

Grades 6-8
LEARNING GUIDE

EXPLORING ANCIENT LIFE THROUGH MUMMY PORTRAITS

Getty





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FEATURED ART OBJECT

Mummy Portrait of a Woman



Object Name: [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#)
Date Created: 100 CE
Place Created: Egypt
Culture: Romano-Egyptian
Material: Encaustic on linden wood; gilt; linen
Maker: Attributed to the Isidora Master
Dimensions: 48 × 36 × 12.8 cm
(18 7/8 × 14 3/16 × 5 1/16 in.)
Getty Museum

This portrait shows a wealthy woman who lived in Egypt during a time when the land was part of the Roman Empire. Her curly hairstyle, braids, and bun were popular during the rule of the Roman emperor **Trajan** around 100 CE. The name “Isidora” is painted on her right shoulder in ancient Greek. The Greeks had ruled Egypt for 300 years before the Romans took over and by Isidora’s time, the Romans had been in control for well over 100 years. She may have identified herself as an Egyptian, a Roman citizen, and a person of Greek origin, all at once.

People of different cultural backgrounds in Egypt shared social, artistic, and religious practices. In Roman times, many people still practiced the long tradition of **mummification**.

Trajan

Roman emperor who ruled from 98-117 CE and expanded the Roman Empire.

Mummification

Process of preserving a body by drying it. The Egyptians removed internal organs and put natron, a natural mineral mixture, on and inside the body. This absorbed moisture and prevented decay.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

When Isidora died, she was mummified and wrapped in strips of linen cloth. Her portrait was painted on a wooden panel and placed over her face. Her body was wrapped in a red shroud (burial sheet), leaving the portrait visible. Her clothing was painted on the shroud, but most of the shroud is broken away. Faint traces of color are visible above the break on the right side. This suggests that her arms were crossed and she once held a rose petal wreath in her right hand. Other women from this area who were buried in red shrouds held such wreaths in this position.

Many details identify Isidora as a person with wealth and status. The portrait itself is of high quality, carefully painted with tinted wax (**encaustic**) on an imported wooden panel. Her jewelry is of gold, amethyst, emeralds, and

Encaustic

Technique of painting using colored pigments mixed with wax. The waxy mixture was worked with a tiny spatula.



FEATURED ART OBJECT

pearls. Her clothing is Roman and expensive, including a lavender cloak. The stripes on her cloak are symbols of high rank. Parts of Isidora's jewelry, clothing, and shroud were **gilded** (covered with gold), including her wreath, earrings, necklace, the edges of the stripes on her cloak, and the designs on the wrappings around her face. The shroud (aside from the part painted to show her clothing) was colored with red lead, a mineral imported from Spain.

Egyptian tombs were often treated disrespectfully in the past by thieves and excavators. Burials were disturbed and mummified bodies damaged. Collectors looked for portraits, amulets, and other valuable items included within the wrappings, and often discarded the bodies. At an uncertain time, Isidora's **portrait** was removed from her wrappings with parts of the surrounding shroud still attached. Her body was lost.

Gild

To apply a thin layer of gold foil or liquid gold (gilt) to create the look of solid gold.

Portrait

Image of a person, usually the head and face. Some portraits include part of the chest or show the whole body. The image may closely resemble a person or emphasize, idealize, or invent characteristics.



VOCABULARY

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TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



Closeup of Mummy Portrait of a Woman



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

Analyze a Mummy Portrait

30
MINS

Use close observation and discussion to make informed guesses about this ancient mummy portrait of a woman.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Examine and describe an ancient work of art
- Identify visual clues and explore what they say about the subject's identity
- Listen to others' perspectives about an ancient work of art

Note for Teachers:

This activity works best as a lead-in activity **before** students read about or research the object, in order to focus specifically on what can be discovered through visual analysis.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital image of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#)
- OPTIONAL (for Explore More):
 - [Featured Art Object information](#) for Mummy Portrait of Isidora
 - Audio: [Mummy Portrait of Isidora](#)



ANALYZE & DISCUSS

DIRECTIONS:

Begin by looking closely at high resolution images of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#). Make sure to zoom in and out to notice small details. Then discuss the following questions as a class or in small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- What is a portrait?
- Describe the details you notice in this portrait.
- What can you tell about the person in the portrait? What details in the portrait give you clues?
- Can you describe this person's social status and/or wealth status? Explain.
- Why do you think this portrait was made?



ANALYZE & DISCUSS



EXPLORE MORE

Read the related [Featured Art Object information](#) and/or listen to [Audio: Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#). Discuss which details you already noticed from your visual analysis and identify four new pieces of information you learned from reading about the object and/or listening to the audio clip. Write down the four new pieces of information.

Did You Know?

In order to lessen damage, scientists today study mummies without unwrapping them, using X-rays and CAT scans.



BE A DETECTIVE

Identify Clues from Life

30
MINS

Discover how funerary portraits can give the viewer a glimpse into the personal life of the deceased.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Describe the types of details used in ancient mummy portraits that offer clues about the subject's identity

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- A printout of a high resolution image of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#) (an online image in combination with software that allows mark-ups can be used if printing is unavailable)
- [Featured Art Object information](#) for Mummy Portrait of a Woman

DIRECTIONS:

Look for clues in this ancient mummy portrait that give a glimpse into the personal life of the woman.



BE A DETECTIVE

1. Read the [Featured Art Object information](#) for Mummy Portrait of a Woman, while viewing an image of the portrait.
2. Using either a printout of Mummy Portrait of a Woman or a digital image on a computer with software that allows markups, circle and label each of the details of the portrait that tell us about the subject's identity and/or characteristics.
3. Discuss what details you circled and labeled in small groups or as a class. What does each detail tell you about the person portrayed in the portrait?

OPTIONAL:

Write a paragraph summarizing your guesses about the person in the portrait, using descriptions of visual details to support your ideas.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

Make a Self-Portrait

90
MINS

Create a self-portrait that captures how you would like to be remembered years from now.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Explain how mummy portraits were used in ancient Egypt and Rome
- Identify visual clues and explore what they tell about a person's identity
- Create a self-portrait that holds clues about your identity
- Discuss, reflect on, and describe your creative process when making your self-portrait

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital image of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#)
- High-resolution digital image of [Mummy Portrait of a Man](#)
- Drawing paper (11 x17 in. or larger) and pencil (or, digital drawing software)
- Tempera paint (optional)
- Colored pencils (optional)
- Variety of paintbrushes (optional)



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

- Hand mirror (optional)
- Assorted Beads (optional)
- Computers with drawing and slide-making software (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

Before getting started with your project, discuss the following questions with the class or in small groups:

- Look at images of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#) and [Mummy Portrait of a Man](#). How do you think the people in these portraits wished to be remembered in death?
- How would you like to be remembered in, say, 500 years? What characteristics or details about your personality, interests, and/or life would you want people of the future to know about you?
- What visual details could you include in your self-portrait to provide clues about yourself?

PLAN YOUR PROJECT:

1. Make a list of three to five characteristics about yourself that you would like to include in your self-portrait.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY

2. Decide how to communicate these characteristics using visual clues.

Make notes about what details you will include in your self-portrait.

3. Plan what materials you will use. Will this be a drawing? Painting? Will you do it digitally using drawing software?

MAKE A SELF-PORTRAIT:

1. Use large drawing paper (11" x 17" or larger) to sketch the outlines of your self-portrait using a photo, selfie, or mirror. Alternatively, you can sketch your portrait outline digitally using drawing software.
2. Using your choice of art materials (or drawing software), fill in and decorate your portrait, adding visual details that provide clues about how you would like to be remembered 500 years from now. You could use colored pencils, paint, beads, and/or any other materials that you have available.
3. Make a small label to accompany your self-portrait using a piece of paper or an index card. Write a short description of the characteristics about you that you captured in your self-portrait. If you are making a digital drawing, you can make a digital slide as your label.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY



EXPLORE MORE

- Present your self-portrait to your classmates. Discuss the details that you included in your label.
- Make a class gallery of all the self-portraits along with their accompanying labels. Then walk around to view the gallery.
- Discuss the following questions to reflect on the creative process:
 - What characteristics did you choose to include in your self-portrait?
 - What part of making your self-portrait did you enjoy the most? Why?



MAKE COMPARISONS

Comparing Mummy Portraits

45
MINS

Chart similarities and differences between two mummy portraits made at different times.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

- Compare and contrast two related ancient works of art
- Describe the stylistic choices made by two ancient artists
- Listen to others' interpretations of an ancient works of art
- Describe the types of details used in ancient mummy portraits that tell you about the person

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- High-resolution digital images of [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#) (Isidora) and a different [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#)
 - Compare and Contrast Graphic Organizer (pg. 17)
- Optional: a high-resolution image of [Mummy Portrait of a Man](#)



MAKE COMPARISONS

DIRECTIONS:

1. Using a Smartboard or individual computer/tablet screens, look at high-resolution images of two mummy portraits made at different times: and [Mummy Portrait of a Woman](#).
2. Using a Compare and Contrast Graphic Organizer (pg. 17) to note your findings, compare these two portraits, considering style, details, how they were made and messaging.
Consider the following questions:
 - a. What style did the artist use to make this portrait (abstract, naturalistic, idealistic, realistic)?
 - b. What details does each portrait include to tell you about the person depicted? Write down nouns and adjectives to describe each detail.
 - c. Based on the details you noticed, what words do you imagine the person would have used to describe themselves?
3. In small groups, discuss your findings. Did you and your classmates have different interpretations of the portraits? If so, what were some of the differences?



EXPLORE MORE

For even more comparisons, you can add a third mummy portrait to this compare-and-contrast activity. Recommended portrait: [Mummy Portrait of a Man](#)



HANDOUT

Compare and Contrast

Object #1 _____

Object #2 _____

How are the objects alike?

How are the objects different?



RELATED LINKS

- [Faces of Roman Egypt](#) online exhibition from Getty + Google Arts and Culture
- [Power in a Mummy Portrait](#) from Getty Museum
- [Unlocking the Secrets of Ancient Egyptian Funerary Portraits through Modern Technology](#) from Getty Museum
- Podcast: [Getty Conservator Marie Svoboda discusses Egyptian Mummy Portraits](#) (30 min.)
- Video on the [Mummy of Herakleides](#) that covers materials used in mummy portraits
- Video about [Ancient Roman makeup for women](#) inspired by the portrait of Isidora, from Getty Museum
- [Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt](#) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art discusses materials used to make the portraits
- Videos on [Roman Period mummy portraits](#) from the Fitzwilliam Museum



STANDARDS

National Core Arts Standards:

- 6.VA:Cr3** Reflect on whether personal artwork conveys the intended meaning and revise accordingly.
- 6.VA:Re7.1** Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.
- 6.VA:Cn11** Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

- SL.6.1.A** Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- SL.6.1.C** Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.
- SL6.2** Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
- SL.6.4** Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- SL.6.5** Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.



STANDARDS

RI.6.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

W.6.1A Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.

W.6.1B Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

W.6.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

California Social Studies Standards:

6.2.5 Discuss the main features of Egyptian art and architecture.