Exploring and Striking a Pose!

Investigate the Work of Art!

1. How would the tone of both of these photographs change if the subjects were posed differently? What if the subjects had been sitting rather than standing?

2. Why would a photographer capture life as it happens and not only have people sit for portraits?

3. Do you take photographs of the world around you and your community? What do you like to take pictures of?

Let’s Make Some Art!

Gather These Art Materials

- Sidewalk chalk
- Smartphone or camera if you want to document your work of art!

Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

A silhouette is the outline of a person or object. For this project, your partner (the “sitter”) will strike a pose for you (the “photographer”) and you will capture their pose by outlining their silhouette using chalk.

1. First, find an area of concrete outdoors, such as a sidewalk or driveway. This project works best on sunny days, especially during “golden hour,” the period of daytime shortly after sunrise or before sunset, during which daylight is softer than when the sun is higher in the sky.

2. Ask a partner to “sit” for a shadow portrait. You can direct them to pose with a command (for example: “Pose confidently!”), or let your partner decide on their own pose.

3. Use your chalk to outline their posed silhouette on the concrete. Make the outline thick so you can see the shape of their pose clearly.

4. When happy with the outline, your partner can release the pose.

5. Fill in the outlined portrait with your second color of chalk. You have now captured their pose by outlining their silhouette using chalk.

6. You can make as many of these chalk portraits as you like, as long as the sun is out. You can even make your silhouette shapes interact with each other by having your partner pose for you again next to their last shape (see the example above).

7. Once your work is complete, you can document your chalk artwork by taking a photograph.

To view a hi-res images of these works, visit the MFAH Collection online database here and here.

Inspired by the street photography of Dawoud Bey, this activity will guide you in exploring modern and contemporary portraits and the art of posing in portraits.

Dawoud Bey, Brooklyn, NY, 1988, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of John S. Parsley and Nancy Nolan Parsley, 2017.142. © Dawoud Bey


Generous support provided by:

- The African American Art Advisory Association (AA) at the MFAH
- Krista and Michael Dumas
- Merinda Watkins-Martin and Reginald Martin
- Nancy Powell Moore
- Joan Morgenstern

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous support from the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

Family Programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive generous support from the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous funding from the Jerold B. Katz Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; H-E-B; MD Anderson Cancer Center; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; Sharon G. Dies; Susan Vaughan Foundation; and additional generous donors.

All Learning and Interpretation programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive endowment funds provided by Louise Jarrett Moran Bequest; Caroline Wiess Law; Windgate Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; Cyvia and Melvyn Wolff; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Fondren Foundation; BMC Software, Inc.; the Wallace Foundation; the Neal Myers and Ken Black Children’s Art Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard; Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Tate; the Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation; Virginia and Ira Jackson; the Favrot Fund; CFP Foundation; Neiman Marcus Youth Arts Education; gifts in memory of John Wynne; and gifts in honor of Beth Schneider.