

Jane Austen (1775–1817) is one of the most famous of all English novelists, and today her novels are more popular than ever, with several recently adapted as Hollywood movies. But we do not have many records of what she looked like. For a long time, the only accepted image of Austen was an amateur sketch of an adult Austen made by her sister Cassandra. However, recently a professionally painted, full-length portrait of a teenage girl owned by a member of the Austen family has come up for sale. Although the professional painting is not titled Jane Austen, there are good reasons to believe she is the subject. First, in 1882, several decades after Austen's death, Austen's family gave permission to use the portrait as an illustration in an edition of her letters. Austen's family clearly recognized it as a portrait of the author. So, for over a century now, the Austen family itself has endorsed the claim that the girl in the portrait is Jane Austen. Second, the face in the portrait clearly resembles the one in Cassandra's sketch, which we know depicts Austen. Though somewhat amateurish, the sketch communicates definite details about Austen's face. Even though the Cassandra sketch is of an adult Jane Austen, the features are still similar to those of the teenage girl in the painting. The eyebrows, nose, mouth, and overall shape of the face are very much like those in the full-length portrait. Third, although the painting is unsigned and undated, there is evidence that it was painted when Austen was a teenager. The style links it to Ozias Humphrey, a society portrait painter who was the kind of professional the wealthy Austen family would hire. Humphrey was active in the late 1780s and early 1790s, exactly the period when Jane Austen was the age of the girl in the painting.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. The evidence linking this portrait to Jane Austen is not at all convincing. Sure, the painting has long been somewhat loosely connected to Austen's extended family and their descendants, but this hardly proves it's a portrait of Jane Austen as a teenager. The reading's arguments that the portrait is of Austen are questionable at best. First, when the portrait was authorized for use in the 1882 publication of her letters, Jane Austen had been dead for almost 70 years [make sure to pronounce "seventy" distinctly]. So the family members who asserted that the painting was Jane had never actually seen her themselves. They couldn't have known for certain if the portrait was of Austen or not. Second, the portrait could very well be that of a relative of Austen's, a fact that would explain the resemblance between its subject and that of Cassandra's sketch. The extended Austen family was very large, and many of Jane Austen's female cousins were teenagers in the relevant period, or had children who were teenagers. And some of these teenage girls could have resembled Jane Austen. In fact, many experts believe that the true subject of the portrait was one of those relatives, Mary Ann Campion, who was a distant niece of Austen's.

Third, the painting has been attributed to Humphrey only because of the style, but other evidence points to a later date. A stamp on the back of the picture indicates that the blank canvas, you know, the actual piece of cloth on which the picture was painted, was sold by a man named William Legg. Records show that William Legg did not sell canvasses in London when Jane Austen was a teenager. He only started selling canvasses when she was 27 years old. So, it looks like the

canvas was used for the painting at a time when Austen was clearly older than the girl in the portrait.

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they respond to the specific arguments made in the reading passage.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is better to have broad knowledge of many academic subjects than to specialize in one specific subject. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.