

## What's on the Inside: Self-Portraits

DALLAS  
MUSEUM  
OF ART



Art can be very personal and a great way to express your feelings about yourself or the world around you. This project delves into self-portraiture and explores our own inner attributes, celebrating the positive qualities that make each of us unique.

During this activity, students will create a Word Self-Portrait using traits gathered from friends, family, caretakers, mentors, and themselves. These attributes represent the qualities that truly matter on the inside—those that define us beyond appearances.

### Looking Closer

Encourage students to examine a self-portrait from the DMA's collection for a full 1–2 minutes.

Optional: Students can write down several observations before discussing.

Students do a Think-Pair-Share in groups of 3–4 and then share their observations in a whole-class discussion.

- What is going on in the image?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find, or what more can we see?
- What feelings are you getting from this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Do you know what a portrait is? What is the difference between a portrait and a self-portrait? Do you think this is a portrait or a self-portrait? How do you know?
- Do you like the artwork? Why or why not?

### Questions to Dig Deeper

- In what way do you imagine that an artist's process of creating a self-portrait is different from creating a portrait?
- Does a self-portrait have to be realistic?
- What information might we learn about a person from a self-portrait?
- Does a self-portrait have to be an image?

Images: *Family Portrait* 1963, 2001. Martin Delabano. Mixed media. Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bryant M. Hanley, Jr., Lorine and David H. Gibson, and Sonny Burt and Bob Butler, 2001.358.A–F. © Martin Delabano; *A Portrait of the Artist as Himself*, 2022. Kohshin Finley. Oil on canvas. Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Art Fair Acquisition Fund, 2022.58.2. © Kohshin Finley; *Self Portrait, New York Fireplace*, 1968. Ethel Fisher. Oil on linen. Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Margaret Fisher, 2022.62. © Ethel Fisher.

## Activity: In the Eyes of Self/In the Eyes of Others

On a blank sheet of scrap paper, have the students create a list of six words describing themselves using the following prompts:

1. **In the Eyes of Self:** Write one word to describe yourself.
2. **In the Eyes of Others:** Write one word that a FRIEND would use to describe you.
3. **In the Eyes of Others:** Write one word that a MOM/DAD/ADULT/CARETAKER would use to describe you.
4. **In the Eyes of Others:** Write one word that your FAVORITE TEACHER would use to describe you.
5. **In the Mirror:** Imagine looking in a mirror. Write one word that describes you.
6. **My Hopes and Wishes:** Write one word that you WANT to be described as or seen as.

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## Bonus Activity: “I Am” Word Portraits

Students will use their list of six words to create an “I Am” Word Portrait. Each student will need a pencil and a piece of white or light-colored construction paper.

1. Orient the paper on your desk in portrait mode (vertical).
2. Draw five lines that extend from the left side of the paper to the right side of the paper, edge to edge. Space the five lines out so that they fill up the entire paper, top to bottom. Lines can be straight, angled, wavy, etc.
3. On the first line, write “I AM . . .” and one of the words from the word list. Draw your letters so that they extend from the top of the paper to the top of the first line, completely filling the space.
4. Continue filling the next three lines with the rest of the words from the word list, always filling up the space between lines. You may need to write more than one word per line.
5. On the final line (the bottom edge of the paper), write “I AM [Name].”
6. Use black permanent marker to trace over your words. Add dots, lines, dashes, hearts, emojis, etc. to add character to your word art.
7. Erase the pencil lines.
8. Add color with crayons or colored pencils if desired.
9. Optional extension: Have students draw a self-portrait on a separate sheet of paper. Cut out the self-portrait and overlay on top of the word portrait.

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## Suggested Supplies

Pencils, blank paper,  
9 x 12 white or light-colored  
construction paper, black  
permanent markers, crayons  
or colored pencils

## Additional Resources

- *I Like Myself*, by Karen Beaumont
- *Beautiful*, by Stacy McAnulty
- *Marvelous Me: Inside and Out*, by Lisa Bullard
- *The Color of Us*, by Karen Katz
- *Just Like Me*, by Vanessa Brantley-Newton
- *What I Like About Me*, by Allia Nolan
- <https://www.nga.gov/learn/teachers/lessons-activities/self-portraits.html>

## Contextual Information

<https://blog.dma.org/2013/04/30/the-spot-for-art/>  
<https://martindelabanoblog.com/2015/07/31/family-portrait-1963/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3090322521216606>  
<https://www.majesticjournal.com/kohshin-finley>