pictures, or spoken word and narration, depending on the literacy level and languages spoken by each student) will enable students to engage more deeply with the art they see, and puts them in conversation with these images so they are more fully able to respond, react and speak for themselves.

Student Portfolios

This unit is intended to be separated into three discrete time periods or modules which will be taught at the beginning of the year, in the middle of the year and at the end of the year. A student portfolio that is created and preserved over the course of the year constitutes the major form of assessment for this unit, with a second form of evaluation being student participation in class discussions throughout the unit.

These student portfolios will feature the self-portraits students create throughout the year, as well as a collection of their ekphrastic writing. Through these portfolios, students will actually be able to see themselves changing over time. Their physical features will change as they grow up, their writing will develop, and students' self-portraits should also become more compelling throughout the year as they see different artists featured and gain insights and ideas for ways to present and capture themselves with more interest and nuance. Having this tangible, visual proof of the ways they have grown and changed in the past year will help students internalize the sense of their identity as dynamic and malleable.

Classroom Activities

Timeline

The intended format for each module would include lessons for one or two weeks at the beginning of the year, in the middle of the year and at the end of year. The lessons could assume the following format and timeline:

Day 1: Module Specific Activity

For Module 1, this would be an initial vocabulary lesson using the portraits of Frederick Douglass, Huang Yan and Barbara Rivera. For Module 2, this would be a lesson exploring the differences between internal and external characteristics using the work of Boushra Almutawakel as described in Sample Lesson 2 below. For Module 3, this would be a lesson, also outlined below, about how people change over time by studying the self-portraits of Frederick Douglass and Yayoi Kasuma.

Day 2: Notice and Wonder

Students notice and wonder about a presented artist or artwork using the notice and wonder structure and the vocabulary terms that have been taught, extending the discussion to include student assertions and evidence where possible.

Day 3: Compare and Contrast

Students compare and contrast two pieces by an artist or work by two different artists using the compare and contrast structure and the vocabulary terms that have been taught, extending the discussion to include student assertions and evidence where possible.

Day 4: My Portrait

Students conceptualize, plan and prepare to execute their own self-portrait, as described in Sample Lesson 1 below.

Day 5: Ekphrastic Writing

Students choose a featured piece of artwork to write about in the format of their choice. Then, students write about the self-portraits they have previously created in personal narrative or poetry format.

Sample Lesson 1: Module 1, Day 4: Creating My Own Self-Portrait

Timeline:

This lesson is intended to be taught at the beginning of the year during Module 1, on Day 4 after the initial vocabulary lesson and the notice and wonder and compare and contrast lessons. This lesson will take roughly 45 minutes to complete in class, but note that extra time may be required after this lesson may be required for student to actually capture their own self portraits, as they might prefer to take them in a different setting than the classroom, wear specific clothes to school for portrait taking, or bring in special props. Also, time and some resources may be needed for the self-portraits to be printed for inclusion into the students' portfolios. However, if printing is not an option, students may

also create a virtual portfolio where their self-portraits are collected electronically in a file.

Lesson Objectives:

SWBAT create their own self-portraits intentionally using vocabulary, ideas and artistic aspects of self-portraits we have studied.

Standards:

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood: Grade 1, Creative Thinking and Expression: Communicating Through the Arts, Production and Performance - Visual Arts.

- 9.1.V.1.E Use imagination and creativity to express self through visual arts.
- 9.1.V.1.J Use a variety of technologies for producing works of art.

Common Core ELA Standards: Grade 1, Speaking and Listening. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5](#)

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5](#) Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Evaluation Tools:

- Anecdotal assessment of student conversations as they discuss how and why they are making certain choices for their self-portraits.
- Student “drafts” of their self-portraits where they note or sketch information about their background, clothing, gestures, props, facial expressions, and color schemes
- Students’ completed self-portraits.

Procedure:

1. Students will begin by reviewing the vocabulary on the class anchor chart.
2. Then, let the class know they will be taking their own self portraits with ipads or cell phone cameras!
3. Prompt students to turn and talk to discuss 1) what they might want to include in their self-portrait and why, and 2) what they would like to say about themselves through their self portraits.

4. Model sketching a draft of a self-portrait while thinking aloud about the intentional decisions being made in each category. For example, saying “I would take my self-portrait outside at my favorite park because I love to take walks there.”
5. Have students write, sketch or draw their own self-portraits as a draft or plan for their actual self-portraits.
6. Ensure that students know how to use the iPad camera or have access to a cell phone camera they can use to take the portraits.
7. Provide options for when and how students can take their self-portraits and a deadline for when they should be completed.
8. The same day, or on a following day, allow students to take their self-portraits. Offer them the opportunity to take the portrait, look at the result and make adjustments to create the visual impact they are seeking.

Sample Lesson 2: Module 2, Day 1: Internal Versus External Characteristics

Timeline:

This lesson is intended to be taught in the middle of the year during Module 2, on Day 1 to kick off the work of this module. This lesson will take roughly 45 minutes to complete in class. This lesson is adapted from a Learning for Justice’s Understanding Prejudice through Paper Plate Portraits lesson plan (Learningforjustice.org, 2022).

Lesson Objectives:

SWBAT distinguish between internal and external characteristics in order to understand that their identity is composed of both.

Standards:

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood: Grade 1, Social and Emotional Development: Student Interpersonal Skills, Self-Awareness and Self-Management. .

- 16.1 1.B Understand the impact of personal traits on relationships and school achievement.
- 16.2. 1.B Recognize and tolerate the uniqueness of all people in all situations.

Common Core ELA Standards: Grade 1, Speaking and Listening.

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.4](#) Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

Evaluation Tools:

- Anecdotal assessment of student conversations as they discuss the 1) different things that are shown or not shown in the presented self-portraits and 2) how they might present themselves differently in various public versus private spaces.
- Student's paper plates displaying their internal and external characteristics.

Procedure:

1. Begin by showing the self-portraits in the series: *Mother, Daughter and Doll*, by Boushra Almutawakel and fostering a discussion about what the artist is trying to show through the portraits. Together, view the portraits from hidden to shown, from shown to hidden and all together as a multi-faceted panel.
2. Have students turn and talk with a partner and list something someone can tell about them just by looking at them, and something someone cannot tell about them just by looking. Explicitly name these as internal and external characteristics.
3. Next, prompt students to begin thinking about intersectionality: discuss with the students the multiple facets of their personalities, asking them to consider how they are more than one thing: a student, a friend, a reader, a skater, a family member, a member of a given religion or cultural/racial group.
4. Ask students to consider different types of private and public spaces they already inhabit. Ask students to discuss how they show different aspects of their personalities, different characteristics at different times and places. For example, how would they dress for a school portrait versus a family portrait? How would they pose for a selfie at the park versus a picture at church? How would they speak to their friends, versus their teacher, versus their grandparents? *NOTE: Throughout this week, continue prompting students to consider how they are able to show who and what they are on the inside by things they show on the outside. For example, if they wear a shirt with Godzilla on it, this is an external manifestation of an internal characteristic (their love of Godzilla). This work will continue to support their understanding of the art presented and push them to dig deeper into their self-representations via self-portraits during this mid-year second round.

5. Model writing and drawing characteristics on a paper plate with internal characteristics on the “inside” of the plate and external characteristics on the “outside” of the plate.
6. Provide time for students to work on drawing and writing about themselves on their own paper plates.

Sample Lesson 3: Module 3, Day 1: Notice Changes Over Time

Timeline:

This lesson is intended to be taught at the end of the year during Module 3, on Day 1 to kick off the work of this module. The first part of the lesson will take roughly 45 minutes to complete in class.

Lesson Objectives:

SWBAT notice changes over time in characters, artists and themselves

Standards:

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood: Grade 1, Approaches to Learning Through Play: Constructing, Organizing, and Applying Knowledge, Learning through Experience.

- AL.4 1.A Relate knowledge learned from one experience to another.

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood: Grade 1, Social Studies Thinking: Connecting to Communities. History, Continuity and Change Over Time / Impact of Continuity and Change on U.S. History

- 8.1 1.A Demonstrate an understanding of chronology.
- 8.3 1.C Identify examples of change.

Common Core ELA Standards: Grade 1, Reading: Literature.

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3](#) Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Evaluation Tools:

- Student’s portfolios featuring their self-portraits and ekphrastic writings from Module 1, 2 and 3.

- Anecdotal assessment of student conversations and discussion of how they have changed over the course of the year, when prompted by viewing their portfolios.

Procedure:

1. Begin by making a connection to favorite characters in books who changed from the beginning of the book to the end.
2. Say, “Characters are not the only ones who change through time and experience – all people do! In fact, that is one of the things that makes us essentially human.”
3. Show some self-portraits by Frederick Douglass that strongly emphasize how he changed over time. Have students think, pair and share to discuss what changes they notice.
4. Repeat the procedure for the self-portraits of Yayoi Kusama.
5. Create a quick 3-column chart listing things students were formerly not able to do, what they can do now, and what they hope they can do in the future (i.e., walk, speak, tie their shoes/ drive, vote, live on their own).
6. Have students turn and talk to discuss whether or not they have changed from the beginning of 1st grade until the end of 1st grade. How do they know?
7. Then, present children with their collected portfolios from the beginning and middle of the year and pose this question to them again. Students can discuss with a partner. Also, throughout this week, continue prompting students to consider how they have grown or changed throughout the year, both internally and externally. How might they show some of these changes as they prepare for their final round of self-portraits?

Sample Lesson 4: Module 3, Day 6: Unit Wrap Up, Evaluation and Big Ideas Discussion

Timeline:

This lesson is intended to be taught at the end of the year, at the end of Module 3, on Day 6 to wrap up, evaluate and solidify final big understandings of the work of this module and unit. The evaluation part and final debrief discussion portion of the lesson will take roughly 45 minutes at the end of the unit.

Evaluation Procedure:

1. Once students have completed their final rounds of self-portraits and ekphrastic writing, have them reflect on the changes in their portfolios from the beginning of the year until the end.
2. Students can reflect individually first, then have them do a round robin discussion where students speak to one another and all students eventually end up speaking to you about changes they see in their physical appearance, their writing abilities, and how their self-portraits are set up and captured.
3. Final Debrief discussion: Based on what students notice in their final portfolios, discuss the following big ideas with students and chart or otherwise capture their responses.
 - a. What have they learned about taking control over how they represent themselves and how they show their external and internal characteristics and their intersectional personalities?
 - b. What have they learned about identity over time?
 - c. If they have changed and learned this much in just one year, how much can they change, learn and grow in a lifetime?

Resources

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Appendix

Common Core English Language Arts Standards: Grade 1

Speaking and Listening:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5](#) Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.4](#) Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

Reading: Literature:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3](#) Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Writing: Text Types and Purposes:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3](#) Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood: Grade 1

Creative Thinking and Expression: Communicating Through the Arts, Production and Performance - Visual Arts

- 9.1.V.1.E Use imagination and creativity to express self through visual arts.
- 9.1.V.1.J Use a variety of technologies for producing works of art.

Social and Emotional Development: Student Interpersonal Skills, Self-Awareness and Self-Management

- 16.1 1.B Understand the impact of personal traits on relationships and school achievement.
- 16.2. 1.B Recognize and tolerate the uniqueness of all people in all situations.

Approaches to Learning Through Play: Constructing, Organizing, and Applying Knowledge, Learning through Experience.

- AL.4 1.A Relate knowledge learned from one experience to another.

Social Studies Thinking: Connecting to Communities. History, Continuity and Change Over Time / Impact of Continuity and Change on U.S. History

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