

# Balance (Self Portraits)

Grade 1 – Lesson 6

(*Art Connections*, Level 1, pgs. 108-109)

## Big Idea

*Human faces are formally balanced – mirror symmetrical – arrangements of organic shapes.*

## Learning Targets

**Target 1:** Identifies and uses formal balance, mirror symmetry. (Arts EALR 1.2 *Principles of Organization: Formal Balance*)

**Criteria 1:** Arranges similar shapes equal distance and flipped from the center line.

**Target 2:** Identifies and draws the closed shapes. (Arts EALR 1.1 *Elements of Art: Closed shapes, organic shapes*)

**Criteria 2:** Draws a line that comes back and meets itself around the features of human face (e.g. eyes, lips, hair, head)

**Target 3:** Creates an open composition. (Arts EALR 1.2 *Principles of Organization: Open composition*)

**Criteria 3:** Fills compositions with color from edge to edge.

## Local Art References



**Belt Mask of Iyoba (Queen Mother of Oba) Idia,**  
1517-50 *Unknown artist, Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria*  
81.17.493  
Seattle Art Museum



**Self Portrait, 1933**  
*Morris Graves*  
85.268  
Seattle Art Museum

(NOTE to Teacher: See **Art Background** section at end of lesson for more information about these works of art.)

## Looking at Art Questions

1. When the two sides of a shape are the same, except **flipped** from each other, we call it **formal balance** or **mirror symmetry**. Hold your hands in front of you with your thumbs pointing together. That's mirror symmetry. Now turn one of your hands the other way so that your pinky finger touches your thumb. Why isn't mirror symmetry? (Because it isn't flipped).

2. How can you tell the *Kuna Mola* (in *Art Connections*, p. 108) has mirror symmetry?
3. How does your face show formal balance, or mirror symmetry?
4. A **portrait** is a picture of a person. Which of these two portraits looks more formally balanced to you? Why do you think so?
5. Do you mostly see **organic** or geometric shapes in these portraits? (Mostly organic). Which organic shapes in the face, can you draw an outline all the way around? (Eyes, lips, outside of head, ears, hair)? These are called **closed shapes**.
6. There are some open shapes in your face that you can't draw an outline all the way around, like your nose, or your cheeks. Some shapes are just made up from soft shadows. We are going to make formally balanced portraits of ourselves, drawing lines around the shapes that are closed shapes, then use chalk pastel for the soft open shapes of our faces.

## **Art Making Activity**

### **Formally Balanced Self-Portraits**

*How can you draw the closed shapes of your face with formal balance?*

#### Day 1

1. Since we want our faces to have formal balance, or mirror symmetry, we are going to start our self-portraits by only drawing half of our face. Fold your paper in half, and draw only on one side of it.
2. When you are drawing a face, here are a few tips to start:
  - Your eyes are close to the middle of your head, measuring from top to bottom.
  - There is the space of about one eye in between your two eyes.
  - The only lines you can really draw around your nose are around the bottom of it, little curving lines for your nostrils, and the bump between them
3. After you draw the basic closed shapes of one half of your face with pencil, go back over the lines with black oil pastel.
4. Fold your paper in half again and rub on the back to transfer the oil pastel from one side to the other.
5. Now you might want to add details, like patterns in the background or on your clothes. Any time you want to add something, draw it only on one side, then fold your paper in half and rub again to transfer the design to the other side.

6. You may find that the lines on the second side need extra oil pastel on them to make them as bold as the lines on the first side. Go over your lines on the second side with extra oil pastel if you need to.

## Day 2

1. Last time we made the closed shapes of our face with black oil pastel.
2. Today we are going to add color to our faces with chalk pastel. Remember that a little chalk pastel goes a long way because you can blend it with a finger ghost and smear the extra into other places.
3. When you are adding color, remember to add it symmetrically too, If you put yellow on one side of your face, put yellow on the opposite side as well.
4. We will fill our whole compositions with color.
5. Also remember not to “blow it” with chalk pastel dust. Instead, tap it onto a tissue if you start to get too much on your paper.

## Day 1

### Each Student Needs

- Sketchbook (to practice drawing the closed shapes of the face)
- A self-portrait mirror
- A 12x12 piece of watercolor paper
- A sketching pencil (HB)
- A black oil pastel

## Day 2

### Each Student Needs

- Their portrait drawing from Day 1, taped down on all four sides with blue painter’s tape
- Two tissues (one for a finger ghost, one for tapping off excess chalk dust)

### Every Pair of Students Needs

- A set of chalk pastels

| <b>Vocabulary</b> |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Formal balance    | Self-portrait  |
| Mirror symmetry   | Organic shapes |
| Flipped           | Closed shapes  |

## **Reflecting on Our Art** (from *Art Connections*, Level 1, pg. 25A)

- **Describe:** Which shapes on your self-portrait are closed shapes? How can you tell it's formally balanced?
- **Analyze:** What makes your self-portrait look real?
- **Interpret:** What kind of expression do you have on your face? What feeling does your self-portrait seem to show?
- **Decide:** What would you add to this self-portrait to show something more about you?

## **Art Background**

### **Belt Mask of Iyoba Idia**, by anonymous artist from *Kingdom of Benin*

"Iyoba Idia's visage is the most widely known face of an African royal woman after the Egyptian Queen, Nefertiti." - Nkiru Nzegwu, 2005

Queen Idia's face conveys the considerable courage and allure that has inspired centuries of respect for her role as an astute leader and spiritual mother of the Benin kingdom. This icon was one of four created in her honor by her son, Oba Esigie, who led the kingdom to the height of its prosperity in the sixteenth century. All four were worn each year in a ceremony by a succession of Obas up until 1897, when a British military force confiscated them from the Oba's bedroom in the palace and brought them back to Europe.

--Pam McClusky, Curator of African and Oceanic Art, 2007

### **Excerpted from Seattle Art Museum Close-Ups at:**

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/SAMcollection/code/emuseum.asp?style=browse&currentrecord=10&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=Benin&quicksearch=Benin&newvalues=1&newstyle=single&newcurrentrecord=13>

### **Morris Graves, *Self-Portrait***

I believe...that in painting, one must convey the feeling of the subject, rather than the imperfect physical truth through photographically correct statement of the object.

Morris Graves, 1937

Who was Morris Graves? Even those who knew the artist well pondered the question in their writings about him. With his intense, searching gaze and his deeply self-absorbed demeanor, Graves was an arresting figure—he seemed to have looked every bit the part of a man on a solitary quest for enlightenment. Even his high school teacher recalled that Graves attracted attention just by his presence: "He was so fascinating that some students followed him around to observe his antics."

Self-discovery would seem to have been Graves' motivation to paint. This self-portrait is the result of unflinching self-scrutiny. As he looked deeper into himself, Graves became interested not in his physical being but in his spiritual makeup. He imagined himself at

one with nature's other life forms and saw himself as another solitary and vulnerable creature-like a delicate bird, whose very existence is shaped by the forces of nature.

**Excerpted from SAM Close Ups:**

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=single&currentrecord=22&page=collection&profile=objExplores&searchdesc=WEB:CloseUps&newvalues=1&newprofile=objects>

AND

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=browse&currentrecord=73&page=collection&profile=objects&searchdesc=WEB:CloseUps&newvalues=1&newstyle=single&newcurrentrecord=80>

## Assessment Checklist

| Student                      | Arranges similar shapes equal distance and flipped from the center line | Draws a line that comes back and meets itself around the features of human face (e.g. eyes, lips, hair, head) | Fills compositions with color from edge to edge | TOTAL<br>3 |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|------------|
| 1.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 2.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 3.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 4.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 5.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 6.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 7.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 8.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 9.                           |   |   |   |            |
| 10.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 11.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 12.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 13.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 14.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 15.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 16.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 17.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 18.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 19.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 20.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 21.                          |   |   |   |            |
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| 24.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 25.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 26.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 27.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 28.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 29.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 30.                          |   |   |   |            |
| 31.                          |   |   |   |            |
| <b>Total Points</b>          |   |   |   |            |
| <b>Percent Comprehension</b> |   |   |   |            |

*Teacher Notes:*

## Letter Home

*Dear Family,*

*Today we learned that the human face is **formally balanced**, or has **mirror symmetry**. We learned that you have to **flip** the same shapes on either side of a formally balanced picture. We looked at a Kuna Mola from Panama, and a portrait mask of the Queen Mother of the Oba (King) of Benin from 16<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria that both had formal balance.*

*We also learned that faces have some **closed shapes** that you can draw an outline around, and some open ones made just by shadows and light. We looked at the Nigerian Queen Mother mask and at a self-portrait by Morris Graves to see which shapes are closed and which are open. Then, we made formally balanced portraits of ourselves, by drawing the closed shapes from just half of our face with oil pastel, then folding our paper and transferring the lines to the other side. After we had made symmetrical shapes on both sides of our faces, we filled in the rest of the composition with chalk pastel.*

*On a walk or in your yard, you could look for mirror symmetry, or formal balance in nature. You could even make up a dance with mirror symmetry, where you try to do the mirror action of a person facing you!*