

No. 52095

Stand Up Self Portraits



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A self-portrait is a drawing, painting or sculpture created by an artist featuring him or herself as the subject. You would think they have been around forever, but they really only became an important artistic tradition since the Early Renaissance (mid 1400's) when high quality mirrors became available and relatively cheap.

Why do people create self-portraits? It may have started when artists were trying to develop their art and would use their own reflections as models because real models were expensive. However, soon after the practice began, artists started to create personal stories around their self-portraits. They explored the mysteries beneath the art and they put messages into their drawings, painting and sculptures that enlightened the viewer to the deeper personalities of the artist.

Although there are many great artists who created self-portraits, there are three that provide interesting histories that you can use in the classroom to introduce your students to self-portraiture.

For forty years Rembrandt created self-portraits. We can see his impressions of himself as a young man and watch him age until his last portrait which was created just before his death in 1669.

During his lifetime Rembrandt was a successful and popular artist. He created works of art featuring some wealthy patrons. Certainly he had his financial ups and downs, but he was never short of people willing to model for him, yet he continued to create self-portraits. At first, when he was still a young artist, it may have been easier for him to hold up a mirror and sketch his own face to practice his technique, but certainly once he was established he no longer had to refine his technique, yet he continued to create self-portraits. Take a look at some of the portraits Rembrandt created of himself on the web. You will notice a couple of interesting things. First, some of these sketches were not at all flattering. He drew and painted himself in moody darkness, sometimes grimacing or even making a funny face! Let's be honest; his patrons would never have wanted their own pictures created in a similar pose. So Rembrandt used his own reflection to tell his own story. He was interested in painting pictures of himself so he could learn more about his own personality, his own moodiness and silliness. He created a whole life history through pictures that describe not only what he looked like, but also his frame of mind.

On a different level, Vincent Van Gogh did something very similar. Instead of spending 40 years like Rembrandt creating

self-portraits, Van Gogh created most of his in only two very difficult years. We see him as a solitary, confused, shocked, disturbed and tranquil young man. We see a man who is deeply unhappy and saddened by his lot in life. When you look at his famous painting, "Self-Portrait with Bandaged Head," created just one year before his suicide, he looks like someone lost in his own thoughts, alone and withdrawn. These portraits seem to be a way for a damaged soul to look for some meaning and understanding, but ultimately not finding anything other than pain and suffering.

The last artist to look at is Frida Kahlo. Her work is very interesting. In life she suffered many physical and emotional hardships. She masked her bodily deformities with long flowing dresses and gaudy jewelry. She assumed an austere personae when dealing with other people to keep them at a distance. Yet in her self-portraits we see a different kind of personality. We see a woman who reveals the anguish and complexities of her personal struggles. She throws open the window on her soul.

To recap, we see in the three artists three very different approaches to the self-portrait. Rembrandt charts the stages of his life; Van Gogh pours out his pain and suffering without really understanding it; and, Kahlo reveals the inner workings of her psyche honestly and graphically. From all three artists we see that the self-portrait is a window on their lives. They use their self-portraits to understand their own lives and as a result, we gain an insight into their personalities that no written biography could reveal.

The point of the self-portrait is to understand the artist in a way that's different, and in a sense, more comprehensive than any other form. It's not like looking at a photograph or even a mirror image. It's the picture of a person's self-identity as they understand it themselves. So by exploring a self-portrait, we explore what we think of ourselves.

Introducing younger students to self-portraiture is easy. Most students enjoy drawing and painting their own picture. The trick to creating a successful self-portrait involves learning a few basic rules and practicing some techniques.

Start your exploration with mirrors. Hand held mirrors are perfect. If you are working with younger students, buy shower mirrors which are less likely to break if dropped. Ask students to really examine their face. Ask them to describe the color of their eyes, the shape of their lips, the richness of their skin tone and the contours of their nose.

Learn the rules of positioning features on the face. On our Stand Up Self-Portrait, the positions are easy to find. There are tiny pin pricks to indicate the center of the eyes, the bottom edges of the nose and the middle ends of each side of the mouth.

To make it a bit easier to



learn the positions of the features, start by drawing the chin on the face. Once you've drawn the chin, you can do a little geometry. Draw a line through the two pin pricks that represent the middle of the eyes. Measure from the "eye-line" to the top of the head. Record your measurement. Now measure from the eye-line to the bottom of the chin. The distance should be the same or near the same. This means that the eyes are in the middle of our face. Many children and young artists position the eyes too far up the forehead when they are exactly in the middle of our face.

Use the ear as a guideline for positioning other facial features. The top of the eye or the eyebrow is approximately in the same position as the top of the ear. The bottom of the nose is roughly in the same position as the bottom of the ear.

The last positioning detail sets the rule for the width of the mouth. If you look at yourself in a mirror, you'll see that the pupils of your eyes line up to the corners of your mouth.

Once you know the positions of the features, you can start drawing them. We've included step by step patterns to create eyes, noses and mouths. These patterns are intended to be very easy and straight forward. An artist can start with the basic shapes and through texture, color and shading create amazingly life-like or emotion-inspiring works of art. Let's start by drawing the features and adding detail later.

Find the pin pricks for the eyes. The pin prick represents the very center of the pupil. Look at our graphic features guide for directions on drawing eyes using the pin pricks as guides. Note: We've included two sheets of eyes. One sheet has a selection of four left eyes representing different emotions or ethnicity. The second sheet features the same four eyes, but flipped so they can be used as reference when drawing the right eye.

Once the eyes are drawn, sketch the nose. Use the pin pricks to indicate the position of the nostrils. The pin pricks can represent the center of the nostril, the inner edge or the outer edge depending on the width of the nose.

Finally, add the mouth. Draw a light pencil line between the two pin pricks. This line becomes the center of the mouth. Add lips using the feature sheet as reference.

When the facial features are complete, finish off with the hair. Because the portrait is made out of cardstock, you can cut out and glue on paper hair. Start by sketching the shape of the head onto colored paper. Use the sketch as a reference when drawing your hair. Cut out the hair style and paste to the self-portrait.

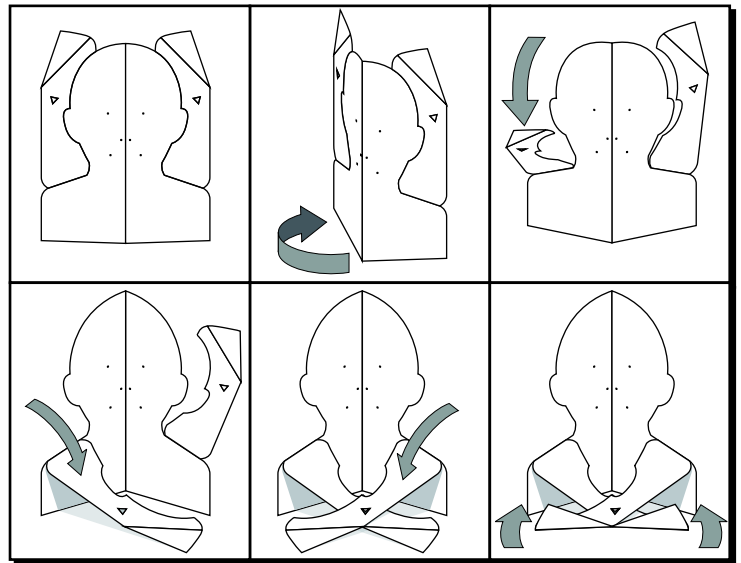
Alternatively, glue on tissue paper strips as hair. Note: Yarn is a very attractive hair material, but it becomes a bit too heavy for the cardstock self-portrait. Check out our hair styles feature sheet for ideas.

When you have completed your portrait, set up your 3D stand. Use these steps to make you portrait stand up:

1. Fold the face gently in half.
2. Detached the two side wings (they are nicked at the ears).
3. Fold down the wings at the shoulders.
4. Fold back the two arrows near the middle of the wings.
5. Line up the two arrows and fold together. Staple in place.

6. Fold up the two bottom flaps.

7. Set up the portrait and adjust the center fold so it sits sturdily in place. The front of the portrait should be flush to the table surface.

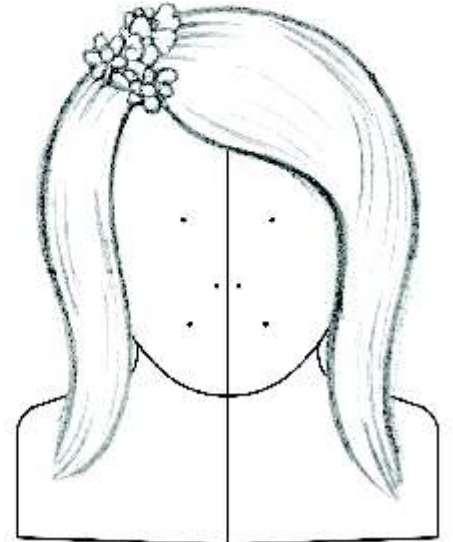
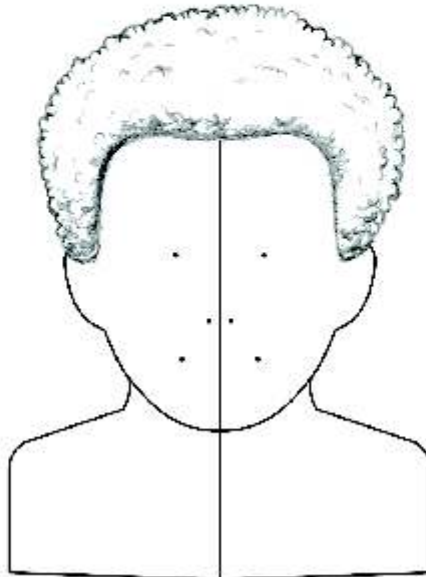
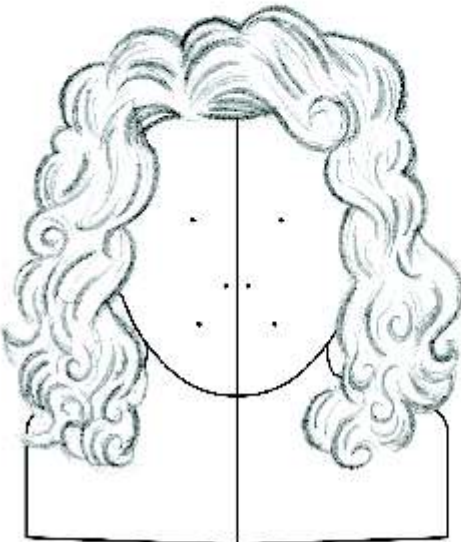
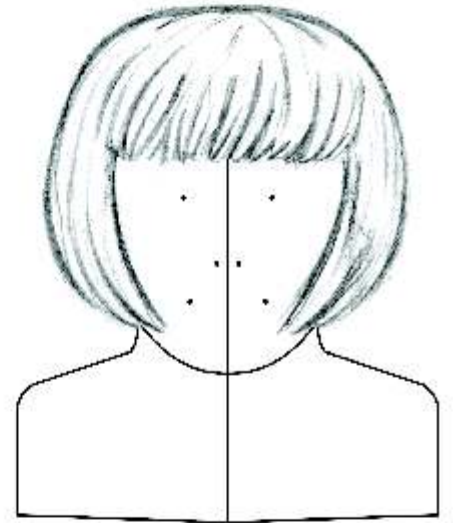
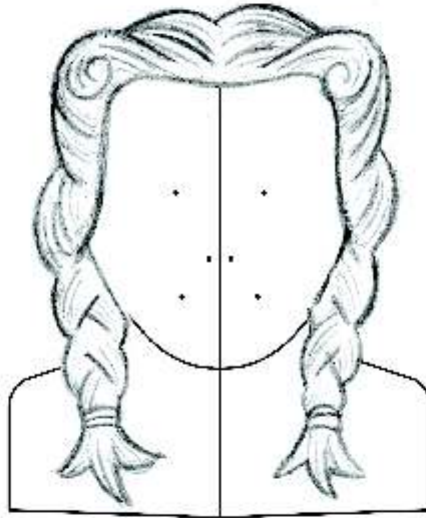
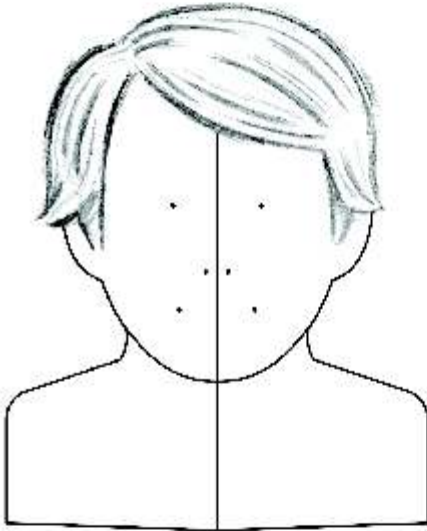
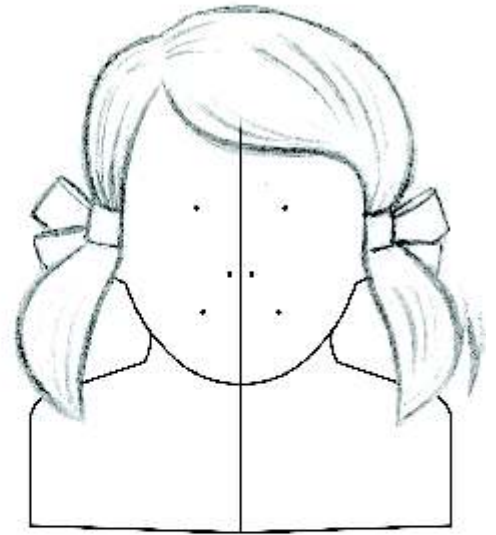
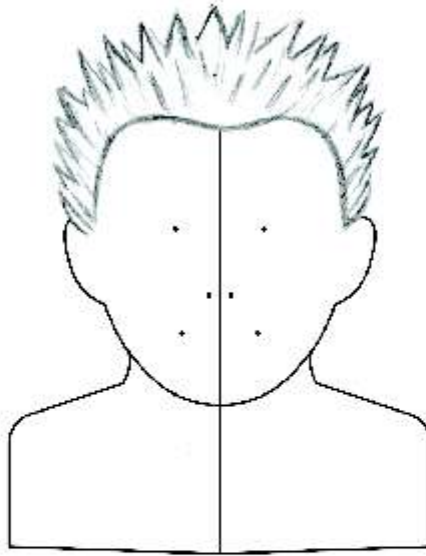
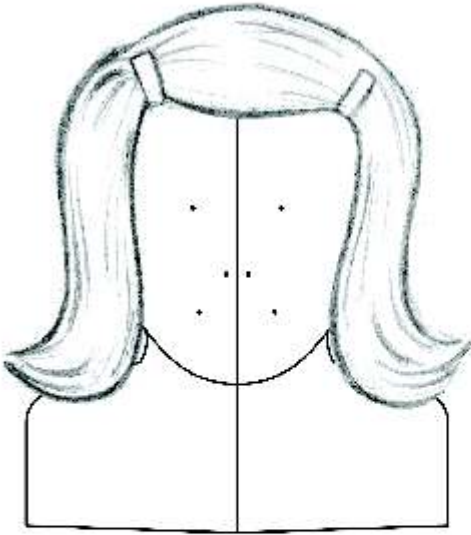


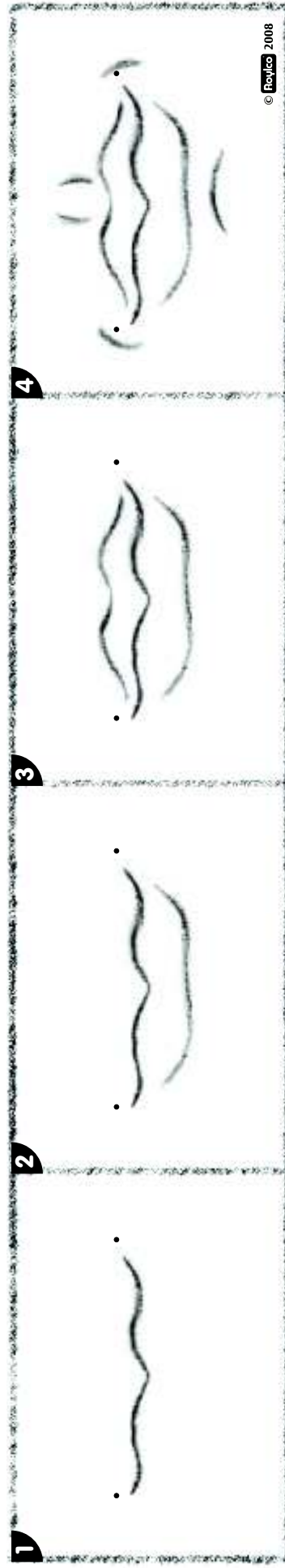
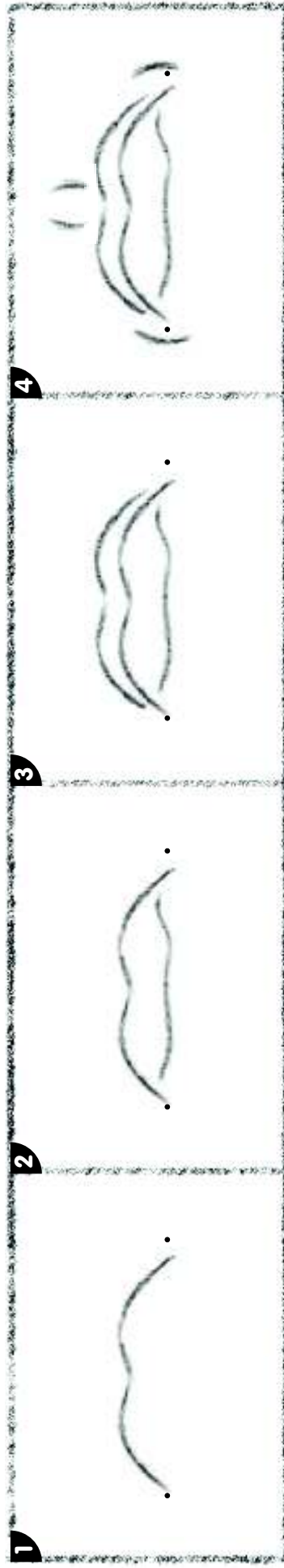
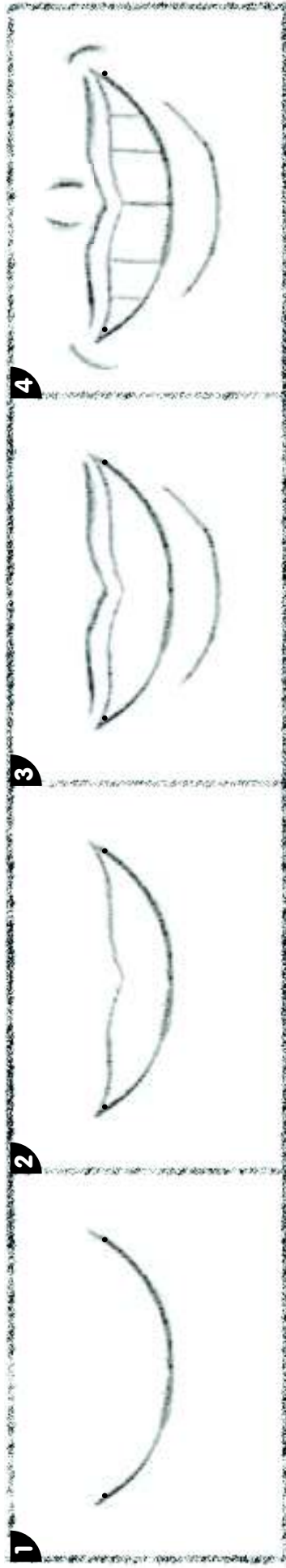
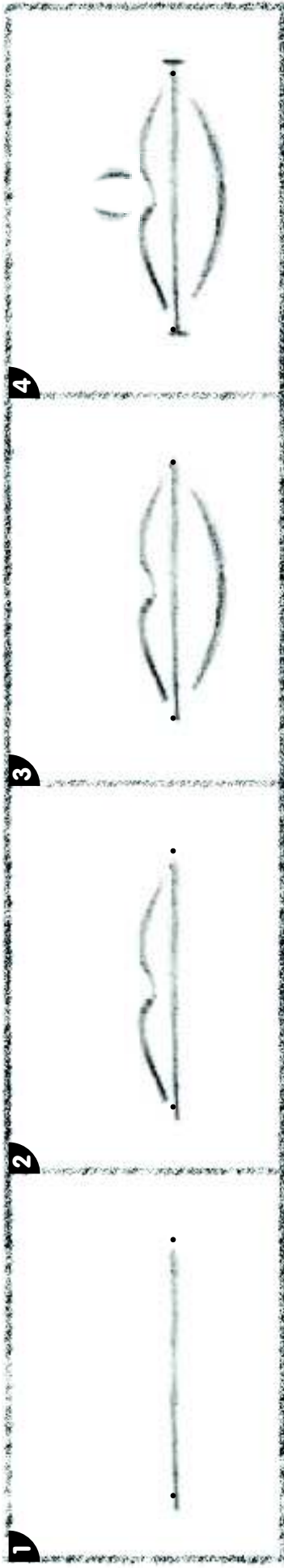
Extended Activities:

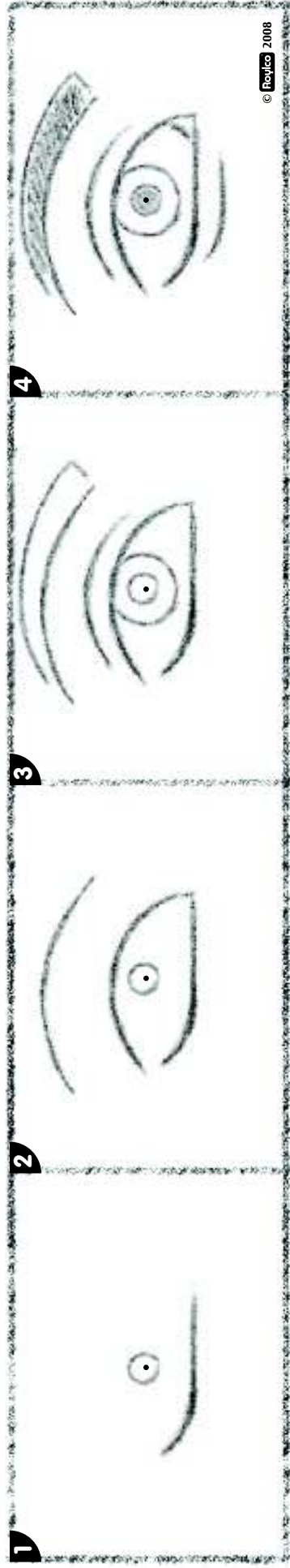
1. **Word Portraits:** Use the stand areas to write a word portrait. After drawing the portrait and adding the hair, encourage students to write words that describe their look or personality.
2. **Thought Balloons:** Add speech or thought balloons to your portrait. Pick a theme for the day and ask students to write one or two words that relate to the theme in a thought balloon. Use a loop of painter's masking tape to adhere the balloon to the portrait. Theme ideas are, "My favorite music is...", "I would describe my personal style as...", "I think that _____ is funny".
3. **Artist Inspired Portraits:** Once you've learned the basics of creating a self-portrait, create pictures inspired by famous artists. Study the works of Roy Lichtenstein, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol. Recreate their style on the Stand Up Self-Portrait cards.
4. **Collage Portraits:** Bring in newspapers, magazines and mail order catalogues. Cut out images, arrange them and glue them in place to create unique pictures. These self-portraits can use favorite or familiar objects to represent facial features.
5. **Super Hero:** Students can reveal many things about themselves when asked to create an image of what they would look like as a super hero. After drawing the portrait ask them to supplement the image with a written description of their special abilities and what they would do with them to improve the world.

Exploring self-portraiture is an intriguing way for students to learn about themselves and others. It is something that everyone can do with a little practice and some help. Lead your students through this exploration and you will be rewarded with a new appreciation of their uniqueness and some great artwork!

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