

# Lesson Plan: Self Portraits in Ink

by Saraiya Kanning

**Grade Level:** 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade (easily adaptable for all older ages, even adult)

**Time Frame:** 2-3 hours, spread across several sessions

**Objective:** Students will explore elements of self-identity and self-representation while combining words and images.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** None

**Required Materials:** 9x12 inch 140lb. watercolor paper (hot press), Pilot V5 ink pens (OfficeDepot or Target), round or flat brushes, old yogurt cups for water, a camera, 4B graphite pencils, erasers

## **Sequence of Activities:**

### ***Preparation (20-30minutes):***

In a prior session, bring a camera and allow students to take one another's portrait. If someone is uncomfortable showing their face, the portrait could be another part of them, like a hand or a shoe. They can also try different poses. Instead of looking directly at the camera, they can do a profile shot or a 45-degree view. If available, outdoor spaces like gardens work especially nice, as they can choose to incorporate things like trees, flowers, buildings, etc.

Save these images and print them out for the following session.

### ***Introduction (10 min)***

What is a self-portrait? Share images of famous artist's self-portraits with students. For example, Van Gogh and Frida Kahlo have several which you could print out and discuss. Ask students a series of questions: Why would you make a self-portrait? How do you decide what to put in the background? For example, self-portraits can also include physical objects that symbolize something important to you (or that are literally important to you, like a pet). What do you find interesting about this self-portrait? What can you tell about this person from their self-portrait?

### ***Tracing Your Image (10-15 minutes)***

Pass out the pictures they took in the last session. Demonstrate how they can trace their picture onto the watercolor paper. To do this, they will cover the back of the image with solid graphite pencil. Then, they will place the picture down on the watercolor paper with the graphite-covered side touching the paper and the image side up. Finally, they will trace the image with a sharp pencil, which pushes the graphite onto the watercolor paper. It's very important that they not wiggle or lift the image while tracing. When they lift the paper, all the lines they have traced will appear on the watercolor paper.

### ***How to use the Pilot pen (10 minutes)***

Give students a smaller sheet of watercolor paper on which to practice their Pilot pen marks. Ask them to make as many different kinds of lines as they can: a thin line, a thick line, a line made of dots, a wavy line, a zigzag line. Then, invite them to apply a little bit of water with a brush to each line. The ink will bleed into a cool gray wash with which they can paint. Some students may not want to use the water-soluble properties of the pen—so the pen can also be used dry. If desired, provide Sharpies and a variety of black pens. Give ample time for playing with the ink on scratch paper.

On the side, ask them to write a list of all the names by which they are known: nicknames, family names, surnames, legal names, names of endearment, etc. They can also include a list of qualities and attributes they think describes them: tenacious, forgiving, hopeful, outgoing, dreamer (and it may even include some darker qualities or aspects of life with which they struggle). Some students may wish to write out their hopes, dreams, and aspirations, or a list of more generic things that are important to them: a college they hope to go to, the name of their pet, a place that's special to them, etc.

### *Drawing a Self-Portrait (1-2 hrs)*

Show a few examples of self-portraits (below) made in this style. Point out that most artistic choices are entirely up to them: the way they make the letters, the shading, the background, etc.

In this style of drawing, the words make up the lines and shadows. The words fill up the space. Encourage them to use the words in this way. The words are becoming the lines that make up you. Or, the words fill up the spaces that make up you. The letters could be written thin or large, as bubble letters. They could even consider filling in the bubble letters with patterns.

There will always be a variety of paces among students, so have a few writing exercise handouts as back-ups—but still allow plenty of time for those who wish to take their time and put a lot of energy into their drawing. Like any activity, it will speak to some and not to others. You might find that students reveal other capacities and other aspects of their life story through this unique combination of visual art and wordsmithing.







