Big Idea
What do we know and what don't we know about a person from their portrait?

Your students will:
• Understand and explore the difference between their inner and outer selves
• Create an expressive mixed-media self-portrait
• Respond in writing to prompts about their thoughts, beliefs and feelings

Create a Portrait with Freddie, Ty and Micka
As a class, co-view the episode “Portraiture & The Me I See,” in which Freddie and Ty meet portrait artist Mickayel (Micka) Thurin. Prompt a conversation about portraiture and how we depict ourselves and others visually. Invite students to think about “the me I see,” as explored in the episode, and discuss the following (offer a mirror if available):

• Ask students to describe or write about what they see when they look in the mirror or at a photo of themselves: the shape of their eyes, the color of their skin, the clothes they are wearing, the expression on their face. What else?
• Now ask them to describe what they don't see in the mirror or in a photo. Describe their inside selves: how they feel, where they’re from, their experiences, interests, beliefs and talents. What else is there?
• How do Freddie, Ty and Micka try to express both their inner and outer selves in their portraits?
Teacher Prep:
1. This project includes three distinct parts, so consider how to structure each layer of the lesson. You can spread the project out over several class periods or create stations to work on each step simultaneously. Adapt the lesson to whatever best suits your classroom.
2. If watercolor paint feels too messy or is unavailable, you can use any colorful drawing supplies or collage materials for the background.
3. Create a sample to share with the students: your own portrait of your inner and outer self.

Lesson Activity

Materials

Part One:
- Cardstock or other thick white paper for each student
- Crayons or oil pastels
- Watercolor paint
- Paint brushes
- Cups of water

Part Two & Three:
- Camera
- Computer
- Printer
- Colored pencils or markers
- Scissors
- Gluestick

No printer or camera? Have students draw black and white line drawings of themselves instead. They can also handwrite their responses to the inner-self prompts instead of typing and printing them.

Instructions

Part One: Your Imagination
1. What would your feelings, moods and imagination look like if you could see them? Would they be abstract colors, shapes and lines? Maybe recognizable images? On the white paper, use crayons or oil pastels and try to draw this expressive part of your inner self.
2. Add watercolor paint on top of your drawing. Try to fill up the whole page with color. Notice how the lines from the crayon or oil pastel come through the paint. This is called a “resist,” because the wax or oil in the drawing supplies resist or oppose the water-based paint. Set aside to dry.

Tip: Let students know that this will serve as the background of their portrait, meaning a portion of it will be covered by their photograph and their words.
Part Two: Your Outer Self

1. Invite students to pose against a blank background and take their picture. Students can take each other’s photos as well. Ask them to think carefully about what clues their pose and expression will offer the viewer about how they are feeling in their portrait. Let them decide if they want a close-up of their face or a photo of their whole body.

2. Print each student’s photo in black and white on regular computer paper.

3. Have students cut out their picture and invite them to add color, patterns and designs to their portrait with colored pencils or markers. They can also choose to leave their picture black and white.

4. Use a glue stick to attach the photograph to their watercolor background once it’s dry.

Part Three: Your Thoughts

1. Have students respond to prompts that reflect their inner selves. Students can type their responses or dictate them to a teacher to transcribe and print out. If a computer or printer is unavailable, students can handwrite their responses. Here are some prompts to consider:

- I wish people knew...
- I believe...
- I feel connected to...
- I struggle with...
- My favorite...
- I wonder if...
- You don’t know by looking that I...
- The me I see is....

2. Invite students to cut out their responses once printed out or written down.

3. Students can collage the words and responses onto their portraits in whatever formation is interesting or meaningful to them.
School-to-Home Connection

- Ask students to bring in a family photo and analyze the picture as a type of group portrait. Where were they? What did they decide to wear? What don’t you know about the photo by looking at it? Look up family portraits from art history and compare them.
- Invite students to create quick two-minute portrait sketches of each of their family members at home.
- Ask students to find pictures of family members from long ago before there were camera phones. Discuss how special and involved it was to capture a person’s picture at that time.

Vocabulary

**Portrait**: A picture or artwork of a person or group of people

**Self-portrait**: A picture that an artist creates of themselves

**Pose**: How a person is positioned or standing

**Viewer**: The person looking at a picture or artwork

**Background**: The parts of a picture that are farthest from the viewer

**Foreground**: The parts of a picture that are closest to the viewer

**Collage**: Artwork made from pieces of cut or torn paper
More about artist Mickayel Thurin
Mickayel Thurin is an artist in Philadelphia who often features friends, family members and herself in her portraits. She focuses on the process of making the portraits, paying attention to the feelings conveyed by the colors and shapes she uses. Lots of her portraits are mixed media, using not only paint on canvas but collaged materials. In *The Infinite Art Hunt* episode, she adds glitter as a finishing touch to her self-portrait. Sometimes Micka creates portraits of a person while interviewing them about their life. You can view more of Micka’s work on her website at mthurin.com.

More Classroom Activities
Visit PBS LearningMedia for more lesson plans like this inspired by *The Infinite Art Hunt*.

Children’s Books with Related Themes
Check out these children’s books online or at your local library to continue exploring the concepts in this episode.

*We’re All Works of Art* by Mark Sperring
Celebrate physical differences through the lens of art history in this playful rhyming book.

*Bodies are Cool* by Tyler Feder
An inclusive journey through the vast differences in bodies and physical appearance, helping us appreciate just how cool bodies are.