

USING PORTRAITS, PAINTINGS AND IMAGES TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE PAST

Using primary sources to find out about the past is an important part of students' history learning. Paintings, photographs, drawings and other images can be useful records of people or events of the past. Looking closely and exploring them in detail develops students' enquiry and critical thinking skills. As with other primary sources, visual imagery needs to be considered critically – and not assumed always to be reliable. Key considerations for students to think about when using visually imagery as source material are:

- Who commissioned the image? What message did they hope to tell with the image? How might this affect an artist / photographer's choices?
- Who was the intended audience of the image? Was the image widely circulated or could just a few people have access to the image? What impact would the image have had?
- How might the intended audience affect the image produced? Is the image made to flatter the sitter in a portrait, provide a particular commentary (perhaps biased) on a key event?
- Was the artist of a painted image present at the time of the event they have documented? Is it possible that they may not have met the person or witnessed the event they are being asked to paint? How does this affect the image's meaning?
- What choices might a photographer have made in framing an image? What did the photographer choose to include and what might they have chosen to crop out of the image? Why might the photographer have made these choices and what does it tell us about the context in which the image was made?

Use the activities below as part of students' general research into their exhibition theme and to support the creation of labels, guides and other information and activities for your exhibition. The Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery** has lots of high-resolution images that can be printed, used on whiteboards or added to programmes and applications. And there are over 2000 portraits to explore in the National Portrait Gallery's **online collections**.

Making a Mark in the Tees Valley Image gallery

www.npg.org.uk/mamteesvalley

NPG online collections www.npg.org.uk/collections



ACTIVITIES

Try these activities to help students explore paintings, portraits and other images, and develop their skills in looking, describing, questioning, hypothesising and testing:

LOOKING CLOSER

Print out an image from the Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery**, or project it onto your whiteboard. Ask the students to look very closely at the whole picture, at the centre and all four corners. Encourage students to look for obvious details and smaller details others might overlook. Use these questions and prompts to help students look closer and steer discussion:

- Are there any people in the picture? What are they wearing? What do their clothes tell you about them? Can you see the expressions on their faces? Are they holding anything?
- What do you think might be happening in the picture?
- If you could step inside the picture what do you think you might hear, smell, feel, taste?
- What might have happened just before the scene in this picture? What might have happened afterwards?
- Who is the artist/photographer?
- How did the artist make this picture?
- Why do you think the artist/photographer made this picture/took this photograph?

Extend the activity by asking each student in turn to tell you something they can see that is different to the last person. This could be something entirely different, or a more detailed description of something another student has seen: 'blue eyes', 'gold buttons', 'a train with 11 carriages', 'three men with moustaches'. Try turning this into a game along the lines of 'I went to the market and I bought...' Each student in turn says: 'In this picture I can see ...' As they take turns, they must each remember, in order, what has already been said before adding their own observation.

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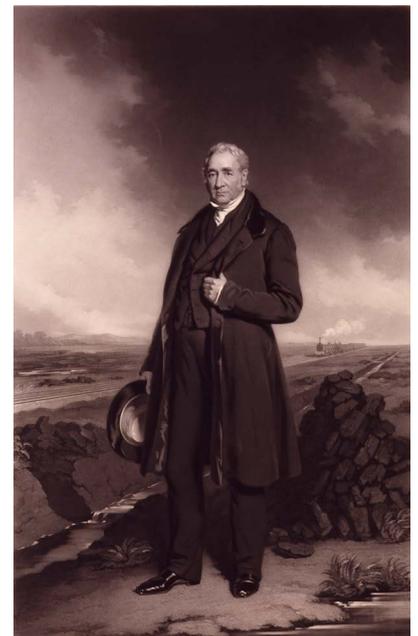
READING PORTRAITS

What does a portrait say about its subject (the sitter)? Print out a portrait from the Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery**, or project it onto the whiteboard. Working in pairs, students look carefully at the image and discuss the 'immediate' things they can see about the sitter – man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, what they are wearing. They then look more closely at:

- The pose or stance – are they sitting, standing, crouching, relaxed, formal?
- The gaze or expression – where is the subject looking?
- What might they be thinking, feeling, doing?
- What can be seen in the background and foreground?
- The colours and lighting – what sort of mood or atmosphere does this create?
- What do students think this says about the subject (sitter) of the portrait?

Older students can annotate their portrait describing their responses, e.g. 'The steam train in the background (of the portrait of George Stephenson) reminds us of his important work designing and building the steam locomotives that hauled the first passenger trains on the Stockton & Darlington Railway.' Try using a simple app like Photo Label (see the **Digital activities guide** for further information). You can include the annotated portraits in your exhibition.

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PORTRAIT BIOGRAPHIES

Print out two contrasting portraits from the Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery**, such as Captain Cook and astronaut Nicholas Patrick, or Gertrude Bell and George Stephenson. Each portrait in the **Image gallery** is accompanied by a biography. Print out the biographies of each subject, cut them up into separate sentences and mix them up. The biographies can be adapted into simpler sentences for younger students. Working in pairs or small groups, students try to match the sentences to the correct portrait. Discuss their choices.

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SOUNDSCAPES

Students can use instruments and voices to create a soundscape for a painting. What might people be saying? Are there any animals, machines or modes of transport making particular sounds? What ambient noises might be in the background – the sound of the sea, the wind? Use an app such as Garageband to record the soundscape (see the **Digital activities guide** for further information). You can include the soundscapes in your exhibition.



The Bombardment of the Hartlepoons (16 December 1914)
by James Clark, 1915. Use by permission of the Museum of Hartlepool.
Copyright Hartlepool Borough Council.

JIGSAWS

Print out images from the Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery**. Working in pairs, students cut the image into pieces to create a jigsaw. Give the image to a partner to complete. Will you let them use the completed image as a reference? This also makes a good exhibition activity for visitors to try.

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TALKING PICTURES

Students choose a person from a portrait or image in the Making a Mark in the Tees Valley **Image gallery**, linked to their exhibition focus. They research the person and use 'Morfo' or a similar app, to give the person a voice and tell us about their life in the Tees Valley. (See our **Digital activities guide** for more details). You can include the results in your exhibition for visitors to view on tablets.

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