



Portrait of My Family by Karalyn (4th grade)

A Portrait of Your Family

The family theme has inspired many artists over the centuries. Artists often paint portraits of their wives or husbands, children, and parents. These are the people that the artist sees most often and knows best. In this activity, you will think about what "family" means to you, view family portraits by other artists, and then paint a portrait of your own family.

Materials You Need: 12x18 inch white paper; an assortment of crayons; watercolor paints along with a water container, a paint brush, and a paint shirt; plus newspaper. A photograph of your family may be helpful.

Getting Started: Before you begin your picture, think about the different types of families that people belong to (e.g., two-parent families; single-parent families, extended families, and so on.). Look at paintings and photographs of families.

Long ago, before there were cameras, some people commissioned artists to paint portraits of their families. Being commissioned to paint a portrait was a good way for artists to make a living. Here are a few Early American family portraits from the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC:

- The Cheney Family by an anonymous 18th Century painter
- The Sargent Family by an anonymous 19th Century painter.
- Family Portrait by Ralph Eleaser Whiteside Earl.

When viewing family portraits, look at the different ways the artists approached their subject matter. Is the sitter's pose casual or formal? What can you tell about the family by looking at their portrait? How are they the same or different as your family?

The Activity: Imagine that you are commissioned to paint a portrait of your family. How will you pose your family for their picture? Will they be sitting, standing, or playing a game? What is a favorite activity that your family does together? Who will you include in your portrait (e.g., your mother, father, brother, sister, yourself, aunt, uncle, grandparents, pets, or friends)?



Family workout by Erica (4th grade)

What you need to do: On a large sheet of white paper, draw your family's portrait using a black crayon. Include a background that helps to show something about your family and where they live.

Next, fill in the shapes of your family member's figures with crayons using rich colors while leaving the background as an outline. Put on your paint shirt, spread newspaper on the table, and prepare to paint using the watercolor set, a brush, and a container of water. Fill in the background using mostly dark, rich colors from the watercolor set.

It's okay to paint over the figures, because the crayon will resist the paint and show through. When your painting is finished, sign, date and title it in the bottom right-hand corner. Show it to your family members to see what they think of it.

Want to Do More? There are many artists who have made portraits of families, including Romare Bearden, John S. Copley, Faith Ringgold, Vincent van Gogh, and Grant Wood. See how many family portraits you can find by artists on the Web or in art history books. By looking at portraits, you can learn a lot about the people who posed for them. You can learn how they lived and also make guesses about what kind of people they were.