

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

1. COSTUMES AND PROPS

Enliven a portrait assignment by collecting costumes and props for students to wear while posing. If you plan several weeks ahead, and let your school community know, you may be able to build a nice collection of capes, gowns, velvet cloth, helmets, feathered hats, large costume jewelry, crowns, etc. Have students look at any Rembrandt prints that feature costumes. If you have time to extend the activity to painting, encourage students to paint in two different ways: smooth application of paint on the faces and backgrounds, and thickly encrusted paint (impasto) on the jewels and fur or heavily textured fabrics. Tempera paint can be mixed with thickeners — soap flakes or cornstarch — and applied with brushes or craft sticks.

2. GROUP PORTRAIT COLLAGE

In his masterpiece, *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt captured a dynamic moment of action, rather than the traditional static group portrait. Locate a print of this work, or another Rembrandt group portrait, and have students analyze the composition, (way the picture is constructed). Where is the center of interest? What does Rembrandt do to let you know this? How does your eye move around the painting and why? What other objects are in the painting besides the people? How does light and shadow play a part in the viewing of the painting? Then, have students cut out magazine photos of people engaged in a variety of activities. Have student use any media — crayon, construction papers, paint, and/or chalk — to create a collage with a convincing visual environment for these figures to interact together. Students will have to use illusion of depth and glue smaller figures higher on the page, near the horizon line, and larger figures toward the bottom of the page. Encourage use of overlapping, which will add complexity and interest to their compositions.

3. CHIAROSCURO

Chiaroscuro is Italian for “light/dark” and it is a good term for students to learn. It refers to the technique of drawing or painting strongly contrasting light and shadow areas in order to model form — that is, to create a better 3D illusion. This style became popular in the baroque period of art, and was used by artists like Rembrandt, Carravaggio and others.

Using a beach ball and a spotlight in a dim room, students can observe the way shadows look on a sphere. With soft pencil, charcoal or crayon, have students try to draw the gradual change from light to shadow on the ball. Charcoal, chalk or soft pencil may be blended with the finger. If you know how to show crosshatching, that is another technique for building shadows with lines. Note: There is also a cast shadow underneath the ball, and a highlight, or brightest spot within the area of light.

4. EXPRESSIVE FACES

Rembrandt was a master at showing a basic human feeling and the emotions of the people in his paintings. As an exercise in self portraiture and expression, have students look into a mirror, and make quick sketches of their faces capturing different emotions: happy, sad, fearful, angry, quizzical, mean, etc. Display the labeled pictures and see if any patterns emerge in how a given emotion is depicted.

STUDENT DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

You can extend this by having students illustrate a scene from a favorite fairy tale, and strive to capture the true emotions in the faces of the characters. (Example: The scene in Little Red Riding Hood when the “grandma” in bed reveals himself to be the Wolf. The students might try to capture surprise and fear on the face of Little Red Riding Hood, and an evil grin on the face of the Wolf.)

5. TINY PAINTINGS

As a way to remember that Rembrandt painted some tiny paintings, have students try painting with tiny brushes on 3” square, 2” square and 1” square pieces of tag board. They can try landscape, portrait, or still life subjects. Remind them to paint backgrounds first, then objects on top of the background when it dries. They may want to work on several paintings at a time. Afterwards, have students share results and discuss the things they noticed about working so small.