
Art Masterpiece: The Torn Hat (1820), by Thomas Sully

Keywords: Portrait, Self-portrait and Miniature

Grade: 1st - 3rd Grade

Activity: Self-portrait



Meet the Artist:

Thomas Sully was born in England but lived in America. (1783-1872). The son of actors Matthew Sully and Sarah Chester, Thomas Sully was born at Horncastle, England, in 1783. The family immigrated to Richmond, Virginia, in 1792 and two years later settled in Charleston, South Carolina. He was famous for painting portraits. A portrait is a picture or a sculpture of a person. One of his most famous paintings is of George Washington crossing the Delaware River. He painting a few of our founding fathers, and was commissioned to paint a full-length portrait of Queen Victoria just a few months after she had ascended the throne! Sully was also one of the founding members of The Musical Fund Society where he painted the portraits of many of the famous musicians and composers. He was also known for painting miniatures. Details were very important to Sully. He looked very carefully at the world around him and really studied faces before he painted them. Sully tried to make people look honest and loving, as well as handsome and beautiful.

Definitions:

Portrait: Any work of art showing a person, several people or an animal. Portraits usually emphasize just the face.

Self-portrait: A portrait the artist makes of himself.

Miniature: A miniature is a tiny painting that can be worn in a locket (necklace) or displayed on a stand.

Meet the Art:

The Torn hat is a portrait. A gently smiling boy looks straight out at you. He is neatly dressed, but his straw hat is rough and worn. The brim of the hat is torn away from the top. A little bit of sunlight peeks through the tear, making a bright spot on the boy's forehead. The rest of the brim casts a shadow across the boy's face. Sunlit areas in the painting contrast sharply with the shadows. The boy's jacket is blue, darker blue in the shadows and lighter blue in the sunlight. The blue is repeated in the band around the hat. The deepest shadows on the jacket match the deep shadow under the back of the brim. Notice how Sully uses some of the blue of the jacket to paint the boy's white shirt. The boy is probably a farm boy, we can tell from his clothes and because his hat is made of straw. He was probably a very typical boy from the 1820's.

Discussion:

- How old do you think the boy in the painting is?
- What shape is his face, his eyes, his nose?
- What color are his eyes, his hair, his clothing?
- Do his clothes look like clothes you would wear?
- Why is he wearing a hat?
- What kind of hat is it and what textures do you see?
- Does he look like he is friendly? Why?
- What do you think he is thinking about?
- How long do you think he had to sit still for the artist to paint him?

Project: Self-Portrait with Oil Pastels - Explain that they will be drawing themselves today.

Materials needed:

- Scratch paper for practicing facial features
- 9"x12" white drawing paper, cut down to 7"x10", if mounting
- 9 x 12" black construction paper for mounting (optional)
- pencils
- oil pastels
- fine tip black felt permanent markers
- small hand mirrors
- Advanced Preparation: Trim white drawing paper to 7 x 10"(optional)

Process:

Pass out the hand mirrors and have the students look at their face. Ask them to notice how their eyes are not a round circle—they are actually shaped more like an almond or an oval with two points at either end (demonstrate this on the board). Inside the almond shaped eye is a large circle (the iris) with a small circle in the middle (pupil). Notice that the large circle contains the color. Have the kids practice **sketching** their own eyes on their scratch paper. They should work to have two eyes that are approximately the same size.

- Ask students to use the mirrors to look at themselves again. Talk about their hair color and eye color. Ask them about the shape of their own face. What size are these shapes?
- Ask them where their eyes are? (Half-way between the top of their head and bottom of their chin).
- Where are their ears located?

*Note-Some students may not be aware of facial proportion. This is not unusual for children at this age. Suggestion: Have students draw their hair first. This will help them place the eyes, nose, etc. in the correct location.

- Have children sketch, with a pencil (keep reminding them to sketch) a large shape for their head/face. Remind them to look in their mirrors to study the details before they start. Check every child's paper that they have drawn a large enough oval. Show them by example. It is a good idea to show them an example of what a head that is too small looks like then compare that to a head that is the right size. You can demonstrate this on the white board.
- They should add lines to make the neck and shoulders. Keep this simple. No arms etc.
- Remind them that lines make hair, lash and eyebrow textures.
- Encourage them to draw every little detail they see. Like our artist, Sully, details are very important! The details show how each person is different and special. Freckles, birth marks, dimples etc.
- Students can then add other details such as: eyebrows, earrings, necklaces, eyeglasses, baseball hats, etc.
- Once the students have rendered their self-portrait in pencil, have them trace the lines with the fine tip black marker. They can erase any pencil marks that remain.
- With the oil pastels they can add a pop of color. They may choose to completely color their portrait or simply add a single burst of color such as a hair bow or eye color.
- Mount their completed portrait.
- Clean up:
- Please ensure that oil pastels are placed back in their original containers and the marker lids are securely fastened.