Table of Contents:

Introduction

Standards

Getting Started

Example 1: DeWitt Clinton (1768-1836) by Ezra Ames (1768-1836)

Example 2: Benjamin Franklin Butler (1795-1858)

Example 3: Adeline Foster Bain (c. 1810-1860), Attributed to Ira Chaffee Goodell (1800-c. 1875)

Example 4: Samuel Ten Broeck (1745-1841), by Ammi Phillips

Example 5: Salting Sheep, Sherman and Lydia Dean Griswold, by James E. Johnson (1810-1858)

Example 6a: James E. Delamater (1808-c. 1850), Henry F. Prime (c. 1811-1841)

Example 6b: James E. Delamater's Business Card (1844)

Example 7a: Robert Dunlop and Janet Andrews Lathrop, by James E. Johnson (1810-1858)

Example 7b: The Lathrop Children, photograph

Example 7c: Robert D. Lathrop, Photograph

Example 8a: Village Postmaster, by Samantha Littlefield Huntley (1864-1949)

Example 8b: Samantha L. Huntley in Her Studio, by the Lloyd Studio

Extension Activities

Writing Prompts

Resources

Vocabulary

Looking at Portraits Worksheet
Introduction:

Overview:
Just like a letter or a diary entry, portraits can be a useful and informative primary source that helps us learn about the past. To effectively learn from portraits, students must hone their observation skills, ask good questions, and think like a history detective. Sometimes, portraits are best used in conjunction with other sources. For example, a museum might have an item of clothing worn by a sitter in a portrait, or a house seen in a portrait (or a house that a portrait was intended to hang in) might still exist.

Grade level: 3-12

Objectives:
• Students will develop their visual literacy as they look for history clues within paintings.
• Students will use portraits as primary documents.
Learning Standards:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details
3. Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

Craft and Structure
5. Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, and problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
6. Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
7. Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

Writing Standard

Production and Distribution of Writing
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge
7. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.

Responding to text
11. Create and present a poem, narrative, play, art work, or literary review in response to a particular author or theme studied in class.
Speaking & Listening

1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
   a. Come to discussions prepared having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
   b. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
   c. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.
   d. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
   e. Seek to understand and communicate with individuals from different perspectives and cultural backgrounds.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

4. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

5. Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentation when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

Language Standards

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being (e.g., quizzed, whined, stammered) and that are basic to a particular topic (e.g., wildlife, conservation, and endangered when discussing animal preservation).
Getting Started:

Introductory Activity:
The class should break out into partners. In each pair, one student will begin as the observer, the other as the sketcher. Pass out portraits to the observers (each pair could get a different one, or everyone could start with the same), but ask them not to show the sketchers. The observers should then describe the paintings, looking carefully at all of the details. The sketchers should draw the painting as it is described to them. After a given amount of time, ask them to compare the two works. If time allows, students should be asked to switch roles, and be given a new portrait.

Discussion Questions for All Examples (See Also Looking at Portraits Worksheet):

- What is the sitter’s facial expression?
- Their pose?
- How do you think they feel? Happy, confident, arrogant, sad, thoughtful…
- What is the sitter wearing?
- Where is the sitter posing? Are there any props? Do the location and the props tell you anything about the sitter?
- What message is the sitter trying to convey with their expression, pose, outfit, and surroundings?
Example 1:

DeWitt Clinton (1768-1836)
Ezra Ames (1768-1836)
Oil on Canvas, 1817
**Example 1:**

*DeWitt Clinton (1768-1836)*

*Ezra Ames (1768-1836)*

*Oil on Canvas, 1817*

- The Sitter: DeWitt Clinton served as United States Senator (1802-1803), Mayor of New York City (1803-1807, 1808-1810, & 1811-1815), New York State Senator (1806-1811), Lieutenant-Governor (1811-1813), and Governor of New York State (1817-1828). Clinton is most known for his tireless efforts to have the Erie Canal built, which, when finished in 1825, connected the Hudson River and Lake Erie.

- The Artist: Ezra Ames began his career doing decorative painting: he painted signs, coaches, sleighs, and clock faces, among other items. He eventually began working in miniature, and finally in full size oil. His talent and his location in Albany made him the painter of choice for many prominent New York State politicians including John Jay, Martin Van Buren, and Alexander Hamilton.

- Portraits are intended to give us an idea of who the sitter is: what their business is, what their personality was like, etc. What impression do you get of DeWitt Clinton?
  - Why do you think it was important for politicians to have their portrait painted?
  - What look do you think they would try to convey?

- Optional Extension Activity: Compare DeWitt Clinton’s portrait to portraits of modern politicians, as well as other historic examples.
  - A collection of portraits of the Presidents and First Ladies can be found on the Library of Congress’ website: [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/odmdhtml/preshome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/odmdhtml/preshome.html)
Example 2:

*Benjamin Franklin Butler (1795-1858)*

Unidentified Artist

*Watercolor on Ivory in a Leather Case, c. 1825*
Example 2:

*Benjamin Franklin Butler (1795-1858)*

Unidentified Artist

*Watercolor on Ivory in a Leather Case, c. 1825*

- This portrait is a miniature—a very small painting that is intended to be carried around with a person. It measures only 3” x 2 3/8”. Why do you think someone would commission a miniature?
  - After living in Kinderhook, and working with Martin Van Buren, Benjamin and his wife Harriet Allen moved to Albany, where he continued his work with Van Buren in the State Government. From 1833-1838, he served as United States Attorney General, a job that required constant travel. Perhaps, he commissioned this miniature as a gift for his wife, to remind her of him while he was travelling.
  - If you were in a similar situation today, how might you keep your loved one’s image with you?
    - E-mail or picture message photos, video chat, skype, face time, etc.
Example 3:

*Adeline Foster Bain (c. 1810-1860)*
Attributed to Ira Chaffee Goodell (1800-c. 1875)
Oil on panel, c. 1833
Gift of Mrs. John W. D. Hyndman
Example 3:

*Adeline Foster Bain (c. 1810-1860)*
Attributed to Ira Chaffee Goodell (1800-c. 1875)
Oil on panel, c. 1833
Gift of Mrs. John W. D. Hyndman

- Portraits can tell us a lot about the fashions of the time they were painted.
  - Looking at this portrait, what do you think some of the “trends” might be?
- Sometimes, the fashionable items a sitter is wearing, or even the way they wear their hair, can help historians determine when a portrait was painted. Items of clothing can be compared to those seen in fashion plates and catalogues, or even other portraits for which the date is known.
  - If you were to sit for a portrait today, what trendy items might you wear? Do you think they might help a historian in the future to date your portrait?
  - What other sources would a future historian use to compare the items you are wearing?
  - Optional: Students can draw or paint their own portrait, before answering the questions above.
Example 4:

*Samuel Ten Broeck (1745-1841)*
Ammi Phillips
Oil on Canvas, c. 1832
Estate of Helen Livingston Mynderse
Example 4:
*Samuel Ten Broeck (1745-1841)*
Ammi Phillips
*Oil on Canvas, c. 1832*
*Estate of Helen Livingston Mynderse*

- Without seeing the title of the painting, does this portrait give you any clues to who this man is?
  - Head of cane includes his initials.
- The Sitter: Ten Boreck was a member of the Livingston manor committee of safety during the American Revolution. He served as a major in Colonel Peter R. Livingston’s regiment of the New York Militia.
  - This portrait was painted many years after Ten Boreck’s service in the American Revolution. Does anything about this portrait tell you that Ten Boreck was an important man, involved in the military during the American Revolution?
- The Artist:
Example 5:

*Salting Sheep, Sherman and Lydia Dean Griswold*
James E. Johnson (1810-1858)
Oil on canvas, c. 1835
Example 5:  
*Salting Sheep, Sherman and Lydia Dean Griswold*  
James E. Johnson (1810-1858)  
Oil on canvas, c. 1835

- “Salting sheep,” was a farm chore that meant giving the sheep some course salt to eat. It was said to help their digestion, and help them to grow better quality wool. Why do you think the Griswolds were shown doing this activity?
- The Griswolds were shown in the painting wearing their fanciest clothes. Do you think they would normally wear such fancy clothes to do their farm chores? Why did they do so in the painting?
- The painting shows the Griswolds’ house and barn in the background. Their property was called Hatfield farm. Why do you think they choose to include the buildings in the portrait? Do they help tell the story of the Griswolds?
- This portrait was painted by James E. Johnson, who also painted *Robert Dunlap and Janet Andrews Lathrop* (Example 7a). Sometimes, being able to study more than one portrait by an artist helps us learn more about the artist themselves. What clues do you think we could find by studying multiple portraits by the same artist?
  - The dates they worked
  - Where they lived or traveled
  - Perhaps when they studied, or saw other artists working in new styles, if their style changed during their career
Example 6a:

James E. Delamater (1808-c.1850)
Henry F. Prime (c. 1811-1841)
Oil on Canvas, 1838
Example 6b:

James E. Delamater's Business Card (1844)
Example 6a:
*James E. Delamater (1808-c.1850)*
Henry F. Prime (c. 1811-1841)
Oil on Canvas, 1838

Example 6b:
James E. Delamater's Business Card

- Background Information: James Elting Delamater, of Hudson, purchased a wagon-making shop in partnership with William Heermance in 1830. Two years later, he bought out his partner's half of the business, and greatly expanded it. In April 1845, the entire shop burned to the ground. Delamater's business card, which has an image of an elaborate carriage on it, is also in the collection of CCHS.
- Background Information: Henry Prime was a portrait painter from Troy, who moved to Hudson around 1838 (and lived in Hudson until his death in 1841).
- James Delamater referred to the carriages made by his company as “tasteful and elegant.” Could the same be said for his portrait?
- Why do you think a businessman would want his portrait painted?
Example 7a:

*Robert Dunlop and Janet Andrews Lathrop*

James E. Johnson (1810-1858)

Oil on Canvas, c. 1846
Example 7b:

The Lathrop Children (from left to right: Alexander D. Lathrop, Janet A. Lathrop, Elizabeth Lathrop Stoll, Robert Dunlop Lathrop, Archibald D. Lathrop)
Photograph, 1859
Courtesy Eugenie Durant
Example 7c:

Robert D. Lathrop
Photograph, 1861
Courtesy of Peter Stott
Example 7a:

*Robert Dunlop and Janet Andrews Lathrop*

James E. Johnson (1810-1858)
Oil on Canvas, c. 1846

Example 7b:

*The Lathrop Children*

Photograph, 1859
Courtesy Eugenie Durant

Example 7c:

*Robert D. Lathrop*

Photograph, 1861
Courtesy of Peter Stott

- Example 7a shows brother and sister, Robert Dunlop Lathrop (called Roby) and Janet Andrews Lathrop. Until the early 1900s, it was common for boys to wear dresses until they went to school. Roby and Janet are shown with some of their toys, including a ball and a hoop and stick (to play this game, a child would along rolling the hoop using the stick). What toys would you have chosen to pose with in your portrait? Does the fact that they were shown with these toys tell us anything about Roby and Janet?
  - These are very active toys—perhaps it tells us that they were healthy children
- Do you see any clues in the painting (example 7a) that tell us about the Lathrop family?
  - In the portrait Roby points to a body of water, with a steamboat. Roby and Janet’s father, Gideon Lathrop, was a well known steamboat captain on the Hudson River and Lake Champlain.
  - Roby’s outfit is made of plaid or tartan. The plaid is the family tartan of their maternal grandmother, Janet Andrews Dunlop. It is called the Red Ross tartan, for the Clan Ross. Roby’s outfit is a reminder of the family’s Scottish heritage.
- Making connections: Sometimes we learn more about objects by their connections with other objects in our collection. On October 31, 1845, Gideon Lathrop (Janet and Robie’s father) noted in his diary, “sent plaid for Robby and Janet.” What might this document tell us about the painting?
  - The diary entry mentions the paid for Roby’s clothing. The fact that it was sent in 1845 tells us that the portrait was probably painted around 1846.
- In addition to Gideon Lathrop’s diaries (which he kept for 33 years), two photographs tell us more about Robie Lathrop and his siblings.
  - In example 7b, Robie is seated with all five of his siblings. Thanks to a note attached to the photograph, written by a family member in the early 1900’s (perhaps even written by Janet or Alexander), we know all of their names and ages:
- Elizabeth Lathrop Stoll (1837-1907), center
- Robert Dunlop Lathrop (1840-1863), second from right
- Janet A. Lathrop (1843-19__), second from left
- Archibald D. Lathrop (1847-1872), furthest right
- Alexander D. Lathrop (1857-19__), furthest left

- In example 7c, Robie Lathrop is shown in his uniform, just before he went off to fight in the Civil War. His name and the date the photograph were taken are written below the photograph. What do you think the other notation means?
  - Gideon Lathrop’s diaries explain that Robie was killed in the war in 1863.

- How do the three portraits, when seen together, help tell a more complete story of the Lathrop family?

- Would any of these sources—the three portraits and Gideon Lathrop’s diaries—be as useful of a resource on their own? Or are they stronger as a group? Why?
Example 8a:

Village Postmaster
Samantha Littlefield Huntley (1864-1949)
Oil on Board, 1931
Village Postmaster
Samantha Littlefield Huntley (1864-1949)
Oil on Board, 1931

• This portrait shows Jul Johnson, Postmaster of Kinderhook from 1922-1934. If you didn’t know the title of the painting, are there any clues in the painting that would help you figure out what this man’s job was?

• Johnson did not commission (pay the artist to paint this image) his portrait. Instead, she probably asked him to pose for her. Why do you think Huntley wanted to paint Johnson?

• Before becoming the Postmaster, Johnson was a farmer. Does anything in the way he looks give away that he did not just work behind a desk?
Example 8b:

*Samantha L. Huntley in Her Studio*
Lloyd Studio
Troy, NY, Platinum Print, 1909
Example 8b:

*Samantha L. Huntley in Her Studio*
Lloyd Studio
Troy, NY, Platinum Print, 1909

- This photograph shows Samantha Huntley, the artist who painted *Village Postmaster*, in her studio in Albany.
- The painting on the easel, which she is working on, is a portrait of Martin H. Glynn. Glynn was the governor of New York, and had grown up in Columbia County in Valatie.
Optional Extension Activities:

- Students can create their own family portraits, including their family, pets, and the place they live, like in *Salting Sheep*.
- Ask students to think about what they would like to be when they grow up. Have them create portraits of themselves as adults, including props, clothing, and expression appropriate to their career choice.

Optional Writing Prompts:

“Museum,” by Felice Holman, from *Behind the Museum Door, Poems to Celebrate the Wonders of Museums*

Pictures on the wall
look into lives
back when
I was not
anyone at all.
They smile
frown
play chess
walk to town
pat heads
of children
see them
to their beds.
They seem so real
and near
but they are fixed there
on the wall
and I am
here.

- Students can write a poem about one of the portraits the class has examined.
- Students can write a letter to one of the sitters of the portraits the class examined, including their observations about the sitter. They may ask questions in the letter, that were unresolved through their observation exercise.
Resources:

  - This guide is an excellent resource for clues found in portraits. Unfortunately, it is out of print. Inexpensive copies can be found online at Amazon, etc.

- The poem “Museum” by Felice Holman, from *Behind the Museum Door, Poems to Celebrate the Wonders of Museums*, selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins, 2007, Abrams Books for Young Readers
  - Available through the Mid-Hudson Library System

- *Dressing a Nation* Series
  - Series covering the history of the way Americans dressed.
  - Available through the Mid-Hudson Library System

- *Ammi Phillips in Columbia County*, by Ruth Piwonka and Roderic H. Blackburn, 1975, Columbia County Historical Society
  - Available in the CCHS gift shop
  - Coming soon to the CCHS website

- *James E. Johnson: Rural Artist*, by Ruth Piwonka and Roderic H. Blackburn, 1975, Columbia County Historical Society
  - Available in the CCHS gift shop
  - Coming soon to the CCHS website

  - Information on using visual thinking in the classroom, the research behind visual thinking, and training opportunities
The Vocabulary of Portraits

**Portrait:** A picture of a person. It may show only their face, their body from the waist up, or it may be full length (show their entire body). It may be done in many different media: painting, photograph, sculpture, print, etc.

**Sitter:** The subject of a portrait. When someone has their portrait made, it is said that they are “sitting” for their portrait (even if they are shown standing!).

**Commission:** A work that someone pays an artist to create. For example, you could commission a painter to paint your portrait.

**Miniature:** A very small portrait, meant to be portable.

**Attributed to:** This term is used when we don’t know for sure that an artist created a particular piece of art (especially if they did not sign it), but there is some evidence that they did.

**c. or circa:** Used when we do not know the exact date of an artwork, or a date in history.

**Oil on Canvas:** An artwork that was painted using oil paints on a piece of canvas fabric stretched tight over a special frame (called a stretcher). You might also see the term “acrylic on canvas” for a painting done with acrylic paint on canvas fabric.

**Oil on Panel:** An artwork that was painted using oil paints on a piece of wood.
Looking at Portraits Worksheet:

What is the media? (oil on canvas, photograph, sculpture, etc?)

Is the portrait full length? Half length (from the waist up)? Just the head?

Who is the artist? Is the portrait signed?

What is the sitter’s facial expression?

What is the sitter’s pose?

How do you think they feel? Happy, confident, arrogant, sad, thoughtful…

Does the sitter look like someone you would want to sit down and talk with?
What is the sitter wearing?

Can you guess when the sitter lived, based on their clothing?

Where is the sitter posing? Are there any props? Any details in the background? Do the location and the props tell you anything about the sitter?

What message is the sitter trying to convey with their expression, pose, outfit, and surroundings?