

PEOPLE POEMS

Recommended Tour: Self Representations and Identity

In the four-story Alder Street Mural, Isaiah Zagar has depicted a woman named Rose. Rose used to walk down the street everyday and chat with Isaiah while he was working. While most murals depict famous politicians and celebrities, Isaiah often depicts the people around him that affect his life, such his plumber, his cleaning lady, and his family. Isaiah also often depicts himself and actually spent an entire year of his life painting hundreds of self-portraits.



This lesson uses contour drawing techniques and concrete poetry exercises to allow students to explore the concepts of identity and story-telling. The activities are designed for grades 3-6, but include suggestions for teachers to adapt the lesson for younger and older students.

Learning Objectives

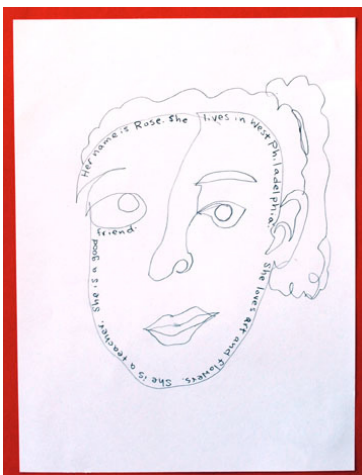
- Students will experiment with contour drawings.
- Students will conduct interviews with their peers.
- Students will create poems based on the interviews.

Materials

- drawing or copy paper
- notebook or writing paper
- drawing materials (pencils, crayons, markers, etc.)

Discussion Questions

- How does Isaiah use contour drawing in his mosaics?
- How are portraits used in Philadelphia's Magic Gardens? What meaning do they have?
- Who is portrayed in Philadelphia's Magic Gardens? Why do you think Isaiah chooses these subjects? How would the space be different if he portrayed famous people?
- Who is important to honor in your life? Why is it important to honor "normal" people as well as "famous" people?



Key Vocabulary

- Portrait - a likeness of a person, usually the face or a written description
- Contour - a line or edge that defines the shape of an object
- Concrete poem - a poem that is written so the lines form the shape that relates to the subject of the poem

Activity

1. Students will make blind contour drawings and contour portraits.
 - Ask students to pick something in the room and draw it without looking down at their paper or picking up their pencils. This will be really hard for them to do! They might use another piece of paper to cover their drawing as they work. Their drawings will look funny and distorted, encourage this. The drawings should take very little time. Repeating the exercise will get the students to be more comfortable.
 - Have students share their work with their classmates. Ask students about their drawing technique. Explain the definition of contour, and show how to trace the outside and inside lines of an object.
 - Divide students into pairs and have them take turns making contour drawings of their partners. Encourage them to look at their subject while they are drawing, following the contours of the face with their eyes and on the paper. They can stop and peek at their drawings as they work.
2. Students will conduct interviews of the person they drew and use the information to write a free form poem about that person.
3. Students will choose their favorite contour portrait and copy the poem onto it, following the lines of the drawing to create a concrete poem.

Adaptations

- For younger students, just focus on having students draw portraits of a classmate. Have students write the name of the person they drew on the portrait using that person's favorite color.
- Older students should focus more on the writing of the poem, creating several drafts. For the final draft, they should redraw the portrait just using the poem text as the contour line. (It will be helpful to use the blind contours as reference).
- If you have access to mirrors, students can create self-portraits and poems about themselves.

PA Academic Standards

Reading Writing Speaking & Listening:
Types of Writing 1.4 A
Speaking and Listening 1.6 E

Arts & Humanities:
Production, Performance and Exhibition
of Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts 9.1.E
Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.H