

## Painting - Self-Portraits

*The children learn about and paint self-portraits. For ages 6 to 9. Plan 2 to 3 sessions.*

### KEY IDEAS

- Learning about self-portraits
- Observing facial features
- Planning use of the whole paper
- Using large and small paint brushes
- Painting wet paint over dry paint

### LANGUAGE

self-portrait, head-and-shoulders portrait, background, outline

### YOU WILL NEED

- Heavy-weight white drawing paper or manila paper (approximately 12 x 15 inches)
- Tempera paints including multicultural skin colors (see note below)
- Brushes in a variety of sizes
- Containers of water for rinsing brushes
- Sponges for drying brushes
- Pencils
- A large mirror or individual mirrors to share
- Examples of head-and-shoulder portraits

*Note: Tempera paint can be purchased in multicultural skin colors. However, if time permits, mix the skin colors with the children. Using glass jars so everyone can see, start with white paint and gradually add small amounts of brown, or start with brown paint and gradually add small amounts of white. For warmer tones, add a dab of yellow. For darker tones, add a dab of blue. For reddish tones, add a dab of red.*

## **THE PROJECT**

### **First Session**

#### **Preparation**

- Set out paper, pencils, paint, brushes, containers of water, sponges, and mirror.
- Display examples of head-and-shoulders portraits.
- Paint a piece of paper and let it dry to demonstrate painting wet paint over dry paint.

#### **How to Begin**

- Explain to the children that when an artist makes a picture of a person it is called a portrait. When the artist makes a picture of himself or herself it is called a self-portrait. When the portrait shows only the upper half of the figure, rather than the full body, it is referred to as a head-and-shoulders portrait. Looking at the examples, tell the children they will be painting head-and-shoulders self-portraits
- Show how wet paint can be applied over dry paint by painting details on the demonstration paper. Explain that this process will make adding details to their paintings easier. For example, it is simpler to paint the whole sky blue and then dab on the stars, than to paint the stars and try to go around each one with the blue paint.
- Explain that, in this session, the children will be drawing the outline of their head and shoulders, and then painting them with a first layer of paint. In the next session, they will be painting their facial features, details on their clothes, and the background.
- Have the children look at themselves in the mirror to observe their head, neck, and shoulders. Point out that the neck needs to be thick enough to support the head, and the shoulders extend past the width of the head on each side. Tell the children that they should lightly sketch the outline of their head, neck, and shoulders, making them large enough to fill the paper. They should avoid drawing details in this session

because after they apply their first layer of paint, the pencil drawn details will disappear.

- Have the children sketch the outline of their head, neck, and shoulders and apply the first layer of paint to their portraits.

## **Second/Third session**

### **Preparation**

- Set out tempera paints, containers of water, brushes, sponges, and mirror.
- Set out the dried paintings and the demonstration paper from the previous session.

### **How to Begin**

- Explain to the children that they will be adding the facial features and details to their paintings, and then filling the rest of their papers with a colorful background.
- Demonstrate again the process of painting wet paint over dry paint. Be sure the children understand that when painting on top of dried paint, it is important to dry the brush well when rinsing between colors. Too much water will re-wet the dried paint underneath, causing it to mix with the new color. To avoid scrubbing, which will also re-wet the dried paint underneath, the children should dip their brushes often into the paint.
- Have the children look in a mirror to observe the three colors in their eyes, as well as the shape and placement of their eyebrows, eyelashes, nose, lips, and ears. Suggest that they include in their paintings any distinguishing characteristics, such as freckles, hairstyles, or glasses.
- After the children have painted the facial features and details on their portraits, they should fill the rest of their papers with backgrounds. Encourage the children to look at their paintings and choose colors that will help their portraits stand out. For example, in the second portrait above, the girl in the pink dress stands out because a contrasting color was used for the background. In the first portrait, the same colors were used in

the dress and the background, but placing those colors slightly askew creates a very strong image.

## NOTES

- Children need to actually see that wet paint can be painted over dried paint successfully.
- When working with children six to nine years old, I prefer to make them aware of their facial features through observation rather than measurements. To over instruct tends to lose the spontaneity which adds so much charm to their self-portraits.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR WORK

- Discuss the information in each self-portrait that helps us to identify the artist?
- Do the paintings fill the papers?
- Discuss the variety of backgrounds and how they affect the paintings.

## What the children might say...

- *I just want to paint a person, not myself.*
- *This picture looks funny with no eyes or mouth.*
- *I forgot to let the white part of my eyes dry before I painted them blue. Now it is all messy.*
- *My hair has yellow and brown in it, so which color should I use?*
- *Can I paint my background like a rainbow?*

## What you might say...

- *When an artist paints a self-portrait, it is of himself or herself. Since you are the artist, you will need to paint a picture of yourself.*

- When all the colors have dried, you can add the facial features. You'll be surprised to see how easy it is to paint over dried paint.
- Let the paint dry while you work on the background. Then you can repaint the color for your eyes.
- If your hair is yellow and brown, you should paint some brown hairs along with the yellow hairs.
- A rainbow background is a wonderful idea since you have so many pretty colors on your self-portrait.



By Graydi



By Brodie



By Lauryn