



# Perfect Portraits

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Grades 1-6

A Ceramic Art and Language Arts Lesson  
based on the work of artist Kimmy Cantrell.

## Language Arts/Visual Arts

### Language Arts

#### Writing Standard 2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

- a. Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- b. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.
- c. Link ideas within categories of information using words and phrases (e.g., *another*, *for example*, *also*, *because*).
- d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

### Visual Art

#### Standard 3.V.CR.1:

Elaborate on an imaginative idea and apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process.

#### Standard 3.V.CR.3:

Demonstrate an understanding of the safe and proficient use of materials, tools, and equipment for a variety of artistic processes.

#### Standard 3.V.R.1:

Contemplate about the processes an artist uses to create a work of art, and determine messages communicated by an image.

**Objective:** Students will create a clay mask self-portrait, chalk and paint the mask to finish it They will then write a story describing the mask and how it represents them.

**Materials:** Clay, rolling pins, mats to cover desks, clay tools (plastic forks and knives), spray bottle or sponges to wet clay, oil pastels, paint brushes, a bucket for water, black acrylic paint and pictures of the work of Kimmy Cantrell.

**Time:** Four 40-minute periods.

### Lesson:

#### Day One:

Have students write a descriptive autobiography. They should include a physical description, choosing their favorite characteristics and qualities. Ask them to focus on what makes them unique or different.

#### Day Two:

Explain to students that they will be making masks based on their autobiographies. Show them the work of current Georgia artist Kimmy Cantrell. Ask them what they notice about the work? Point out that he stylizes features in his ceramic masks. His

work is asymmetrical, unbalanced, and geometric. Cantrell's work is influenced by African masks and Cubist artists like Pablo Picasso. Point out that art doesn't have to look realistic, or exactly like a person, it can represent ideas and still be good art.

Have students draw a stylized face shape, adding geometric features, being sure to exaggerate their favorite features. Have the students color their drawings.

### Day Three:

Have students create their masks. They should start with a flat pancake or 'slab' and cut it into the mask shape they drew out in their sketch. Clay can be rolled out with rollers or pounded flat to a thickness no greater than a half inch. Have students add features by making another slab with their leftover clay. They should cut out eyes, a nose and a mouth. Hair and ears could also be added.

Demonstrate how to join clay together by using the "scoring" method or scratching the clay with a fork, then putting a little water on the score, and smoothing the two pieces together. Students should write their names on the back of their masks to help with identification later. Allow masks to dry completely, then fire.

Note: If using a kiln fired ceramic clay, note that as clay dries, it shrinks. If clay pieces aren't properly attached using the scoring method, facial features could dry and fall off of the mask. Store any unfinished work in sealed plastic quart/gallon sized bags (up to a week). Clay is VERY FRAGILE while drying, be sure to store in a safe place. Clay is ready to be fired when completely dry; it should feel warm to the touch, not cold.

### Day Four:

Return masks to students. Have the students get out their sketches to look at and review. Demonstrate how to finish the mask by first coloring each facial attribute with a different color of oil pastel. Remind students that Kimmy Cantrell would not paint all of the face one color. Encourage them to try and break up their masks by using many different colors, and to use their sketch to get ideas of color. Tell students they will need to push the oil pastels to get enough color.

When students have finished coloring with pastels, have them paint over the entire mask with black acrylic paint. Have students immediately dip their finished painted black mask into a tub of water to remove black paint. Dipping the mask into water allows the oil pastel to shine through and covers the white gaps in the mask, and balances the colors.

### Biography on Kimmy Cantrell

Kimmy Cantrell is an Atlanta, Georgia based artist who did not start out as an artist. He studied ceramics in college but made a career in management. After going through a difficult time in his life, he decided to focus on the thing that brought him the most happiness, working with clay. He began making pots, moved on to sculpture and later to what would become distorted human faces. Kimmy uses human faces to challenge traditional definitions of beauty. His forms are abstracted and asymmetrical. "I want to show the beauty within flaws," the artist explains. "Imperfections tell stories that are far more compelling than perfection." Kimmy's vibrantly colored faces tell stories, too, and they're written in the eyes and titles. "I manipulate the shape and position of eyes to express a range of emotions," he remarked, "and the titles of my work often reflect my own life experiences." (Kimart.com)

