

## Unit 7 Images of an age: what can we learn from portraits 1500–1750?

### About the unit

In this unit pupils will acquire knowledge about the main personalities and events of the political, economic and religious changes that occurred in Britain 1500–1750 through an evaluation of the images created at the time. This leads into a study of historical interpretations.

This unit is expected to take 6–8 hours. There is scope to adjust some of the teaching activities to take account of time constraints in different schools.

### Where the unit fits in

This unit provides an overview of the period 1500–1750 through a consideration of a range of portraits. It can be taught as an introduction to the period, in which case the final, summative task should be held back until toward the end of the teaching of this period, or it can be taught as an overarching unit that draws together pupils' knowledge and understanding of the period.

This unit links to unit 7A 'Self image', unit 8B 'Animating art' and unit 9A 'Life events' in the art and design scheme of work, where pupils analyse paintings and images.

### Expectations

#### At the end of this unit

**most pupils will:** drawing upon their knowledge of the history of Britain 1500–1750, assess the usefulness of portraits as sources of information for the period; frame appropriate questions when studying portraits; describe how features of portraiture changed 1500–1750; identify 'coded messages' in portraits; investigate the lives of particular people and judge how powerful they were; comment on some of the limitations of portraits as sources; describe how portraits can be used to create different interpretations of life in Britain 1500–1750

**some pupils will not have made so much progress and will:** demonstrate factual knowledge of aspects of life in Britain 1500–1750 when commenting on portraits of the period; find answers to questions by studying portraits; identify differences between portraits produced in the earlier and later parts of the period; extract information from portraits in a way that goes beyond simple observation; combine information from a portrait and information from another source when describing the life of a powerful individual; comment on why portraits exist only of rich people; describe how choices are necessary when setting up an exhibition to depict an aspect of the past

**some pupils will have progressed further and will:** drawing upon their detailed knowledge of the history of Britain 1500–1750, assess critically portraits as sources for the period; show independence and judgement when carrying out an investigation into the significance of particular portraits; analyse changes in portraiture 1500–1750 and link these to wider social changes; analyse 'coded messages' in portraits; independently reach substantiated conclusions about the lives of particular people represented in portraits; compare the relative value and usefulness of portraits and other contemporary sources; analyse how the intended audience can change the nature of an historical interpretation such as an exhibition of portraits

### Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils have:

- used paintings as sources of information for historical enquiry
- understood some of the limitations of sources
- visited a museum or art gallery
- considered questions of significance and interpretation

### Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- portraits as sources, *eg propaganda, symbolism, coded message*

Speaking and listening – through the activities pupils could:

- answer questions using relevant evidence
- collaborate with others to share information and ideas, and solve problems

### Resources

Resources include:

- reproductions of a range of portraits 1500–1750 (for a portrait of Olaudah Equiano see [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))
- textbooks, reference books and CD-ROMs covering the period
- *Teacher's guide to using portraits* (English Heritage) provides useful background information and further ideas for teachers

### Out-of-school learning

Pupils could contact museum and art gallery curators and ask them how they select and organise their interpretations of the past.

### Future learning

Pupils could go on to:

- study British history in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
- use visual sources in different historical contexts provided in other units

### Why do powerful people take great care about the way they are shown in pictures?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the idea of propaganda</li> <li>• how powerful people in the twentieth century manipulate the media to convey a favourable impression</li> <li>• to treat pictorial sources with caution</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give pupils examples of photographs of modern political leaders that are clearly the result of planned 'photo opportunities'. Discuss the impression that each picture is intended to convey. Introduce the concept of 'propaganda'. Show the pupils more extreme forms of propaganda, such as pictures and posters glorifying various twentieth-century dictators. Ask students to annotate pictures with comments on how the person depicted wants to be seen.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show an understanding of the concept of propaganda, <i>eg by describing particular features of a photograph</i></li> <li>• explain how examples of twentieth-century propaganda try to create a favourable impression on viewers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizenship: this activity will support pupils' study of the significance of the media in society.</li> </ul> |
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### How did Elizabeth I want herself to be portrayed?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to use prior knowledge of a period</li> <li>• ways of analysing and evaluating significant sources</li> <li>• how Tudor and Stuart portraits were used as propaganda and how they contain symbolic information</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a whole-class activity brainstorm pupils' knowledge of Elizabeth I.</li> <li>• Show pupils a portrait of Elizabeth, <i>eg the 'Rainbow' or 'Armada' portrait</i>. Help pupils make careful observations of the portrait, either by asking small groups to recreate the pose, or by asking each pupil in turn to make an observation about the portrait, <i>eg She is wearing a lot of pearls; There are ships in the background</i>.</li> <li>• Provide groups of pupils with a copy of the portrait and a large sheet of paper on which they can note their observations and questions they would like to ask. Ask pupils to try to group their questions, <i>eg those to do with clothes, those to do with why this portrait was painted</i>.</li> <li>• Lead class discussion of pupils' observations and questions, drawing out issues of propaganda, including the use of symbols.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse and begin to evaluate portraits as sources of information, making some use of prior knowledge</li> <li>• recognise some ways in which the Tudors and Stuarts used portraits for propaganda purposes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This activity follows up the previous activity in the context of a portrait of a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century monarch. It is designed to help pupils look carefully at a portrait, initially by making observations, then by posing questions that could be developed into an investigation.</li> <li>• Portraits of Henry VIII or Charles I might be used instead of Elizabeth I.</li> <li>• As an additional activity, pupils could be asked to compare the portrait with written sources, <i>eg those giving a less flattering account of what Elizabeth was like</i>.</li> <li>• Language for learning: pupils collaborate with others to share information and ideas, and to answer a historical question.</li> <li>• ICT: save a copy of the portrait of a monarch from a CD-ROM and annotate it using a word-processing application. Pupils could compare the portrait with other accounts of the monarch's appearance.</li> </ul> |
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**Getting the message?**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to use prior knowledge about symbolism in portraits to make inferences about unfamiliar portraits</li> <li>• to use portraits to identify aspects of change and continuity over time</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind pupils of the portrait of Elizabeth I and of how it portrayed her not as she was, but as she wanted people to believe she was.</li> <li>• Tell pupils that portraits often carry that sort of message when they are commissioned by the sitter, but that some carry messages that are not so obvious.</li> <li>• Show pupils a sixteenth-century family portrait, <i>eg Lord Cobham and his family, Sir Richard Saltonstall and his family</i>, and initiate a whole-class discussion on the 'messages' it conveys. Are there likely to be differences between what a sixteenth-century person understood by the 'message' and what a person nowadays would understand? If appropriate, more than one portrait could be discussed in this way.</li> <li>• Give pupils, in pairs or small groups, an eighteenth-century family portrait, <i>eg Mr and Mrs Andrews, Robert Gwillym of Atherton</i>. Ask pupils to identify similarities/ differences between the portraits, <i>eg clothes, background</i>, and then brainstorm the 'messages' in them. If appropriate, different groups could be given different portraits – pupils annotate 'their' portraits.</li> <li>• Talk about differences and similarities in the 'messages' from portraits at the beginning of the period compared with portraits at the end.</li> <li>• Tell pupils that there are portraits that carry coded messages that only a few people would be able to interpret. Show pupils a portrait that includes a deliberately coded message, <i>eg the 'Sunflower' self-portrait attributed to Van Dyck</i>, and explain the hidden codes.</li> <li>• Pupils, individually or in pairs or small groups, design a portrait of a specific individual. The intention is not to draw a likeness, but to include coded messages that the individual or an artist would wish to be understood by people viewing the portrait.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify 'messages' in portraits and begin to infer meanings</li> <li>• describe similarities and differences between portraits from across the period</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to make this accessible across the pupils' range of ability, it is important to choose portraits that make obvious use of symbolism.</li> <li>• The exercises involving assessment of the gap between portrait image and reality depend on the extent to which pupils have contextual knowledge that can be used to inform their judgements.</li> <li>• If this unit concludes the study of Britain 1500–1750, pupils could be asked to choose an individual from that period, demonstrating knowledge of the period as well as of portraits.</li> <li>• Language for learning: pupils will be able to answer questions using relevant evidence.</li> </ul> |
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### Images of an age: who was powerful?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to sort and clarify information</li> <li>• about some key individuals from the period 1500–1750</li> <li>• about the reasons why some individuals are powerful</li> <li>• to use prior knowledge, including period knowledge, to inform inferences</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give pupils a range of reproductions of portraits of kings, queens and leading individuals 1500–1750.</li> <li>• Working in pairs or small groups, pupils sort the portraits into different categories. Ask pupils to work out their own categories to sort and re-sort. Pupils could be given, initially, a small number of portraits to sort and then these could gradually be added to and pupils would need to re-categorise.</li> <li>• Lead a class discussion on differences between the categories and how the grouping of portraits altered as the categories changed.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to rank the persons portrayed from the most powerful to the least powerful.</li> <li>• Lead a class discussion on the reasons behind the ranking.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to put the portraits in chronological order, and ask questions about the criteria they used, <i>eg How did you do this? What clues did you get from the portraits? How would you check if you were right?</i></li> <li>• Pupils undertake research to identify the individuals and to confirm their decisions about chronology, and use their findings to contribute to the creation of a class timeline.</li> <li>• Placing portraits along a timeline could show how people's lives overlapped and interlinked, and could be accompanied by mini-biographies.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain the criteria used to sort portraits</li> <li>• identify individuals and suggest reasons why they were powerful</li> <li>• describe aspects of change 1500–1750</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portraits should include some of children who became powerful or influential adults, some individuals from ethnic minorities, and some people whose portraits might not immediately suggest power.</li> <li>• The discussion on power should address those factors that make an individual powerful and those that tend to make them powerless, <i>eg childhood</i>.</li> <li>• Through both the selection of portraits and the discussion, teachers should help pupils to consider changes over time in who/what was considered powerful and important.</li> <li>• Language for learning: pupils will understand and use correctly terms of qualification and comparison, <i>eg more, most, less, least</i>.</li> </ul> |
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### What don't portraits tell us?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about aspects of the contrast between the lives of the powerful and the lives of poorer members of society</li> <li>• about the strengths and limitations of different sources</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the limitations of portraits as sources of information. Ask the pupils to list questions about life 1500–1750 that cannot be answered by using portraits. Discuss how we can learn more, <i>eg about the lives of poor people at the time</i>.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• give reasons to show understanding of the limitations of portraits as sources of information</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers might wish to extend this activity to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of a broad range of sources. This could be done by focusing on a particular event, individual or topic from the period, <i>eg the Plague, Guy Fawkes, textile workers in the domestic system</i>.</li> <li>• Key skills: this activity will provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of communication (discussing, evaluating sources).</li> <li>• ICT: pupils could use interactive investigation to compare two alleged portraits of Olaudah Equiano as an introduction to this activity. These could be downloaded onto the school intranet from the BBC website or pupils could also search the internet.</li> </ul> |
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### What were the most important images of the age?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how an interpretation, such as a museum display, is put together</li> <li>• the importance of selection from evidence, and the intended audience, in determining an interpretation</li> <li>• about significant people and aspects of major developments that occurred in Britain 1500–1750</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell pupils that they have been commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery, in London, to design a travelling exhibition for schools about important and powerful people in Britain 1500–1750. Exhibition space is very small. Out of, say, 20 portraits that are available, there is room for only 10. Pupils must decide which portraits to include and which to leave out.</li> <li>• Discuss with pupils the criteria they must use to select the 10 portraits for the exhibition. Establish that the pictures must show the most important figures in the story of the development of Britain 1500–1750.</li> <li>• In addition to ‘importance’, pupils must make decisions about how interesting the intended audience of pupils of their own age will find the stories associated with each portrait. Having made these selection decisions, pupils research captions to explain the part played by each individual in the overall story of Britain 1500–1750.</li> <li>• When the pupils have created the exhibition, ask them to reflect on their interpretation. Ask them to justify their selection decisions and to show how they have used their knowledge to ensure the right choices. Ask them to explain why different members of the class have come to different decisions. Encourage them to see connections between the process they have undertaken and the work of professional museum curators.</li> <li>• Pupils could be asked to make a further selection of just one figure (one which they believe is the most important in attracting people to the exhibition) to go on a poster advertising the exhibition. They could be asked to produce a précis of no more than 100 words justifying their choice.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of key personalities and events in British history 1500–1750</li> <li>• select from the portrait sources and organise their knowledge of the period in order to produce a structured and coherent interpretation</li> <li>• explain how and why there can be different interpretations of ‘portraits and power’, referring to such factors as the selection from a wider evidence base and the impact of the intended audience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This activity depends on pupils having a good level of knowledge about key episodes in the overall story of Britain 1500–1750.</li> <li>• If this unit is used to introduce the period, the activity can be adapted by providing pupils with sufficient information on individuals to make an initial selection. This activity can then be completed at the end of the work on the period.</li> <li>• ICT: each group of pupils could use web publishing software to create a web page about their most significant individual. They could use a picture and text to justify their choice. Analysis of the whole ‘exhibition’ will allow pupils to appreciate various alternative interpretations.</li> </ul> |
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