



“The Secrets of the Paintings” Teacher Guide



SEASON 4 EPISODE 1

The Weird Sisters/The Secrets of the Paintings

by Eloy, age 7, New Mexico

Overview

In “Secrets of the Paintings,” by a kid from New Mexico named Eloy, some museum visitors find out that famous paintings like the Mona Lisa can *talk*! In this lesson, students will pick a portrait from an online museum gallery, observe details about the portrait, then infer what kinds of character traits the portrait subject might have based on those observations. Using these inferences, they will then write a speech imagining what that portrait would say if it could talk.

Age Group

Best for 3-5th grade readers and writers; can be done with younger students using a grade-appropriate Character Traits list.

Common Core Standards

For simplicity, here are relevant 4th grade standards; similar 3rd and 5th grade standards apply.

1. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3.b](#) Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
2. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9.a](#) Apply *grade 4 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., “Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions].”).
3. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1](#) Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
4. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2](#) Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Use the term *portrait* to describe a picture of a person
- Observe details in a portrait and use them to Infer character traits associated with it
- Show understanding by writing a speech based on inferred character traits

Materials

1. Story Pirates Podcast: Season 4 Episode 1 (story at 19:40-27:30)
2. List of Character Traits for Reference (included below)
3. Online Portrait Galleries to reference:
 - [National Portrait Gallery](#)
 - [National Portrait Gallery: TIME Collection](#)
 - [Portraits from The Louvre](#)
 - [National Portrait Gallery London](#)
4. Writer’s Notebook or other place to write down ideas and speeches

Activity Steps

1. Intro:

Introduce the lesson to your students with a short discussion.

- People have been getting their pictures painted for hundreds of years! Before we had film and cameras, it was the only way to have a picture of someone. A painting or picture of a person is called a *portrait*. Many *portraits* are in museums full of art, and by looking at them we can *observe* what people were like in the past.
- Let's listen to a story from the Story Pirates Podcast called "Secrets of the Paintings," by a kid from New Mexico named Eloy. As you listen, see if you can identify where they meet some portraits, and if there is anything unusual about them!

2. Play the Story:

"Secrets of the Paintings," Story Pirates Podcast: Season 4 Episode 1. Listen to the whole thing, or jump to 19:40 for the intro to this story, which runs to 27:30.

3. Check for Understanding:

After listening, you might ask your students some questions.

- What were some of the portraits that the character met in the story?
 - *Mona Lisa, George Washington, Bluegrass Band, Rock Stars*
- What was unusual about the portraits? Did anything surprise you?
 - *They could talk! They did things like play music and train people to be soldiers, and they could pull people into the paintings!*
- What Character Traits did the paintings have?
 - *Mona Lisa was friendly, George Washington was determined*

4. MiniLesson: Observe, Infer, Show

Now we are going to look at some portraits and think about what we think they might say if they could talk! We will do this in three steps:

- **Observe:** we will look at the painting and say what we see
- **Infer:** we will think about what the things we see might tell us about the person, and use the things we have observed as clues to make inferences about character traits they might display if they could talk
- **Show:** we will show the character traits we think the person would have based on our inferences by writing what we think they would say if they could talk

5. Group Practice: "We Do"

Once you've gone over the steps of the lesson, you can move on to group practice. Pick out one of the paintings to

use as an example. The Mona Lisa is a fun one because it is in the story, is very famous, and people always wonder why she is smiling!

- **Observe:** Write down some things you observe in the painting:
 - *She is wearing all black, she is smiling in a strange way, her hands are crossed in front of her, she has curly hair with a veil over it, there is an interesting landscape behind her with a river and mountains, etc.*
- **Infer:** Write down some things you infer about what the person would be like in real life. Inferring is using things you observe as clues to draw conclusions. You can use the Character Traits list to link what you observed to infer what kinds of character traits the person would display if they were talking to us. (You can use a different character traits list if you'd prefer.) Story Pirates encourage authors to be creative and a little weird! You can let student imaginations run wild, as long as they are basing their inferences on things in the portrait.
 - *Her smile might mean she is amiable, OR maybe it means she is sly and is hiding something! OR Maybe since she lives in a place that has mountains and rivers, she is adventurous!*
- **Show:** Using one or more character traits, write a short speech in the voice of the portrait that reveals that trait. What kinds of words would a character with that trait use? What would a character DO that would show that trait? You can write a speech as a group using a speech bubble, or on a separate sheet of paper/screen. Below is an example for reference:
 - *It's me, sly Mona Lisa! I bet you're wondering why I'm smiling....well....well... I'm not gonna tell you. I could be smiling because I live in this beautiful Italian countryside. It could be because I have beautiful curly hair. It could be something else totally secret that only I know. I would tell you, but I'm SLY, so you'll just have to guess!*

6. Independent Practice: “You Do”

- Students will follow the same steps as above to complete their own portrait speech
- Students can pick out a portrait at any of the art museum websites listed above in Materials
- **Observe:** Then, students should write down in their Writer's Notebook or other place what they Observe in the painting: What do you notice?
- **Infer:** Next, students should write down what they Infer about the person in the painting, using the Character Trait list as reference, or another list if you prefer
- **Show:** Finally, students can write a speech that shows the person in the portrait displaying that character trait! They can print out the portrait and use a speech bubble, or simply write the speech in the same place they made their observations and inferences.

7. Sharing:

- Students can show the picture of the portrait they picked and then read their speeches.
- If you've picked out a few portraits for students to choose from, you could even have students read their speech and have the other students guess what painting is speaking and what character traits they observed in the speech!

List of Character Traits

- **Helpful:** describes someone who likes to help others
- **Pleasant:** describes someone who is easy to hang out with
- **Courteous:** describes someone with good manners
- **Joyful:** describes someone who is upbeat and has a big smile on their face
- **Content:** describes someone who looks like they have what they need, and are happy
- **Brilliant:** describes someone who is really smart and it shows
- **Reliable:** describes someone you could trust to keep their word and do what they say
- **Adventurous:** describes someone who likes adventure and trying new things
- **Determined:** describes someone who is not likely to give up on what they want
- **Amiable:** describes someone who is friendly
- **Glamorous:** describes someone who lives a fancy life
- **Bold:** describes someone who is brave and unafraid of obstacles
- **Loyal:** describes someone who always helps their friends
- **Bewildered:** describes someone who looks confused
- **Gloomy:** describes someone who looks like they would be sad all the time
- **Dishonest:** describes someone who would not tell the truth
- **Selfish:** describes someone who only thinks of themselves
- **Sly:** describes someone who is sneaky and might be hiding something
- **Rigid:** describes someone who is a stick in the mud and doesn't like fun
- **Nervous:** describes someone who is worried and anxious about something
- **Cruel:** describes someone who likes to be mean to others
- **Bashful:** describes someone who is shy around other people