Memory Portrait

Grades — 6-12 (with modifications for elementary)

Time — 2-3 class periods

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Essential Questions</th>
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<td>• What does it mean to know someone? Do we need to physically meet a person to know them?</td>
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<td>• How do political issues, like war and displacement, impact personal and family histories and identities?</td>
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Key Concepts/Vocabulary/Art Elements
Portraits, altar, memory, displacement, collage, image transfer

Materials
Heavyweight paper, such as watercolor or cardstock (8x10 in or larger), transparency sheets, personal photograph/print-out (smaller than base paper), water-based markers, paint roller, brushes, bowl of water, clean rag, white glue, decorative papers, magazine clippings, lightweight craft materials like glitter, gems, string (optional)

Artwork in Focus
- Ann Le, Sisters I (2011)
- Ann Le, Family Portrait I (2011)
- Ann Le, Grandparents (2018)

Talking About Art

Take a close look at Ann Le’s photographs, Sisters I, Family Portrait I, and Grandparents. What do you notice about them? Do the compositions of people in front of houses remind you of anything you’ve seen or experienced before? Can you find the subtle visual differences between the people and the houses? Do they look like they are from the same time and place or are they somehow different?

These images are part of a series called Home: Faux Family Photo Album. What similarities and differences do you notice between them and family albums you have seen? For example, you might notice that the photos depict families outside of their houses, a common subject among family photo albums. However, the clothes worn by Le’s family are different than ones you may be familiar with. Some people are wearing loose garments that resemble pajamas. Who wears these in the pictures, adults or children? Men or women? What observations can you make about the people’s facial expressions? What about their body positions? What can all of these elements say about their family and social culture? Are there any clues that tell you when and where these photos were taken?

Le creates her images by digitally manipulating old photographs of her extended family in Vietnam with photographs of middle class houses in San Diego, CA, where she grew up. Many Vietnamese families have been displaced and separated from each other following the Vietnam War. Why do you think the artist creates these faux, or fake, family albums? Do you think she knows the people in the photographs personally? Why might she not have current photos of them in front of their actual houses?

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Can you think of other historical events that have displaced families from their native lands to foreign ones? What do you think happened to their family albums? Think about how family influences your identity. Is there a family member or relative who made an impact on your life? Is there a relative or ancestor who you never met but who is remembered by others in the household?

Creating Art

Now, you will create a memory portrait to honor a relative or ancestor who has either passed away or whom you have never met. This is inspired by the Vietnamese tradition of creating altars, or visual displays with objects and images to show respect to a deceased family member. According to Vietnamese tradition, the altar is filled with the person’s favorite food and drink on the anniversary of their passing. Paper offerings, or gifts, are burned to ensure the dead can enjoy a comfortable afterlife. Popular paper offerings are fake money, gold/silver joss paper, paper houses, clothes, accessories, etc. These can get quite elaborate, with pop-up paper mansion the size of a doll-house!

Take a moment to think about your family history. Is there a relative you’ve never met but have always been curious about? Perhaps it is your great grandma who was rumored to be a descendant of a royal bloodline. Or maybe it’s your distant fourth cousin who supposedly lived in the woods for years all by himself. Your first task is to find out more about this mystery family member. Use what you already know about them (their name, when and where they were born, their profession, etc.) to search for more information. Don’t be afraid to ask members of your household, search the internet, or pick up the phone and interview a family member about this mystery relative. Consider what you would like to know about them to feel like you actually KNOW them, (i.e. their likes/dislikes, favorite place, dreams, personality, favorite food, color, book, music, etc.) Research the time period and location where they lived for further insight into what they may have been like.

Next, try to find a photo of the person. If one is not available, try to get a detailed description of what they look like and make a drawing. You will use the picture to make an image transfer, which is the first part of the project.

Directions for Image Transfer (See video in “Resources” section for reference):

Step 1 - Place the transparency sheet over the photo (or drawing) and trace the portrait using a marker.

*IMPORTANT NOTE: The image will be reversed (backwards) once it is transferred. If you are ok with that, then continue to step 2. If not, use a light-color marker to trace the image. Then flip the transparency over and retrace the lines you put down with another darker marker. Then, erase the light marker drawing in the back before moving to step 2. You can also use a computer to flip the image before printing.

Step 2 - Use markers to color in the rest of the portrait. Get creative with how you color the shapes and shadows of the face. The colors do not have to be the same as the photo.

Step 3 – Place your watercolor paper on a table. Dip your brush (or rag) in clean water, shake off the excess, and brush over the paper to get it wet. Make sure your paper is damp, not dripping wet!

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Step 4 – Carefully place the transparency with the colored side face down on the paper. Take your paint roller (or wooden spoon, or even palm of your hand) and roll over several times to make sure the marker is transferred to the paper.

Step 5 – Wait a few minutes before peeling off the transparency. Wait for the watercolor paper to dry completely. Voila, you have an image transfer!

Now, gather magazine clippings, craft materials, small found objects, and pictures that illustrate the things you found out about the relative. These items will be added to your memory portrait. You can also make drawings or small paper sculptures, such as origami, to show things they liked.

Be creative with your embellishments! You can add paint, glitter, craft materials, anything you think will make your portrait special.

Grade Level Modifications and Extensions

Lower Elementary – Students can make their portrait about a known relative or someone in their household. Skip the image transfer technique and use a printed photo for the collage instead. They can make a list of words that describe the person and present their portrait to the class.

Upper Elementary – Students can make the portraits of historical or literary figures studied in class, write short essays about them, and present their work to the class.

Middle and High School – Students can experiment with different image transfer techniques and materials, doing their own research and experimentation. They can write an essay about the person they selected for the portrait and describe their artistic choices in detail.

Reflection

- Reflect on your feelings toward the mystery relative now vs. before the lesson. Have they changed now that you know more about them? Do you feel more connected to them? How has their story become a part of your family history? Have you discovered anything in common between you and them?

- Imagine what it would be like if you could meet them. What do you think your relationship would be like? What would you like to do together?

- What do you think people who are separated from their families due to war and/or politics feel?

- What would you say to a child who is far away from their loved ones at this time? How might you comfort them?
Curricular Connections

National Core Art Standards
VA:Cr1.2.6a - Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
VA:Cr3.1.7a - Reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.
VA:Cr2.3.8a - Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.
VA:Re.7.2.1a - Analyze how one’s understanding of the world is affected by experiencing
VA:Cn11.1.IIa - Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts

CCSS for ELA – Writing and Speaking
6.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
7.5 - Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.
8.5 - Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.
9-10.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
11-12.5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Resources

- USC PAM Short Documentary on artist Ann Le
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=HD17iSVZGQU&feature=emb_logo
- Ann Le’s Artist Website https://annle.net/
- Memory Portrait Video Tutorial https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2p2fvsgtDZg
- Information on Vietnamese Altar Tradition
  https://www.cdm.org/voyagetovietnam/altars.html
- Information on Vietnamese Diaspora https://www.pilotguides.com/study-guides/vietnamese-diaspora/

Educator Night@PAM, Spring 2020 Lesson prepared by Yeu Q Nguyen in collaboration with USC Pacific Asia Museum Education Staff
Ann Le
*Sisters I, 2011*
Archival Pigment Print
Courtesy of the artist
Ann Le
*Family Portrait I, 2011*
Archival Pigment Print
Courtesy of the artist
Ann Le
*Grandparents*, 2018
Archival Pigment Print
Courtesy of the artist