**Portrait detectives**

Getting your portrait painted has always been quite expensive. Most of the time only important or rich people have had their portraits painted. Omai was important because he was the first Pacific islander to visit Britain: so his portrait was painted. William was not important or rich enough to be painted.

Portraits hold clues about the people they show. They often include objects and gestures that tell us about the person’s position, work, interests and so on.

**Activity** Portrait detectives

Choose a portrait and, as a whole class, describe the person. Use the Detective questions activity sheet as a starting point. Come up with as many descriptive words as possible.

Now it is time to do some detective work. Come up with some ideas about who this person is as a whole class. Encourage pupils to be creative but ask them to back up their ideas with a reason. You could start the discussion by clarifying the meaning and reason for choosing certain describing words.

If you wish, you could then read out the official museum description of the painting and discuss whether the two interpretations match.

**Extensions and adaptations**

**Draw your own explorer portrait**

Working in pairs, pupils draw or paint portraits of each other as explorers. What objects, gestures and backgrounds would they choose to tell people about where they have explored? You could focus on exploring other places on Earth or you could let their imaginations run wild exploring fantastical new worlds.

**Detective tool-kit**

As a class, come up with a list of useful questions you can ask when looking at a painting. Discuss what sort of questions you can definitely answer and what you have to guess.

**What were they really thinking?**

Another aspect of portrait painting to consider is how much control the sitters had over how they looked in their portraits. Was the person in the portrait really happy, or did they just want people to think they were?

**Learning outcomes**

Pupils will be able to

* describe a painting to others
* explain that there are clues in paintings

**Curriculum links**

Historical enquiry

4a. Pupils should be taught how to find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, including ICT-based sources (for example, documents, printed sources, CD-ROMS, databases, pictures and photographs, music, artefacts, historic buildings and visits to museums, galleries and sites)