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GREENWICH

# Picture Yourself

The Armada National  
Outreach project

**Arts activities**



## Classroom activity – Constructing Oneself

This exercise is useful if you have been exploring symbolism as a means of expressing a sense of self. Discuss with your students if, in the world of the 'selfie', a self-portrait can reflect what we feel, think, practise, believe, imagine and/or aspire to be?

Like Elizabeth I, we have multiple identities. Based on what your students have learnt about the 'Armada Portrait', ask them now to apply this to their own image to broaden their perceptions of identity.

Before you begin, ask students to reflect on their identity and what is important to them. For example, what are their hobbies or interests? Where are they from? What communities do they belong to? How can they demonstrate their personality and the values that are important to them in an image?

If they were to include objects in their self-portrait, what would that collection say about them? What is the key message they would like to communicate? If they want to, how will they go about putting themselves in the portrait with their objects? Do they wear, hold or look at their objects? How can they grab their audience's attention?

Next, discuss how the way we dress can reflect our personal identity – how does clothing communicate meaning? For example, why do teachers wear business dress at school? What does this 'say' about them and the institution? Ask students to reimagine their own portrait by manipulating aspects of costume to reflect on how their identity is communicated. Does clothing signal a different self, like an imagined character in a performance, or a self we aspire to be?

The final stage involves students creating their self-portrait in whatever medium you are using and weaving together their ideas. Ask students to share and present to analyse the content, intention, language and composition of their final pieces.

## Classroom activity – Outstanding Outfit

The body is a means of expression – a space where an alternative identity can be experimented with and/or expressed. Our clothes and accessories can offer us a choice of how we present ourselves to others and communicate our identity. An alter ego is the perfect tool for reinvention.

In childhood, children transform themselves through dressing-up and play acting. But this doesn't need to be reserved to childhood. Ask your students how they could transform themselves to portray and project a different sense of self or exaggerate an element of themselves. Most people spend their lives trying to fit in.

Your students could look at artists for inspiration, such as Leigh Bowery and Daniel Lismore who wear elaborate and extravagant clothes as living sculpture. Or alter egos such as Lady Gaga's Jo Calderone, David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, Paul O'Grady's Lily Savage, Christopher Green's Tina C, Joan Jonas's Organic Honey and Shana Moulton's Cynthia, to name a few.

Ask students to construct an alter ego or create an outstanding alternative outfit to adopt a temporary different persona. Perhaps they can challenge beauty standards and societal norms, transform their physical appearance, posture, attitude and walk.

Ask them to list a set of imagined character traits.

- How do they talk?
- What do they do?
- What do they sound like?
- What do they look like?
- Where are they from?
- What do they like doing?
- What are their beliefs and values?
- What stereotypes and labels do they have that follow them?
- What is their story?
- What might it be like to interact with others? Can they try it?

Next, ask your students to share their alternative identity as an artwork and/or a story, and state:

- What do they now appreciate about their real selves behind the fiction?
- What were their perceptions of others? Did people relate to them differently, physically and emotionally?

## **Classroom activity – Another Perspective**

Ask your students to choose an object that has significance to them. This could be an everyday object in their lunchbox or a personal object. Next, ask them to give their object a human quality that best represents them, beyond what they look like. Are they confident, shy, envious of another object, or a gossip? How do they see themselves and how do others see them as this object?

Explain they are going to construct a scene for their object to sit in; they may wish to include other objects to support the scene or equally they could take it on an adventure. Ask them to photograph it. They could use a shoebox like a stage set design, apply collage, experiment with food to create a landscape and/or use a greenscreen. Use a desk lamp to light it and set the mood. Experiment. What are they trying to communicate? There are lots of possibilities.

- How does scale or the juxtaposition of their object in relation to another shift and forge new meanings or narratives?
- Ask a family member or friend's opinion. What do they think?
- Does it make them question it or look at it differently?
- Did they find something out about themselves?

## **Classroom activity – What's in a Picture?**

This exercise will help your students to explore ideas around gender and identity, challenge social norms and encourage empathy. This will be an opportunity for you to observe if there is a relationship between gender-role stereotypes and how boys and girls interpret the Armada Portrait.

Ask your students to consider how we are bombarded with images of gender-role stereotypes and if there are positive and negative effects of gender-role stereotyping in our society.

Ask your students to imagine being Elizabeth to appreciate the gender inequality she would have experienced, to inspire empathy for each other.

- Does Elizabeth's gender matter?
- Would she look more powerful if she were a man?
- How does Elizabeth use hidden gendered symbolism and if so, what is she trying to say?

Determine if the boys and girls observe the portrait differently. Ask your students to describe the portrait. Are there differences between their responses? Do gender stereotypes affect the way students view and interpret the portrait?

Ask your students to imagine Elizabeth was a man.

- What words would you use to describe him?

Next, ask them to list typical masculine and feminine words and see if they both apply to the portrait.

Use advertising as a stimulus, explain to your students how we interpret the world because of our personal beliefs and values. Compare and discuss how adverts are targeted at a male and female audience.

Describe how artists have used their work to challenge gender stereotypes and traditional roles of women. It is important to remember that the perceptions of women differ within different cultures and across time periods. For example, prior to European invasion, Taíno society in the Caribbean didn't have a distinct gender hierarchy. Their role of chief was not gender-specific, and women had important political and economic roles. This did not fit neatly into the Western European tradition, so, colonisers suppressed women and misrepresented them as sexually transgressive.

Ask students to make a piece of artwork that promotes gender equality. They could look to other artists who subvert gender norms as inspiration, such as Kehinde Wiley, Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun, Zofia Kulik, Joan Jonas, Richard Prince, Guerrilla Girls, Jo Spence, Suzanne Lacy and Barbara Kruger.

Ask your students to choose and research an artist and demonstrate how they have challenged conventional notions of masculinity and femininity. How might their chosen artist reinterpret the Armada Portrait in their style and art form? Ask your students to imagine if they were to exhibit their pieces, where might they show them, so their work has a bigger impact and a wider reach. Examples could include a shopping centre, online, street art and/or a festival.

The Armada National Outreach project has been a partnership between Royal Museums Greenwich and Speakers Trust to support secondary schools in oracy and public speaking. The starting point and inspiration was the *Armada Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* and her Tilbury speech.

