

## *Reading a Portrait: Symbols and Politicians at the Biggs*

**Grades:** Grades 4-7  
**Subjects:** Social Studies, Visual Arts  
**Time Required:** 30-45 minutes  
**Author:** Biggs Museum Curator of Education  
**Featured Artwork:** *Portrait of Maskell Ewing*, Charles Willson Peale, 1787, Biggs Museum of American Art  
*George Washington*, Gilbert Stuart, 1796, Brooklyn Museum of Art  
*George Washington*, unknown artist, 1845-60, Biggs Museum of American Art  
*Statue of Caesar Augustus* (63 BC-14 AD) from Velletri – Roman, Musee du Louvre

<p><b><u>ANCHOR STANDARD:</u></b></p>	<p>VA: Cr1.2.6a</p> <p>VA: Cr2.3.4a, 7a</p> <p>VA: Re7.1.5a</p> <p>VA: Re7.2.4a, 5a, 6a, 7a</p> <p>VA: Re8.1.6a, 7a</p> <p>VA: Cn10.1.6a</p> <p>VA: Cn11.1.4a, 5a, 6a, 7a</p> <p><b>Social Studies:</b> History – Anchor Standard Two [Analysis] – 4-5a, 6-8b</p> <p><b>Social Studies:</b> History – Anchor Standard Four [Content] – 4-5b, 6-8a</p>
<p><b><u>ESSENTIAL QUESTION and ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:</u></b></p>	<p>How does knowing the contexts, histories, and traditions of art forms help us create works of art and design?</p> <p>How do artists and designers create works of art or design that effectively communicate?</p> <p>How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our response to art?</p> <p>What is an image? Where and how do we encounter images in our world? How do images influence our views of the world?</p> <p>How can the viewer “read” a work of art as text?</p> <p>How does making art attune people to their surroundings? How do people contribute to awareness and understanding of their lives and the lives of their communities through art-making?</p>

	<p>How does one determine criteria to evaluate a work of art? How and why might criteria vary? How is a personal preference different from an evaluation?</p>
<p><b><u>PERFORMANCE STANDARD:</u></b></p>	<p><b>VA Grade 6:</b> Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art</p> <p><b>VA Grades 4 &amp; 7:</b> Document, describe, and represent regional constructed environments</p> <p><b>VA Grades 5:</b> Compare one’s own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others</p> <p><b>VA Grades 4-7:</b> Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages/ Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery/ Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions/Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences</p> <p><b>VA Grades 6 &amp; 7:</b> Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed/Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristic of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood convey</p> <p><b>VA Grade 6:</b> Generate a collection of ideas reflecting current interests and concerns that could be investigated in art-making</p> <p><b>VA Grades 4-7:</b> Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created/Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society/Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses/Analyze how response to art is influence by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses</p> <p><b>History, Anchor Standard 2</b>  <b>4-5b:</b> Students will examine historical materials relating to a particular region, society, or theme; chronologically arrange them, and analyze change over time  <b>6-8b:</b> Students will examine historical documents, artifacts, and other materials, and analyze them in terms of credibility, as well as the purpose, perspective, or point of view for which they were constructed.</p> <p><b>History, Anchor Standard 4</b>  <b>4-5b:</b> Students will develop an understanding of selected themes in</p>

	<p>United States history, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did the United States develop its form of government?</li> <li>- Important people in American history</li> </ul> <p><b>6-8a:</b> Students will develop an understanding of pre-industrial United States history and its connections to Delaware history, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)</li> <li>- Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)</li> <li>- Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>I CAN STATEMENT</u></b></p>	<p>I CAN use symbolism when creating art</p> <p>I CAN develop and plan a work of art that relates to me personally</p> <p>I CAN compare my interpretation of a work of art with my classmates' interpretation</p> <p>I CAN explain what symbols in an artwork mean/I CAN identify and analyze cultural symbols in artwork/I CAN analyze ways that cultural symbols add meaning to artwork/I CAN analyze multiple way that images influence specific audiences</p> <p>I CAN compare and contrast the relevant information in a variety of artworks/I CAN analyze how and why the artist created the artwork/</p> <p>I CAN be inspired by current events and popular culture to create art</p> <p>I CAN learn about times, places, and different cultures from looking at works of art/I Can identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society/I CAN analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses/I CAN analyze how responses to art are influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the resources, and cultural uses</p>
<p><b><u>ACTIVATING STRATEGIES:</u></b></p>	<p>Students will learn the meaning of several objects pictured in a portrait of a lawyer from the Revolutionary era</p> <p>Using a worksheet and their knowledge of the George Washington and the Revolutionary War, students will analyze objects from a painting and share their analysis with the class</p> <p>Students will learn about a small statue of George Washington from the 1800s dressed in a toga and begin to make connections between the Roman Empire and the 1800s in America</p>
<p><b><u>ACCELERATION STRATEGIES:</u></b></p>	<p><b>Vocabulary</b></p> <p><b>Character Trait:</b> all the aspects of a person's behavior and attitudes that make up that person's personality</p> <p><b>Lawyer:</b> a person who practices or studies law. Lawyers either to defend or prosecute suspected criminals. They also help write laws.</p> <p><b>Marble:</b> a hard type of stone often used for decorative purposes and statues</p> <p><b>Portrait:</b> an image of a person</p> <p><b>Sculpture:</b> any artistic work made in three dimensions</p>

	<p><b>Symbol:</b> something that represents or stands for something else</p> <p><b>Toga:</b> a loose flowing outer garment worn by the citizens of ancient Rome, made of a single piece of cloth and covering the whole body apart from the right arm</p> <p><b>Quill Pen:</b> a pen made from a main wing or tail feather of a large bird by pointing and slitting the end of the shaft</p>
<b><u>LEARNING STRATEGIES:</u></b>	Using what they've learned from all three images of politicians from the past, students will create a sketch or description of a politician, making sure to include symbolic objects and surroundings
<b><u>SUMMARIZING STRATEGIES:</u></b>	Students can share their portraits with the group and explain why they've included certain objects and settings

### Featured Artwork

*Portrait of Maskell Ewing*, Charles Willson Peale, 1787, Biggs Museum of American Art  
*George Washington*, Gilbert Stuart, 1796, Brooklyn Museum of Art  
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### Lesson Overview

Students will be taught about portraits of historical figures, use what they've learned to analyze two portraits of George Washington, and create their own portrait or idea for a portrait with their new knowledge

### Learning Objectives

- Students should be able to:
- discuss and analyze the meaning of the various objects in the painting *Portrait of Maskell Ewing*
  - apply these analyses to other portraits
  - understand that art can have many layers of meaning
  - understand that the way politicians are represented reflects how people viewed them and how they viewed themselves

### Materials

- Worksheet
- Pencils

### Pre-Lesson Understanding

Students should have a basic knowledge of the Revolutionary War, the founding of the United States and its government, and George Washington

## Lesson Steps

1. View Charles Willson Peale's *Portrait of Maskell Ewing*. The guide should explain the following through lecture and by asking questions of the students related to these topics:
  - a. Use the included timeline to identify the time period in which Maskell Ewing lived and ask students to talk about the Revolutionary War and the events that surrounded it
  - b. Tell students that Ewing was a lawyer and encourage students to explain what a lawyer does and why that might have been important during the Revolutionary War
    - i. Ask students what they might put in a portrait of a lawyer that might tell viewers the person was a lawyer
    - ii. Point out that the law books and letter from another lawyer were ways that this artist showed viewers that Ewing was a lawyer
  - c. Point out that the letter has both a date and the name of another lawyer and ask them why the artist might have chosen to include a date
  - d. Ask students to define the word "character trait" then ask them to say what character traits they think Maskell Ewing has and ask them to explain why they think that. For prompt questions, you can use the following
    - i. Was he smart?
    - ii. Do you think he could read and write?
    - iii. Was he wealthy?
2. Use the worksheet to help students analyze Gilbert Stuart's *George Washington*, from 1796. Ask them to identify George Washington and explain who he was and why he was important. Guide students through each highlighted symbol, have them write their responses on their own, and then encourage them to share their answers with the group
  - a. Passing Storm Clouds – symbol of the end of the Revolutionary War
    - i. Talk with students about the difficulties of the Revolutionary War and ask them for examples of what they might use as a symbol for war if they were going to paint it
  - b. Rainbow – the new beginnings and hope for the future of America
    - i. Talk with students about what emotions rainbows make them feel and ask them to write about what during George Washington's time might have made people feel those emotions
  - c. Sword – George Washington's role as a general and victories during the war
    - i. Ask students to write about what Washington might have done before he was a president and why it would be important to show that he held that role
  - d. Inkwell and Quill Pen – Washington's education and correspondences
    - i. Explain or encourage students to explain what a quill pen was
    - ii. Ask students to write about who they thought George Washington might have been writing letters to and if they can think of any of the "Founding Fathers" he may have been corresponding with
  - e. Based on what the students have determined about these symbols, ask them if they think this is a positive or negative portrait of George Washington and why they think this
3. *George Washington*, unknown artist, 1845-60
  - a. Ask students to identify the subject
  - b. Encourage students to talk about this image of George Washington
    - i. What personality traits can be gleaned from this?
    - ii. How is he dressed?
  - c. Show students the image of Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus in comparison to that of George Washington

- i. Ask students to compare and contrast the two works
    - ii. Ask students to explain what they know about ancient Rome
  - d. Encourage students to discuss why artists might have wanted to associate George Washington with Rome
  - e. Use the included timeline to ask students what was happening during the era this statue was created
    - i. Louisiana Purchase (1808), Westward Expansion in full swing by the 1840s, idea of Manifest Destiny
    - ii. Ask them how this might have been related to Rome – Roman Empire etc.
- 4. Use the remaining time to have students sketch or write a character description of a notable politician
  - a. For both groups, encourage students to think carefully about the following:
    - i. What are the most important things you want to portray about this politician?
    - ii. What objects are around him or her? What do they indicate anything about his or her beliefs, personality, or accomplishments?
    - iii. What is the politician doing? Is he or she interacting with anyone else? Why do you, as the artist/author, feel the need to include that?
    - iv. Where is the politician sitting? Why is that important?
    - v. If students choose to write, encourage them to use descriptive adjectives to describe the politician's voice and what that might say about the politician's character