

Expressive Questions – Portraits

Use these questions to help build your essay, but make sure you think up your own

You get most marks for having a personal opinion and backing it up with evidence from the painting or from books



- 1) Who has been painted here?
 - i) Do you know their name, who they are and what they do?
 - ii) If not, try to work out who they are or what they do.
 - iii) Try and decide what kind of person they are.
- 2) How has the sitter been posed? How much of their body can you see?
 - i) Why do you think they have done this?
- 3) How much movement is in the portrait?
 - i) Are they sitting still or is it more of a snapshot and they look as if they are in the middle of something?
- 4) What kind of person is in the portrait?
 - i) What clues do you have in the painting to help you decide this?
- 5) Start to describe in detail what you see in the picture.
 - i) What is in the foreground, middleground and background?
 - ii) Does any part attract your attention? Why?
 - (a) How has the artist captured your attention?
- 6) Which of the key elements of line, tone, texture, pattern, colour, shape and form are most important in this painting and why?
 - i) *Use the keywords on the classroom wall to help you.*
- 7) What medium has the artist used? Oil paint? Chalk? Pencil? Watercolour?
- 8) What type of brushstrokes or marks have been used?
- 9) Is there any sense of depth or perspective in the picture, or does it appear flat?

- 10) What mood do you think the painting gives?
- i) How does the picture make you feel?
 - ii) How do you think it's meant to make you feel? [If it was painted a long time ago, maybe you feel differently about things than they did]
 - iii) *Put yourself in the picture – imagine what it would feel like to be in this place in this painting looking at this person.*
- 11) How has line been used (if at all)?
- 12) How has the artist shown light and dark tones?
- 13) How have they used colour?
- i) Is there an obvious colour scheme?
 - ii) What are the main colours used?
 - (a) How has the artist used contrasting colours?
 - (b) How have they used harmonious colours?
 - (i) *[Use the colour wheel in the classroom to help you decide.]*
 - (c) How warm or cold are the colours? Why?
- 14) Do you think this portrait is realistic? If you were to meet the person would you recognize them?
- 15) How do you think the artist has altered how the sitter looks?
- i) How have they distorted the image?
 - ii) How have they improved upon things?
 - (a) *Have they made them look prettier, uglier, more impressive and/or more important looking?*
- 16) When was the portrait painted?
- i) Find out information about the style of the painting or if there is an artistic movement/group that the painter belonged to.
- 17) What purpose does the portrait have?
- i) Why did the painter paint it?
 - ii) Did someone pay the artist to paint it? Why?
 - iii) Is it meant as a portrait (e.g. "This is a portrait of my mother") or is there more meaning to it (e.g. "The person in the painting is meant to be a character from a book")?

- iv) If it's a self-portrait, what is the artist trying to say about themselves?
- 18) Find other portraits by the artist and see if they have painted them differently.
- i) Why might they have done this? What are they trying to say?

19) What do you think, or feel about the picture?

20) Why do you like it or dislike it?

21) How successful is the picture? Why do you think this?

22) How does it attract your attention?

23) How could the artist have changed the picture to improve it or make it different?