

Make Your Own Object Portraits

This “getting to know you” activity asks kids to show who they are by composing a portrait made of their objects. It also introduces or reinforces an idea central to historical research—objects hold stories about the people who own them and when they lived.

This activity suite is designed to offer a variety of options. Review the options for introduction activities and extension activities and **only select the option(s) that you think will be successful in your class.**

This activity suite includes:

- Introduction Activity Options (Pages 1–3)

If your students are already familiar with thinking about objects, they may not need to do an introduction activity.

- Core Activity Instructions (Pages 3–5)
 - Extension Activity Options (Pages 5–6)
 - Object Brainstorming Sheet (Page 7)
 - Flickr Step-by-Step for Teachers (Pages 8–9)
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Introduction Activity Options

Introduction 1: Teacher’s Desk

Use your desk as an object portrait. Students will look at the objects on your desk and start a discussion about how those objects represent you.

This activity will work best if it is done in the same classroom as your desk.

1. Ask students to look at your desk and identify objects that they see.
2. As they list objects, ask students why you might have that object on your desk and what they think it says about you. For example, “If a new student walked into my room now and saw this desk, what would they learn about me?” Feel free to dig deeper into correct or incorrect assumptions about the objects.

3. Conclude with a summary of a few key objects and what someone looking at your desk might learn about you just from looking at your desk.

Introduction 2: Teacher's Object Portrait

Create a model object portrait of yourself and share it with the class. Discuss how the objects serve of symbols of who you are.

This activity requires some teacher preparation.

1. To prepare, select 6-10 "objects that say YOU."

- Some objects can be biographic connections, such as photograph(s) including you.
- Other objects should be more symbolic connections (such as a pennant from your favorite sports team, a hat that you knitted, or a book that you love to read).
- To encourage the highest level of thinking, consider adding one or two objects that are abstract symbols of something important to you (such as a rubber band to symbolize flexibility or a magnifying glass to symbolize close observation).
- Either bring the objects in to your classroom or take one or more photographs to share in class.

2. In class, ask students to take a look at the objects that are assembled and ask them to guess who the objects represent. Explain that you assembled all of these objects as a way to show who you are.

3. Ask the students why they think you chose each object. Offer support or explanation as needed.

- Once you have uncovered the reasons behind each object, ask the students to brainstorm other objects they could have used to convey the same idea. For example, instead of having a pennant from your favorite sports team, you could have had a jersey from the sports team.

4. Ask the class which objects could also apply to them. For example, "I also love to read ___ book. I could use that in my portrait, too."

Introduction 3: Objects in George Washington's Portrait

Explore the digital version of a famous portrait of George Washington to discuss how objects can have meanings.

This activity will work best if your students have learned a bit about George Washington and if you have access to one or more computer.

1. Load the interactive or full image of the portrait on the screen (<http://www.georgewashington.si.edu/portrait/index.html>).
2. Ask students to identify the person in the portrait.
3. Ask students to identify the objects in the portrait. As students respond, ask the student to guess why the artist would have put that object in the portrait. What meaning could that object have?
4. Explore the main interactive together (<http://georgewashington.si.edu/portrait/flash.html>), focusing especially on the symbolic filter. Depending on time or student interest, you may only want to review a few of the points in the picture. The following points will be most helpful in building the foundation for the core activity: books (7), clothing (3), sword (4), and inkwell (9).
5. Ask students if the portrait didn't have the picture of George Washington, would they have been able to guess who the portrait was about, just from looking at the objects? What other objects could they add to make the portrait-without-a-person more clearly George Washington?
6. This site also includes some related follow-up activities focusing on George Washington (<http://georgewashington.si.edu/kids/teacherguide.html>).

Core Activity

Materials: The classroom will need:

- at least one frame to use for picture-taking
- a digital camera
- a computer with Internet

- Depending on the size of the picture frame you are using, you may need to take pictures looking down from a ladder.
 - Depending on your preference, you may want to use colored paper as the background or as accents for the portraits. Consider reviewing examples in the Flickr group (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/objectportraits/>) to plan your use of background(s).
 - Each student will bring in 4–5 objects.
1. *(optional)* If you did an introduction activity, remind students of the person/character studied in that example and how objects represented him/her.
 2. Ask each student to bring in 4–5 objects that represent who they are. The objects must meet the following criteria:
 - All 4-5 objects fit together inside the class picture frame.
 - None of the objects are valuable enough that the student’s family would be crushed if the object was lost.
 - Objects must not display offensive languages or images.
 - Objects cannot display the full name of any student.
 3. Explain that digital photographs of the portraits will be submitted to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, where they will be shown in an exhibition called Object Project at the National Museum of American History. Explain that about 3 million people from around the U.S. and around the world come to the Museum each year, and many of those people will get to learn a little about you from your portrait and a little bit about what it’s like to be an American kid today.
 4. *(optional)* If you have access to an art teacher and you are able to collaborate, ask you art teacher to work with the students on composition. Discuss appropriate aspects of layout and how those aspects could be used to support the portrait’s message.
 5. *(optional)* To help students think about which objects to include in their portraits, consider prompting them to consider their identities (student, athlete, sibling, etc) and associate objects with each identity. See the Object Brainstorming Sheet (Page 7) for more.
 6. At several “stations” in the room, use tape to mark out a space the same dimensions as the inside of the picture frame you will be using. Allow students to practice setting up their portraits within these stations.

7. Take pictures of each student's portrait. (If you have a classroom helper system, consider dedicating one classroom helper as the photographer for the day)
 8. (*optional*) Ask each student to write a short essay identifying and explaining the objects they chose for their portraits.
 9. Upload the portraits to the Flickr group. For tips on using Flickr, see the Flickr Step-by-Step for Teachers (Pages 8–9).
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Extension Activity Options

Extension 1: Looking for Trends

Ask students to look for patterns and trends in the portraits created within their class or school.

1. Depending on the size of your class or school, decide if you will look for patterns across all of the portraits or just a subset of the portraits. These portraits will make up your sample set.
2. Display the sample set so that students can easily survey the portraits. If you have printed the portraits, consider displaying them as a gallery in a hallway. Or if you have uploaded them to Flickr, display the images in the gallery view.
3. Ask students to point out categories of objects they see in the sample set. Then ask students to tally the number of occurrences for each category. For expediency, you may want to assign one student as the "official" number for each category. Or assign multiple students to count for each category and be prepared for a rich discussion of how different students arrived at different numbers for the same category.
4. (*optional*) Have students create graphs or charts displaying the information. Options for this step include:
 - Ask all students to compose the same type of graph, such as a bar graph.
 - If students know multiple types of charts and graphs, allow students to select the graph or chart type they think would be most successful in communicating the information. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each after the students have completed their work.
 - Consider using all of the categories counted or just a subset. Less advanced students may struggle with many categories in a single chart.

5. Discuss the trends you have identified. For example, “Why do you think ___ was so popular? What does that say about the students in our class?”

Extension 2: Compare to Other Classes

Follow the same instructions as Extension 1, but complete one data set for your class or school, and another data set from portraits submitted by others on the Flickr group. In step 5, discuss how the trends for your class match or don't match others from elsewhere in the country. Make hypotheses about why.

Extension 3: Imagine a Portrait for a Historical Figure

Ask students to imagine creating an object portrait for a historical figure they have learned about.

This can be done as whole-class, group, or individual work. If you run this as group or individual work, consider assigning the same historical figure to multiple groups and compare the differences or similarities between portraits.

1. Ask students to identify character traits of a historical figure they have studied.
2. Have students associate objects with those traits. For more advanced students, consider challenging them to incorporate objects that would have been contemporary to the figure. For ideas, consider browsing the artifacts in Smithsonian's History Explorer by era.
3. (*optional*) Have students create visual compositions of the objects selected.
4. Save these portraits to use as introductions to the historical figure for next year's class.

Object Brainstorming

I am a ____.

Circle any of the identities that could finish the sentence "I am a ____."

student son/daughter sister/brother pet-owner scout athlete artist

future_____ (career) from_____ (city or state) _____ (heritage) –American

Write down any other identities that are a part of who you are, but aren't listed above.

Think of objects.

Pick your top five identities and brainstorm objects to complete this chart.

I am a ____.	A ____ looks like/uses/ makes/wears/seems like...
student	A student <i>wears</i> a <u>school uniform</u> , <i>uses</i> <u>pencils</u> and <u>workbooks</u> , <i>seems like</i> a <u>blank book</u> ready for words.

Choose your objects.

Of all of the objects in the right-column, pick only five to include in your portrait. Use these questions for help:

- Do any of the objects you selected have multiple meanings? For example, a school uniform says you are both a student and from your specific town.
- Are all of your identities equally important? If one is the most important, think about picking a large object to represent it.
- Are any of your objects delicate or valuable? Try to pick objects that will be easy to bring into class.

Flickr Step-by-Step for Teachers

Setting Up Your Flickr Photo Group

1. Go to Yahoo mail to set up a free e-mail account for your classroom use. You must have a Yahoo e-mail to use Flickr.

If you create your e-mail as lastname_gradelevel_schoolname@yahoo.com and use your school e-mail address as the "primary" email for the account, you will be able to use the account for class projects year after year and will only need to change the password for new groups of students. This will also identify all of the photographs you upload with this account as belonging to your school.

2. Go to Flickr.com and create a free Flickr account using your Yahoo e-mail address.
3. Login to your Flickr account.
4. Visit <http://www.flickr.com/groups/objectportraits/> and click "Join this Group" to join the National Museum of American History's "Object Portraits" Flickr group.

Uploading Your Photographs/Text to Flickr

1. Place all your students' portraits in a single folder on your computer.
2. Login to your Flickr account and upload your students' portraits.
 - a. Click on "upload photos/video."
 - b. Select the photographs to upload (from your computer).
 - c. Set privacy settings for the photographs to "public." (This is necessary to share the images with the museum.)
3. Insert description text. For each portrait, insert description text that includes the student's first name, grade, and hometown. For example, "Stacy, Grade 4, Auburn, AL." If students also prepared short essays, consider posting all or part of that text as description. However, this data will display on the web site and at the National Museum of American History, so avoid posting any information that could infringe on the student's privacy.

The photograph's "Description" is different than "Comment." The description stays directly under your photograph, but comments will push down depending on how many comments you receive.

4. Click “send to group” to share the photograph with the Smithsonian National Museum of American History’s Flickr group.

Basics of Online Photograph Sharing

http://news.cnet.com/8301-17939_109-9703620-2.html

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cogdog/265279980/>

Flickr in the Classroom

<http://k12online.wm.edu/usingflickr/usingflickr.html>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cogdog/265279980/>

<http://www.educause.edu/ELI/7ThingsYouShouldKnowAboutFlick/162592>

<http://creativecommons.learnhub.com/lesson/1517-flickr-in-the-k-12-classroom>