

# STEAM LESSON PLAN

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Grade Level Middle school (adaptable for lower and higher grades)

**INSPIRED BY** John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Abbott Lawrence Rotch*, 1903,  
and Callot Souers, *Evening dress*, about 1900

## PROJECT TITLE: The Four Cs in Grand Fashion

### DRIVING QUESTION

**How do you communicate your aspiration through fashion?**

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Put these on the board or have students write them in a notebook/journal.

- *I will create self-portrait that features my fashion sense.*
- *I will respond to John Singer Sargent's portraits through a YELP-like review.*
- *I will present my artwork, explaining who I am or want to be based the fashion I used.*
- *I will connect with my classmates as we work on a team fashion challenge.*

### CONTENT STANDARDS

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)



John Singer Sargent (American, b. Italy, 1856-1925), *Mrs. Abbott Lawrence Rotch*, 1903, oil on canvas, 69 3/4 x 49 1/2 in. (177.2 x 125.7 cm), Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, Lent Anonymously, L-1987.5

### THE FOUR C'S FOR STEAM CAREER READINESS SKILLS

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will create an alternate story for John Singer Sargent's career.
- **Creativity:** Students will make self-portraits and a fashionable, wearable item.
- **Collaboration:** Students will work together in on a team challenge.
- **Communication:** Students will discover the importance of visual communication.

**VOCABULARY:** brand, communication, fashion, influencer, portrait, review, sitter, unconventional material, viewer, visual communication, wardrobe

**RESOURCES:** [Sargent Teaching Poster](#); [Sargent Pinterest board](#); [Nelson Teacher Resource Center](#)

- Resource - ["Branding explained to a child," Luc Speisser, Landor](#)
- Images - [Callot Soeurs at The Met](#)
- Article - ["Twenty-One Dresses," Jessamyn Hatcher and Pari Dukovic, The New Yorker](#)
- Images - ["Beyond Madame X: Portraits by John Singer Sargent," Alexandra Kiely, Daily Art Magazine](#)
- Video - [The Artist Project: Kehinde Wiley, The Met, YouTube](#)
- Video - [Kehinde Wiley: John Singer Sargent, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, YouTube](#)
- Video - [Time Lapse of a John Singer Sargent master study. Oil painting his self portrait in just 3 hours! Pavel Sokov, YouTube](#)

- Video - [Unconventional Materials in Experimental Designs On Parade at Thomas Jefferson University, CBS Philly, YouTube](#)
- Video - [Project Runway S14 Greeting Cards Challenge, ILUV NYC, YouTube](#)
- Video - [Project Runway: Unconventional Challenge | Lifetime, YouTube](#)
  - ▶ Preview all resources before sharing with students.

## PROCEDURE

**Overview:** Students will build STEAM career readiness skills—critical thinking, creating, collaboration and communication. This lesson has an emphasis on communication while inherently utilizing the other three "Cs" to present the activities.

**Engage:** What is communication? Ask students to list the many different ways to do so.

**Ask students...**

- Do words need to be involved in communication?
- What is the best way to communicate?

**Deliverables:** Tell students they will...

- Write a YELP-like review of Sargent's work.
- Develop and tell an alternative story of the artist's career.
- Create a self-portrait that communicates something important about themselves.
- Collaborate on a fashionable challenge to make a wearable item.

**Art Talk:** Discuss Sargent's career as a portrait painter. Talk about how important it was to the sitter to communicate their wealth and status in society through these pictures, using Mrs. Rotch as a place to start. Consider fashion's role in conveying that information.

**Ask students...**

- What is a portrait?
- Why did people get their portrait painted in time of Sargent?
- Why do you think, in the age of cameras, people continue to get their portrait painted?
- Would you like to have someone paint your portrait? If yes, how would you select what to wear?
- What do the sitters' clothing choices tell us about them?

**Description of Activity:**

- Tell students about the controversy surrounding Sargent's portrayal of Madame Pierre Gautreau or Madame X, who was considered a celebrity in Paris. Talk about how this portrait affected his reputation and his career. For older students, you can make the connection between Madame Gautreau and "influencers" of today.



Callot Soeurs (French, active 1895-1937), *Evening dress*, about 1900, silk, chiffon, and linen lace, Joslyn Art Museum, Lent anonymously, L-2018.1

**Ask students...**

- How do you think Parisians communicated their concern about Sargent's work?
- How long did the process take?
- Do you think Sargent made the the right decision to move to England?
- Have students imagine the same situation only in the 21st century. Sargent's portrait is just revealed and viewers cannot believe what they are seeing.

**Ask students...**

- How would people communicate their thoughts about the work today?
- How long would the process take?
- Do you think Sargent would be able to recover from this controversy today and continue his career as a portrait painter? Why or why not?
- Discuss the various ways people can communicate their opinions today. For example, what platforms do people have to share those thoughts (ie. social media, crowd sourced review forums, blogs, etc.)
- Give students the opportunity to write down their thoughts about Sargent's work or imagine what people were saying in 19th-century Paris. Then have students write a Yelp-like review of the artist's work.
- Work with students to carefully construct this review. Consider what information is needed for it: understanding of the audience or who will read it, description using descriptive words, examples and evidence to support your opinion, your recommendation for this product or service, and score system.
- Take time to share reviews with each other.
- Have students consider what would have happened if Sargent decided to stay in Paris after the poor response to his portrait *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)*, 1883–1884. Challenge students to tell the story in a way they feel best communicates their thoughts about this possible scenerio. Perhaps they create memes or a cartoon or Twitter feed (from Sargent's or a reporter's perspective).
  - Extension: take the opportunity to consider how jazz muscians relocated to Paris during this time. Sargent was a pianist, sometimes playing for his sitters during a break from painting. Ask students to consider, what if the artist abandoned painting to become work as a musician?
- Now shift to fashion and how it impacted the portraits. First have students consider clothing.

**Ask students...**

- Do you have something special you like to wear? Would you like to share it?
- Is there something you would like to have in your wardrobe?
- Give students the opportunity to create a self-portrait, but rather than focusing on the construction of their face, encourage students to consider the clothing or accessories they include on canvas.
- Discuss the idea of a brand and now how it applies to people.

**Ask students...**

- What does it mean for a person to have a "brand?"
  - How do people create their brand?
  - How would you create your brand?
  - Is it important to have a brand? Why or why not?
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- Advise students to carefully select the items in the painting because they need to communicate something about themselves to the viewers. Consider if the items are "on brand" for who they are or want to become.
  - Take the finished portraits, put them up in your classroom for a gallery walk and have students share what they learn about each other from the portraits.
  - Divide the class in small groups, and let them know they are going to make a wearable item. Rather than using typical materials like fabric, have it be an "unconventional materials" challenge ala Project Runway.
  - Show students some examples of these challenges before revealing what materials you've chosen for them to use.
  - Have students determine roles in their groups, including who will model their item(s).
  - You may want to have students create a pattern for this item so that others can reproduce it.
  - Students will engage in geometry as they consider shapes and the volume of the item to determine how much "fabric" is needed to create their item.

**Closing:** Celebrate with a fashion show and photographers taking photographic portraits of students taking turns wearing the items.

**Assessment:** Have students share what they learned about communication through this lesson, but they may not use words or have them draw a graphic that describes their brand.

**STEAM LESSON PLAN** Joslyn Art Museum uses the Nebraska Department of Education's STEM Approach as a guide, but we took the liberty of adding the **"A"** to emphasize the **ARTS**.

NDE's STEM Approach reflects an integrated and interdisciplinary philosophy to teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative school-based, work-based, family-based, and community-based experiences as a context for helping students to master key competencies within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Teaching and learning resources, experiences, and example activities included within NDE's STEM Approach serve as a standards-based framework for supporting the engagement of students in hands-on, authentic, and contextual learning experiences that provide students with the opportunity to learn STEM content while promoting essential career readiness skills, including communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

NDE's STEM Approach strives for compatibility with all content-areas, all grade levels, and all career clusters, not just those traditionally defined as STEM.