Objectives

- Examine symbolism as an artistic tool
- Create a self-portrait which addresses the student’s values or concerns
- Write an explanatory piece about their self-portrait

Introduction

This lesson will help students to understand self-portraiture and the reasons behind it. Ask students to discuss the difference between a portrait and a self-portrait. Why might a portrait and a self-portrait of the same person look different? Take some time to talk about the role of symbols in self-portraiture.

As a class, look at the different self-portraits provided with the lesson plan. Discuss the different symbols, colors and objects used in the paintings. Here are some examples of questions to ask:

- Why would it be important for an artist’s to be holding a paintbrush in a self-portrait? What does this say about the artist?
- Why might an artist choose to depict themselves as a rhino or a crow?
- Why might an artist decide to look directly at the viewer?
- Does a self-portrait have to be exactly realistic?
- What symbols can you see in the paintings? What might they represent?

It might be helpful to explain some of the self-portraits (i.e. James Christiansen portrayed himself as a Rhino trapped in a room, what might this mean? He was illustrating his fear of growing older).

Learning Activity

Students will now have an opportunity to create their own self-portraits. Allow students time to brainstorm what they will include in their artworks. They can use the attached Self-Portrait Worksheet to examine different symbols and subject matter.

After completing the worksheet, give students time to create their self-portraits. Students should incorporate at least 2-3 symbols from their worksheet into their self-portrait. Be sure to have students use symbols in the artwork to represent different ideas and personal experiences.

Materials

- Images of Self-Portraits (See Images from the Museum)
- Paper
- Pencils
- A color medium of student’s choice (crayons, markers, paint, etc.)
- Writing materials

Images from the Museum

- James C. Christensen, The Rhinoceros
- Roger D. Wilson, Crow-Crowded or I Myself
- Arch D. Shaw, Ego Trip: Self Portrait
- Thomas Sylvester Hoffman, Mini-Me
- Randall Lake, Self Portrait, from the primal slime
- Edith Taylor Roberson, Channel Three
- Shauna Clinger, Self Portrait

Utah Core Standards

Language Arts:
W.6.2.
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.

Visual Arts:
Standard 3 Objective 1a: Select themes of symbols appropriate for describing an idea or personal experience in art

Social Studies:
Standard IV. Objective 2: Investigate pressing issues facing the world.
**Language Arts and Visual Art**

Looking through the mirror - Examining Self-Portraiture and Symbolism Continued

**Sixth Grade**

**Learning Activity**

After the student has completed their self-portrait, have them write up an explanatory essay explaining the symbolism they decided to include in the painting. Why did they choose certain items? Which issue is this addressing in their own lives? Students should include a title for both their written work and their art work.

**Conclusion**

When students finish both their self-portrait and their write-up, talk about the experience. Ask students to share their self-portraits, focusing on the symbols they used and why they are important to them. Use the following questions to generate class discussion:

- What was the hardest part of this activity? Why was it so difficult?
- What was the most enjoyable part of this activity?
- Why are symbols important in helping us understand an issue or idea?
- Why is it important for artists and authors to include symbolism in their works?
- Do you think symbolism helps people relate to or understand your works better?

**Assessment:**

Assign points to students based on the following criteria.

- Did the student participate in class discussion?
- Did the student complete the Symbolism worksheet?
- Did the student create a thoughtful self-portrait including at least 2-3 symbols?
- Was the student’s writing informative and explanatory in explaining the ideas and concepts behind their symbols?

**Optional Extension Activity**

Have students think about outer appearances. Is how we view ourselves the same as how others view us? When we look through a mirror, do we see what others see? How might you see yourself differently than others see you? Explain to students that self-portraiture is an opportunity for the artist to create a visual representation of how they see themselves and how they want others to see themselves.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women were not considered artists. It was seen as a male profession. Because of this, many female artists painted self-portraits of themselves in the act of painting, with a paint brush in their hand. They wanted people to see that they were indeed artists. Ask students how they would depict themselves in a self-portrait.

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Roger D. Wilson, *Crow-Crowded or I Myself*, 1985, oil on canvas

Thomas Sylvester Hoffman, *Mini-me*, 2001, oil on canvas
Arch D. Shaw, *Ego Trip: Self Portrait* 1986, oil on canvas

Edith Taylor Roberson, *Channel Three* 1981, oil on canvas

Shauna Clinger, *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas

Randall Lake, *Self-Portrait, from the primal slime*, oil on canvas
Looking Through the Mirror - Self-Portraiture and Symbolism

1. Explain what a symbol is and what it is used for in art and writing?

2. What is the most important thing in your life right now? Make a list of your hobbies or pastimes that are important to you. (example: orchestra, painting, volleyball, family)

3. Take some time to brainstorm some important issues, concerns or values in your own life. In the space below, write a list of concerns or values in your own life. (Fear of growing up, equality for women, patriotism etc.)

4. Choose 5 items from the lists above. Match each item with a visual symbol. How might you depict these ideas as visual representations?
   Example: Painting --> paintbrush in hand, an artist’s beret
            Feeling fear of growing up --> a rhino trapped in a room
            Patriotism --> using the colors red, white, and blue