

Culminating Activity: Identity of Self

Overview

The purpose of this culminating activity is to wrap up the Identity of Self cycle. Students will be creating their own archeological portraits using personal objects.

Source for the Lesson

Adapted from a Smithsonian Explorers Lesson

<https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/ObjectPortrait.pdf>

**Note, every “step” in this culminating activity is a separate lesson.* Do not plan to do them all in one day.

Materials

1. For Step 2: 6-10 objects that describe the teacher for “teacher object portrait.”
2. For Step 3: Projector and computer.
3. For Step 4: Each student will bring in 4–5 objects for their portrait
4. For Step 5: Materials for wooden frames
 - “Picture frame” molding ([HomeDepot.com](https://www.homedepot.com) has many choices)
 - [Miter box with a hand saw](#) (sold as a set)
 - Clamps
 - Wood glue
 - [Heavy-duty stapler](#)
 - Light-duty stapler or small nails for holding in the picture/cardboard
 - [Sawtooth picture hangers](#)
 - Hammer
 - A piece of cardboard (cut from a cardboard box)
 - 150-grit sandpaper

Time Needed

For actual portrait gallery walk, one full 90 minute period. Several days if other lessons are included.

Step 1: Introduction Teacher’s Desk

Teacher will use their desk as an object portrait. Students will look at the objects on the desk and start a discussion about how those objects represent the teacher.

1. Ask students to look at the teacher’s desk and identify objects that they see.
2. As they list objects, ask students why the teacher might have that object on their desk and what they think it says about the teacher. For example, “If a new student walked into the teacher’s room now and saw this desk, what would they learn about the teacher?” 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 the teacher’s desk might learn about the teacher just from looking at their desk.

Step 2: Teacher's Object Portrait

The teacher will create a model object portrait of themselves and share it with the class. Discuss how the objects serve as symbols of who they are.

1. To prepare, select 6-10 objects that represent the teacher.

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

Either bring the objects in to the classroom or take one or more photographs to share in class.

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

3. The teacher will ask the students why they think the teacher chose each object. The teacher will offer support or explanation as needed.

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

4. The teacher will ask the class which objects could also apply to the students. For example, "I also love to read __ book. I could use that in my portrait, too."

Step 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 the students have learned a bit about George Washington and if they have access to one or more computers.

1. Load the interactive or full image of the portrait on the screen

(<http://www.georgewashington.si.edu/portrait/index.html>).

2. Teacher will ask students to identify the person in the portrait.

3. Teacher will ask students to identify the objects in the portrait. As students respond, the teacher will ask the students 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, the teacher 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. The teacher will 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>).

Step 4: Directions for culminating activity

The teacher will 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 language or images.
- Objects cannot display the full name of any student.

Step 5: Students Make a Frame for Their Portraits!

- Students will be making their own frames for their archeological portraits using hand tools.
- Help and lessons will be provided by local carpenters.

Step 6: Students Show Off Portraits

- Tables will be put around the classroom, students will be invited to arrange their portraits in their frames.
- Students will participate in a gallery walk to see what other students' portraits look like.
- Students will have the option to put a name placard next to their portrait, or leave it absent.