

## Imagining: Outside the frame

### Aim of the exercise:

### To develop an awareness of character and setting

This exercise involves looking at a portrait and then imagining the things it doesn't tell us.

Look again at your notes for 'Portrait piece'

Did you write down anything that wasn't in the portrait? For example:

- Did you imagine what the person smelled like?
- Did you give them an occupation?
- Did you imagine what they were thinking? (At some level, most portraits lead their viewers to do this.)

Choose a portrait from the selection below that is different from the one previously chosen.



If you chose an anonymous portrait for the first exercise, then consider choosing one with a named sitter for this exercise - and vice versa.

Making notes as fast as you can, jot down your responses to the following suggestions and questions:

Without using the portrait's actual title, give the person you are looking at a name, age, occupation, and place of residence. You might also want to give them a date. Here is an (invented) example: 'Jan is a farmer, he is 46 years old, and this is not a bad age to have reached for someone living in the year 1362.'

What does the person smell of? Is it one predominant scent, or a mixture of scents? Be as subtle as you can. For example, a single scent description ('Jan smelled of the cowshed') might be less effective than a mixed one like

this: 'Jan's scent was a thick mixture of cow dung, parsley, and apples, with an odd, underlying aroma of lime that you couldn't get out of your nostrils.'

Look at the setting for the portrait. What do you think is going on just outside the frame of the picture? What is the person in the picture looking at? What are they hearing? If the portrait is a sculpture, imagine the sitter in a suitable setting.

Hearing and scent add two important sensory dimensions to a description. They also, again, add elements that the portrait itself doesn't possess. Vision, what the person in the portrait is seeing, adds a further new dimension.

Another dimension comes when you combine the sensory elements above with a sense of what the person is thinking. Are they thinking about having their picture painted, or about the painter? What do they think of him or her? Are they thinking about something totally disconnected to the picture? Are they mentally somewhere else entirely?

They might be thinking about something important to them: such as a political event or an affair they are having. Or it may be about something seemingly trivial, such as the noise children are making just outside the frame of the picture, or what they are going to have for lunch.

Sometimes, the smallest details can be the most telling.

Imagine a complete story for the picture based on the notes you have made from the suggestions above. Write a short poem (40 lines or fewer) based on this story.

This time it is up to you to decide who is speaking. You can choose to write it in:

- the first person, the voice of the person in the portrait ('I am bored with having my portrait painted')
- the second person, as an involved observer of the sitter: possibly even the painter ('You are a striking figure, and you know this perfectly well')
- the third person, as a 'fly on the wall' or an uninvolved narrator ('He listened absent-mindedly to the sounds outside the window')