

# PRIMARY LESSON PLAN

## Nature as Code: Creating identity using Nature symbolism (Art & Design/PSHE)

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*For students to:*

- Be able to describe how Nature symbols have been used by the artists to convey public and private messages about the sitters in Tudor-era portraiture
- Be able to explain the difference between Image (public) and Identity (private)
- Understand that portrait sitters came from diverse backgrounds/races/social classes
- Be able to choose nature-based symbols and create a personal meaning for them, for use in their own self-portrait
- Describe their personal qualities, strengths, skills, traits, interests, concerns and ambitions

### CURRICULUM LINKS

#### KS1: Art & Design

*Students should:*

- Use drawing, painting and sculpture to develop and share their ideas, experiences and imagination
- Learn about the work of a range of artists, craft makers and designers, describing the differences and similarities between different practices and disciplines, and making links to their own work.

#### KS2: Art & Design

*Students should:*

- Create sketch books to record their observations and use them to review and revisit ideas.
- Learn about great artists, architects and designers in history.

#### KS1: PSHE

- Ourselves, growing and changing
  - Recognise what makes them special
  - Recognise the ways in which we are all unique
  - Identify what they are good at, what they like and dislike

- Respecting self and others
  - Recognise the ways in which they are the same and different to others
  - Talk about and share their opinions on things that matter to them

#### KS2: PSHE

- Ourselves, growing and changing
  - About personal identity; what contributes to who we are (e.g. ethnicity, family, gender, faith, culture, hobbies, likes/dislikes)
  - To recognise their individuality and personal qualities
  - To identify personal strengths, skills, achievements and interests and how
- Respecting self and others
  - About respecting the differences and similarities between people and recognising what they have in common with others e.g. physically, in personality or background

### BEFORE THE LESSON

- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation to include discussion questions and activity instructions (optional)
- Set up the portrait images on a large screen
- Photocopy or print out:
  - sufficient copies of Activity Resources (ARs) for students to have one each
  - sufficient copies of Supporting Materials (SMs) to be read to class or for paired reading

### Additional resources needed

- Drawing pencils
- Materials appropriate for creating symbols for self-portraits
- Materials appropriate for designing the landscape background for a self-portrait

### Room set-up

It is envisaged that students will work groups/pairs for some activities and independently for others.

## INTRODUCTION

Explain that in this lesson students will be exploring the difference between image and identity. They will be finding out how Tudor artists used flowers, animals and other nature-based symbols to communicate ideas about the people in their portraits. Students will also be choosing their own symbols and meanings inspired by Nature before creating self-portraits that reflect their qualities, skills, interests, ambitions, etc. for a public image and/or for one that reveals who they really are (Identity).

### ACTIVITY 1

#### Reading a Portrait

The aim of this activity is to introduce students to the public image Queen Elizabeth I wanted her portrait to convey to anyone viewing it, with particular focus on the use of nature-based symbolism by the artist.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 1 | AR1 | SM1 | SM2

---

### ACTIVITY 2

#### Knowing Esther

The aim of this activity is to explore the identity of Esther Inglis, a female artist of the Tudor period, by uncovering the possible meanings of the nature-based symbols used in her portrait.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 2 | SM3 | SM4

---

### ACTIVITY 3

#### Comparing Tudors

The aim of this activity is to show how people in the 16th century represented wealth and social status in their portraits through the clothes they are wearing. Students will be comparing the portraits of two women painted during this period, from very different walks of life.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 3 | AR1 | SM1 | SM3

---

### ACTIVITY 4

#### Creating personal symbols

The aim of this activity is for students to draw ideas for symbols inspired by Nature that they can then use to represent things that are important to them in their own self-portrait.

You could work with students in outdoor green spaces in order to collect ideas for nature-based symbols.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 4 | AR3 | SM5 | SM6

---

### ACTIVITY 5

#### Designing a Background

The aim of this activity is for students to plan the background of their self-portrait, a landscape filled with nature-based symbols (e.g. plants, animals, weather, mountains), representing places and memories that are important to them and their public *image* and/or *identity*.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 5 | AR4 | SM7 | SM8 | SM9

---

### ACTIVITY 6

#### This Is Me

The aim of this activity is for students to create a self-portrait, using their background design and the symbols they selected (AR3), as well as adding clothes, jewellery, hairstyle, etc. that also represent the message about themselves that the students want their portrait to reveal.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 6 | AR3

---

### ACTIVITY 7

#### Plenary

The aim of this activity is that students begin to understand that, knowing who we are, what we like and don't like, what our hopes and dreams are, and being able to be ourselves, is important for our wellbeing.

**Pack resources:** Activity Card 7

---

## IDEAS FOR ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- As an extension you could also work with students in outdoor green spaces in order to collect ideas for Nature-inspired symbols for their portraits.
- **HOT SEATING**  
Students can take turns to sit 'in the hot seat' and be interviewed by their classmates to reveal who they are (qualities, likes/dislikes, hobbies, talents, ambitions, etc.)

## Reading a Portrait

The aim of this activity is to introduce students to the public image Queen Elizabeth I wanted her portrait to convey to anyone viewing it, with particular focus on the use of Nature symbolism by the artist.

Start by showing students the short video Who was Queen Elizabeth I?

– BBC Bitesize <https://bbc.in/3vLtLuA>

Show students the Phoenix Portrait of Elizabeth I (SM1) on a large screen or provided as a full-colour A3 handout.

### Introducing symbols

Explain that Tudor artists used symbols in portraits to communicate ideas.

- A symbol is a thing that represents or stands for something else, e.g., a light bulb is often used to represent an idea
- Many of these symbols would be familiar to people living at the time and explained in emblem and iconographical books
- Pamphlets were sometimes produced for special gatherings when a painting was unveiled or gifted to explain the hidden meanings
- Although many symbols would have been familiar to people in Tudor times, some had secret or personal meanings only known to the sitter, to a select group or even just to the artist!

Hand out the symbol worksheet AR1 to each group.

Read through each of the symbols as a class.

Ask each group to discuss the symbols and see if they can find each one in the Phoenix Portrait (and if any appear more than once).

Ask each group to think about why each symbol might have been included in this portrait and what they might be telling us about Elizabeth, writing their ideas on worksheet AR1.

Ask students to share their thoughts with the whole class.

### Prompts

- What describing words would you use for this symbol?
- What type of environment do you find this symbol in the natural world?
- What country would you find this in?
- Is it rare? (if it's from a country far from England it would be rarer and more valuable)
- What is its lifecycle? Where in its lifecycle is it in the painting? (e.g., flowers could be in bud or full flower, which may add extra meaning)
- What qualities does it have?

Read through the symbol explanations in SM2 and compare them with the students' ideas.

Remember, there's no wrong answer – any symbol can mean different things to different people!

---

## Knowing Esther

The aim of this activity is to explore the identity of Esther Inglis, a female artist of the Tudor period, by unpicking the possible meanings of the flowers used in her portrait.

Bring up image of SM3 on a PowerPoint or handout copies for every student to see.

Read Esther Inglis's Biography SM4. The biography (SM4) is designed to be read aloud to the class, or to groups, by a teacher or TA, who can explain any unfamiliar words or ideas. You may like to give any more confident students their own copies so that they can follow but this is not essential.

**Question:** Which of the clues that you found do you think might be clues about Esther's life?

- **Answer:** she was an artist and calligrapher so the book might be one she has made. Religion was also important to her, so it could also represent a prayer book.
- **Answer:** The Tudor rose on the blackwork on her bodice (black embroidery on white) shows that Esther supported the Tudor royal family and the Protestant church.
- **Answer:** Her clothes shows that she is well off but not royalty. Black was an expensive dye colour in Tudor times. There were even laws to control what colours people could wear (e.g., only members of the Royal family could wear purple).

**Question:** Why has the artist painted the two flowers in the top left corner of the portrait?

- **Answer:** this painting may have been produced as a pair of paintings to mark Esther's marriage to Bartholomew Kello. The meanings of the chosen flowers are:
  - Red carnation – commitment, betrothal, true love, marriage, passion.
  - Honeysuckle – love and devotion

**Question:** Why is it unusual for Esther to have been a successful scribe and calligrapher?

- **Answer:** scribing was typically a job done by men - at the time it was hard for women to be taken seriously and have the same opportunities for paid work in a role controlled by men.
-



## Comparing Tudors

Bring up both portraits SM1 & SM3 on a PowerPoint or handout copies of both images for all students to see side by side.

Hand out copies of worksheet AR2 and ask students in small groups or pairs to list the similarities and difference between the portraits of Esther Inglis and Elizabeth I.

### Possible answers:

Similarities: female, Tudor roses, holding something, flowers, wearing ruffs, blackwork (black embroidery on white), hairstyle, head facing in the same direction.

Differences: Esther is wearing a hat, holding a book, her clothes are plainer, and she doesn't have any jewels or pearls (although she is wearing rings).

### Prompts

- Who do you think looks the most important and why?
  - Would these paintings have been made for the same reasons?
  - Had the artists met these women?
-

## Creating personal symbols

Explain to the class that they are going to create their own botanical symbol drawings to be used in their self-portraits, like those seen in **SM5** and in Tudor paintings.

Flowers, gardens and the animals and insect pollinators were important to the Tudors. Flowers symbolised many different things connected to their uses in food, medicine and references in religious writings.

During the Tudor period, the French artist Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues published books of flower illustrations for people creating paintings or embroidery. You can see examples of these drawings here: [Hulton 1977 / The Works of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, a Huguenot Artist in France Florida and England | British Museum](#)

These pictures could be traced and copied by artists and dressmakers and embroidered onto clothing, like the examples in **SM5**, of embroidery on a dress that belonged to Elizabeth I.

Explain that insects and animals also had personal meanings and connections to family for people in Tudor times, as seen in heraldry and family crests. The Gresham family's symbol was a Grasshopper, as explained in **SM6**.

Provide the class with drawing materials. Ask each student to draw a selection of Nature symbols that best describe who they are, as well as writing what meaning they give each symbol, on worksheet **AR3**.

You might like to use the Superbloom Schools Seeds List ([Superbloom learning resources | Historic Royal Palaces \(hrp.org.uk\)](#)) as a source of images and ideas for flowers that students can use as symbols.

**Questions that students might consider for choosing their Nature symbols:**

- It flowers at your favourite time of the year
- It has a meaning or use by the Tudors that is also important to you
- Shape
- Colour
- Reminds you of a place or a person

**Examples of qualities:**

- Confident - wasp
- Social - sparrows
- Hard worker - ant or bee
- Noisy but good at hiding - cricket
- Warm and friendly - butterfly or ladybird
- Organised - spider
- Intelligent – crow

You could work with students in outdoor green spaces in order to collect ideas for Nature symbols.

---

## ACTIVITY CARD 5

Pack resources: AR4 | SM7 | SM8 | SM9

### Designing a Background

The aim of this activity is for students to plan the background of their self-portrait, a landscape filled with Nature-based symbols (e.g. plants, animals, weather, mountains), representing places and memories that are important to them and their public image and/or identity.

Provide students with drawing materials and paper for creating a drawing of a garden or landscape.

Bring up image of SM7 and SM8 on a PowerPoint or hand out colour copies.

Explain to students that Tudor gardens were places of rest, recreation and exercise. They were also useful in providing fruit, vegetables, herbs, flowers for food and medicine. Tudor gardens were often organised in geometric designs to enhance the Tudor house.

Some gardens would have included brightly coloured heraldic features, we see in garden featured in the background of Henry VIII's family portrait SM7, wooden posts decorated with carvings of creatures. These posts would often depict lions, horses, dragons, and the Tudor Rose.

Show students the 'Wanstead' portrait (SM8). We see a garden behind Elizabeth I. This might be the garden of the house of her favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at Wanstead, which could mean that this portrait's background symbolises a particular place and person that the Queen knew well and liked.

Still looking at SM8, you might want to ask students to spot other symbols in the painting and suggest why they might have been included (use SM9 to support this discussion).

Using AR4 as idea prompts, ask each student to plan a garden or landscape that represents a place that is important to them, which they'll create later as the background to their self-portrait.

---

## ACTIVITY CARD 6

Pack resource: AR3

### This Is Me

The aim of this activity is for students to create a self-portrait, using their background design and the symbols they selected (AR3), as well as adding clothes, jewellery, hairstyle, etc. that also represent the message about themselves that the students want their portrait to reveal.

Body language and pose also send important messages.

It's important that the students are clear whether their portrait represents:

- Image
- Identity

Alternatively, the portrait can be split in half, with one side representing Image and the other half Identity, to show the differences in symbolism between who they are in public and private (some symbols may appear on both sides).

Any medium can be used, to suit the abilities of the students, including drawing, painting, collage, or photography.

---

## ACTIVITY CARD 7

### Plenary

Using their self-portraits as prompts for group discussion, ask students to reflect on what they've learned about themselves. Do they show a different side to themselves at school or with new people than who they are at home or with their friends? If so, why do they do that?

The aim is that students begin to understand that knowing who we are, what we like and don't like, what our hopes and dreams are, and being able to be ourselves, is important for our wellbeing.

#### Prompts

- Name one thing about your personality that most people don't get to see (e.g., good at baking, love swimming in the sea, raise money for charity).
  - Why may only showing the public image of yourself cause problems? (Image)
  - Why is it important to know who you really are? (Identity)
-

	Where can you find this symbol in the portrait?	What do you think this symbol says about the person in the portrait?
<b>FLOWERS</b>		
<b>TUDOR ROSE</b> A flower with five white inner petals and five red outer petals		
<b>RED ROSE</b>		
<b>PHOENIX</b> A mythological bird		
<b>PEARLS</b> Small round white or grey balls made by some types of oyster inside their shells		
<b>VINE LEAVES</b> The leaves from grape vines		
<b>OSTRICH FEATHERS</b>		
<b>JEWELS</b>		
<b>CLOTH OF SILVER</b> Fabric made with silver thread		
<b>GOLD</b>		

THE SAME	DIFFERENT



Symbol drawing	What this symbol means	Symbol drawing	What this symbol means
1.		5.	
2.		6.	
3.		7.	
4.		8.	

- Where in the world is this garden? Is it somewhere important to you and your family?
- What is the weather like and how will it affect the mood of your portrait?
- What types of flowers and plants grow in this garden?
- What animals and pollinators would be there?
- Who is in this garden with you?
- Is this an important event like a family gathering or a party?





Queen Elizabeth I, by Nicholas Hilliard, circa 1575 © National Portrait Gallery, London



**FLOWERS**

Beauty, youthfulness, growth and fertility.

Knowledge - it is saying that you are knowledgeable or clever, as you know all about flowers, their meanings and uses in medicine.

Elizabeth I was described as the 'Empress of flowers', by the poet Sir John Davies.

**TUDOR ROSE**

The Tudor Rose is a made-up flower with five white inner petals and five red outer petals. There is no Tudor Rose in the plant world!

The Tudor Rose is the symbol of the Tudor family.

The Tudor Rose reminded people that the Tudor family had brought peace and unity to England following a long civil war.

The Tudor Rose was the national emblem of England.

**The War of the Roses**

In the 15th century, the powerful families of Lancaster and York fought a terrible civil war in England called the War of the Roses.

To end this war, the Tudor king, Henry VII of Lancaster, married Elizabeth Woodville of York.

The white petals of the Tudor Rose represent the white rose symbol of the House of York, and the red petals represent the red rose symbol of the House of Lancaster. Elizabeth I was the granddaughter of Henry VII of Lancaster and Elizabeth Woodville of York.

**RED ROSE**

A symbol of the House of Tudor and also of true love.

The rose is still the national flower of England.

**PHOENIX**

A mythological bird which never really dies. When it gets old, this bird is consumed by fire and is born again from the ashes.

The phoenix was used as an emblem for Elizabeth I to show her purity and how special she is (there is only one phoenix). It also means that the Tudor royal family will live forever and always be strong.

**PEARLS**

Purity

Positive morals and good values.

Financial wealth - pearls are expensive and had to be imported from countries far from England.

**VINE LEAVES**

Peace and plenty – they might mean that Elizabeth as Queen looks after her people and provides them with peace and plenty (like a good farmer looking after their grape vines).

**OSTRICH  
FEATHER**

Wealth – ostrich feathers were very expensive because they came to England all the way from Africa.

**JEWELS**

Wealth  
Power

**CLOTH OF SILVER**

Wealth – this special fabric was woven from silk and real silver thread.

**GOLD**

Wealth  
Power





Esther Inglis (1569 – 1624), anon, 1595 © National Galleries Scotland



Esther Inglis was an artist and calligrapher. Making a career of art and decorative handwriting was really unusual for a woman at this time, as most women in England were uneducated.

Esther was born around 1569 in either London or Dieppe.

Her parents, Nicholas and Marie Langlois, were French Huguenots. As Protestants they had fled to London to escape religious persecution in France, which was Catholic.

Esther grew up in Edinburgh and changed her name to 'Inglis', the Scottish version of Langlois.

Nicolas was a school teacher and Marie was a talented calligrapher. They probably taught Esther themselves because only boys from wealthy families got an education in those days.

Esther learned to write in over 40 different handwriting styles. She also decorated her manuscripts and small books with self-portraits and nature symbols, including flowers and birds.

Sometimes the words she painted were so small they were only one millimetre high! Esther was an expert in different drawing effects, such as mirror writing (writing while looking in a mirror).

Many of Esther's little books are dedicated to Royalty and important Protestants in England and Europe, including Queen Elizabeth I.

Esther married a Scottish clergyman called Bartholomew Kello in around 1596. She used her artistic skill to copy documents for him in his job as the Clerk of Passports and other foreign correspondence.

The portrait of Esther may have been painted to celebrate her marriage to Bartholomew. The carnation and honeysuckle flowers in the top left-hand corner of the painting represent betrothal, true love, marriage and devotion. If this portrait was created to mark their wedding then it may have been created alongside a painting of her husband that is now lost.

Esther lived in London for a while, but died in Scotland in 1624 aged about 54 years.









Queen Elizabeth I, 'The Rainbow Portrait', anon © Bridgeman Images



Thomas Gresham was an important financier, diplomat and Mercer in Tudor England. The worshipful Company of Mercers was a livery company trading in fabrics such as woollen cloth, velvet, silk and tapestries. Thomas also founded the Royal Exchange in London to act as a centre of business.

The grasshopper is a symbol used by the Gresham family and can be seen in the crest above the family coat of arms. According to the Gresham family's story, a woman was walking when she heard the sound of a grasshopper coming from some long grass by the road. Looking for the grasshopper in the grass, she found a new-born baby, who became the founder of the Gresham family.

Thomas Gresham often presented expensive gifts of gold rings to close family and business friends. Seven of these rings still exist today - they have the person's coat of arms on the outside but also a secret grasshopper on the inside. The grasshopper would only have been seen when the owner took the ring off and looked underneath. We don't know why Thomas gave these rings out but they could have been used to remind the owners of Gresham's help and support.

**Images of two Gresham grasshopper rings can be found here:**

1. Lee ring: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O119787/the-lee-ring-ring-unknown/>
2. Fleetwood ring: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_AF-636](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-636)



The Family of Henry VIII, by unknown, oil on canvas, c.1545. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022





Queen Elizabeth I, 'The Wanstead Portrait'. by unknown but attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder. oil on panel, c.1580-1585 © Bridgeman Images



## MEANINGS OF SYMBOLS FOUND IN PORTRAIT OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I, 'THE WANSTEAD PORTRAIT'

### OLIVE BRANCH

Peace. The olive branch is often seen held by Pax the Goddess of peace.

### SWORD AT FEET

Sword of Justitia - Goddess of Justice. A sword means that justice can be swift and final.

### FLAG

Displays the royal coat of arms and indicates that this is a royal portrait.

### DOG

Faithful and loyal.

This may also be a joke about Elizabeth I's favourite, Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester. When Elizabeth heard that Dudley was planning to travel to France without telling her she said, "I cannot live without seeing you every day... You are like my little dog. As soon as he is seen anywhere, people know that I am coming, and when you are seen, they say I am not far off."

### CARPET

Carpets and tapestries were incredibly expensive and were usually hung on walls or over furniture. The Queen seen standing on a carpet shows how important and wealthy she is.

### GARDEN

This could be the garden of the house of her favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at Wanstead.