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# Drawing the Face



**Grade:** 5th

**Medium:** Pencil

**Learning Objective:** Students will:

- Observe proportional elements of the face and placement of facial features.
- Draw a face based on observation, using correct proportions and placement of features.
- Use good craftsmanship.

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## **Elements of Art**

**Line:** a long narrow mark or stroke made on or in a surface to control the viewer's eye movement, define edges, texture and value gradations.

## **Principles of Design**

**Balance:** visual weight of a composition, in this lesson **symmetrical balance:** both sides of the face are the same, as in a mirror image.

**Proportion:** the relationship of objects within the whole to each other as well as to the whole. In this lesson the facial features should be in proportion to each other and to the face.

## **Additional Vocabulary**

**Detail:** additional visual information that informs the viewer about the person portrayed.

**Facial features:** eyes, nose, mouth, ears, eyebrows, hair.

**Portrait:** a depiction of the human face, head and shoulders.

## **Materials & Supplies**

- Pencils, Erasers (1 per student)
- 9" x 12" Plain White Copy Paper (3-4 sheets per student)
- Clip Board (1 per student, optional)

## **Context (History and/or Artists)**

In every era and culture there are portraits. Artists have devised a template that human facial features align with, in respect to placement on the face, even though details such as eye shape, hair texture, nose size etc. may vary.

This lesson guides students towards moving from formulaic symbols for faces (smiley face circles and lines) and rely on observation to render realistically.

Observation is the true method of recording what something really looks like. “Draw what you see!”

## **Advanced Preparation**

The art docent will lead a guided drawing with the students: some practice in advance is recommended. Such drawing can either be done on large paper, or on an overhead projector.

For this activity, each student will need copy paper and a pencil. If clipboards are used, paper can be set up on each clip-board ahead of time.

## **Tips & Tricks**

- If you are nervous about teaching a drawing lesson, just keep in mind that the students may be just as new to this! Stick to step-by-step instructions and wait while people complete each one.
- The students may find the new pencil-grip position awkward. Have them do a warm-up scribble on scratch paper.
- Encourage students not to erase unless the instructions say to do so, or unless the mistake is preventing them from following the steps. Drawing lightly at first makes erasing easier.
- Mistakes are a part of the process. Most artists draw and re-draw, adjusting the lines until they look correct. Remind them that the purpose of this lesson is to learn *how* to draw a face from observation, and not to make it perfect the first time. Some “mistakes” may even become part of the drawing.
- If mirrors are available, provide them to the students and encourage them to consult their own faces as reference.
- This exercise can be used as the basis for a finished piece of art, such as drawing over the pencil lines with marker, or by doing the drawing on watercolor paper and then painting it. Or it can be left as a pencil drawing.

## **Discussion Points**

This method of drawing from observation is like using an outer scaffolding when erecting a building. Eventually the scaffolding is taken down and the building remains. In this process, some of the drawing will ultimately be erased. That doesn't make the erased parts of the drawing less important as the drawing is being ‘built’. Drawing should be lightly done until the final lines are chosen to keep. The finished drawing will be darkened with final pencil lines.

Note: there aren't separate instructions for drawing a male vs. a female face. Faces are surprisingly neutral! How do we tell who is a boy and who is a girl, if not by our faces? (Details like eyelashes, hair, clothing.)

When we show emotions our face changes. What facial features express emotion the most? (Eyebrows and mouth.) What other features also change to express emotion? (Eyelids, cheeks, forehead, exposed teeth.) How would you change the shape of the eyebrows in your drawing to express happiness/anger/etc.? A smile/frown is just a big curve. How about a diagonal mouth? How would you draw a face that was scrunched up with emotion? Quickly sketch simple 'faces' with eyebrows, mouths and eyelids in different positions, while asking what emotions students see: sadness, fear, happiness, anger, surprise etc. Have students practice this quickly on scratch paper.

### **Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)**

Students will:

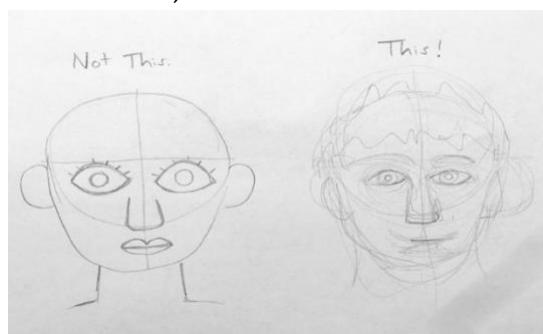
- Observe proportional elements of the face and placement of facial features.
- Draw a face based on observation, using correct proportions and placement of features.
- Use good craftsmanship.

The goal of this activity is to have students consciously move from drawing symbolically (i.e. happy faces, stick figures) to drawing with more realism. "Draw what you see!" Success shouldn't be measured by how perfect the results are, but by the effort that a student puts into following the steps. Stepping out of your 'comfort zone' is required to make the leap from childhood drawing techniques to adult drawing techniques. Adult drawers engage in quite a bit of trial and error.

Success can also be measured by the layers of lines that a student has accumulated on the drawing. There should be a scaffolding of light lines, including obvious mistakes, with a few darker lines built up indicating that the student has investigated different line-placements and made a decision about which lines to keep.

Below is a drawing that shows a successful drawing and an unsuccessful one. The unsuccessful one on the left is highly symbolic. The student spent time darkening the same lines instead of exploring different line placements that might 'mess up' or change the drawing. This reveals that the student wasn't truly observing a face.

The successful drawing, on the other hand, is a mess of exploratory lines. The student has taken the risk of messing up in order to do that exploration. It's always easier to add lines to 'mistakes' and then erase the mistakes late, than to erase first and re draw with no guideline of what not to do.

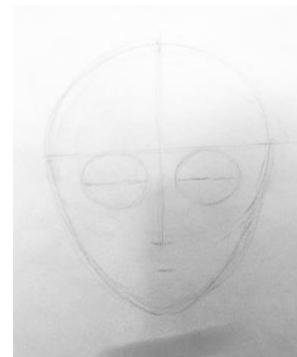
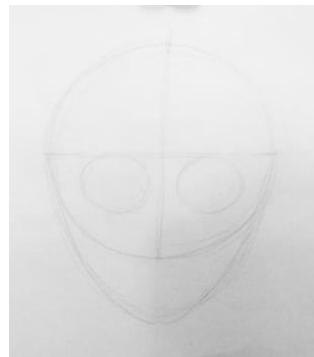
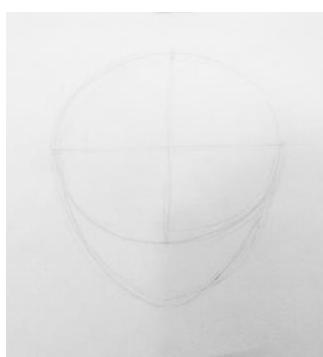


## Instructions for Lesson

1. **Demonstrate**, using the overhead projector, the pencil grip for drawing, by setting the pencil down and picking it up from the top, with the index finger balanced near the point. This prevents the hand from dragging across the drawing, and prevents the student from bearing down too hard. It makes lines loose and wiggly – and that's good! Allow students to practice doodling this way on scratch paper.
2. **Demonstrate** how to lightly draw a circle. It is important to draw lightly because the initial lines are just scaffolding for the final drawing. Use a whole-hand circular movement, going around and around until a good circle appears. Unneeded lines will either be erased or redrawn as the drawing progresses. Don't erase anything yet: allow lines to build up.
3. **Have** students follow your demonstration, step by step.

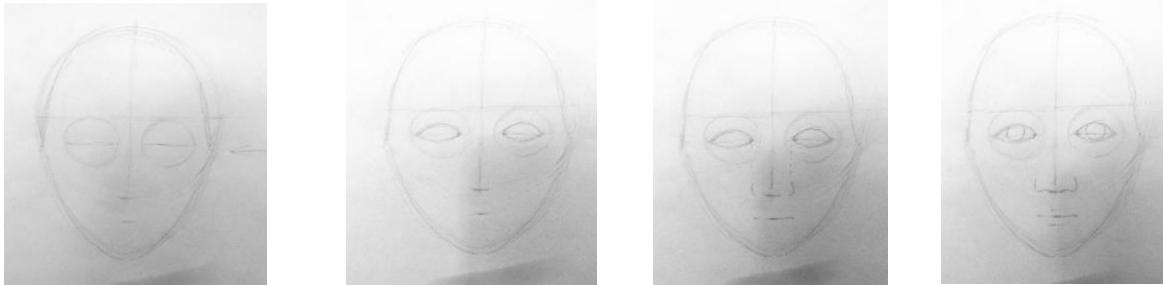


4. Lightly draw lines bisecting the circle horizontally and vertically. Then, starting from the points where the horizontal line meets the circle, draw a curve below the circle that makes the overall shape look like an egg. Proportionally, this extension of the circle should be a little less than half the width of the circle.



5. Lightly sketch in circles for eye sockets. The tops of the circles should just touch the horizontal line.
6. Where the bottom of the circle meets the vertical line is where, proportionally, the bottom of the nose will be. Erase the bottom half of the circle, except for a small mark where it meets the line.

7. Lightly draw horizontal lines through the eye-socket circles. Halfway between the nose-mark and the chin, add another horizontal mark. This is the line where the lips meet.
8. Look at the shape of the face. The widest point should be the cheekbones – at either end of the horizontal line that runs through the eyes. Make the head narrower above that point.

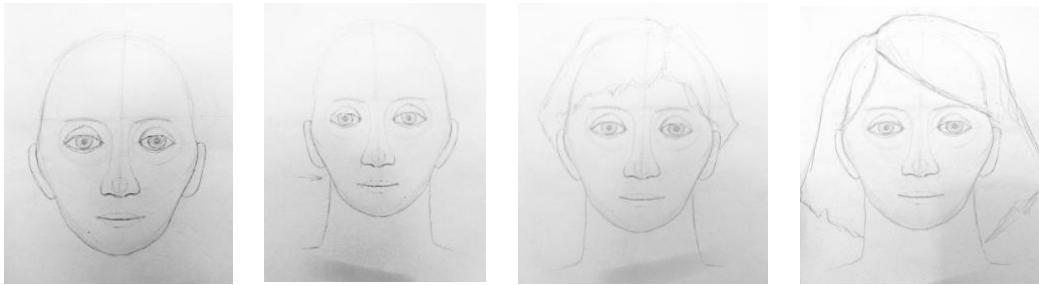


9. Now open the eyes! Draw an almond shape around each eye-socket line. In between the two eyes, proportionally, there should be just about enough space for an imaginary third eye.
10. Now the nose: The bottom of the nose is proportionally as wide as the space between the eyes. (Below there are dotted lines to indicate this placement. You don't have to do this with students.) Draw two curves to indicate the sides of the nostrils. Then extend the line where the lips meet to be about as wide as the nose.
11. Add pupils to the eyes. When looking straight forward, the pupils are overlapped by the top eyelid, but not the bottom. Add one horizontal mark above where the lips meet, and another below, to mark the top and bottom of the lips.
12. The line where the lips meet can be darkened and extended a little, and curled upwards at the ends – just a little! – to make a hint of a smile. The marks indicating the top and bottom of the lips can be connected to the ends of that line. Lips are tricky and can be kept half drawn if it helps the overall portrait.



13. Darken the edges of the eyes, and add arches above and below the eyes to indicate eyelids. The top eyelids are larger than the lower ones. Eyelashes can accentuate the lids.
14. Now look at the shape of the face again. There are two places where the bones of the skull add shape to the face: the cheekbones, and the jaw. Experiment with adding gentle curves bulging outward at the edges of the face below the eyes and mouth.

15. Proportionally, **ears** begin right about at the corners of the eyes, and stretch downward to about the bottom of the nose. From the front, ears don't stick out very far.



16. The neck is almost as wide as the head! It starts just below where the ears meet the head.
17. Hair comes in many shapes and textures. The best way to draw it is to treat it as a solid shape that sits on and around the head. Do not draw individual hairs, except near the edges. The hair will cover some or all of the forehead, extend outward into space, and can hang over ears and eyes.
18. One advantage of drawing lightly is that it lets you experiment with hair styles. Here, I have erased my first hair style and drawn in another
19. To finish, darken the most important features: eyes, underside of the nose, the line between the lips, and the edges of the face and hair. Light hatching can be used to add some shading, which shows that the face has volume. Where the shadows go depends on where the light is, but in general you will want to shade the eye-sockets between the eye and eyebrow, under the nose, upper lip, the space directly below the lower lip, the neck and underside of the hair.



## References and Attributions

Lesson and drawings by Michelle Clay. Special thanks to Nicholas Palermo at the Rhode Island School of Design. YouTube: [Basics #60-Anyone can draw from observations with these steps \(charcoal drawing\)](#).

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## **Notes for Educators**

### **21st Century Thinking Skills**

Thinking flexibly, persisting, listening with empathy, taking responsible risks, reflecting, observing, making connections, visualizing, sequencing, comparing/contrasting, determining main idea, finding evidence, determining point of view, decision making, evaluating.

### **WA State Learning Standards**

(VA:Cr1.2.5) a. Identify and demonstrate diverse methods of artistic investigation to choose an approach for beginning a work of art. This happens when discussing the 2 methods of drawing: the child's method of using simplified symbols of the subject vs the adult's method of observing the subject and drawing what is seen.

(VA:Cr2.1.5) a. Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.

(VA:Cr2.2.5) a. Demonstrate quality craftsmanship through care for and use of materials, tools, and equipment.

(VA:Cr2.3.5) a. Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.

(VA:Cr3.1.5) a. Create artist statements using art vocabulary to describe personal choices in art-making.

(VA:Re7.1.5) a. Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.

(VA:Re8.1.5) a. Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

### **Arts Integration Opportunities**

Science: When observing examples from science, record drawings in a notebook along with observable facts, like a naturalist's logbook or diary.

Writing: Write a biography of the subject of the portrait. Write a personal response to the act of changing drawing methods from using symbolism to relying on observation.

Spelling: All vocabulary words used.

Math: find relationships between the measurements used when placing facial features within a face shape.