

Nature Portraits

Background:



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Flora*, 1588

Now that the weather is getting better and trees and flowers are in bloom, many of us are eager to get outside. It's good to get fresh air and walk around in nature. One fun exercise is to look closely at buds, flowers, grasses, leaves, small stones, twigs etc. Collect a few in a pail or bag. If you get to the shoreline, you might find shells or bits of beach glass. When you get back home, arrange your nature treasures carefully. Try looking at them with "Leonardo" eyes: Leonardo da Vinci was a great artist/scientist who learned a lot by observing. Notice how many petals an iris has or how one seed pod differs from another. Gently touch the edges of an oyster shell. Wonder about the veins of a leaf. Think about what may have caused the spots on a leaf you found on the ground.

Many artists have spent their careers drawing and painting flowers and fruit. An Italian artist named Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who was born about 500 years ago, took painting fruit, vegetables and flowers one step further: he created portrait heads from them! Did you ever think that a pear could be a nose or grapes would make fun hair?

Read on for how to create your own nature portraits without having to get out markers or paint!



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Rudolf Painted as Vertumnus*, 1590-1



Supplies: Construction paper, pencil, scissors, assorted nature objects such as flowers, leaves, seed pods, grasses, fruit, small stones, sea shells etc. Smartphone or camera, printer, office paper

Procedure: Draw a large egg-shape for the face on a piece of construction paper. Cut it out. Experiment with arranging your objects on the face. Add details such as eyes, eyebrows, hair, ears, noses, nostrils, mustaches, beards, jewelry, etc.

Here's a fun "portrait" fact that may surprise you: Did you know that a person's eyes are *halfway* down their face? Most people place the eyes up too high because they know that the eyes are above all the other facial features, but people have big brains that take up a lot of space behind their foreheads. Take a look in the mirror or look at a family member to notice this!

Don't bother gluing down your objects when you have made a portrait that you like: flowers, leaves and fruit will dry out or rot. Instead, take a picture of your face and then scramble up your objects to make a new face. Take a new picture.

Let everyone in the family in on the fun. Can you make "portraits" of each other? How could you make curly hair? A small mouth? Can you take turns working on the same face? Work collaboratively? See how many variations you can make, being sure to take a picture of each finished portrait. Later, you can print out your pictures and assemble them into a book. You might want to make a cover for your book. Think of a good title: How does *Facebook* sound?

Next week, we'll experiment some more with faces and give directions for making a simple book to mount your pictures in.