

COVER DAY &amp; SUPPLY · ALL GRADES

# Self-Portrait Cover Lesson

From Reception to Year 6

## Why self-portrait

Self-portrait is the perfect cover lesson: • **Materials:** pencils, paper. (Sometimes mirrors — but not essential.) • **Works at any age,** with the same activity, just different expectations. • **Quiet,** focused work. Calming for a class with a supply. • **Outcomes are visible** — easy for the class teacher to see what was done. • **Genuinely good art-curriculum work.** Not 'busy work.' This lesson scales: Reception children produce simple shape-based portraits; Year 6 children produce shaded, proportioned, observational drawings.

## Setup

<b>Materials per child</b> 1 piece of A4 plain paper, 1 sharp pencil, 1 eraser. (Optional: small hand mirror, or use phones'/tablets' selfie mode if school allows.)	<b>Layout</b> Children at desks. Quiet music if appropriate. Subdued lighting where possible — this is a thoughtful lesson, not a high-energy one.
<b>Length</b> 45-60 minutes. Could be longer. Children often want more time.	<b>What to display</b> If possible, find an existing self-portrait by an artist (the school may have copies, or a teacher's iPad with Frida Kahlo, Van Gogh's self-portrait, Rembrandt). 5-minute discussion: how did the artist look at themselves?

## The lesson — Reception / Year 1

1. WARM UP (5 mins). 'Look at your face in the mirror. What do you see? Tell me one thing.' Take 6-8 examples — eyes, hair, glasses, freckles, etc. 2. DEMONSTRATE (10 mins). Draw a face on the board step by step. • Big circle for the head. • Eyes about halfway down (this is counter-intuitive but true). • Eyebrows above. • Nose in the middle (just a U shape). • Mouth



lower. • Ears between eyes and nose. • Hair around the head. • Neck and shoulders. 3. **THEY DRAW** (25 mins). Children draw their own face. Encourage looking — even a few seconds in the mirror per feature beats no looking. 4. **ADD COLOR / DETAIL** (10 mins). If you have crayons, add. If not, more pencil details — earrings, freckles, glasses if they wear them. 5. **SHARE** (5 mins). 2-3 children show their portrait. Praise specific things noticed.

## The lesson — Year 2-3

1. **WARM UP** (5 mins). 'What proportions does a face have? Roughly equal halves? Eyes high or low?' Discuss. 2. **DEMONSTRATE** (10 mins). Same face structure as above, with more emphasis on: • **PROPORTIONS** — eyes are exactly halfway down the head. • **SHAPE OF FEATURES** — almond eyes (not round), curved nose, lips with shape. • **ASYMMETRY** — faces are NOT perfectly symmetrical. Look for one eyebrow higher. 3. **THEY DRAW** (30 mins). Multiple looks at the mirror. Pencil only. Erase and adjust as needed. 4. **SHADING** (10 mins). Demonstrate shading: the side of the nose, under the chin, the side of the cheeks. Children try. 5. **SHARE** (5 mins). Partner show. Then a few to whole class.

## The lesson — Year 4-6

1. **WARM UP** (5 mins). Discussion: 'What makes a face LOOK LIKE the person?' Take ideas — proportion, expression, attention to detail. 2. **DEMONSTRATE** (15 mins). Walk through: • Light proportional guidelines first (vertical centre, horizontal eye-line, mid-mouth). • Block in features lightly. • Develop one feature at a time, looking carefully. • Shading: where light falls, where shadows are. 3. **THEY DRAW** (35 mins). Light pencil first. Refine slowly. Erase and rework where needed. Add shading at the end. 4. **EXTENSION FOR FAST FINISHERS**: • Add a background that says something about you. • Try a profile (side-on) instead of full face. • Try drawing just an eye or hand — really detailed. 5. **SHARE** (5 mins). Pair sharing then a few highlights to the class. Discuss specific things noticed.

## What to leave for the class teacher

1. **PORTRAITS PILED OR DISPLAYED**. Some teachers love wall display; others want them in books. If unsure, leave in a tidy stack on the teacher's desk with a sticky note: 'Year [X] self-portraits. Display or file as you prefer.' 2. **NOTE WHO HAD WHICH PORTRAIT**. Most children will write their name. Spot-check. 3. **NOTE ANYTHING UNUSUAL**. A child who refused. A child who drew something concerning. Pass on. 4. **NOTE TIME**. If you ran 30 minutes instead of 60, say so. Helps the teacher plan.

