

## 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.



James C. Christensen, *The Rhinoceros*, 1981, oil on canvas

## 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.

## 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 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/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 other view us? When we look through a mirror, do we see what others see? How might you see yourself differently than other 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 other to see themselves.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women were not considered artists. It was seen 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.



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



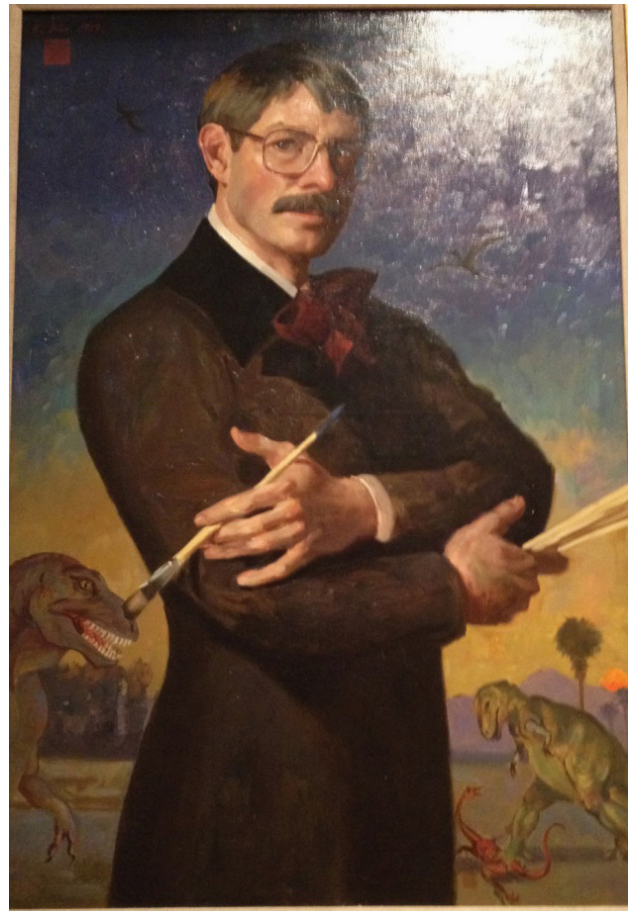
Thomas Sylvester Hoffman, *Mini-me*, 2001, oil on canvas



Arch D. Shaw, *Ego Trip: Self Portrait* 1986, oil on canvas



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



Randall Lake, *Self-Portrait, from the primal slime*, oil on canvas



Shauna Clinger *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas

