

Portraiture in the social studies: Interdisciplinary and technological approaches to instruction*

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Abstract

This article is based on action research on the integration of portraiture in social studies instruction. At a public high school in Detroit, 54 students in four social studies classes studied the biographies of prominent African Americans, and they created portraits based on historic images. Some of the students' drawings were exhibited as posters in mass transit stations during Black History Month. For their own portraits, the students utilized sketch apps, and they engaged in autobiographical writing. Forty-four students completed optional and anonymous surveys on the portraiture project. The findings suggest that interdisciplinary approaches to social studies instruction engage learners, and they increase students' understanding of how art is used in society to honor and commemorate.

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* This article is based on action-research that was conducted during the 2014-2015 academic year at a public school in Detroit, Michigan. Fifty-four high school students, who were enrolled in four social studies classes, studied the biographies and drew portraits of prominent African Americans in preparation for Black History Month. After digitization, several portraits were installed as posters in mass transit stations in the city's center. During the project, the students also engaged in autobiographical writing and digital portraiture; they modified photographs using sketch apps. Through an e-museum site, the portraits were shared with parents. The majority of the students, who completed surveys, reported that the project had increased their interest in historic persons. They gained understanding of how portraits are used to honor and commemorate prominent people in society.

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INTRODUCTION

This action-research project lies within the theoretical frameworks of culturally responsive and constructivist teaching in the social studies. To social studies classes, students bring prior knowledge and understandings of history that they have developed in familial and community contexts (Dunn, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching builds on students' frames of reference and experiences (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The approach emphasizes the formation of learning communities that respect the cultural contributions and perspectives of diverse peoples (Gay, 2010). The portraiture project explored how historical knowledge is constructed and conveyed. The students considered their own roles in transmitting knowledge (Cf. Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000).

For centuries, portraits have been created throughout the world to commemorate and memorialize, to record, and to influence. Defining a person's status in society and history, portraits shape the collective memory. Monumental portraits are part of the construction of national narratives. In the United States, monuments, such as the *Stone of Hope* or Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, attract thousands of visitors to the capital each year.



*Figure 1. Stone of Hope or Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial
Lei Yixin, 2011, National Park Service*

Portraits shed light on the social and historical contexts in which they were created (Soussloff, 2006; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Students' utilization of multiple sources of information and their consideration of diverse perspectives are objectives of the *College, career, and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards* (2013). Some iconic portraits, such as Dorothea Lange's Depression-era photograph, *Migrant Mother*, have long been used in social studies instruction to deepen students' knowledge. Still, the potential to educate students with portraits has not been fully explored.

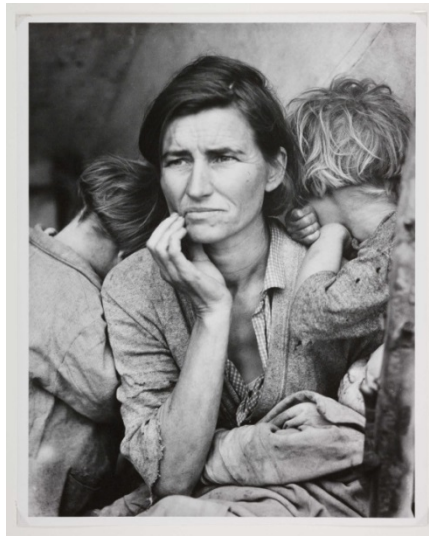


Figure 2. *Migrant Mother*
Dorothea Lange, 1936, Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division

“One of the pleasures of most portraiture is the feeling of being in the presence of people from the past, a feeling that no verbal description can match, however much more information it may give,” wrote Malcolm Warner (Warner, 2007, 17). Because portraits give life to historic persons (Brilliant, 1991/2013), their use in instruction is impactful. A person’s appearance, though changing, is often viewed as a facet of his or her identity (Brilliant, 1991/2013). Portraits forge visual connections (Soussloff, 2006).

In this interdisciplinary project, the authors aimed to answer multiple research questions: a.) Would the study of portraits increase students’ understanding of and interest in notable persons in history and society?; b.) How important is learning about prominent African Americans to the students?; c.) Would the prospect of a public display of the students’ drawings be motivational?; d.) Would the students find the use of new technologies, such as sketch apps, to be engaging?; and e.) Would the project increase the students’ understanding of biography?

The school and the students

Located in Detroit, the all-boys, public school serves middle and high school students. Over 98% of the students, who attended this Title I school during the 2014-2015 academic year, were African American. Of the 54 high school students who participated in the portraiture project in four social studies classes, 53 were African American, and one was white. Participation in the study was optional; 44 students (N=44) chose to take part by completing anonymous surveys.

The establishment of a collaboration to explore arts integration in the social studies at this school was the eventual outcome of a professional development workshop for teachers; four years before the implementation of the portraiture project, one of the authors was invited by the Detroit Public Schools to give a presentation on arts integration in the social studies. Held at the school, the districtwide workshop ultimately led to a long-term, educational partnership. The portraiture project is the second action-research project by two of the authors. This IRB-approved study was implemented with the support of the principal, a veteran administrator in the city’s public school system.

RESEARCH METHODS

Action research is a “...systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers...in the teaching/learning environment...with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes

and the lives of those involved,” writes Geoffrey E. Mills (2011, p. 5). To address the essential questions, the authors determined that an action-research study with a mixed-methods research design would be the most suitable investigative approach (Mertler, 2014). Mixed-methods designs are often used in action research (Mertler, 2014; Efron & Ravid, 2013). Mixed-methods inquiry offers insights into complex phenomena, thereby fostering meaning-making (Green, 2007, xi; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). According to Jennifer C. Greene, “...a mixed-methods study seeks broader, deeper, and more comprehensive social understandings by using methods that tap into different facets or dimensions of the same complex phenomenon” (Greene, 2007, p. 101)

The authors created an eight-item, embedded-design survey with both quantitative and qualitative items (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The survey was, therefore, both “confirmatory and exploratory” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Seven items solicited structured responses on Likert-scales as well as unstructured explanations in comments’ sections. The eighth item offered space for the students to write their thoughts and ideas regarding any aspect of the project. On the survey, each participant was asked to indicate the extent to which he agreed or disagreed with these statements: a.) *Studying portraits deepens my knowledge of historic persons*, b.) *Viewing portraits increases my interest in historic persons*, c.) *Learning about prominent African Americans is important to me*, d.) *Knowing that some of our drawings would be displayed in mass transit stations increased my interest in the project*, e.) *Using the Sketch Guru app for our own portraits was engaging*, f.) *The portraiture project increased my understanding of how portraits are used in society to honor and commemorate*, and g.) *The portraiture project increased my understanding of biography*. A copy of the survey is in the appendix to this article.

Administered in hard copy after the exhibition of the students’ portraits in the mass transit stations, the surveys were voluntary and anonymous. To avoid tracking the participants in the study and to preserve their anonymity, the surveys were administered on a single day. The response rate was 81.48%. Shortly after the collection of the surveys, the quantitative and qualitative data were manually entered into Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey is a cloud-based analysis tool that generates averages and percentages. The researchers created bar graphs to illustrate the quantitative findings using the graphing site of the National Center for Education Statistics.

In accordance with standard research methods, the qualitative data were manually coded by the researchers, who read the students’ comments multiple times (Saldaña, 2013). In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Johnny Saldaña observes that coding is a heuristic process whereby researchers establish linkages and grasp meanings. After descriptive codes were assigned, representative comments that shed light on the students’ responses to each Likert-scale item were selected for this article (Saldaña, 2013; Cf. Mertler, 2014). The quotations are presented with the quantitative data in the findings section of this article. The credibility of the research process was bolstered by prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Stringer, 2014; Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2011).

The project

This action-research project was multi-faceted. Prior to beginning their research, the students participated in interactive lectures on portraiture, a topic which they had not previously studied. They considered the reasons why portraits are created, where portraits are typically found, and the various forms that portraits may take. They contemplated the historical, political, and social functions of portraits. In light of Black History Month and because the majority of the students were African American, portraits of African Americans were the primary foci.

The students viewed paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, and computer-generated portraits. They studied the dissemination of images of people on stamps, posters, and currency. They considered

the democratization of portraiture since the advent of photography and the ubiquity of portraits today because of social media (Gustafson & Sidlauskas, 2014). The young men speculated about the impact that three-dimensional printing would have on portraiture after the Smithsonian produced the first 3D presidential portrait in 2014. In addition to viewing the Smithsonian Institution's video on the making of President Obama's 3D bust, the students watched a BBC webcast that captured the reactions of ordinary people to the opening of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial in 2011 (Waibel, 2014; British Broadcasting Corporation, 2011).



*Figure 3. Barack Obama
Smithsonian Institution, 2014, National Portrait Gallery*

A number of students were familiar with biography as a narrative genre, but most had not previously written biographies of historic persons. Each student chose the name of a prominent African American for biographical study. In writing, he described the person's background and early life experiences, the historical setting in which the person lived, his or her accomplishments and impact, and any setbacks or challenges that the person may have had to overcome. The students were asked to explain why other people should know about the significant persons. Though provided with readings, the students were instructed to conduct independent research online. In light of their findings, they thought of appropriate adjectives with which to describe the work and character of the prominent individuals.

To enhance their knowledge of notable persons and portraiture, the students created 8 x 10" portraits based on historic or contemporary images. Only a few students had ever drawn portraits. The young men studied images that were found on the sites of the Library of Congress, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and other institutions. The students used charcoal, graphite, and/or colored pencils on paper. In or around their drawings, they included the person's name and biographical information. They were invited to include quotations taken from primary sources, such as speeches. The students designed the portraits in light of the prospect of their display in the mass transit stations; they had to discern which biographical details were the most important to relate to the public.

Because only three portraits could be installed in the mass transit stations, the students voted. On anonymous paper ballots with the images of all drawings, each student ranked his top three drawings based on their educative potential and artistic merit. After the votes were tallied, the winning designs were digitized and printed on large posters. The Detroit People Mover exhibited the posters in glass display cases in its mass transit stations downtown. The portraiture project engaged students in each of the four dimensions of the inquiry arc in the *C3 framework* (2013).



Figure 4. The installation of Dakari Randall's portrait of Frederick Douglass in a mass transit station



Figure 5. A transit rider examines Joshua Johnson's portrait of Barack Obama



Figure 6. Daylon Randall's portrait of Jesse Jackson

“By tying our own stories to those who have come before us, the past becomes a useful resource in our everyday life,” observes Sam Wineburg (2001, pp. 5-6). To increase the project’s personal relevance and to strengthen such ties, the students engaged in autobiographical, reflective writing and digital portraiture. They wrote about their favorite subjects, their plans after graduation, the people who have influenced them, their hobbies and extracurricular activities, and what they hoped to accomplish in their lives. According to each student’s instructions, digital portraits were taken. Using an iPad or a Droid phone, each student modified his own portrait with Sketch Guru. The sketch-apped portraits were posted to an e-museum site. Designed by the authors of this article and constructed using Google Sites, the e-museum was shared via a link with parents.

FINDINGS

“Portraiture describes identity, the ‘who,’ perhaps better than any other visual genre. Through both its material instantiation and the actions around it, portraiture invokes identity,” writes Catherine M. Soussloff (2006, p. 23). On the surveys, the majority of the students (63.64%), who had participated in the portraiture project, strongly agreed (13.64%) or agreed (50.00%) with the statement that studying portraits deepens their knowledge of historic persons. They commented on the provision of context and clues. The following quotations are representative:

“It shows that there is more to people than what the text says.”

“(A portrait) helps you understand what they represent.”

Portraits appeal to students because of their expressive content; students are presented with lifelike depictions of people from the past. According to Levstik and Barton (2001), when people in history are emphasized, the subject itself becomes less abstract and therefore more interesting. The majority of the students (77.27%) indicated that viewing portraits increases their interest in historic persons. They wrote that portraits generate curiosity and spark the imagination. These statements are illustrative:

“It makes you think about what they did in their lifetimes.”

“When I saw portraits of famous and courageous people, it inspired me.”

“(Portraits) may spark a deeper imagination.”

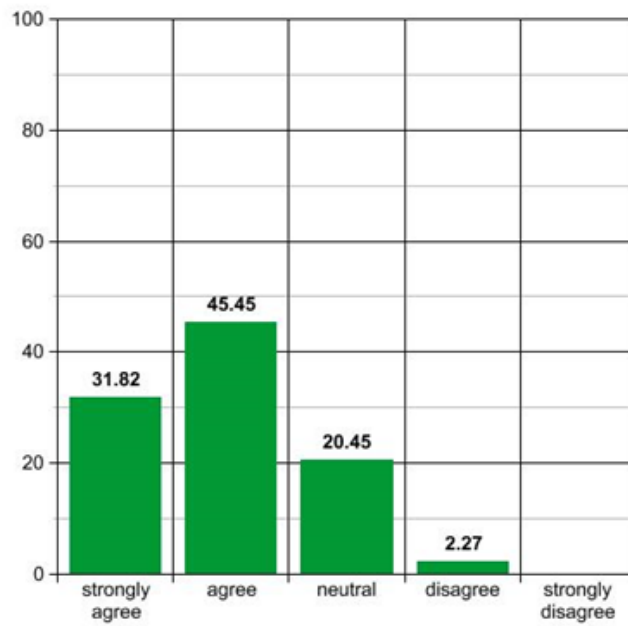


Figure 7. Viewing portraits increases my interest in historic persons.

In *The Dreamkeepers*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) stresses the importance of the development of students' cultural competence and sociopolitical awareness. Biographical studies are part of culturally responsive teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Of the students who participated in the portraiture project, the majority (81.81%) reported that learning about prominent African Americans was important to them. The students wrote about the significance of knowing their heritage and having an awareness of the individuals who had striven for increased opportunities. The following comments are characteristic:

"...I like to see and hear about my heritage."

"These African Americans had a strong impact on my life in some way."

"I have the opportunity to learn about what African Americans did for me to have the chance to do things African Americans couldn't do long ago."

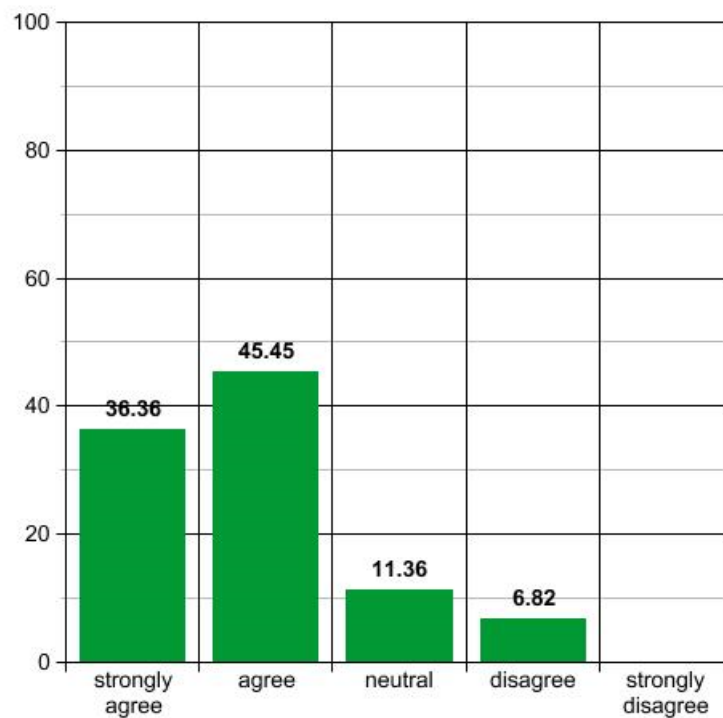


Figure 8. Learning about prominent African Americans is important to me.

The prospect of the exhibition in the mass transit stations increased the interest of the majority of the students (68.18%) in the project. With real-world applications, the project was authentic. The students were engaged in each of the 4Cs for learning and innovation that were established by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009): Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. These comments reflect the views of many students:

“By the drawings being displayed in public, it made me want to do my best.”

“You would like to have other people see the work you have done.”

“It will show people what I can do.”

With the statement, “Using the Sketch Guru app for our own portraits was engaging,” the vast majority (81.82%) concurred; 34.09% strongly agreed and 47.73% agreed. The integration of technology has positively impacted student engagement in other studies (Bebell & Kay, 2010; Suhr, et al., 2010). Students perceive the use of handheld devices as interactive and collaborative (Wu & Chang, 2010). In the portraiture project, the Sketch Guru app rendered the students’ own photographs in eye-catching and sometimes dramatic ways. Thus, the app itself had strong appeal. The students appreciated its expressive potential. They wrote the following:

“The Sketch Guru app was engaging because it gave our portraits a different look, in color and shape.”

“I like how the app showed a different side of me.”

“I learned that I can use other techniques besides drawing to get (pictures) to look the way I want.”

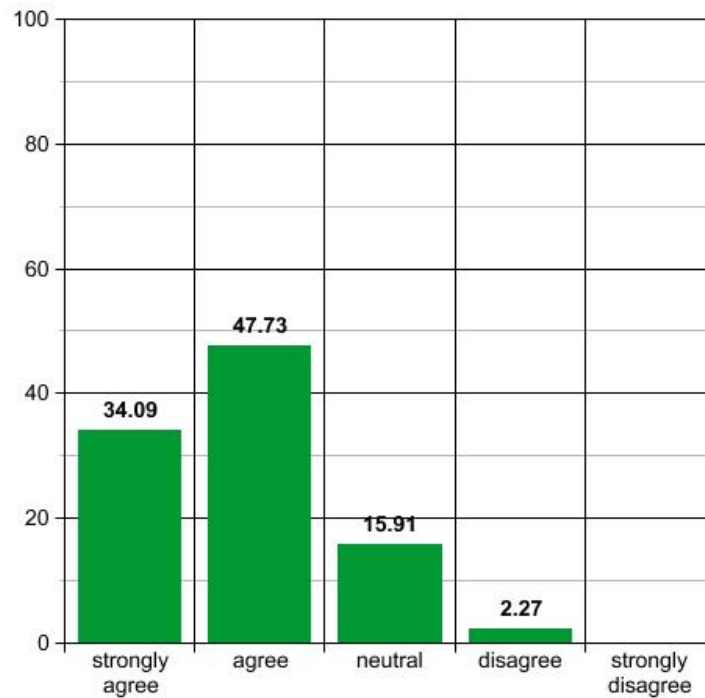


Figure 9. Using the Sketch Guru app for our own portraits was engaging.

The majority of the students (72.72%) strongly agreed (20.45%) or agreed (52.27%) that the project had increased their understanding of how portraits are used in society to honor and commemorate. Monumental and commemorative portraits raise historical consciousness. Public presentations of the past are political (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000). The exhibition of the poster portraits in the stations afforded the students the opportunity to participate in the process of publicly honoring individuals. The students wrote these comments:

“...as our drawings were displayed, I saw that people noticed and looked at our work. It showed that they understand that the people were important.”

“I feel our ancestors have done so much that they need to be honored.”

“I see how portraits are used to display a person’s value.”

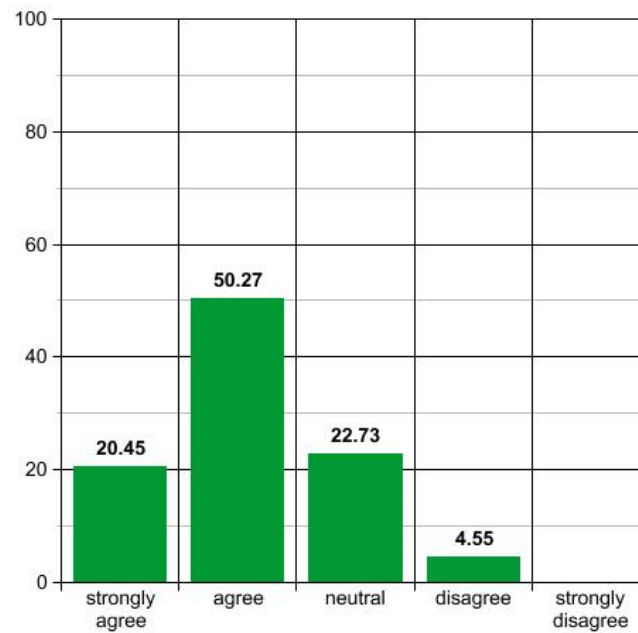


Figure 10. The portraiture project increased my understanding of how portraits are used in our society to honor and commemorate.

On the surveys, most of the students (72.73%) indicated that the portraiture project had increased their understanding of biography. Over 29% of the students strongly agreed, and 43.18% agreed that it had. Through research and analysis, the students had learned about historic persons and why they were remembered. Barbara Finkelstein describes biographies as “entrees into the study of history” (Finkelstein, 1998, p. 46). She maintains that biographies shed light on the convergences of social structures and human agents. The students wrote the following:

“The portraiture project increased my understanding of biography because I read up on different African Americans, and it helped me understand why they were appreciated.”

“(The portrait) enhanced my analysis.”

DISCUSSION

Art has the power “...to offer a visual alternative to textual explanations of the human condition,” writes Catherine M. Soussloff (2006, p. 4). In social studies instruction, portraits with a high degree of verisimilitude are fitting because they provide information about historic persons and contexts. Portraits typically resemble their sitters or subjects, who may be living or deceased (Brilliant, 1991/2013). Not all portraits depict faithful likenesses, though; abstract artists challenged the idea that portraits should be descriptive (Brilliant, 1991/2013; Pointon, 1997). Art historians have reflected on the extent to which a portrait ought to resemble its sitter (Brilliant, 1991/2013; Soussloff, 2006; West, 2004; Pointon, 1997). Some portraits represent qualities or attributes (West, 2004; Woodall, 1997). Minimally, portraits make references.

Portraits often communicate information about a sitter’s status, character, and personality (Brilliant, Portraiture, 1991/2013; West, 2004). Artists and sitters construct images through pose, gesture, dress and the inclusion of symbolic objects (Brilliant, 1991/2013; West, 2004; Alarcó, 2007; Harris, 1987). Artists often adhere to conventions when depicting facial expressions in order to convey intelligence, dignity, and composure (Brilliant, 1991/2013; West, 2004). “Portraits of persons who occupy significant positions in the public eye – statesmen, intellectuals, creative artists, war heroes, and approved champions – usually bear the gravamen of their ‘exemplary’ public roles; they offer up images of serious

men and women, worthy of respect, persons who should be taken equally seriously by the viewing audience” (Brilliant, 1991/2013, p. 10).

Government agencies have used portraits of respected and/or popular persons in soft propaganda to influence the thoughts and/or behaviors of members of the public (Welch, 2013). During World War II, David Stone Martin of the Office of War Information designed a poster, aimed at African Americans, of Dorie Miller (Reaves, 2008). Miller had received the Navy Cross for his bravery during the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In addition to having assisted an officer and other wounded men while under fire, Miller had manned an anti-aircraft gun during the attack (Reaves, 2008). Tragically, Miller was one of 644 men who died when the *Liscome Bay* sank in the Pacific in 1943. In addition to the war-era poster portrait, a commemorative postage stamp with Miller’s image was issued in 2010.

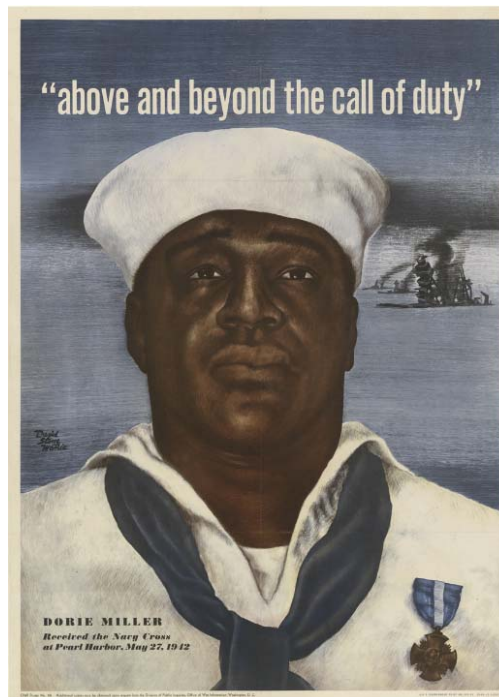


Figure 11. Above and beyond the call of duty: Dorie Miller

David Stone Martin, 1943, Color photolithographic poster with halftone, National Portrait Gallery

Portraits have been created to show support, respect, and/or affection for a leader or another notable figure. During World War II, photographer Arthur S. Mole photographed 21,000 U.S. Army officers and men at Camp Sherman in Ohio (Barber, 1993). Based in Chicago, the photographic firm, Mole and Thomas, sent this and other patriotic photographs in an album to President Wilson (Barber, 1993). Skillfully executed portraits of presidents have been sent as gifts by U.S. citizens and people in other countries (Barber, 1993). Of jelly beans, coconut shells, peach pits, match sticks, leather, and numerous other found materials, such portraits by amateur artists are in the presidential libraries. During World War II, Robert L. Brown in California tooled leather to create a remarkable image of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, surrounded by allied flags. Brown included the slogan, "Remember Pearl Harbor," as well as the date of the Pearl Harbor bombings.

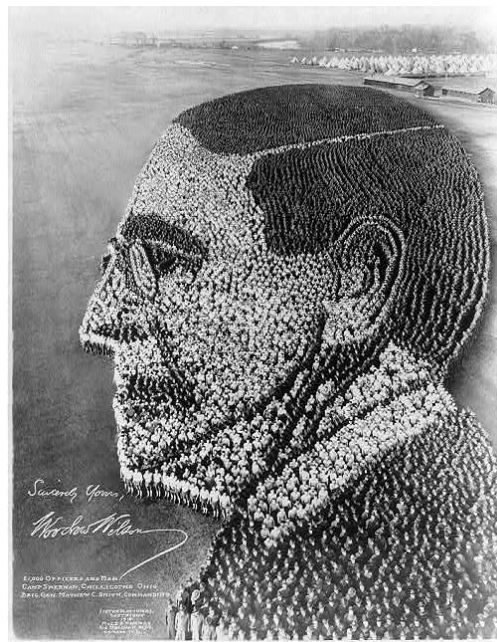


Figure 12. *Sincerely yours, Woodrow Wilson: 21,000 Officers and Men*
Arthur S. Mole and John D. Thomas, c. 1918, Gelatin silver print
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



Figure 13. *Remember Pearl Harbor*
Robert Lee Brown, 1942
Leather, stain, and wood
Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

To promote civic education, creative portraits of U.S. presidents have been and continue to be made by students in schools. In 1977, of papier-mâché, eighth-grade students in New York fashioned a portrait of Jimmy Carter in the shape of a peanut with a broad smile. They labeled the portrait, "A tribute to Jimmy." (Barber, 1993) In his campaign the previous year, Carter had presented himself as an honest and approachable politician with a background in peanut farming. In 1988, elementary school students in Pennsylvania made Ronald Reagan's portrait with jelly beans, the president's favorite candy (Barber, 1993). Their principal sent the framed, jelly-bean portrait to the president. The portrait is now in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

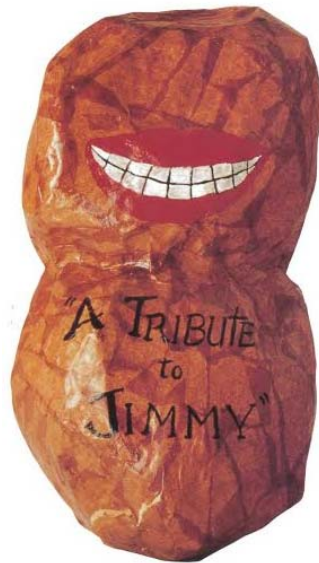


Figure 14. Jimmy Carter

Arif Akram, Michael Banks, John Oswald, and Delmar Ross at John W. Dodd Junior High in Freeport, New York, 1977, Papier-mâché, Jimmy Carter Library

The students, who participated in the portraiture project, viewed works by political cartoonists. Caricatural representations exaggerate or deform the distinguishing features of subjects (Soussloff, 2006; Serraller, 2007). In political cartoons, artists poke fun, mock, and/or critique powerful and ordinary people. The students examined two political cartoons by Matt Wuerker. In one drawing, the cartoonist illustrates a change in Obama's campaign strategy in 2012. Discarded are the Faireyan images of the president that were used in the 2008 campaign. Obama is shown posting instead a graphically similar image of George Bush with an admonition: "Remember." Remarking on the distortions of both presidents' features, particularly the enlargement of their ears, the students observed that neither presidential portrayal was flattering. The cartoon sparked discussions of freedom of speech, satire, and the First Amendment.

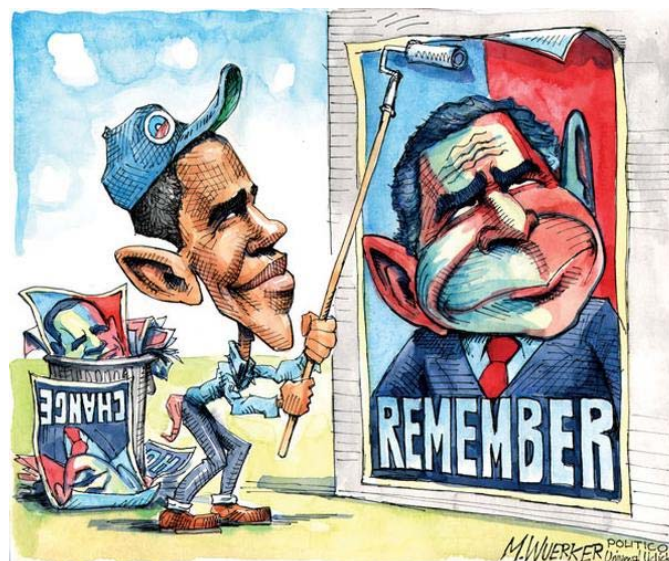


Figure 15. Cartoonist's eye view of Obama's first term, no. 29

Matt Wuerker, 2013, *Politico*, Courtesy of the artist

Matt Wuerker's other cartoon depicts Obama in a gallery viewing portraits of Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon B. Johnson. Obama is admiring Lincoln's portrait, which is labeled "Honest Abe." As he does so, Johnson reaches from his frame to tap Obama on the shoulder. Sinking in a quagmire labelled "Vietnam," Johnson is attempting to warn Obama about what his legacy might be if he were to escalate U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. This political cartoon was fitting for obvious reasons; the students explored presidential legacies, foreign-policy decisions, and portraiture in the discussions that ensued.



Figure 16. *Cartoonist's eye view of Obama's first term, no.3*
Matt Wuerker, 2013, *Politico*, Courtesy of the artist

In news magazines and websites, portraits inform readers of influential persons and their impact. The students, who were involved in the portraiture project, viewed Boris Chaliapin's watercolor and pencil portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr. Now in the National Portrait Gallery, the work appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine on February 18, 1957, not long after the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The editorial decision to publish King's portrait on the cover was made in recognition of King's agency and influence.



Figure 17. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Boris Chaliapin, 1957

Watercolor and pencil on board, Based on a photograph by Walter Bennett

National Portrait Gallery, Gift of Time magazine

Photographic portraits are taken for quotidian and practical purposes such as passports, identification cards, driver's licenses, immigration documents, and police records. Many portraits are indexical (Soussloff, 2006). The function of a portrait may change in the course of history. In the portraiture project, the students examined the booking photograph of Rosa Parks that was taken in February 1956, after she had been arrested, along with others, for leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Originally documentary in purpose, the image has become an important symbol of the Civil Rights Movement.



Figure 18. Rosa Parks' booking photograph
Montgomery County Sheriff, 1956, Montgomery, Alabama

Portraits help students appreciate diverse perspectives of history and historic persons. In the project, the young men examined William H. Johnson's *Three Great Abolitionists*. Most works by Johnson, an African American painter, are in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The students noted that, of the abolitionists whom Johnson honored with his painting, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln, the artist must have held Frederick Douglass in the highest regard; Douglass is depicted in the center of the painting, and his figure is the largest. The artist also used bright colors to draw the viewer's attention to Douglass, whose hair is green and whose vest is yellow. The students learned how artists make statements through their compositions and color choices, and they pondered Johnson's representations of the three men.

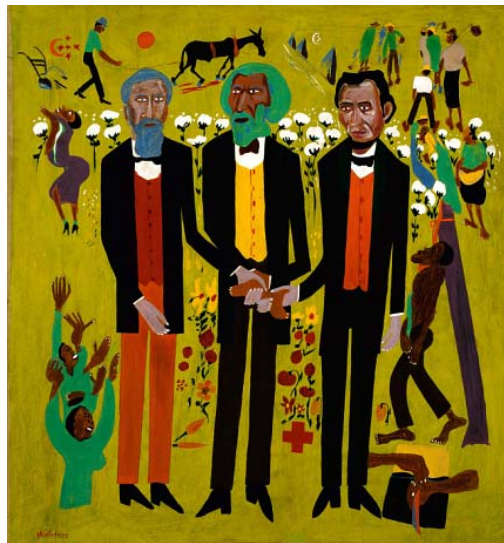


Figure 19. *Three Great Abolitionists: A. Lincoln, F. Douglass, J. Brown*
William H. Johnson, ca. 1945, Oil on paperboard
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Harmon Foundation

Portraits make statements about identity. In *Cutting a figure: Fashioning black portraiture*, Richard J. Powell maintains that the analysis of portraiture must consider the ethnic, racial, and cultural identities of the sitters (Powell, 2008). In the African American community, portraits have been used to challenge and counter negative images and stereotypes (Willis, 2007; Powell, 2008). Portraiture has been a means to self-assert (Willis, 2003; Powell, 2008). "Alternative and self-created images of the African American experience, especially those related to the arts, education, and family life, publicly challenged the predominantly negative representations circulating in American mainstream culture," writes Deborah Willis (Willis, 2007, p. 15).

Shearer West observes that portraits are "...both records of specific events and evocations of something more lasting." (West, 2004, p. 44). Among the portraits of Sojourner Truth, which the Library of Congress has preserved and digitized, is a calling card on which she is shown seated at a table with a book and knitting. Truth sold her calling cards as well as cabinet cards, which were of larger dimensions, in order to raise money for her work (Willis, 2007; Powell, 2008). The statement, "I sell the shadow to support the substance," and Truth's name are printed below her image. Having published her narrative in 1850 with Olive Gilbert, Truth recognized the power of biography and portraiture (Truth, 1850). She copyrighted her photographs.



Figure 20. Sojourner Truth
 Photographic print on carte de visite mount, c. 1864, Library of Congress

As photographs proliferated in the nineteenth century, people began archiving and preserving images in albums (Finley, 2007). Photographic albums facilitated the narration of stories. As they were shared, the collections shaped people's understanding of heritage and their sense of identity (Finley, 2007). Portraits were and continue to be exchanged among friends and family members to affirm social ties (Gustafson & Sidlauskas, 2014). Fundamental to the writing of national, historical narratives and cultural transmissions are the collections of museums, libraries, and archives.

Analyzing portraits

Portraits, like other sources, should be critically evaluated by students in the social studies. Historical thinking involves assessing the quality and judging the appropriateness of evidence (Seixas & Morton, 2013). An artist may have made compromises with a living sitter about renderings (Brilliant, 1991/2013). Artists may editorialize through their work. Their aim may not be mimetic. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many artists consciously shifted from representational painting (West, 2004). Understanding the context in which a portrait was made is essential.

Portraits call for careful readings. The gestures of sitters contribute to pictorial narratives (Alarcó, 2007). Artists use colors to convey emotions, and they often include symbols. In photographs, props such as pillars, lecterns, desks, and books communicate a person's status, educational level, or intellect (Willis, 2007). Artists sometimes include words, which may be found within the image or on the frame (West, 2004). On the borders or backs of many historic photographs, librarians and archivists have written notations. On Harriet Tubman's full-length portrait in the Library of Congress are written her full name, the years in which she lived, and a list of her occupations ("nurse, spy and scout").



Figure 21. Harriet Tubman
 Photographic print, ca. 1860-1875
 Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division

During the interactive lectures of the portraiture project, various questions were posed to facilitate in-depth analysis. The authors emphasized these questions: a.) *Who is depicted in this work? (Who is the sitter?); b.) What did the sitter do? Why was he or she important?; c.) How has the artist represented the sitter?; d.) Are there symbols or words in the portrait that tell us about the sitter and the period in which he or she lived?; e.) Why was this portrait created? What was its original purpose? Has the portrait's purpose changed since it was created?; f.) Where did people originally see this portrait? Where is the portrait today?; and g.) What can we learn about history by looking at this portrait?*

In the examination of some works, such as the political cartoons, Visual Thinking Strategies (V.T.S.) were employed. Museum educators often use V.T.S. to promote observational learning. Visual Thinking Strategies are based on three questions: a.) *What is going on in this picture?; b.) What do you see that makes you say that?; and c.) What more can you find?* (Yenawine, 2013). Students must support their interpretations with evidence. When analyzing the political cartoons, the students in the portraiture project were asked to identify the cartoonist's point of view. The Library of Congress calls for the identification by students of the opinions of political cartoonists (Library of Congress, 2015).

Sketch Guru and the e-museum

Because of digital technologies, portraits now circulate widely. Smart phones and tablets have increased their diffusion (Howgate & Nairne, 2013). The ubiquity of these devices and their connectivity mean that higher numbers of portraits are being taken and shared instantaneously (Howgate & Nairne, 2013; Serraller, 2007). Many high school students are accustomed to sharing portraits on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. In the portraiture project, the use of sketch apps and the e-museum site offered students the opportunity to conceptualize, personalize, and share portraits in new ways. The National Educational Technology Standards call for the customization of learning activities and the design of experiences that foster creativity (International Society for Technology in Education, 2008).

By altering outlines and colors, sketch applications transform photographs in seconds. Sketch apps give photographs painterly qualities. The effects of the graphic arts, such as drawing and painting, are

rendered. Among the students in the project, the most popular Sketch Guru options were PencilSketch, ColorPencil, ComicB&W, Blackboard, BlackboardColor, Crayon, B&W, and Watercolor. To protect the students' privacy, their sketch-apped portraits are not included in this article, but Figure 22 illustrates the technology.



Figure 22. *The Hand*, 2015
Sketch Guru: ColorPencil

Google Sites were utilized to construct the e-museum. Museum Box® is an engaging and widely used online tool, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, but the authors decided to construct a site that would offer a different format and greater flexibility of use. To the secure e-museum site, if the parents or guardians had given permission, the students' sketch-apped portraits and drawings were uploaded. The authors shared the link to the site with the participants and their families.

Museum resources for teaching with portraits

Museums offer the richest resources for teaching with portraits. Since 1968, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. has educated visitors about individuals who have shaped U.S. history and culture. In its collection are portraits of presidents, artists, activists, and cultural icons. The gallery's permanent exhibit, *American Origins: 1600-1900*, relates history through portraits that are arranged in chronological order. The museum's website offers classroom resources such as guides to reading portraits and writing labels. Educators may download lesson plans as well as images.

By honoring the people who have shaped national identities, portrait galleries have advanced contemporary political ideologies (Woodall, 1997). The aims of the National Portrait Gallery in the United Kingdom are similar to those of the National Portrait Gallery in the United States; in addition to advancing the understanding of portraiture, the National Portrait Gallery, London seeks to increase the public's knowledge of the people who have influenced British history and culture (Baxter, 2015; Cf. Graham-Dixon, 2013). Visitors to the website of this museum may search among over 200,000 portraits. Some of the portraits are suitable for teaching U.S. history. On the learning page, educators will find teaching guides and other resources.

Museums are employing holographic and 3D technologies to display portraits and to disseminate life masks and models. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois was the first to present a presidential image using holographic technology; in the Ghosts of the Library show, students see an actor interact with Holavision® images of Lincoln and other historic figures (Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, 2004). To reach classrooms throughout the country, the Digitization Programs Office of the Smithsonian Institution scanned the Lincoln life mask by Clark Mills; schools with 3D printers may now download and print the mask by visiting this link: 3d.si.edu/downloads/27. The data on President Obama's bust has been deposited in the National Portrait Gallery. Whether or not the gallery will allow downloads has yet to be determined.

Many art and historical museums offer virtual experiences and material resources. To reach classes who are unable to take field trips, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and other museums offer videoconferences. These videoconferences may be arranged online through the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration. For a number of years, Mount Vernon, George Washington's estate, has given framed replicas of Rembrandt Peale's *George Washington (Porthole type)* to schools, public libraries, and government offices. The portrait request form is on Mount Vernon's website. Having painted Washington from life in 1795, Peale drew on his experience when he created the "Patriae Pater" portrait, and Mount Vernon's copies are well made (Voss, 2012).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Learning about how stories about the past are constructed is an essential part of history education (Levstik & Barton, 2001; Epstein, 2009). Portraits have the potential to deepen students' appreciation of key actors and the historical contexts in which they lived. When they are of monumental proportions, portraits serve as memory sites that contribute to the transmission of national narratives. The integration of portraiture facilitates the exploration of individual identity. According to the National Council for the Social Studies, "Questions related to identity and development...are central to understanding who we are" (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010).

This action-research project focused primarily on African American portraiture. Although an analysis of the use of portraits in the teaching of world history is beyond the scope of this article, the authors acknowledge the potential for teaching world history with portraits. Portraits are found globally in a myriad of forms: medals, sarcophagi, statues, busts, engravings, tapestries, mosaics, and paintings (West, 2004; Woddall, 1997). Numismatic portraits of reigning powers circulated in the Roman Empire, thereby establishing authority (West, 2004). Funerary portraits were fashioned by the ancient Egyptians (Harris, 1987). In China, portraits of ancestors were made for religious purposes (West, 2004; Stuart & Rawski, 2001). On medieval tombs in Europe, artists carved effigies (West, 2004). In India, a tradition of miniature portrait painting flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (West, 2004; Jariwala, 2010). Political and/or commemorative portrait-cloths are widely worn in sub-Saharan Africa today (Faber, 2010). Portraits are not pervasive in all world cultures, though; they are not emphasized in Islamic art (West, 2004). Research that focuses on portraits that advance the learning objectives of world history courses in secondary schools holds promise.

The findings of this action-research project on portraiture are significant. The students' interest in historic persons increased. Their understanding of the uses of portraiture in society deepened. The vast majority of the students affirmed that learning about prominent African Americans was important to them. Insights into methods and motivators were gained from the study; the students found the use of the Sketch Guru app, a new technology, to be engaging. They were inspired by the prospect of an exhibition of their work in mass transit stations. The outcome of this project suggests that the purposeful integration of select portraits enhances history education and meets social studies learning objectives. Therefore, the increased use of portraiture in instruction is worthy of consideration by social studies educators.

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**Appendix
Survey**

1. Viewing portraits deepens my knowledge of historic persons.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain your answer:

2. Viewing portraits increases my interest in historic persons.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

3. Learning about prominent African Americans is important to me.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

4. Knowing that some of our drawings would be displayed in mass transit stations increased my interest in the project.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

5. Using the Sketch Guru app for our own portraits was engaging.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

6. The portraiture project increased my understanding of how portraits are used in our society to honor and commemorate.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

7. The portraiture project increased my understanding of biography.
strongly agree *agree* *neutral* *disagree* *strongly disagree*
 Please explain:

8. Additional comments about the project:
