Sir Joshua Reynolds

Sir Joshua Reynolds was born July 16, 1723, in Plympton, near Plymouth, Devon, in south-west England. One of eleven children born into a middle-class family, young Reynolds attended the local grammar school where his father, a minister, served as the school principal. A very good student who especially enjoyed reading Greek and Roman classics, Reynolds began to show his interest in art. He loved to copy pictures he saw in books in his father’s library. While Reynolds’s father first thought to apprentice him at a local apothecary, he noticed his son’s artistic talent and sent him to apprentice in London with portrait painter, Thomas Hunter. Reynolds studied under Hunter for four years and then ventured to Italy for another three years to study the paintings of the old masters. While in Rome, Reynolds caught a severe cold which left him partially deaf in one ear. To compensate for his loss of hearing, he used a small ear trumpet—an early version of a hearing aid.

Reynolds returned to England in 1753 and settled in London where he set up a portrait studio. Business was good and Reynolds soon had to hire others to assist him. In 1758, Reynolds and his assistants painted over one-hundred-fifty portraits. To accommodate his many clients, Reynolds painted their faces and hands and his assistants completed the clothing and background under close watch of Reynolds. Reynolds charged his clients based on the complexity of the portrait and the size of the image painted; heads only, half length, three-quarter, or full body length. Princes, politicians, wealthy citizens, children, and common people all were his clients. He became one of the best known portrait painters in England, known for his use of light and theatrical effects as well as his pleasant personality. To make it interesting for his clients, he placed a mirror in his studio at an angle so his sitters could watch him paint. He also engaged them in lively conversation around the news of the day to put them at ease. In the end, he painted his clients as people of dignity and interest despite their position in life. Among all his clients, Reynolds loved most to paint children. He had a special appreciation for their innocence and tried to capture that in his paintings.

As Reynolds’ reputation as a fine portrait artist grew, so did his reputation as a brilliant academician. Reynolds recognized a need for London artists to exhibit their work publicly as he had seen in Rome. He helped found the Society of Artists and its subsequent exhibitions. He was also instrumental in establishing the Royal Academy in London along with skillfully developing its policies. King George III approved Reynolds as the first President of the Royal Academy and knighted him, hence the title of “Sir.” At the Academy, Reynolds both lectured and exhibited his work. His annual lectures or “Discourses” of rules and theories about art were well received for their “sensitivity and perception.” These Discourses, published after his death, are thought to be the basis of academic art education. As a painter, Reynolds did not always practice what he preached. While experimenting with new techniques, he improperly prepared his oil paints which led to fading and/or flaking paint on some of his portraits. Despite his success as a portrait painter, an academic, and art advocate in raising the social status of a professional painter to prestigious level, Reynolds’s own influence diminished in his later years.

Reynolds was said to be a man of small stature with dark brown curls. His skin was scarred from smallpox and his upper lip was disfigured from a fall off a horse during his youth. He was always considered a gracious gentleman and a great conversationalist. He never married. Reynolds lost sight in his left eye in the summer of 1789, forcing his career to come to an abrupt end. He died February 23, 1792, at age sixty-nine and was buried in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

About the Art

The Strawberry Girl was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1773, oil on canvas, when the artist was fifty-years old. The Strawberry Girl is part of the Wallace Collection, London, United Kingdom.

Since photography was not yet invented in the mid-1700s, portrait painting was a common business and used by all types of people. A painting studio was the place to go to have your image recorded in a visual form. In addition to his formal portraits, Reynolds painted “fancy pictures” which were quick character studies, usually comprised of several poses of the client. Reynolds was happiest when he painted children and considered these paintings among his greatest work.

The Strawberry Girl is a fancy picture of a young model named Theophilia Palmer, the niece of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds was very close to his niece whom he nicknamed “Offey.” She and her mother (Reynolds’ sister) lived with Reynolds until Theophilia married.

This painting is considered a three-quarter portrait since we see three-quarters of the entire body. The young girl is wearing a beautiful dress, smocked on the upper sleeves and embroidered at
Discipline-Based Art Education
The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience.

Art Aesthetics
Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

Art Production
Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

Art History
Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

Art Criticism
Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

ELEMENTS OF ART
- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area encircled by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN
- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

COMPOSITION
- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

ARTISTIC STYLES
- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE BOOKS
Children’s literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:
- Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey
- First Strawberries: A Cherokee Story retold by Joseph Bruchac
- Grey Lady and the Strawberry Snatcher by Molly Bang
- The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear by Audrey Wood
- Over the River and Through the Woods by Lydia Maria Child
- Strawberry Girl by Lois Lenski

REFERENCE/BIBLIOGRAPHY
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the lower edges of the sleeves. A green ribbon is at the neckline. There is an abundance of shiny fabric in her dress. This is a dress that might seem too elegant for play. The girl’s small hands are folded over her waist and a small, cone-shaped basket is looped over her right elbow. She is postured attentively with her head lunged slightly forward and just a bit downward as are her shoulders. A red piece of fabric is wrapped around her head exposing brown curls. The large eyes of the young girl are looking right at the viewer. We see the small features, especially the heart-shaped lips of the young girl. She is placed outdoors in front of a woody background, and appears to be alone, but not frightened.

Directed Observation
Show students an image of The Strawberry Girl and tell them it was painted with oil paint by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1773. Explain the term portrait painter, and share a bit about that profession in the 1700s. Share other facts about Reynolds as appropriate. Invite students to quietly study the work. After some time for thinking, encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. Why do you think Sir Joshua Reynolds painted the young girl?
2. Reynolds used models to pose for him as he painted. Invite a student to describe how the girl is standing. Ask for a volunteer to study the girl’s posture carefully and mimic her posture.
3. Describe the girl’s dress. Is this the kind of dress to wear when going outside? Why might she be wearing this? Notice the fabric of the dress is shiny. How did Reynolds paint “shiny?”
4. Can you guess what is in the girl’s basket?
5. Describe the background.
6. How does the artist let you know the girl is the most important object in the painting?
7. The girl is looking right at you. How does that make you feel? What do you think about her? Why is she outside? Does she seem to be lost? What tells you she is fine? If she were frightened, describe how she would look.
8. Sometime Reynolds had just enough time to paint the model’s face and hands. He had other painters add the background. If you were Reynolds’s assistant, what kind of background would you paint behind the girl?
9. If Sir Joshua Reynolds were to paint a portrait of you, would you like just your head, half-body, or full-body painted?
10. What would you like for your background and/or, what props would you like to use?
11. Would you rather have your portrait painted or photographed? Describe the benefits of each type of portraiture.

Things to Do
1. Gather a variety of clothing, hats, and other props for your art center. Invite students to dress up in an outfit and have their portraits drawn or painted.
2. Practice drawing from life and use a model. You could use someone in the classroom or ask a mother with a baby or an elderly person to serve as the models. Be sure to vary your models by gender, ethnicity, and age to present opportunities to observe similarities and differences among people.
3. Before you start to draw your model, walk around the area where the model is seated to find the angle you like the best.
4. Consider how much of the model you would like to draw. You could focus just on the face. If the model is wearing interesting clothes all the way down to her/his feet, then consider drawing a full-length pose.
5. Try the Reynolds’ method of mass production: start working on a portrait and complete the face and hands. Then, pass your incomplete portrait to another student who will finish the background and the clothing. How hard is it to give your work away? Is there anyone who is especially good at painting backgrounds?
6. Paint a portrait of a model and cut the painted model out (like a paper doll). Next, paint backgrounds on separate sheets of paper. Be sure to vary the backgrounds. Finally, place your cut-out model on top and see which background looks best. Glue it down. Share your extra backgrounds with others.
7. Reynolds was a master at painting portraits in which the people looked important. How did he make the model in The Strawberry Girl look important? Have a volunteer come to the front of the classroom and collectively decide on a pose and props that would make the volunteer look very important.
8. Use oil pastels instead of paint to create a portrait.
9. Search out portraits of the U.S. presidents and the first ladies. Compare them. Discuss the decisions the artist made in dressing and posing the person. Learn about the portrait artists.
10. Use a mirror to carefully study your head, neck and shoulders. Paint a self-portrait. Consider painting it larger than life.