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**A Presidential Portrait: Andrew Jackson**

**Writer:** Jill Taylor, NCMA Educator

**Grade Level:** 8

**Related Big Picture Concepts:** Identity, Power, Communication, Perception

**Subject Areas:** Visual Arts, Social Studies

**Essential Question:** How is our perception of history shaped by primary sources?

**Abstract:** Students will examine the role of perception in interpretation of primary sources in Ralph Earl’s portrait of Andrew Jackson. In small groups, students will research periods in Jackson’s life and use gathered information to create their own portraits of Jackson that communicate facts about actual events filtered through the point of view of someone affected by Jackson.

**Duration:** 5–6 50-minute periods

**Focus Works of Art:**

[](http://68.169.57.134/sites/default/files/Earl,%20%20Andrew%20Jackson,%2052_9_12.jpg)

Ralph Eleazer Whiteside(s) Earl (American, 1785/88-1838)

***Andrew Jackson* (1767-1845), circa 1830-32**

Oil on panel

30 x 24 3/4 in. (76.2 x 62.9 cm)  
[www.artnc.org/node/295](http://www.artnc.org/node/295)

**North Carolina Standards Correlations:**

Visual Arts: 8.V.2.3, 8.CX.1.1, 8.CX.2.2, 8.CR.1.1

Social Studies: 8.H.1.2, 8.H.1.3, 8.H.2.1, 8.H.3.3

**Student Learning Objectives:**

* Students will discuss a work of art and conduct group research to:
  + learn about the life and impact of Andrew Jackson within the context of three time periods: the Revolutionary War, the Constitutional period, and the early 19th century.
  + interpret various historical perspectives through primary and secondary sources.
* Students will develop and use cooperative learning skills to create a group portrait that uses artistic point of view to portray the life and influence of Andrew Jackson.

**Activities:**

1. Show students Ralph E. W. Earl's portrait of Andrew Jackson. Discuss the role of primary sources of written and visual forms in understanding history. Have students describe Jackson's personality characteristics based on evidence found in the portrait. Solicit questions raised by the portrait, and consider the following.

*How do portraits convey a sense of identity?*

*What is the popular perception of Andrew Jackson—now and when he was president?*

*What adjectives would you use to describe Andrew Jackson?* (civilized or wild, serious or easygoing?)

*What details does Earl use to create your impression of Jackson?* (mourning clothes, pose, books and papers)

*Who painted the portrait, and what was his relationship to Jackson?* (Ralph E. W. Earl, a family friend who lived at the White House with Jackson and married into the family; he painted many portraits of Jackson.)

*How could the artist’s relationship with Jackson or perception of him influence the way he depicts the president?* (flattery, emphasis of the ideal over the real)  
*Is a portrait a faithful document? Why or why not?*

Discuss Andrew Jackson's life and presidency, and have students evaluate how the popular conception of "Old Hickory" may be at odds with the man presented in the portrait. (*Where does the nickname “Old Hickory” come from, and how does it reflect perceptions of Jackson? How does the portrait play into this perception or contradict it?*)

1. Break the class into smaller groups to research the following periods in the life of Andrew Jackson and to evaluate how these periods reflect events and issues in North Carolina history. Consider how different people might have perceived Andrew Jackson.  
    American Revolution  
    Tennessee pioneer days  
    War of 1812  
    1824 and 1828 presidential campaigns  
    Presidency: exploration of policies that affected North Carolina
2. Keeping students in their small groups, have them collaborate on a [portrait](JavaScript:OpenGlossaryWindow(%2270%22)) of Andrew Jackson that reflects their assigned time. Ask them to select an artistic persona for their depiction that highlights a specific point of view, or perception, of Jackson. For example, their artistic point of view could be that of a soldier who served under Jackson in the War of 1812 or that of a Cherokee Indian affected by the Indian Removal Act. In addition, have students consider Jackson's age, his clothing, and his environment to [depict](JavaScript:OpenGlossaryWindow(%2215%22)) Jackson accurately at this period. Groups should include significant objects that symbolize events or issues in Jackson's life. Portraits can be drawn or created using computer programs such as Adobe Photoshop. Groups should complete the Andrew Jackson [Portrait](JavaScript:OpenGlossaryWindow(%2270%22)) Worksheet as a written complement to their portrait.
3. Bring students back together as a class. Have groups show their portraits of Andrew Jackson to the class without giving preliminary explanation. The rest of the class will look for visual clues in the portrait to interpret the work and will pose questions to the group. Guide the discussion by providing conversation subjects and questions covering the style of the depiction, artist point of view, and portrait details (such as those used in Step 1). Give students the Andrew Jackson Portrait Worksheet to use as a guide for discussion. The presenting group will confirm or deny interpretation through the answers they give to questions.
4. Display the portraits in chronological order to create a class timeline of Andrew Jackson's life. Use the portraits as a basis for discussing his life as a whole and how he affected North Carolina and United States history. Students may compare their portraits of Jackson to others created during his lifetime to further explore the role of perception in understanding primary and secondary sources.

**Assessments:**

* Group research, the portrait, and the worksheet may be used to assess students’ understanding of one of the periods in the life of Andrew Jackson.
  + The group portrait should be recognizable and include symbols relevant to the subject, time period, and point of view that students select.
  + The worksheet answers should show evidence of the group’s planning and decision-making process within the context of their research.
* Class discussion and the worksheet will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of portraits in communicating information about people, history, and significant events.
  + Students’ questions and responses to the Earl portrait and the student-created portraits will demonstrate their ability to interpret source material.
  + The worksheet explanations will be compared to the portraits to evaluate the effectiveness of the work in portraying information and a point of view.

**Resources:**

Vocabulary:

portrait

identity

primary source

Materials:

art supplies (paper, marker, etc.) or computer imaging program

Links:

Andrew Jackson on the Web

<http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/jackson/index.html>

Andrew Jackson Biography

<http://ncpedia.org/biography/jackson-andrew>

Andrew Jackson Historic Site

<http://www.thehermitage.com/> Andrew Jackson Portrait Worksheet

Biographical period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Andrew Jackson period details:

Approximate age:

Location (residence and/or site of events):

Occupation:

List events from this period and explain their significance:

Artistic Point of View

Who is the artist, or what group of people does the artist represent?

What is the artist’s relationship to Andrew Jackson?

How is it shown in the portrait?

Portrait Details

How is Jackson’s age shown?

Explain how Jackson’s clothes are appropriate to the period or his personality.

Cite examples of symbolic objects used and what they represent.

Describe challenges in presenting Jackson at this period of his life. Do you consider the portrait objective or subjective, positive or negative?