

# CATHERINE OPIE: IN AND AROUND HOME



## Pre-Visit Activities for High School Students

orange  
COUNTY  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

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# CATHERINE OPIE: IN AND AROUND HOME

## Pre-Visit Activities for High School Students

These pre-visit activities will help prepare your students for their museum visit to see the exhibition, Catherine Opie: In and Around Home. In and Around Home showcases the artist's renowned images alongside rarely seen works that document the people, places, and identities in our culture, including works ranging from her earliest photographs taken in the mid-1980s to her most recent series, In and Around Home, completed in 2005.

Your museum visit and pre-visit activities support interdisciplinary learning by connecting Visual Arts and Language Arts, and address the California State Content Standards in the Visual Arts.

- 1.0 Artistic Perception
- 2.0 Creative Expression
- 3.0 Historical and Cultural Content
- 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
- 5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Feel free to adapt these activities according to your classroom needs.

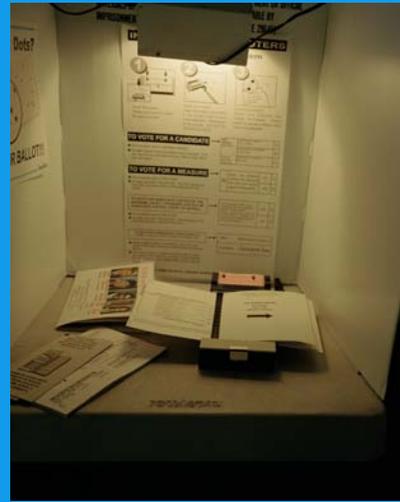
## Learning Objectives:

Students will view the images from the exhibit Catherine Opie: In and Around Home and analyze self-portraiture's connection to personal identity, culture, and the world around them. Students will discover how to use symbols to represent their own identities to others.

Catherine Opie, Me and Nika by Julie, 2005



Catherine Opie, Self Portrait, November 2, 2004, 2004



## Featured Artworks:

Catherine Opie, Me and Nika by Julie, 2005

Catherine Opie, Self Portrait, November 2, 2004, 2004

## Materials:

- Transparencies of Me and Nika by Julie and Self Portrait, November 2, 2004
- Pen and paper for ideas
- Magazines and newspapers reporting on current events
- Glue sticks or double-sided tape
- Sturdy surface, such as cardstock, to support a collage

## Discuss:

Tell students that they will visit the Orange County Museum of Art to view the exhibition Catherine Opie: In and Around Home. Catherine Opie's primary subject matter for her photography is the portrait. Ask students to define the term, **portrait**. Ask students to describe some portraits they are familiar with. Who or what are these portraits of? What imagery do you typically find in a portrait?

Traditionally, a portrait is an image of an individual person; a **likeness**. Catherine Opie also photographs **self-portraits**. Ask students to define the term, **self-portrait**.

A **self-portrait** is traditionally defined as a portrait of oneself by oneself. However, the sole purpose of a self-portrait is not always to depict one's own image. In contemporary art, the definition of the self-portrait goes beyond the actual physical representation of an artist. A self-portrait can be any picture in which the artists' presence can be detected. Under this definition, many of the photographs included in this exhibition's title series, In and Around Home, could be considered self-portraits because the artist, although not represented figuratively, reveals to the viewer her world and the things that are important to her.

- Why do you think artists choose to create self-portraits?
- What imagery should a self-portrait include?
- What should a self-portrait reveal about the person who created it?

Ask students to write a quick description of what they see, taking into account what the artist chose to include and what the artist chose to leave out. Tell students to investigate the artist's **intent**, or the ideas she may have wanted to communicate. Ask students to consider questions like: Where does it take place? What is included in the scene? Who or what is involved? When students are finished writing, ask students to share what they wrote.

Reveal the title of Self-Portrait, November 2, 2004. This self-portrait contains symbolic components. **Symbols** are images used in art to convey meaning without depicting the actual object they are representing.

- What has Opie selected to represent her?
- What objects are included in this image that help to expand our understanding of Opie?
- What does Opie reveal about herself to her audience by selecting this image for her self-portrait?
- How can Opie's self portrait, on display in a museum or gallery, affect viewers?
- Does Opie successfully tell you about herself with this photograph? Why or why not?
- Which portrait gave you a better understanding of who Catherine Opie is? Why?

# Create:

## Component Strands

### Creative Expression

2.6 Create two-dimensional works of art that addresses a social issue.

### Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.3 Prepare portfolios of original works of art for a personal narrative.

Ask students to think about the components of their own symbolic self-portrait. How will you successfully send a message to your audience about who you are without showing them a picture of yourself?

- Make a list of the activities, objects, people, traditions, food, places or other items that make you who you are.
- Write a description next to each of these items. For example, if there is a family heirloom that you feel helps make you who you are, describe a story behind how this item became important to your self-identity.
- Make clippings or make a list of the current world events that you feel impact your self-identity. You may want to look through the week's newspapers or news magazines.
- Explain in writing how these current events affect you.

Lay out the magazines, newspapers and other media in a large, centralized location. Distribute materials to each student: paper, glue, tape, etc. Using the lists they made of descriptive items and descriptive current events, have students create a collage that represents them. Using newspaper clippings, magazine clippings, and other found images, create a collage of items that represent your beliefs, personality, traditions and other aspects of yourself.

Display the collages in the classroom so students can see them. Pair up students and have each student attempt to identify the collage that belongs to their partner.

- Create 10 interview questions that will help you identify the collage that your partner created. For example, you may want to ask, “What is your favorite food?” or “what do you like to do in your spare time?”
- After the interview, if you are still stumped, ask your partner to share the descriptions they wrote of each object earlier in the lesson as a hint.
- Are you able to identify your partner’s collage? Why or why not?

Have a classroom discussion about the process of self-portraiture. What challenges did you encounter when you attempted to identify yourself with non-representational imagery, or symbols? Do you feel this was a good way to communicate to others about you? Why or why not?

Now, have a classroom discussion about identifying their classmates’ non-representational collages. What challenges did you encounter? Is it easy or difficult to learn about someone through symbols? Why?

# Write:

## Component Strands

### Aesthetic Valuing

4.5 Employ some conventions of art criticism in a written critique.

Have students evaluate the effectiveness of non-traditional self-portraits by writing a one-page art review about the portrait they were given. Have them think about the conclusions they drew from non-representational portraiture during the “Discuss” and “Create” activities. After a discussion about the collages, include responses to the following.

- Briefly describe what you see in your partner’s collage for someone who has never seen it.
- What did you learn about your partner just by looking at their collage?
- Do you think this student has successfully created a self-portrait? Why or why not?
- Is depicting yourself, without including an actual image of you, an effective way to communicate your personality to others? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary:

Portrait

Self-Portrait

Intent

Likeness

Symbol

# Who is Catherine Opie?

Catherine Opie was born in 1961 in Sandusky, Ohio. She lives and works in Los Angeles. Catherine Opie uses her camera to examine the world around her: documenting community, decoding identity and deciphering America. In elementary school she discovered the power of photography, after completing a report on photographer Lewis Hine who documented the plight of child laborers at the turn of the twentieth century. After receiving a Kodak Instamatic for her ninth birthday, she used that camera to photograph her friends and her neighborhood. Her fascination with community began with those first photos. Opie notes, "Basically what I did then, and I still do now is wander around with my camera to describe my relationship to the world and where I live."

