

YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

Acting Out: Strike a Pose

This activity asks students to think about expression, gesture, and setting within a portrait—exploring how the artist chose to express and describe the individual.

Required Materials: paper, pencils, clipboards

Grade Level: K-12

Subject Area Connections: performing arts; visual arts

Step 1: Students choose a portrait.

Looking Questions:

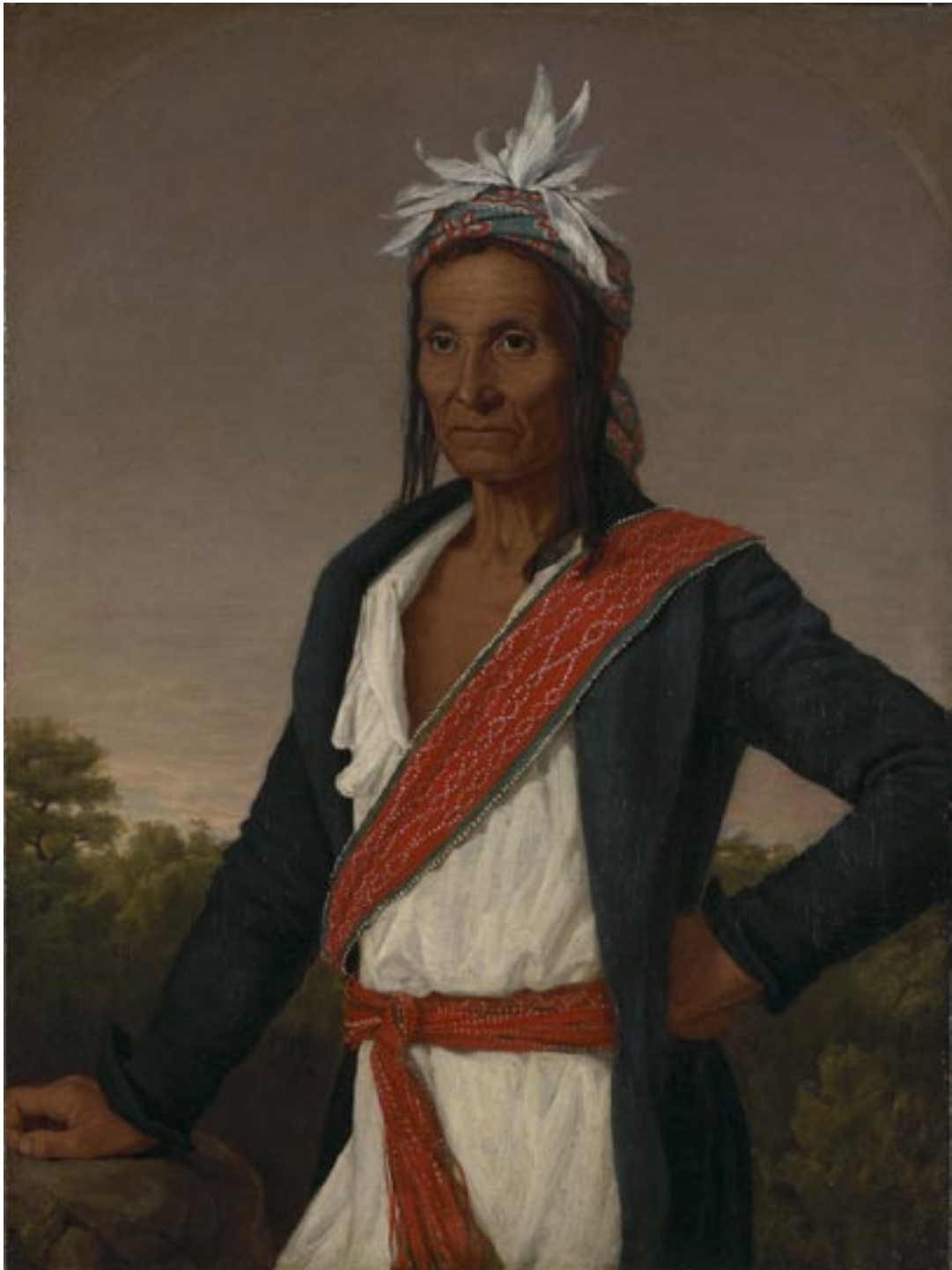
1. Ask students to take a moment to look closely at this person's face.
Then, in specific terms, describe the person's face—the shape, texture, age, expression.
2. Describe the way this person's body looks—is it a formal pose or does the person look relaxed and comfortable?
3. Describe the setting—what do you see in the background?
4. Are there objects depicted in the painting that tell about the individual?
For example: what does the person's clothes tell about them?
What do the objects that surround the person say about the individual?
5. What can you tell about the person based on your answers to the four previous questions?

Step 2. Ask students to find a painting that depicts a person “striking a pose” or exhibiting a clear gesture. Then, ask students to act out the gesture they see in the painting. After they have had a chance to capture the pose, ask them to explain how it feels to make that gesture, and what they think it might mean. Invite some of the students to make this gesture in front of the class, so that others can try to guess the mimicked painting—based solely on the gesture.

Step 3. (Optional) For an optional studio component, ask students to look for and to choose a particular gesture within a painting. Then, ask them to sketch just the isolated gesture of the person. Students should study and sketch this gesture in detail and finish by annotating their sketch with a description of what the gesture communicates.



Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741-1827)
William Buckland (1734-1774), 1774 and 1789
Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 36 5/8 in. (69.9 x 93 cm)
Yale University Art Gallery, Mabel Brady Garvan Collection
1934.303



William John Wilgus (American, 1819-1853)

Captain Cold or Ut-ha-wah (died 1847), 1838

Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)

Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of de Lancey Kountze, B.A. 1899

1939.39