

# What's the **BIG IDEA?** Changing Faces

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**T**he first day of school, like Christmas Eve, is full of hope and excitement, and anything is possible. As I began planning for the school year, I looked for inspiration and connections with my personal experiences that would explore the ever-changing identities of my elementary students. During the spring of 2004, I had the opportunity to visit the British Museum in London. They featured an exhibit focusing on portraits used on coins. As I walked through the museum, I began noticing a common thread that tied most works of art together—the human face.

As you look at a crowd of faces, they all may appear similar, yet each face is unique. Art history connections using portraiture are unlimited, from Egyptian mummies and Roman coins, to Colonial portraits and modern photography.

Each portrait joins in the celebration of the human face and reflects the mysteries that are hidden within.

## Choosing a Big Idea

Students need to make a personal connection through art that will allow them to explore the complexities of the world around them by focusing on physical, mental, and emotional changes in their lives. The museum exhibit inspired the topic “Changing Faces” to complement the beginning Big Idea of Identity for the new school year.

Students' faces are ever changing, yet for each individual, they are the one constant, familiar sight that is reflected back in the mirror. Students make transitions as they are promoted to a new grade and their self-images change both on the surface and within. What better way to explore their personal views

of themselves and how others see them?

Using the Big Idea, “Changing Faces,” focused on the transitions of growth and change in the students' lives as they evolve into who they will be. Each grade level explored their own changing faces with a variety of materials and connections to the classroom curriculum.

## Kindergarten Key Concepts

### Explore Visual Language to Understand and Make Artwork

Kindergarten students began their exploration by viewing themselves in a mirror with an artist's eye. We discussed the changes our faces go through from the time we are born to the mature five-year-old face, and our differences and similarities. Students were asked to look at the lines and shapes that make a face and how each face has individual characteristics that make each person special. Kindergarten students created self-portraits by experimenting with geometric shapes, proportion, and lines that make up their faces. Students created preliminary portraits by cutting and gluing construction paper to make a face. They viewed numerous self-portrait reproductions, made observations about the differences in each face, and continued their lesson by drawing their self-portraits with crayons, using a variety of geometric shapes.

## First-Grade Key Concepts

### Use Personal Connections in Making and Responding to Art

First-grade students examined the changing faces of Rembrandt and Picasso that showed changes through their lifetimes. Their



Aisha Andrews, grade four.



Kymnisha Johnson, Self-portrait line drawing, grade five.



Christopher West, grade five, works on a watercolor spirit mask.



Antonia Young, Self-portrait, grade one.

self-portraits were used to introduce students to changes in physical characteristics as well as self-image. Students' personal growth was examined through numerous preliminary line drawings. Drawings were used to develop large painted self-portraits. They began with their individual face shapes and added hair and facial features.

### Second-Grade Key Concepts Explore Similarities and Differences of Art in Different Cultures

Second-grade students explored changing faces by comparing modern portraits with stylized ancient Egyptian portraits. Students used a variety of lines to create single-line contour profile portraits of their partners using markers and crayons. Lessons included portraits portrayed in Egyptian art and architecture; these were used as points of inspiration for students. Following the Egyptian portraiture style, students began their final project by drawing the profile using oil pastels to create the lines of the face, headdress, and neck collar. The collar included symbols that would reflect their individuality. Watercolor paints added color for the finished portrait and background.

### Third-Grade Key Concept

### Investigate the History of Visual Arts in Various Cultures

Ancient Greece provided numerous opportunities for third-grade students to study faces in coins, art, architecture, and artifacts. Students examined masks from around the globe and discussed the use of masks in ritualistic events, how masks can portray unseen characteristics or emotions, and how the use of masks has changed over time. We also discussed the concept of using a mask to change how others see you. Students began developing Greek drama masks using construction paper, yarn, and raffia. The three-dimensional masks focused on the use of line, symmetry, balance, and proportion within the math curriculum, as well as social studies concepts.

### Fourth-Grade Key Concept Use Big Ideas to Create and Understand Artwork

Fourth-grade students studied how artists manipulate and change how others see them through abstract works by Adler, Mirò, Modigliani, and Picasso. Classes discussed how we allow others to see our inner selves through the manipulation of our own self-image. Students were

required to draw five or more line drawings in one forty-five minute class, and they had to identify one area that needed change on subsequent drawings.

Choosing their best work, students used permanent markers on clear acetate to create a finished line portrait. They continued to explore changing faces by viewing celestial designs used in art, architecture, and cultural symbols throughout history. Students developed sun designs to express their inner selves through the use of design and color. Preliminary thumbnail sketches developed their big idea of "Changing Faces" to paint a celestial design, including facial features, on large, square papers.

### Fifth-Grade Key Concept Understanding Connections between Art and Other Disciplines

My biggest challenge was the fifth grade. They were mature fifth graders who were ready for change. They began the year by exploring the statement "I was, I am, I will be...." to discover their personal journey of change. They each had to ask themselves, "How have I changed? How has my history and culture shaped me? Who am I? How am I going to create my future?" With these questions in hand, students began



*Elston Haley, Greek Drama Mask, grade three.*



*Rashad Woodhouse, Wire Portrait, grade five.*



*Bandela Simmons works on a clay portrait.*

self-portraits with contour line and color drawings using markers and crayons. Students used the drawings to develop wire portraits.

We transitioned to a study of African art and culture to discuss the influence that African slaves had on the arts during the Civil War, and how the past has influenced who they are. Spirit masks were developed to give students a sense of their personal significance within their historical culture and to answer the statement, "I was..." Students used watercolor paints and oil pastels to create masks that portrayed their pasts.

Fifth-grade students also studied the use of quilts in the Underground Railroad and modern quilts produced by the women of Gees Bend, an area of Alabama where women who descended from freed slaves have developed a distinctive quilting style based on American and African-American quilting traditions. Student self-portraits were drawn on fabric and assembled into a large-scale quilt that helped make a connection between the past and the present. The quilt served as a backdrop for student performances during our African American history program.

When students pondered the

statement, "I will be..." they explored possible opportunities for their futures, set goals, and planned how they would meet their own expectations. Using clay, students created three-dimensional portraits that depicted visions of their hopes and dreams.

### Conclusion

The unit, "Changing Faces," gave students room to explore how others see them, how they see themselves, and how they want others to see them. Each project built on the students' prior knowledge, and connected their learning across the curriculum. Students reflected on the past, analyzed the present, and hoped for the future as they explored their own "Changing Faces." 

### Resources

Sydney R. Walker, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking, Art Education in Practice* series. Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 2001.

Marilyn Stewart, *Rethinking Curriculum in Art. Art Education in Practice* series. Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 2005.

*See also: Art: A Community Connection, Art: A Personal Journey, and Art: A Global Pursuit available from Davis Publications, (800) 533-2847. www.davis-art.com.*

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### NATIONAL STANDARDS

*Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.*

*Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas.*

*Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.*

### WEB LINKS

The British Museum, [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

The Quilts of Gees Bend, [www.quiltsofgeesbend.com](http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com)