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

INSPIRED BY  Faces from the Interior: The North American Portraits of Karl Bodmer
On view at Joslyn Art Museum October 2, 2021–May 1, 2022

PROJECT TITLE:  The Sitter's Story

DRIVING QUESTION
How is a culture's past presented through portraiture?

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

•  I will create a portrait of a classmate.
•  I will respond to another classmate's portrait.
•  I will present observations from the perspective of an artist and/or a scientist.
•  I will connect with Karl Bodmer's subjects by sitting for a portrait.

CONTENT STANDARDS
NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS
IOWA CORE STANDARDS

THE FOUR C’S FOR STEAM CAREER READINESS SKILLS

•  Critical Thinking: Students will consider what portraits convey.
•  Creativity: Students will create a portrait using drawing, painting, or photography.
•  Collaboration: Students will work together to document their observations.
•  Communication: Students will use portraiture to communicate their classmate's story.

VOCABULARY: accomplishment, colonialism, document, gender, interior, observation, portrait, pose, proportion, regalia, render, sitter, symmetry

RESOURCES: Bodmer Teaching Poster; Bodmer Pinterest board; Map (below); Native American Terminology Resource (below)

•  Resource - NAEA Position Statement on Use of Imagery, Cultural Appropriation and Socially Just Practices
•  Resource - Native American Cultures, History.com (overview of 10 culture areas)
•  Resource - What is a Portrait? Whitney Museum of American Art
•  Images - Karl Bodmer: North American Portraits, The Met
•  Video - Karl Bodmer: North American Portraits | Insider Insights, The Met, YouTube
•  Video - Karl Bodmer: North American Portraits | MetSpeaks, The Met, YouTube
•  Video - Faces from the Interior exhibition opens at Joslyn Art Museum, 3NewsNow

PROCEDURE

Cultural Note: The legacy of colonialism, including the myth that Europeans discovered America, perpetuates the erasure of Indigenous peoples. It is thus important to remind students that there are over 2,000 tribal groups living across the Americas today, each with their own unique and dynamic culture. It is also important to discuss cultural appropriation with students so they understand how to celebrate, not use, a group's culture. For further resources regarding Native American cultures, see Native Knowledge 360°: Essential Understanding about American Indians published by the National Museum of the American Indian: americanindian.si.edu/nk360


A – Ask elders; be aware of tokenism; engage in conversation
I – Invite and honor cultural traditions; collaborate with guest artists; connect to first hand knowledge
R – Reflect and research the culture; assess stories being told; determine the project’s intent

Overview: Students will discover Indigenous peoples who lived on the Upper Plains in 1830s through the portraits Swiss-born artist Karl Bodmer (1809–1893) created and the information German explorer and naturalist Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied documented. They traveled from Saint Louis through the tribal lands of the Omaha, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Blackfoot, among many Plains nations. Their observations carefully documented in images and writings continue to tell us what early nineteenth-century life was like in the North American interior. Joslyn and The Met worked with Native American communities to interpret these works, providing us with a rich context to connect to the sitters.

Engage: Show students some of Karl Bodmer’s portraits. Select a few to carefully look at the details and share what we know today from studying his works. For example, *Omaha Man*, 1833 and *Omaha Boy*, 1833.

Ask students...

• What do you think the sitter would like to convey?
• What emotions does this portrait evoke?
• Why do you think it was important to draw and paint the people who lived along the Missouri River?

Deliverables: Tell students they will...

• Create portraits of each other
• Discover how to make observations as an artist and/or a scientist

Art Talk: Tell students about Bodmer and Maximilian’s 1832–34 expedition. Share the video Karl Bodmer: North American Portraits | Insider Insights, The Met, YouTube (if appropriate for grade level; preview before sharing with students)
Ask students...

- What do you think this journey was like?
- What do you think it was like to paint someone’s portrait while on a boat?
- How would the journey be different if the expedition was completed today?

Description of Activity:

Start with defining a portrait. Refer to the Whitney Museum of American Art’s What is a Portrait? activity for ideas on how to get started.

Have students think about the methods for creating portraits before cameras: sketching and painting. For the portraits students will create in this lesson, determine if you will have them draw, paint, or photograph each other. Perhaps you will do all three for side-by-side comparisons and students can consider which type they think most accurately represents who they are.

Optional connection: Discuss school pictures with students, keeping in mind your individual students’ demographics or resources so as not to cause any student to feel bad about their homelife. Connecting to Bodmer’s sitters, students can share how they get ready for their school picture.

Students may work in groups of three to four. You have one student record one classmate using all three media, or each student works with a different classmate for each media. Encourage students to bring something from home that they would like to include in their portrait to tell their story and/or have props for students to use. Consider establishing a “photo booth” in your classroom.

Ask students...

- What would you like your portrait to convey about you?
- How can you, as a sitter, make that happen?
- What should the artist know about you before they create your portrait?
- What is one item you would like to include in your portrait, and why?
- What colors would you like to have in your portrait, and why?
- If your cloths or props are not in that color, would you ask the artist to use that color in your portrait?
- What does this color say about you and your personality?

Optional discussion: For older students, you can talk about gender. Many of Bodmer’s sitters are men when in reality, Native American women were leaders in their communities. Faces from the Interior works to correct this through some of the films produced for the exhibition. Question to consider: Did these European travellers project, intentionally or unintentionally, their own patriarchal understandings or perspective on Indigenous peoples?

Some of Bodmer’s portraits showed the sitter’s accomplishments. Discuss what accomplishments mean and have students think about what they have accomplished from completing a challenging task or game to making sports or academic team.
Ask students...
- Do you want your accomplishment(s) to be part of your portrait?
- How would you represent the accomplishment?
- How will you pose for your portrait?
- How do sitters and portraitist build trust?
- How do you know what you’re seeing is real?

Optional discussion: Those who posed for Bodmer knew they would likely not get to keep the portrait. For older students, consider the ethics of this practice.

Ask students...
- How is it different from then compared to today, considering the impact of the Internet and social media?
- What if an artist makes money of a picture of you? Do you think it is fair?
- Do you think Bodmer’s sitters understood what it meant to have portrait done and shared with others?

Once the portraits are complete, hang them up for an art show. Have students select a portrait they did not create and have them write what they learned about their classmate from their portrait. Share the observations, and if the sitter is comfortable, perhaps they can share if the observations are correct.

Have students consider the partnership or relationship of Bodmer and Maximilian—the artist and the scientist. Understanding he is not a skilled artist, Maximilian hired the draftsman Bodmer to accompany him on his North American expedition.

Ask students...
- Why do you think it’s important to have both a scientist and an artist document their observations of a culture?
- What is the artist’s job? What is the scientist’s job?
- What are the strengths/weakness of an artist?
- What are the strengths/weakness of a scientist?

Have students pair up and determine who will be the artist and the scientist for the next activity. Send them to observe a scene, research a topic, or attend a cultural event. Advise them to come up with a plan on how they will document and present their findings. Some topics to consider:
- Steamboats vs. keelboats - during the expedition, the travellers had to change their method of transportation.
- Compare today’s travel with 200 years ago.
- Explore the idea that Bodmer’s portraits demonstrated trade routes and economy.

Closing: Look at the portraits and observations from the artist-scientist activity. Have students imagine these are part of an exhibition. Have them share what objects or information they would like to include to give visitors context.
Assessment: Essay answering the following questions:
- What would a picture/portrait today tell us in 30 years/130 years from now?
- What would your portrait tell us?

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.
Indigenous territories and American Fur Company outposts encountered by Prince Maximilian of Wied and Karl Bodmer during their voyage along the Missouri River, 1833–34