

ART · Y3–Y6

Portrait & Figure Drawing

Knowledge Organiser — Y3–Y6

Key vocabulary

1

Proportion

The size relationships between different parts of a subject. In portraiture, correct proportion makes faces look 'right'.

Example: Eyes are halfway down the head — most people draw them too high

2

Observational drawing

Drawing what you actually SEE, not what you think something looks like. Requires looking more than drawing.

3

Contour line

A line that follows the edge or shape of a subject — without shading, just the outline and key interior lines.

4

Gesture drawing

A quick sketch (30 seconds to 2 minutes) capturing the movement and feeling of a pose, not the detail.

5

Foreshortening

When a body part appears shorter because it is pointing toward the viewer.

Example: An outstretched arm pointing at you looks much shorter than it is

6

Negative space

The space around the subject, rather than the subject itself. Drawing the negative space often produces more accurate proportions.



Portrait artists to study

How different artists approached the

- REMBRANDT VAN RIJN (1606–1669): Dutch master. Extraordinary use of light (chiaroscuro) on faces. Many self-portraits — study how light and shadow model form.
- FRIDA KAHLO (1907–1954): Mexican. Intense, symbolic self-portraits. Faces that communicate deep emotion.
- CHUCK CLOSE (1940–2021): American. Hyper-realist enormous portraits built from grids of colour. Grid method is accessible for primary.
- LUCIAN FREUD (1922–2011): British. Unflinching observational portraits — rough, honest, deeply realistic.
- **KEY TECHNIQUE:** the grid method — divide the reference photo into a grid, draw the same grid on paper, copy one square at a time.
- **KEY RULE:** eyes are in the middle of the head. Ears align with eyes. The nose is halfway between eyes and chin.

