Unit 29 Drawing a portrait

For many students the drawing of their self-portrait is the most challenging and rewarding task they will be given. Often they are filled with fear of making themselves the centre of ridicule, but with a bit of information, encouragement and some time, practicing drawing individual facial features and working with pencil tone, beforehand, many are pleasantly surprised by what they can achieve.

Explicit teaching - Basic information and practice
Explicit teaching about the proportions of a head, the placement of features on a head and some hints and practice time for drawing the eyes, ears, nose and mouth are all essential before the student is set the task of drawing their portrait. Convincing representations of these features often require student to recognise the role that shaded edges rather than drawn lines play in describing the nose or lips, for example. Practising pencil shading is important to a student’s success.

Good resources for this include

Web site – arty factory
An excellent site that provides instructions in a very simple, easy to understand manner is the Arty Factory site http://www.artyfactory.com/portraits/. It has all the information students need to practice beforehand. Use this as the basis for your explicit teaching.

This is an excellent book for introducing the basic understanding necessary for drawing faces successfully. This book will also support your explicit teaching for portrait drawing.

Drawing self portraits
The above resources are helpful for establishing what to look for when students are drawing self portraits. For students to achieve a real likeness in a self portrait the following is recommended:

• Students sit comfortably in front of a mirror (Often better results are achieved if this is done at home away from distractions. However, this is not essential.)

• Begin with a very light outline of the head on the neck. Explain that the head is basically egg shaped, and that they need to include the neck.

• Point out to students the width of the neck – one of the most common errors of judgment made by students when drawing portraits is that they underestimate the width of the neck.

• Lightly indicate where the features should be placed (proportions of the face and placement of features within this)

• Concentrate on their own features, by looking at their image in the mirror, beginning with drawing the eyes and moving on to the nose, mouth, ears, then the chin and hair. (moving outwards)

• Encourage students to look very carefully at the exact shape of their eyes, the centre line of their mouth and so on. Careful observation of these details is what helps to make their drawing ‘look like them’.

Another web site that may be useful
http://www.portrait-artist.org/face/index.html - more helpful hints on drawing the basics
Possible extensions

The Universal Story – Unit 29 The cycle of life

Discussion points

• So what is it that makes the human face so appealing as an arts theme?

• What do portraits, photographs, paintings, films, drama or dance sequences focussing on the human face tell us about the human condition?

• Is the human condition universal or are there many stories?

• A picture of a face tells a thousand stories.

• How can we track family resemblances?

Things to explore

• A picture tells a thousand stories
  Collect pictures of different faces – choose faces of people from different cultures, different times in history, different ages, and different socio economic backgrounds, gender

• Use these to make your statement about the human condition – collage, scan into Photoshop and alter or enhance, colour or add drawing to emphasise the statement you are making

• Choose individual faces. Write a short story about what their face shows – the story it tells. Use this as the basis to develop a dance sequence. Across a class a number of faces could be chosen and movements could be choreographed to show the movements of individuals; the differences and the similarities of shared experiences.

• This approach could also be used for musical sequences and compositions or role plays.

• Exaggeration and distortion
  How can you use exaggeration and distortion to emphasise a particular feature or characteristic of a person to assist you to make a powerful or comical statement about them or their image?

• Look at the work of artists, caricatures and cartoons to discuss how distortion and exaggeration are use to highlight a particular character or characteristic.

• Experiment with distortion and exaggeration

• An easy way for students to do this is to draw a grid over a portrait or a photograph. They then draw a grid on a piece of paper with the same number of horizontal and vertical lines as the original grid, but varying the distance between the lines or using wavy lines. The grids are used as reference points to transfer the original image onto the paper in a distorted format. This image can be used as a starting point for another composition or for a construction such as the clay construction of a head.
Unit 29 - Creating a clay head

Building a clay head or portrait can be quite a simple task, especially if working on a small scale. The basic clay construction technique to be used in this project is **coiling**.

1. **The following website shows the basic steps in creating a simple coil pot.**
   http://www.jhpottery.com/tutorial/coil.htm

   As you can see the coiling technique is much the same as rolling out plasticine or play dough snakes as in kindergarten or pre-school.

   **Hint – Rolling the coils**
   Although the pictures and instructions in the above web site indicate that you should roll the clay back and forth, if students press too hard when rolling the clay, rectangular coils often result. Sometimes these fold over and trap air. This may become a problem when the construction is fired. For this reason instruct students to roll coils out on a flat wooden board, spreading their hands / fingers evenly across and roll lightly in one direction (either towards themselves or away from themselves). Pick up the coil and place it to its beginning place and repeat until the coil is the required thickness.

2. **The following web site (Egypt Lesson 1 - Handbuilding a Canopic Jar using coil construction) shows steps in working on this scale.**

   Look at Procedures steps A, B and C.

   **Air flow**

   For this project we need to keep building the coils up so that we enclose the top of the pot so that it looks like an egg in an egg cup.

   Each of the two above web sites shows constructions that have a base. A hole will need to be cut into these bases before the shape is enclosed. This enables air to flow out of the egg shaped pot when it is being fired. (If this does not happen the air trapped inside will expand and the pot will break as a result.)

   For this project it is better to construct the egg shape without a base. This enables students to better access both inside and outside the pot when the top opening is gradually becoming smaller.

   **Controlling the shape of the pot using coils**

   The shape of the pot is determined by the placement of the coils. For example,
   - To build a shape that has straight vertical walls, place the coils one on top of the other
   - To build the wall so that it is sloping outwards students need to put each coil slightly on the outside of the previous one. The degree to which the wall slopes outward is determined by how far off centre the student places the next coil. Care needs to be taken that this does not occur too quickly or the wall will become too heavy and collapse. I recommend that the students alternate one coil directly on top of the previous one, then one slightly off centre, and so on, ensuring that the wall of the pot begins to slope outward more gently.
To build the wall so that it is sloping inwards, as in closing the top of the egg shaped head, students need to follow the steps previously described, but put the coils a little inside of the centre of the previous coil. Once again I recommend one coil placed directly on top of the previous one, then one placed a little on the inside.

**Hints from the above web site (Egypt Lesson 1 - Handbuilding a Canopic Jar using coil construction)**

- Follow each of the hints listed on this web site. Each is useful for the project students are involved in – building a clay head using coils.

- Note particularly, hints on how to join coils, keeping the clay at a dampness that enables construction to continue, without the egg shape collapsing due to the clay being too damp.

3. The following web site is useful as an example of how one artist, Lynne Kelly, has developed her own coil constructed clay heads.

http://www.lynnekelly.com/index.htm

This is an excellent site to see directly how to build the clay heads for this art activity or project.

**Take a good look at this site.** For example

- Click the Art tab and look at the portraits

- Click on the Techniques tab and look at the building techniques

- In particular look at the **View a head building demonstration** – The demonstration includes 57 steps that show and describe the process of building a clay coil construction head.

**Note**

- This web site (and in particular, the **View a head building demonstration**) best shows the process to be used here in this project.

- You will notice that Lynne Kelly’s heads range from 21 inches (53.34cm) to two and a half feet (76.2cm) tall.

- In the past my Year 10 students have built these constructions to approximately 50cm in height. Adjust the height of the heads to suit the
  - ages of students involved in the project
  - time available
  - materials, storage space and firing equipment (kiln) available
  - students’ experience in working with clay and their ability to concentrate on long term projects

**Variations**

- It may be a lot easier for students to construct an egg shape rather than build the chin, nose, mouth and eyes as they go.

- Once the egg shape is built, students use their knowledge of proportions and placement of facial features to add these to the ‘egg.’

- They may choose to add these fairly roughly to establish where each feature is placed in relation to the others, and then refine the shapes of each feature later.

- The walls of the pot need to be kept a fairly consistent thickness. This means that as the student adds a chin or nose to the ‘egg’ clay needs to be carved out behind these shapes (on the inside of the egg) so that the walls of the egg are fairly even.