

Exploring Background Messages

Studio Objective

Investigate the symbolic power of color and pattern.

You have learned:

- Artists can use artworks from the past to send messages.
- Portraits can express ideas and emotions.

Now, to grow as an artist, you can explore the ways color and pattern can be used to suggest ideas.

Investigate and Document

Textile patterns give life and meaning to Kehinde Wiley's portraits. He finds textile patterns from history and in places he visits.

Notice the brightly colored, patterned backgrounds in Wiley's paintings (**Fig. 1-54**). Wiley keeps the original floral design but adds bold colors to suggest the subjects' strength and resilience.

Consider. Your gender, race, religion, age, the neighborhood you live in, hobbies you enjoy, and holidays you celebrate are important layers of who you are. How can you use these histories, experiences, likes, dislikes, hopes, and dreams to send messages in your artworks?



1-54 In this painting, Wiley filled the background with colorful flowers over a field of bright green. What messages do these flowers send to the viewer? Do you think the colors he chose have an important meaning? Why do you say this?

Kehinde Wiley, *Naomi and Her Daughters*, 2013.

Oil on canvas, 9' x 7' 6" (2.7 x 2.3 m). © Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Stephen Friedman Gallery.



1-55 George Dawe, *Naomi and Her Daughters*, exhibited 1804.

Oil paint on canvas, 37 3/4" x 30 5/16" (96 x 77 cm). Tate, purchased 1990, T05746. Photo © Tate.

Posing with History

Studio Objective

Collaborate to create a portrait of a classmate based on a historical portrait.

Most artists know about art history and have favorite artists and styles they go to for inspiration and ideas. Kehinde Wiley's paintings refer to historical portraits that send a message about status, power, and authority. Poses, gestures, facial expression, clothing, and objects add to the meaning (**Figs. 1-58** and **1-59**). Historical portraits are often very large in scale, requiring viewers to look up at the person.

What happens when ordinary people today are painted in power portraits? What messages do these new portraits send? How do our ideas change? Like Wiley, you can investigate these questions.

Create

Your Challenge

Create a portrait of a classmate based on a historical portrait. With your classmate, choose a portrait from the past and the message your artwork should send.

Consider Your Choices

Narrow Your Focus

- **Subject Matter** What historical portrait will be your source?
- **Expression** What message or feelings do you want to send? Consider clothing, pose, facial expression, and gestures.
- **Personal Connection** What message does your classmate want the portrait to send?



1-58 How has the man in this painting interpreted what he saw in the historical portrait by Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck? What words describe his attitude?

Kehinde Wiley, *Portrait of Andries Stilte II*, 2006.

Oil on canvas, 8' x 6' (2.4 x 1.8 m). © Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Columbus Museum of Art, the Ron & Ann Pizzuti Collection and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles.

1-59 Johannes Cornelisz Verspronck, *Portrait of Andries Stilte*, 1639–1640. Oil on canvas, 24 5/8" x 16 5/8" (62.6 x 42.2 cm). Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio: Museum Purchase, Bequest of J. Willard Loos. 1981.003.



Select Your Materials

- You may take photographs of your classmate, paying attention to clothing, pose, facial expression, and gestures.
- Will you include the actual photograph in your artwork or use it as a reference?