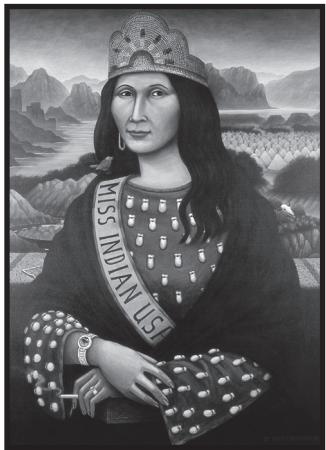




LET'S LOOK & LEARN

BEYOND THE BEADS AND FEATHERS: PORTRAIT OF A CULTURE

"To be an artist is to seek the truth." - David Bradley



NATIONAL STANDARDS

The activities in this educational resource address the following National Standards for Arts Education, Visual Art Content Standards:

1. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.
2. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
3. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of [the students'] work and the work of others.

Pow-Wow Princess in the Process of Acculturation

David P. Bradley, 1990
acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36"
Museum Purchase

ABOUT THE ART

This contemporary painting is a portrait of a young American Indian woman who has been crowned a Pow-Wow Princess. The painting is a parody of the "Mona Lisa" with visual references to Leonardo da Vinci's portrait, pop culture, and American Indian traditions. As with most of Bradley's works, this is a narrative painting that tells a story using images that have meaning. It is a symbolic portrait or **personification** of a culture, which presents a truth behind Indian stereotypes and a new perspective on how acculturation has affected the traditional American Indian culture.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

David Bradley (b. 1954) is a contemporary artist who was born in Eureka, California, and grew up in both Minneapolis and the north woods near the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota. As a child living in Minneapolis, the social services system split up his family, and Bradley was sent to live with foster families. At age 16, he fought his way out of the system, lived on his own, and eventually was reunited with his family and his self-respect. He developed his narrative folk style in art out of his experiences with his own Ojibwe people and a "sense of vision" from what he describes as a transformational experience living with the Mayans of Central America.

Because of these experiences, Bradley has always felt strongly about Indian rights issues. The characters he paints are often portrayed as parodies of great works of art and characterized by meticulous attention to detail, pop-culture iconography, and American Indian political and social commentary. He uses symbolism and visual humor to make serious statements about such issues as the attempted cultural genocide of American Indians, and the American mainstream culture's general disregard for the Earth's natural resources.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Teachers: Although the curriculum in this Learning Poster is designed for older students, you are encouraged to adapt the material to your students' ages and ability levels.

In this painting, Bradley uses symbolism to present a multi-dimensional portrait of his culture and how it has been influenced by the mainstream. Let's look closely at the concepts Bradley is portraying and the images he uses to convey those concepts visually.

Parody (*Mona Lisa*)

Bradley often creates paintings that parody great works from art history. Why do you think he chose to parody Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in creating his "Princess" portrait. Can you think of other portraits from art history he might have parodied just as effectively? Do you think using humor is an effective way to communicate a message?

Art Connection

Research the artwork in the exhibition *Indian Humor*, which was organized by the National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution (view at www.conexus.edu/humor/exhibit/5.htm). Note how the artists use humor to redefine negative ideas and humorless approaches to viewing Native American cultures. Find ways you can incorporate humor and parody into your portrait.

Values (Pow-Wow Princess)

An important event at the contemporary Pow-Wow is the crowning of a Pow-Wow Princess. To be a Pow-Wow Princess or to become Miss Indian USA is a great honor. A Pow-Wow Princess has to be a good dancer and public speaker, and represent her tribe by attending and dancing at various other Pow-Wows and functions. A Pow-Wow Princess or Miss Indian USA who is chosen to represent her tribe or nation must "walk through life in a good way," carry herself with dignity, and have a good attitude. What do you think might be the criteria for choosing the homecoming or prom queen at your school? How do you think Miss America is chosen? How does this compare to the criteria for a Pow-Wow Princess?

Art Connection

Why do you think Bradley chose a Pow-Wow Princess as a symbol of his culture? Choose an image or symbol that you feel best represents the personification of the values of your culture.

Time (the wrist watch)

Two hundred years ago American Indians did not live by the clock. Instead, the "ticking of time" was measured by the heartbeat, which is symbolized by the beat of the drum. Units of time were measured by night and day, the months from new moon to new moon, and the cyclical return of the seasons.

Art Connection

How does your culture measure time today? How did your culture measure time 200 years ago? How would your life be different if you didn't live by the clock? Is time an issue in your culture? How would you symbolize the idea of time in your portrait?

Wealth (dollar bill / elk teeth)

Traditionally, American Indians did not use money to buy the things they needed. They either created what they needed from nature, traded one object for another, or gave away their goods to someone in need. The princess in the painting has several elk teeth sewn to her cape. A hunter traditionally gathered these elk teeth, which were not easy to come by, for his wife or daughter. They symbolized that the wearer was well dressed and well loved.

Art Connection

What do well-dressed people wear in your culture? What objects might one own that indicate they are wealthy or well loved? Is having money or the right clothes important in your life? How would you express that idea in your work?

Spiritual Guidance (blue bird)

According to Bradley, the blue bird on the princess' shoulder is "her advisor, kind of a guardian angel, as she moves into the future among the dominant society and the modern world."

Art Connection

How does your culture depict the idea of a guardian angel or spiritual guide? If this is an important concept in your life, use this image in your portrait.

Honesty and Respect (tobacco)

In the American Indian tradition, tobacco is a sacred herb used to show honesty and respect. Whether sealing a verbal agreement, blessing an event, asking a favor, or offering a prayer, the tobacco smoke travels ahead of the words so that honesty will be received in a kind and respectful way. To offer tobacco in this traditional way is to pay an ultimate respect to that which you are asking.

Art Connection

How does your culture seal an agreement? Ensure honest transactions? Show respect for others? Do you feel your culture is based on trust, honesty, and respect? If so, how would you symbolize those traits? If not, what image(s) would you use to express this? Parody (*Mona Lisa*)

Pop Culture Icons (*End of the Trail*)

The princess' watch has an image of *End of the Trail* on the face. It refers to a sculpture created by James Earle Fraser for San Francisco's 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. This lone figure on his weary horse is one of the most recognized symbols of the American West and has been widely reproduced in curios of popular culture. By many it is viewed as a reverent memorial to a great and valiant people. To some American Indians, however, it is viewed as a negative stereotype.

Art Connection

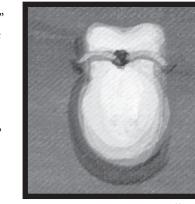
Why do you think David Bradley used this image in his painting? What images from popular culture could you use in your portrait that either misrepresent or present stereotypes of your culture?

Visual Art Production

Use the ideas and imagery you have identified to create a portrait of your culture. Follow up your art making with a class discussion of the concepts and images in your resulting portraits. Create an artist statement to describe your artistic process and intent. Collaborate with your fellow artists to create an exhibition of your work in your school and/or community.



wrist watch / *End of the Trail*



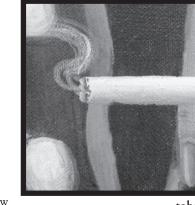
elk tooth



dollar bill



blue bird



tobacco

VOCABULARY

ACCULTURATION

The process of adoption, by one cultural group, of the customs, traits, traditions, and values of another group with which it has been brought into contact.

Acculturation can be distinguished from assimilation because it is one sided: one group adapts its culture to another, which dominates it economically, politically, and socially, rather than a merger of identities taking place.

CULTURE

The predominating behavior patterns, creative endeavors, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought of a particular group, organization, or society.

PARODY

A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an artwork for comic effect or ridicule.

PERSONIFICATION

Representation of an idea or abstraction as a person or by the human form (e.g., "Uncle Sam" and "Lady Liberty").

SYMBOLISM

The practice of representing ideas by means of attributing significance to objects, events, or relationships. For instance, a dog might represent fidelity, a ring marriage, or a rabbit's foot luck.

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