

# No Student Is an Island

**Denise Clyne-Ruch**

**W**e are all trying to support state mandated testing within the art room. The dilemma I encounter is how do I stay true to my own discipline and yet create authentic lessons that incorporate general education objectives? One lesson I have used successfully with fourth graders is a portrait-island lesson that compares the contours of the face with contour, or topographic, maps.

## Introducing the Self-Portrait

When students arrive for the first session, I have the board covered with portraits and self-portraits. Some are realistic and others are not. We discuss the fact that portraits do not have to look very much like the subject at all. This relaxes and prepares students for the portrait or self-portrait they will draw for this lesson. I reassure them that, by the time they are finished, their portraits will be less realistic than most of the portraits on the board.

A brief portrait lesson, with a demonstration of me adding my imperfections to my own self-portrait relaxes them even further. As they begin their drawings, I emphasize that they should be feeling the "hills and valleys" on their own faces. Surprisingly good portraits are the result.

## Drawing Contours

During the second class, students gather around a table with a clear plastic tub that has a plastic mask form placed in the bottom. I pour a little water into the tub. We discuss that the mask form is an island and the people on the mask who live around the base of the form live on the shore of the island. I identify this as sea level and draw a ring around the base of the portrait I drew last week. I mark it as ten feet above sea level. I also begin to draw a map key.

We talk about global warming and decide that an iceberg has melted.

The water it releases raises the sea level by ten feet. I add more water to the plastic tub and we watch the level of the water rise up the side of the mask form. The new level of water is now

twenty feet above sea level and the shore dwellers are running to higher ground!

Natural disaster and global warming submerges our island until all the inhabitants are living on the nose and forehead. Each time I add water, I draw another contour around my portrait and add to my map key. Once students understand the concept, they work on the contour portraits they started during the last class. If



*Nyasha, grade four.*

time permits, they add a compass rose in a bottom corner of the map and outline their drawings in permanent black marker.

## Third Class

During the third class, students paint the map key one color at a time and immediately paint the appropriate coordinating area on their portraits with tempera paint. Students also creatively name their islands.

They are eager to compare their completed portrait contour maps with maps found in books or online. They also begin to understand how the contours of the face, the hills and valleys, become translated into darks and lights in the portraits we study. Perhaps no man is an island, but in this class, sometimes my students are. ☺

*Denise Clyne-Ruch is a K-5 art specialist at L.A. Nelson Elementary School in Denton, Texas. deniseclyne@yahoo.com*

## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum.*

## WEB LINK

[www.earthtools.org](http://www.earthtools.org)