
Investigating Portraiture

Presenter: Shannon Perich, Associate Curator, National Museum of American History

Web Site: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/portrait.mp3>

Teacher Guide

Listen to *Investigating Portraiture* Podcast (15:32)

- Download the podcast as an MP3 (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/portrait.mp3>)
- Enhanced version with images (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/portrait.m4a>)
- Download the images (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/portrait.zip>)

Pre-Listening Questions

- Think about the last time you sat down for a portrait or had your photo taken. What things might a future researcher look at and notice when looking for historical context?
- Look carefully at each image—who is this person? What can you learn about him or her from this photograph? Is there anything that stands out to you about the way this portrait is framed?

Discussion Questions

- Is there anything from the three portraits Shannon discusses that she did not mention, and that you find interesting or important?
- Look in your textbook or online for other examples of historical photographs as portraiture (the [Library of Congress](#) and the [National Archives and Records Administration](#) are great places to start). Pick one photograph you find intriguing and keep in mind Shannon's research tips while examining it. What do you now notice about the portrait? What historical clues are found within the photograph? Describe the portrait as if you were a curator here at the museum.

Activity

- In pairs, have students photograph each other. Ask students to consider how they would like to be portrayed in the photograph as the sitter, and what issues they would like to consider when they are the photographer, and who their audience is. Or, have students choose one person to photograph, and explain why they chose the person they chose and how the elements of the photograph represent that person and his/her time period.

Related Resources from the National Museum of American History

- Portraits of a City: The Scurlock Photographic Studio's Legacy to Washington, D.C.
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives/scurlock/index.html>
- Photographic Collections
http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/subject_detail.cfm?key=32&colkey=25

Related Thinkfinity Resources

- Comparing Portrayals of Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Photography and Literature –from ReadWriteThink—<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/comparing-portrayals-slavery-nineteenth-30527.html>
- Photojournalism Guide—from National Geographic Xpeditions—
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/09/g68/photographyguidestudent.pdf>

Related National Standards for U.S. History (National Center for History in the Schools)

- NSH (5-12) HT4: Historical Research Capabilities

Name:

Date:

Period:

Investigating Portraiture

Presenter: Shannon Perich, Associate Curator, National Museum of American History

Web Site: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/thinkfinity/podcast/portrait.mp3>

Student Worksheet

Listen to the podcast. Take notes and answer the questions.

1. Think about the last time you sat down for a portrait or had your photo taken. What things might a future researcher look at and notice when looking for historical context?

2. Is there anything from the three portraits Shannon discusses that she did not mention, and that you find interesting or important to their given time period?

3. Look in your textbook or online for other examples of historical portraiture (the [Library of Congress](#) and the [National Archives and Records Administration](#) are great places to start). Pick one portrait you find intriguing and keep in mind Shannon's research tips while examining it. What do you now notice about the portrait? What historical clues are found within the photograph? When was it created and what makes you think this? Describe the portrait as if you were a curator here at the museum.