



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Connecting Writing and Art :

Portraying Attitude and Emotion through Self-Portrait Poems

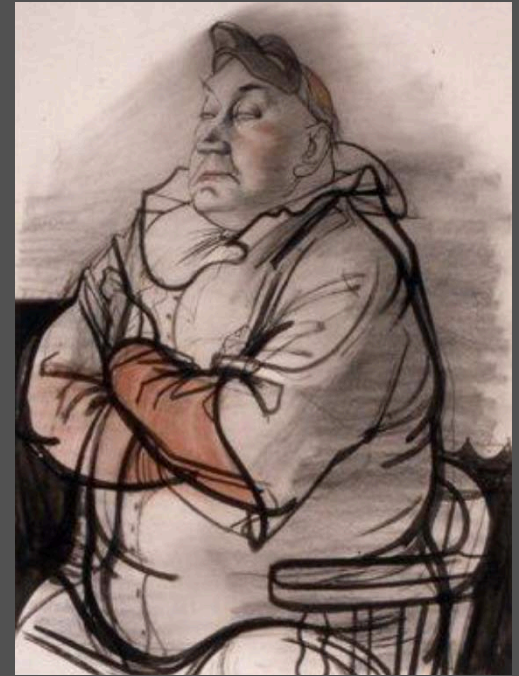


Rico Lebrun, born Italy, 1900; died United States, 1964. *Seated Clown*, 1941. Ink and wash. SBMA

It's All About Attitude: Writing Self-Portrait Poems

When a writer projects an attitude, the word portrait includes carefully selected concrete details, strong verbs, and imagery. A poet can add color, highlights, and shading with words and phrases.

In the same way that an artist encloses the emotions of a subject within drawn contour lines, a writer captures emotions between lines as well – in this case, in the lines of a self-portrait poem that uses figurative language: similes and metaphors.



Consider the attitudes portrayed by these students, who each “struck a pose” after observing Japanese color woodblock prints of actors in Noh drama productions. They created these self-portraits using the same techniques described in the art lesson based on the work of Rico Lebrun.





Can you match the portraits with these “attitude” statements?

I’m on a journey, and I am strong and determined.

Stop and listen to me! I am wise and I have advice for you.

I’m very shy, and I am quiet. Don’t come too close!

I’m watching you, but I am not shy. Come chat with me!

Let's consider this student self-portrait. The writer could convey her feelings by focusing on the details in the artwork.





Consider some of the features and details that she has depicted:

her hair
her eyes
her hands
her ears
the fan
the robe



Let's begin by comparing her hair to something else by writing a simile (a comparison using *like* or *as*):

My hair is like a curtain, and I can decide how much drama I want to reveal.

What does this first line of a self-portrait poem tell us about the subject?

She is shy and very private.

She thinks carefully about what she chooses to reveal to others.

Drama includes a wide range of emotions, and she will decide how much of herself to share.



Now let's describe her eyes and consider what they reveal by writing another simile (a comparison using *like* or *as*):

My eyes are like a deep green pond, still and reflective.

What does this line of a poem tell us about the subject?

She thinks deeply. She is quiet and still – a good observer of life. She is reflective and thoughtful.



What do her hands and posture tell us?
Let's include another simile (a comparison using *like* or *as*):

*My hands clutch the robe and fan
that are **like** silk walls.
They protect me from prying eyes.*

What does this line of a poem tell us about the subject?

Her hands **clutch** (that's a strong verb!) her robe and a fan – objects of concealment. Both are made of silk, and they are like walls that protect her heart and emotions from the prying eyes of others. Her hands are not relaxed and open to the world, grabbing everything life has to offer. Instead, they clutch the objects that protect her. She chooses to keep to herself.



Let's consider her ears by writing a final simile (a comparison using *like* or *as*):

*My ears are like shells on the shore,
capturing whispers of the wind and the
song of the sea.*

What does this line of a poem tell us about the subject?

Our subject may be shy, but she is an excellent observer. She listens carefully to sounds that others might miss. She hears the music of nature.



Finally, put the four similes together into a Self-Portrait Poem:

*My eyes are like a deep green pond,
still and reflective.*

*My hair is like a curtain,
and I choose how much drama
I want to reveal.*

*My hands clutch the robe and fan
that are like silk walls,
protecting me from prying eyes.*

*My ears are like shells on the shore,
capturing whispers of the wind
and the song of the sea.*

Does this poem match the artwork? Has the artist's quiet, shy attitude and reflective voice come across to both the viewer of the artwork and the reader of the poem?



Here is another version, using *metaphors* instead of similes (remove the word *like* in the comparisons):

*My eyes are deep green ponds,
still and reflective.*

*My hair is a curtain,
and I choose how much drama
I want to reveal.*

*My hands clutch the robe and fan
that are silk walls,
protecting me from prying eyes.*

*My ears are shells on the shore,
capturing whispers in the wind
and the song of the sea.*



Your turn! Try writing a Self-Portrait Poem using figurative language (similes and/or metaphors) about the details and attitudes you included in your work of art!

Create a Word Painting!

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