Grades 6-8

Topic: Picture This! Our Family Portraits

Welcome families! We are so glad you are visiting us during the Spring Break. We have put together a great collection of links and suggested activities for you and your middle school children. If you have younger or older children, make sure they join in too and make this a family experience.

It's great to get everyone in the family involved because these activities are all about making self and family portraits....and learning that there are different ways to represent yourselves.....some without even drawing faces!

For the artmaking activities, you will work separately and together. When you have explored the sites, and have made all of your artwork, put it all together into a Family Art Exhibition. And remember to take out your phone and take pictures of your work!

Working as a Family – The Art of Collaboration

You are going to spend several days making art separately and together. After you finish all of your artmaking, you will decide as a family, how to set up your Family Art Exhibition.

That takes collaboration. Collaboration doesn’t only happen in the kitchen or when you play a team sport like basketball. Some artists also like to work together on creating artworks.

Kelly and Ferris are two artists who like to work together. They even gave themselves a special name. They like to be called KeFe. Can you figure out how they came up with that name?

Take a look at the drawings of KeFe on PBS Kids to get some ideas for your family’s collaborative drawing. You may even want to think about your family members’ names into one and sign your drawing with your new name!

Watch the fun video, The Art of Collaboration with KeFe. Then take a big piece of paper (you even can use newspaper) and make art together. Use pencil, pens, markers, or crayons. This can be the first work of art for your Family Art Exhibition.
Who Are You and What Do You Look Like?

How do we know what we look like? Of course we can look into a mirror, or see our reflection in a window. You all have probably seen lots of photographs of yourselves. And of course, there are all those selfies!

Try this too. Pair up with someone in your family. Ask them to look very closely at you. Ask them to pretend they are on the phone and they are describing you to someone who cannot see you. Listen carefully to what they say. Write down their words on a loose piece of paper. (It could be on an envelope from “junk mail” or any scrap of paper. Hold onto that paper for later....you will be using it later on in your artwork.

Are you ready to try your own self-portrait? You can either take a selfie or look at yourself in a mirror. Here are some questions to ask yourselves before you begin.

- Do I look the way my family member described me?
- What are the features of my face?
- What shape is my head?
- What shape are my eyes, lips and nose?
- What lines can I use to create these features?
- What expression would I like to show?
- How will I use lines to create expression?

Take a look at Emery’s self-portrait. He did it with his art teacher a while ago. Emery calls this work *Me in the Mirror*. What does that tell you about how he drew his self-portrait?
● Notice the lines he used to create his hair.

● What is Emery’s expression?

● How does Emery use lines to create his expression?

● How would you describe the shape of his glasses?

That’s a lot to think about. And here’s the thing...your works of art begin even before you pick up your pencil. You really start to make artwork when you begin to just think about it. Have fun making your self-portraits!

Your Portrait Plus

Here is a self-portrait by Anastasia done when she was in the 6th grade. It’s done in pen and ink. Notice that the artist is telling us a lot about herself:

She likes wearing hairclips and jewelry

She has a pet (or is it a favorite stuffed animal??)

She likes to write a lot (The words are a bit hard to read but they are all about her.)

She must be a very patient person to have done all this detailed work!
Now you all have a choice:

Take the self-portrait you already created and add some details that tell everyone about you

OR

Begin a new self-portrait and make sure to include some details

Oh, and remember that writing that you did, when you noted down how family members described each other? You can tape or paste that piece of paper right into your artwork.

Portraits Without Faces....Really! Making a Family Portrait

What if Anastasia had decided to tell us about herself without her own portrait? Suppose she just included some of her writing, favorite hair clip, her necklace and her pet (or is it a stuffed animal?)

Wouldn’t this tell us about her?

Take a look at this amazing work of art, I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold. You can find it at this link: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/488315

Here, the artist, Charles Demuth did a portrait of his friend, William Carlos Williams. But where is William? How do we know anything about him?

This is really cool. The artist knew that besides William being a doctor, he was also a poet. He wrote a wonderful poem entitled The Great Figure. And here’s the poem:

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city
Charles decided to make a portrait of his friend by illustrating one of his poems!

Now take a look at the artwork again. Have a great family discussion around these questions:

- What is this a scene of?
- Where is that firetruck?
- Where are the streets?
- Did the artist put his friend’s name anywhere? (He did...twice!)
- How many 5’s are there? (Trick question....Demuth shows only part of one 5.)

Time for a family portrait using this idea of objects or writing representing who you all are, without drawing your faces. Here are the steps:

Take a sheet of paper, newspaper, cardboard, printing paper....anything you can find to draw on.

1. Sketch your favorites: food, comfy chair, toy, pet, stuffed animal, candy, drink, and so on.
2. Fill up the whole page with your favorites.
3. Color them in with crayons or colored pencils....or leave just in pencil or pen.
4. Cut out each item.
5. Take enough newspaper to glue, paste or tape everyone’s favorites.
6. Stand back and admire the family portrait you created together

What Materials Can You Use to Make Art? Most Anything!
Hello again, families! Let’s go outside of the United States to England. Discover artists from Tate’s collection who are using new and unusual materials and methods to make art.

The Tate Museum in London has a wonderful online exhibition titled Materials and Objects. The show looks at ways in which artists have used ordinary materials in extraordinary ways.

Families, visit the site together to see how artists use everyday materials in their work. As you view the online exhibition, think about why an artist would choose to use ordinary objects to make works of art. Are you inspired? Now explore making an artwork with things you have at home.

Take a look around your home and find an everyday material that could be repurposed into a work of art. Are there items you might have throw out like an empty cereal box, or newspapers, or envelopes from “junk mail”? How about that wire hanger that nobody is using….even apple pits! Be creative.

But here’s the thing. How would you use your found objects to make a self or a family portrait? Have fun!

Take a Museum Tour, Have a Family Discussion, and then Make Art

You have found ways to represent yourselves. We learned how Charles Demuth represented his friend, William. Now let’s turn to some artists who looked at the everyday people around them, and found some very unique ways of representing them.

Let’s visit an art exhibition in New York City. It’s all about Mexican artists who painted murals on very large walls for all to see. You may see murals in your own neighborhood. There are many in New York City on the sides of buildings.

Did you know that about 100 years ago, Mexican artists introduced the art of murals to the United States? The Whitney Museum of American Art has a great virtual exhibition, Vida Americana: Mexican Muralist Remake American Art. The show is all about the ways that US American artists got many of their ideas from the Mexican muralists.

Enjoy the show! Here’s what we suggest:

Take a look at the first two videos at www.whitney.org/exhibitions/vida-americana

Los Tres Grandes about the three great Mexican muralists:

- Diego Rivera
- David Alfaro Siqueiros
- José Clemente Orozco

The Abelardo L. Rodriguez Market showing murals in Mexico
1. Go back and see the artwork from the show.

*Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art*

2. Select one piece that everyone found interesting.

3. Spend just a few seconds looking at it.

4. Have a conversation and discuss
   - What each person noticed first
   - Something you wonder about
   - What each person liked about the work

5. Remember our self and family portraits. If the work you are talking about has figures, how are they grouped together? If it’s just an individual face, how did the artist make it interesting?

This exhibition will definitely get your creative juices going. To help you think about how to get your ideas on paper the Whitney has posted a wonderful drawing activity guide. You can find links below to the guide in English and in Spanish. All you need is paper and pencil to get to work!

No need to print it out...look online and do the work together as a family.

As you scroll through the guide, look for the work of these Mexican and US American artists.

**Mexican Artists**
- Diego Rivera
- Frida Kahlo
- José Clemente Orozco
- David Alfaro Siqueiros

**US American Artists**
- Jacob Lawrence
- Aaron Douglas
- Charles White
- Harold Lehman

**Vida Americana Activity Guide**

[Guide in English](#)

[Guide in Spanish](#)
One Last Note

We hope your family has enjoyed making self and family portraits. Remember to take all your artwork and create a Family Art Exhibition in your home.

You saw how much information can be found on museum websites. Keep looking, discovering, discussing….and keep making art together!