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Charcoal Portrait Drawing

Best for: grades 7-12

Description: learn traditional techniques for using charcoal to make a portrait drawing.

Vocabulary: portrait, self-portrait, value, mid-tone, proportion

Required Materials

- 11 x 14" drawing paper
- spray fixative
- soft vine charcoal
- charcoal pencil
- kneaded eraser
- vinyl eraser
- mirror
- ruler

Images:
 Michael Werboff (American, born Russian, 1896—1986), *Portrait of Marassato Antonin, Venetian Fisherman,* 1950, chalk pastels on paper mounted on card. Gift of Mrs. Eunice Howard Dane. 1951.6
 Fred Stratton (American, 1870—1960), *Portrait of a Woman,* 1929, pencil on paper mounted on board. Gift of Mrs. Robert D. Patterson. 1933.6

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Instructions

1. **Charcoal** is a versatile drawing medium that can get messy. It can smudge onto your hands and may smear onto surfaces. Simply wash off with soap and water, and use care when working with charcoal.

2. Select an image of a person, or **portrait,** to draw from or choose to draw a **self-portrait** using a mirror. Gently add charcoal to the background and smoothly blend by hand or with tissue. Keep background a **mid-tone** (medium darkness) for best results.
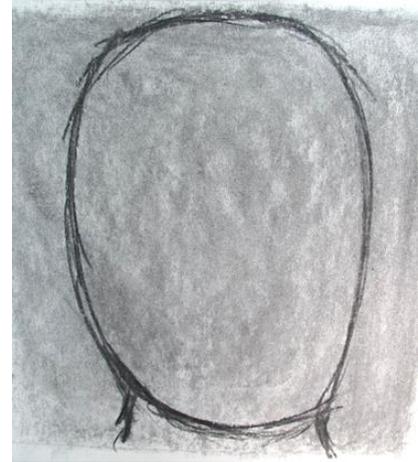
   Note*: choose a **portrait** with subject facing straight—head is not tilted or turned.

   **Helpful hint***: use a black and white photo to better see all **value** (lights and darks).

3. Draw a simple pointed oval shape for the head. Use a ruler to divide head into 4 equal quadrants.

   Note*: draw _very lightly_ as to make corrections more easily as needed. Individual features may differ from standardized **proportion** guidelines.

4. Draw an almond shape for an eye. Place eye near the middle of horizontal line on right half side of the face. This eye will now be a unit of measurement for all the other features.

5. Eyes = half as tall as they are wide.

6. Head = 5 eyes wide.

   Note*: if head is not 5 eye lengths wide, all other measurements will not be **proportional**. Adjust where needed before proceeding.

7. Space between eyes = one full eye length.

8. Tip of nose = 1 ½ eye lengths from center line.

9. Nose base width = one full eye length.

nose width = 1 eye

nose length = 1.5 eyes

1 2 3 4 5
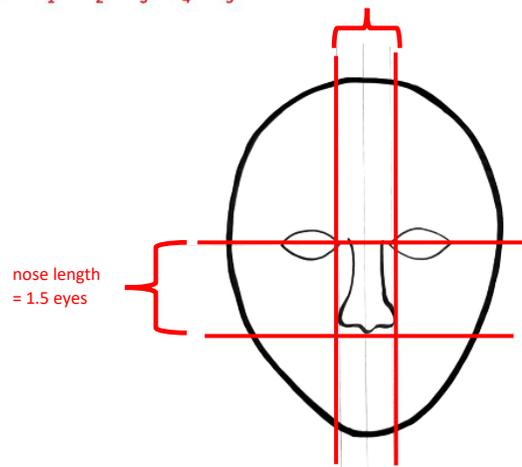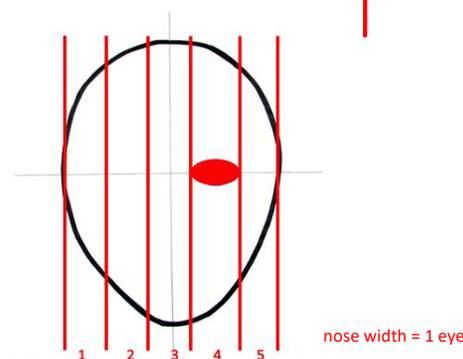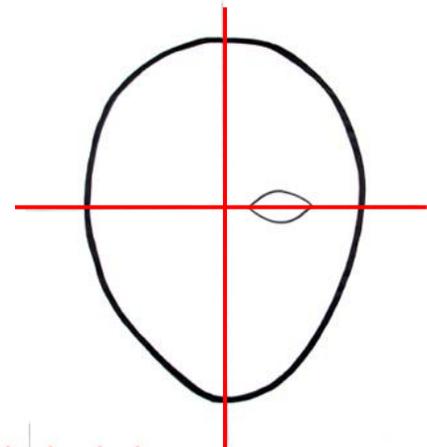
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10. Space between tip of nose and top of lips = ½ eye length.

11. Base of lips = one full eye length from tip of the nose.
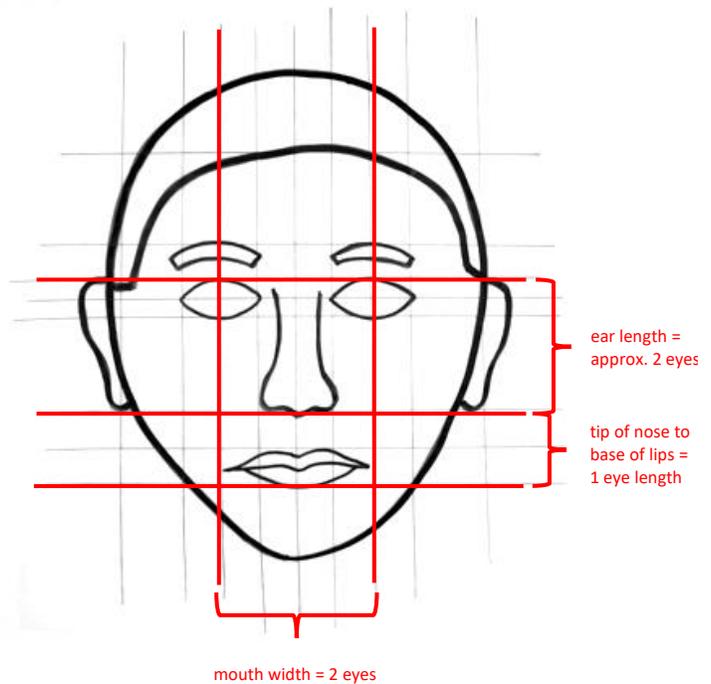
12. Height of lips = ½ an eye length.

13. Width of lips = the length between the centers of both eyes (2 eye lengths).

14. Top of eyebrows = one full eye length away from the bottom of the eye.

15. Ear height = length from top of the eye to tip of nose (approx. 2 eye lengths).

ear length = approx. 2 eyes

tip of nose to base of lips = 1 eye length

mouth width = 2 eyes

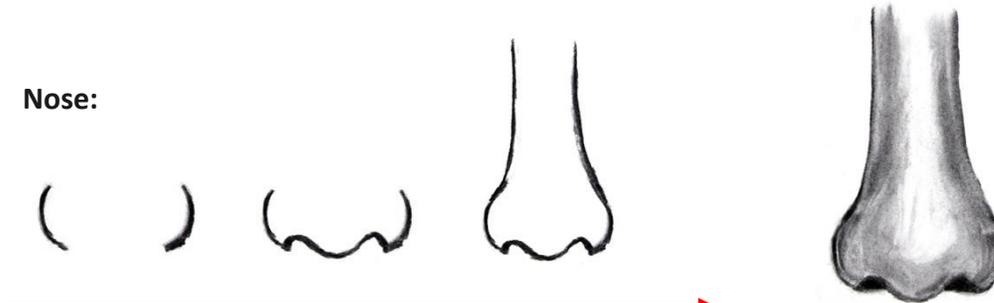16. Hairline starts approx. 2/3 up from center of face between the eyes.

17. Define facial features of eyes, nose and mouth using general guidelines below. Individual facial characteristics may differ.

Eyes:

Nose:

Mouth:

18. Draw hair, add value and sketch other details (ex: glasses, shirt, beard, freckles, etc.).

> **Helpful hint:** identify lightest and darkest values. Achieve mid-tones by comparing to those two extremes (ex: 2 shades lighter than darkest tone). Drawing should include all values from white to black. Blend values with fingertips.

> **Helpful hint:** use kneaded eraser as a drawing tool for extra fine details in the eyes (ex: mold eraser into fine point for highlights or thinly flatten eraser to draw thin white lines).
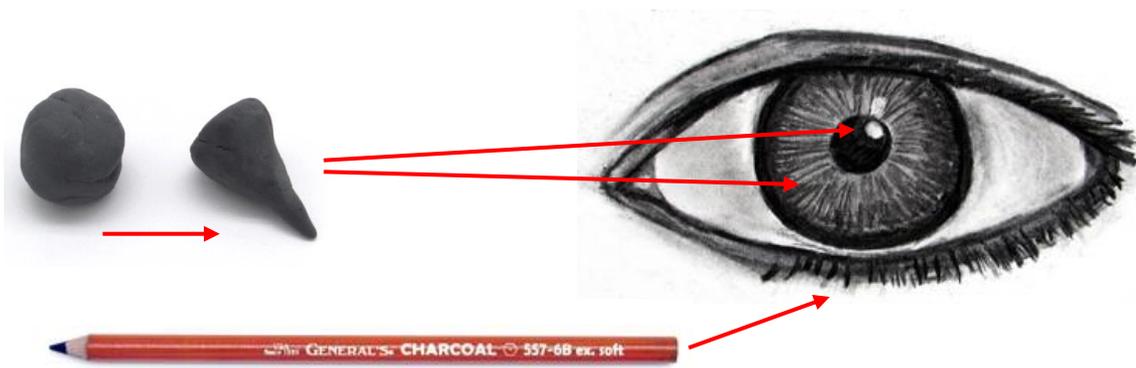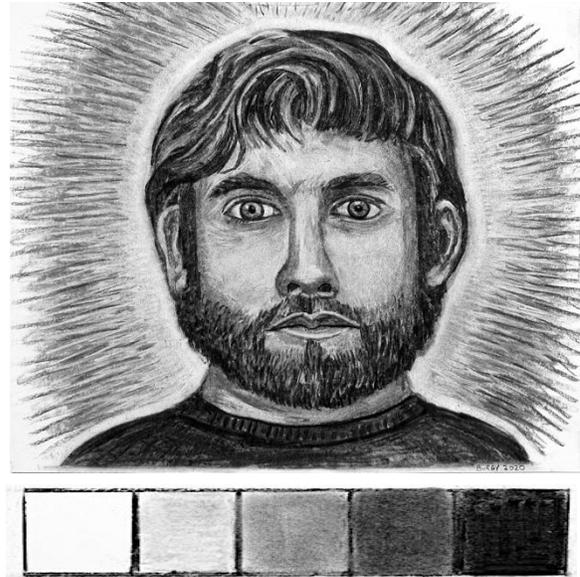
> **Optional:** use charcoal pencils for extra fine details (ex: eyelashes).

> **Note***:* preserve artwork and prevent smearing with several thin coats of final spray fixative. Only spray outdoors or in a well-ventilated environment. Let dry about 5-10 minutes between coats. *(No fixative? Use hairspray).*

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Extensions

For extra challenge:
1. Try drawing the **portrait** from differing angles (ex: side view). Facial **proportion** guidelines will change based on the pose of the head.
2. Build the **value** of your **portrait** in reverse, starting with adding mid- and dark-tones first, then carefully removing areas away with a kneaded eraser.

Web Resources

Tips on drawing with charcoal from the Metropolitan Museum of Art
Artworks in charcoal at the Museum of Modern Art, New York
How to get started drawing in charcoal
Video: learn to draw with charcoal
Charcoal portraits at the Cincinnati Art Museum

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