

Exploring Portraiture with Young Children

“A self-portrait is an intimate, bold declaration of identity. When we look at her self-portrait, we see a child as she sees herself. The story of self-portrait work is a tender story to tell.”

~ Loris Malaguzzi

Why explore portraiture with children?

- Fostering **symbolic thinking** – how might these parts, this paint, capture or represent me?
- Growing **Habits of Mind** – slowing down, noticing details, making connections, communicating ideas.
- Inviting **belonging** through authentic conversations, sharing, and documentation of portraiture work.
- **Celebrating Identity**
 - Children are experts in themselves. How does a portrait help you know a child better? What might you learn that you didn't know before?
 - *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (NAEYC, 2020)



Goal 1: Nurturing Positive and Confident Identities.

- **Who am I?** What makes me special and unique?

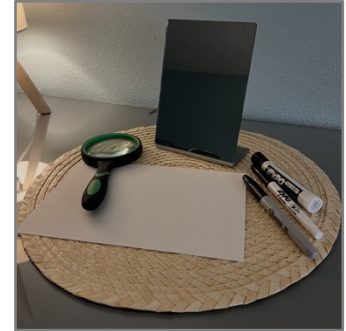
Goal 2: Appreciating Difference.

- **Who are you?** How are we the same? How are we different?
- How do our similarities, differences, and connections make us an amazing learning **community**?

Preparing to introduce portraiture to children

- **Offer book connections** to pique interest.
 - *The Colors of Us*
 - *All The Colors We Are*
 - *Skin Again*
 - *Our Skin*
 - *Hair Love*
 - *I Am Every Good Thing*
- **Distribute mirrors** during a community meeting or set out an invitation of mirrors and magnifying glasses for exploration.

- **Share and invite reflection.** What do you love about your face? About your hair? What did you discover about your eyes?
- Be ready to **lean into conversations** about similarity and difference.
- **Notice children’s efforts during exploration.** Tell me about your portrait. I notice you used a lot of pink beads. Oooh, look at your eyes; how would you describe the shape of your eyes? What colors do you see in your lips?
- **Document the portraiture results.** Share documentation of the exploration in ways that invite your reflection, grow children’s connections to the learning community, engage families, and increase school appreciation for the genius and capability of young children.



“Look at yourself, you beautiful, marvelous person. Look at your unique and precious eyes, nose, mouth, ears. In all the world, only you look like this. You are a gift to us. You are worthy of close and careful study.”

~ Ann Pelo

Portraiture in Three Contexts

Loose Parts

Gather a diversity of loose parts that might form facial features. Think about a variety of shapes and sizes. Long and short. Thick and thin. Round, square, diamond. Fuzzy and smooth.

Listen for the stories that children tell while creating their faces. Whose face is it? What do they tell you about the parts? What inspired their selections? How is their face feeling? Is it happy or sad?



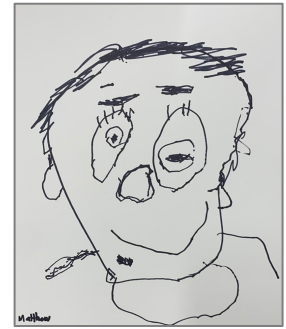
Take photos to share at reflection circle. *Tell us about the face you created? How did you decide to use the jewels for lips? What is your favorite part of the portrait?*

Drawing and Skin Color Matching

Offer children mirrors. Invite children to look closely at their features.

What is the shape of their heads? Round? Oval? Long? How many colors do they see in their eyes? In their lips? What do they notice about their eye lashes?

What lines do they see in their chin, cheeks, ears, hair? Invite children to draw on the mirrors with dry erase markers.



Snap photos of the drawings, print, and offer with loose parts or in combination with paint from skin color matching.

When matching skin color paint, invite children to name their color once they are happy with the result.

Do your own research of color names for browns, beiges, and pinks so you have a collection of words to support children (e.g., warm sand, shiny walnut, soft penny). However, let the children find their own skin color name.

Clay Shaping

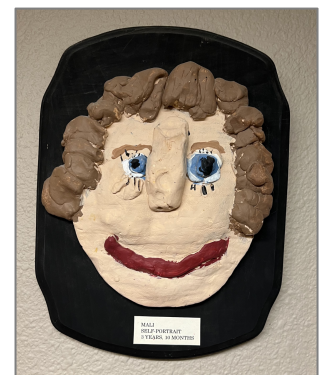
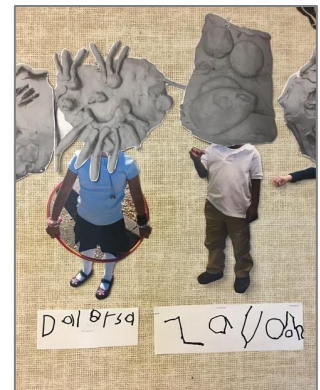
Clay offers a three-dimensional opportunity to explore facial features and portraiture. How does a clay experience with portraiture change the nature of children's exploration and understanding?

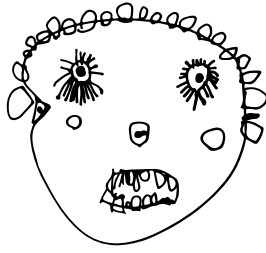
Consider sharing photos of how artists have sculpted heads and faces.

Oil-based clay explorations will be impermanent. Potter's clay creations could be impermanent or could be dried and painted.

Clay could also be used as a base for natural materials to represent facial features.

How could you use the clay to make a mouth? How could you create your hair from clay?





“When creating our portraits, our focus is not on how realistic or how ‘good’ the drawings look. We are focused on the process of observation, drawing what they see in the mirror versus ... their ideas of a face. Our intention is for the children to take a detailed look at themselves and notice the features of the face, separating the parts from a whole.”

*~ Preschool of the Arts
Madison, WI*