READ A WORK OF ART AS YOU WOULD READ A BOOK

Art is a powerful pathway into the Hawai'i Common Core

Observe
Look closely and quietly.

Describe
What do you see?

Interpret
What do you think this painting is about and what makes you say that?

Connect
What does this remind you of? Why? What more do you want to know? Why?

Learn more at HawaiiPublicSchools.org

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Israel “Iz” Ka'anoi Kamakawiwo'ole is an internationally known icon of Hawaiian music. Born in 1959, in Honolulu, he was only 10 when he gave his first public ‘ukulele performance. Iz was a founding member of the Mākaha Sons of Ni'ihau and recorded many albums with the group as well as on his own. His ‘ukulele version of the well known song “Over the Rainbow,” which was written for the film The Wizard of Oz, has been featured in films, television series, and commercials. Kamakawiwo'ole battled health issues his entire life due to his large size and died in June 1997 from complications of obesity at age 38.

How did Yan Pei-Ming come to paint a portrait of such a treasured figure of Hawai‘i? A few months after Kamakawiwo'ole’s death, Yan Pei-Ming was invited to participate in an art exhibition at the University of Hawai‘i’s East-West Center. He painted 20 portraits over the course of a few weeks, including local residents who posed for him, and, in the case of Kamakawiwo'ole, a prominent figure gone too soon.

Echoing the murals he painted as a teenager, Yan Pei-Ming’s paintings are usually very large—it is not unusual for him to work with canvases that are nine feet tall. He creates his portraits quickly, working on all areas simultaneously, laying down some background, and then painting part of the figure, followed by an outline, then returning to the background.

Connecting to Standards

Hawaii Common Core ELA Literacy Standard
(CCRA.R9)
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge and compare the approaches the authors take.

Using Portraits as Biography
(process adapted from Focus 5, Inc.)
(www.arteducationconsulting.com)
• Have students examine several portraits of Israel Kamakawiwo’ole.
• Ask them to compare/contrast the choices the artist made in the portraits.
• Sample prompt. What is the same about these portraits? What is different?
• Remind them to notice elements of portraiture such as facial expression, focal point, gesture, clothing, setting, objects, size, quantity, and color.
• Discuss with students the idea that artists make specific choices in their artwork and that each portrait tells us something about the sitter. We can use our inferences, predictions and conclusions to try to interpret the portrait, to figure out what it means.
• Ask students to begin to draw conclusions and make predictions and inferences using the sentence frames that follow for support. This could begin in partners and then move into a group discussion. Ensure students speak from evidence and when they do not, prompt them with, “What is it you saw that makes you say that?”

When I see ______________, it makes me think________________.
When I see ______________, it makes me feel________________.
When I see ______________, it makes me wonder________________.

Moving into inquiry
• Ask students to generate meaningful questions about the portrait(s). You may choose to chart their questions.
• Provide resources for students to read and learn more about Israel Kamakawiwo’ole and get answers to their questions. (See Teacher Resources on web)
• You might want to remind students that artists make specific choices in their works and ask them: What do you think the artist may have been trying to teach or show the viewers about Iz? Remind them that their inferences should be supported by both visual evidence from the portrait and written evidence from text.
• Ask students to compare what they learned from the portrait with what they learned from reading written text.

Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III Fine Arts
Standard 2: Music
Understand and apply elements of music and understand how music communicates ideas, feelings and experiences across cultures.
• Introduce students to some musical terms. Play music by Kamakawiwo’ole and ask students to discuss the music using the terms introduced. Have them discuss how listening to the music adds to their understanding of Iz, gained by studying the portrait and written biographical information. (See Teacher Resources on web)

Hawaii Content and Performance Standard III Social Studies
Standard 3 History: MODERN HAWAIIAN HISTORY
Understand important historical events in Modern Hawaiian History
(See Teacher Resources on web)
Analyze significant contemporary issues that influence present-day Hawai‘i, such as the Hawaiian Renaissance, the sovereignty movement, current land issues, and the influx of new immigrant groups.
• Many musicians have used their art to communicate about time and place. Kamakawiwo'ole was known for promoting Hawaiian rights and Hawaiian Independence. One example of this is his song “Hawai‘i 78.” You may want to have students listen to the song and discuss the lyrics.