

Here's Looking at You, Kid

A Basic Guide to Portrait Analysis Based on a List of Questions Used by Art Historians in Analyzing Portraiture

Describe the subject:

Gender and approximate age: _____

Clothing: _____

Pose (standing, sitting upright, relaxed, sprawled out, lying down, active): _____

Does the subject appear to be looking at the viewer or at something else? If something else, at what is the subject looking? _____

How does the subject's gaze make you feel about the subject? _____

What kind of expression does the subject have? _____

If you could ask the subject a few questions, what would they be? _____

If the subject could talk to you, what would he or she say? _____

Describe the type of the portrait:

Full-length, half-length, 3/4 length or bust (head and shoulders only)? _____

'Sunday best' or a relaxed portrait? What are the clues? (clothes, pose, expression, setting)

Describe the setting or background: _____

Is the background a backdrop (as in a modern-day photographer's studio or most school photos) or a specific place? _____

Describe the artist's style:

If a painting, is the portrait created to resemble a photograph? _____

If the painting is not completely realistic, what parts are not realistic? How does the lack of realism make you feel? _____

What colors stand out in the painting? _____

Other:

Does a particular feature stand out or catch your eye? _____

What objects are included in the painting? Why do you think they were included? What do the objects lead you to think about? _____

Summary:

What do you think this portrait was supposed to make you believe or feel about the subject? How do you feel about the subject? Do you think you would like/admire the person if you could meet? _____
