

# First-Grade Portraits with Pendants

by Josey M. Brouwer

While browsing a 2010 issue of *Arts & Activities* magazine, I was inspired to begin an ambitious portrait project with my first-grade artists.

I wanted to introduce an easy clay project to my first-grade classes—one that would give them ample opportunity to explore working with clay for the very first time. I knew that they could successfully create a textured clay pendant, but needed something more to make the project come together.

When I saw Aimee Fresia's "Jewelry Portraits" in the June 2010 issue, my project idea was complete! Instead of making Aimee's rolled-paper beads to display with their self-portraits, my students would create clay pendants. Combining their clay necklaces with their own carefully drawn portraits would give the students a perfect way to display their clay projects.

**TO PREPARE FOR OUR UPCOMING CLAY PROJECT,** we began we began "making our hands strong" at the end of each art class. We rolled imaginary clay spheres and then smooshed our pretend clay into a pancake, squeezing our hands together with all our strength. A few weeks later, when "clay day" finally came, my students were more than ready to begin!

First we spent a few minutes exploring some pendants, learning that "pendant" was a fancy word for a piece of jewelry that hangs from a chain. We viewed images of pendant necklaces, and I passed around some dollar-store pendants so students could look at the textured details.

My students were eager to begin, and their first task was to simply play with the clay. I encouraged them to roll snakes and coils, pound the clay,

squeeze it, and even smell it. The next steps were easy because we had practiced them often: roll a smooth sphere and then smoosh it into a round disc with their strong hands.

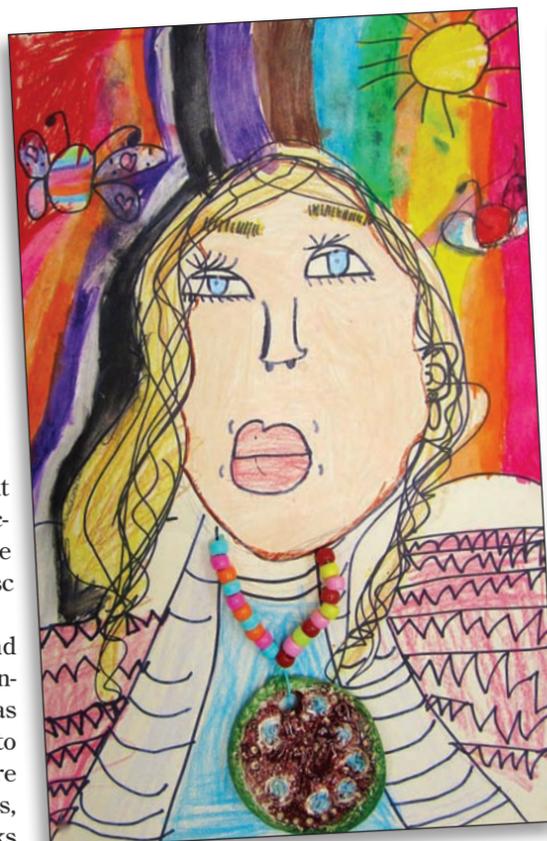
I walked around the room and pushed a plastic straw into their pendants to create a hole for stringing, as students added texture and patterns to their pendants with a variety of texture tools. The containers of dry noodles, nuts and bolts, combs and toothpicks brought giggles and "oohs and aahs" as they discovered the designs each tool could produce.

Their treasures were placed on a large tray to dry, and the waiting began. I was greeted at the beginning of each class with an anxious "Are they ready yet?!" while the pendants were dried and were bisque fired. Fortunately, the beauty of this project was that we could work on our self-portraits while waiting for our pendants to come out of the kiln!

Go to [artsandactivities.com](http://artsandactivities.com) and click on this button for resources related to this article.



Completed clay pendants, glazed and strung with beads.



Khloe



Brenden



Chloe

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Primary-level students will ...

- create a detailed, correctly proportioned self-portrait.
- form a clay pendant and embellish it with texture and beads.

## NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- **CREATING:** Experimenting and developing skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches.
- **CREATING:** Demonstrating quality craftsmanship through care and use of materials, tools and equipment.

## MATERIALS

### Clay Pendants

- Images of pendant necklaces
- Dollar store jewelry samples
- Clay (quarter-pound per student)
- Various texture tools, glazes
- Colored plastic-coated wire, beads

### Self-Portraits

- Reproductions of portraits, such as Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Vincent van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Straw Hat*
- 10" x 16" heavy-weight manila tagboard
- 12" x 18" black construction paper
- Small mirrors
- Permanent markers, crayons, watercolor crayons, paintbrushes, water

**WE BEGAN BY LOOKING** at a number of portraits—from Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait With Straw Hat*. We looked at the placement of our facial features as we examined our images in 5" x 7" mirrors, and gently followed the outer part of our eyes around our heads to find ... our ears!

We noticed that our eyes are not close to the top of our heads, but in the middle. And, when we smile, some

of us have dimples and some have little lines around our mouths. We also learned that our necks need to be wide enough to support our heads, which can weigh eight pounds! If we have a little spaghetti neck, our heads will fall over!

Next, I chose a first-grader as my model, and the class watched as I demonstrated how to draw a portrait. We talked about shapes and lines as I drew



Kingston



Kylie

oval eyes, round pupils, curved eyelashes, eyebrows, and lips. Finally, it was their turn!

In preparation for this project, I had lightly traced an oval on the students' manila tagboard to help them get the portrait size large enough. Their concentration was amazing as they viewed their reflections in small mirrors and began drawing.

Many students caught excellent likenesses of themselves as they added important details such as freckles, pointy chins, missing teeth, glasses, and hair bows. Over the next two classes, their images were traced with permanent marker and colored with crayon. Background colors were added with watercolor crayons.

**BEFORE WE KNEW IT,** we were ready to glaze our pendants and embellish the fired pendants with beads. My students spent an entire class selecting and stringing them on colorful plastic-coated wire (we used TwisteezWire®). Some chose favorite colors, while others created thoughtful color patterns, and they took great care to coordinate their beads with their glazed pendants. After attaching their portraits to construction paper, I used an awl to poke two holes through the paper so the pendants could be added.

My students learned so many important skills while completing this long project. They also learned *patience*: Who knew a clay project took so LONG to dry, bisque fire and glaze?

Along the way, they learned about famous artists who drew portraits, explored texture and pattern while creating their pendants, reviewed shapes, discovered the importance of proportion and detail, and fine tuned their blending and shading techniques as they captured their own skin color with crayons.

My first-graders were so excited to see their portraits and pendants on display. The project was a big hit with parents, who enjoyed finding their own child's portrait when they visited during our parent-teacher conferences. ■

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