

SECONDARY LESSON PLAN

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

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

For students to:

- Be able to explain the difference between Image (public) and Identity (private)
- 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
- Understand that portrait sitters came from diverse backgrounds/races/social classes
- Make comparisons between symbolism in Tudor portraits with today's celebrity images on the internet and social media
- Devise a personal coded language using nature-inspired symbols
- Create a formal 'public image' self-portrait, and a contrasting 'private me' self-portrait that include nature symbolism

CURRICULUM LINKS

KS3: Art & Design

Pupils should be taught to develop their creativity and ideas, and increase proficiency in their execution. They should develop a critical understanding of artists, architects and designers, expressing reasoned judgements that can inform their own work.

Pupils should be taught:

- To use a range of techniques to record their observations in sketchbooks, journals and other media as a basis for exploring their ideas
- To use a range of techniques and media, including painting
- To increase their proficiency in the handling of different materials
- To analyse and evaluate their own work, and that of others, in order to strengthen the visual impact or applications of their work
- About the history of art, craft, design and architecture, including periods, styles and major movements from ancient times up to the present day.

KS3: PSHE (PSHE Association)

Health and wellbeing

H1. How we are all unique; that recognising and demonstrating personal strengths build self-confidence, self-esteem and good health and wellbeing

H2. To understand what can affect wellbeing and resilience (for example, life changes, relationships, achievements and employment)

H3. The impact that media and social media can have on how people think about themselves and express themselves, including regarding body image, physical and mental health

H6. How to identify and articulate a range of emotions accurately and sensitively, using appropriate vocabulary

Relationships

R3. about the similarities, differences and diversity among people of different race, culture, ability, sex, gender identity, age and sexual orientation

BEFORE THE LESSON

- 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 f or 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 identity and finding how Tudor artists used flowers and other nature-based symbols to communicate ideas about people in their portraits. They will be comparing symbols used in Tudor portraiture to those used in contemporary media. They will use what they have learned to design their own symbols and meanings for flowers and natural objects to use in public and private self-portraits.

ACTIVITY 1

Nature symbolism in Tudor portraits

The aim of this activity is to introduce students to the public image Queen Elizabeth I wanted to create through her portraits, as well as the ideas the artist and the people who commissioned the portraits wanted to communicate about her.

Pack resources: Activity Card 1 | AR1 | SM1 | SM2 | SM3 | SM4

ACTIVITY 2

Modern Symbols

The aim of this activity is to compare Tudor portraiture to that of images of celebrities from contemporary media and reflect on what would be the modern equivalents to Tudor symbolism.

Pack resources: Activity Card 2 | AR2 | AR3 | SM1 | SM3 | SM4

ACTIVITY 3

Missing Symbols

The aim of this activity is to explore the diversity of Britain and Europe during the Tudor period and how they were represented in portraiture and what symbols students might add as artists to particular portraits to tell a deeper story with the benefit of modern hindsight.

Pack resources: Activity Card 3 | SM5 | SM6 | SM7

ACTIVITY 4

Building Image and Identity through nature symbolism

The aim of this activity is to plan self-portraits representing Image and/or Identity, incorporating nature-based symbols.

Pack resource: Activity Card 4

ACTIVITY 5

Plenary

Using their self-portraits as prompts for group discussion, students reflect on what they've learned about themselves.

Pack resource: Activity Card 5

IDEAS FOR ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- THE BACTON ALTAR CLOTH

Introduce students to the incredible story of the Bacton Altar Cloth. This cloth was discovered recently in a church but is thought to be the only surviving example of fabric from one of Elizabeth I's dresses.

The cloth is hand embroidered with nature symbols and resembles the dress Elizabeth is wearing in the Rainbow Portrait (SM3).

Watch the short film about the Cloth on YouTube.

Share the images on SM8 on a large screen or on colour handouts.

- CLASS AND GENDER BIAS IN TUDOR ART

Explore why most people in the Tudor period would never have had a portrait painted of them and the reasons why almost all artists were men.

Nature symbolism in Tudor portraits

The aim of this activity is to introduce students to the public image Queen Elizabeth I wanted to create through her portraits, as well as the ideas the artist and the people who commissioned the portraits wanted to communicate about her.

Students will create a collection of images and annotations, unpicking the messages about Elizabeth provided by one Tudor artist via nature symbols in the so-called Rainbow Portrait, and comparing the contemporary meanings of these symbols with students own interpretations of them.

Introduce the students to Queen Elizabeth I by sharing the biography provided (SM1) and/or by showing one of the online videos listed on SM2.

Display the Rainbow Portrait of Elizabeth I (SM3) on a large screen or provided as a colour A3 handout.

Introducing symbols

Explain that 16th-century European artists used symbols in portraits to communicate messages about the sitter.

- 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 the symbols used by artists in the Renaissance/Tudor era would be familiar to people living at the time and their meanings were explained in emblem and iconographical books.
- Pamphlets were sometimes produced for special gatherings when a painting was unveiled or gifted to help viewers decode the symbols' hidden meanings.
- Although many symbols would have been known to people at the time and used by more than one artist, some symbols had secret or personal meanings.

Hand out the symbol worksheet AR1. Ask students to sketch any nature-inspired details they see in the portrait which might have a symbolic meaning (this activity can be completed using sentences describing the symbols if preferred).

Prompts

- Every aspect of this public image of Queen Elizabeth has been constructed, so everything in the painting has been included for a reason, even if that reason has been lost to us over the centuries since it was painted.

Question: do you think your meanings are going to be the same for someone living at the time this was painted?

Share ideas from each person or group and allow the class to add and annotate new ideas onto their worksheet.

Distribute or display (SM4) on the interactive whiteboard. Discuss and compare the meanings students have written on AR1 for the symbols to what they think people at the time would have read into them. Annotate and add any new ideas on a whiteboard.

Modern Symbols

The aim of this activity is to compare Tudor portraiture to that of images of celebrities from contemporary media and reflect on what would be the modern equivalents to Tudor symbolism.

Collect additional resource images of celebrities and examples of modern symbols, such as brands, emojis and memes, used in modern advertising and social media. Make these into a PowerPoint or handouts.

Give students worksheet AR2. They can work in pairs or small groups.

Prompts

Question: What symbols do we see around us in everyday life?

Possible answers:

- Brands
- Emojis
- Memes
- Instructional - fire exit, recycling, school badge

Question: Where do we see nature symbols used in everyday life?

Possible answers:

Apple, BP, Adidas, Chupa Chups, Marc Jacobs Daisy perfume, bees for the city of Manchester, the thistle emblem for Scotland.

Question: if you had to create a modern portrait of Elizabeth I using brand logos or emojis to convey a public image, which symbols would you include?

Working in pairs or independently and using what they wrote on worksheet AR2, ask students to write or draw the modern symbols they would use as an artist in a modern portrait of Elizabeth I using AR3.

Students can use SM1, SM3 and SM4 for inspiration.

Missing Symbols

The aim of this activity is to explore the diversity of Britain and Europe during the Tudor period, how non-white subjects were represented in portraiture and what symbols students might add as artists to particular portraits in order to tell a deeper story with the benefit of modern hindsight.

During the Tudor period, it has been estimated that there may have been around 300 Africans living in England and Scotland. They would have been employed in various roles. Some, like Henry VIII's court musician, John Blanke, would have had a higher status. Most would have been employed in lower-status roles such as service, but many were also working in the cloth trade (England's main industry at the time). They were living free and normal lives and were generally accepted, as the prejudices associated with the transatlantic slave trade had not yet developed. However, this attitude changed from the mid-1600s onwards as English involvement in the slave trade grew.

Through trade, Tudor England was in contact with communities and nations across Africa, Europe, the Mediterranean, Asia and the Americas. This brought new goods to England (including potatoes, ivory, pepper, turkey, coffee, tea and tobacco), as well as contact with different cultures and religious beliefs.

Show students these portraits on a large screen or printed off in full colour (see **SM5** for weblinks):

1. Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I, unknown artist, 1600
2. Portrait of an African Woman, circa 1583-1585

Either ask students to read or read out descriptions of each painting (**SM6** and **SM7**).

Discuss

- Are these paintings sympathetic to their subjects?
 - How has the significance of these paintings changed over time?
 - How do these paintings change the way you think about the Tudor period?
 - What messages do you think are missing?
 - How could those missing messages be added in these paintings in the form of nature symbols?
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ACTIVITY CARD 4

Building Image and Identity through nature symbolism

The aim of this activity is to plan Image and Identity self-portraits, incorporating nature-based symbols. Consider using symbols from both Tudor and contemporary sources, with their original or new meanings.

Every detail sends a message to the viewers of your self-portrait, so think carefully about what you can say with clothes, hairstyle, jewellery, tattoos, etc.

Image: how you wish to be seen outwardly in public. Your public image might be different depending on the audience you've created it for. The symbols used for your public image might represent different groups, organisations or places you have links with.

Identity: who you really are or aim to be, skills, traits, hopes, personal passions and significant moments, qualities that are important to you. These things can be secret - you might choose to hide them using cryptic nature symbols.

Provide students with art materials and ask them to create a self-portrait. They can either work on separate Image and Identity portraits, or try one of the methods below:

Layered – a private *Identity* portrait with a public *Image* portrait laid on top, drawn on acetate or tracing paper.

Duel – a single portrait with the face divided into two; one half showing a public Image, the other half showing Identity.

ACTIVITY CARD 5

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 two things about your personality that most people don't get to see (you have a dream to be a fashion designer, you raise money for a charity, you're afraid of spiders, etc.)
 - Why may only showing their public image be bad for people's wellbeing? (*Image*)
 - Why is it important to know who you really are? (*Identity*)
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SYMBOL	(1) What could this symbol mean? (2) What could it be telling you about Queen Elizabeth?

AR2

Qualities symbolised in Tudor portraits	Contemporary symbols with a similar meaning
WEALTH	
BEAUTY	
ROYALTY	
PURITY	
WISDOM	
FAMILY	

AR3

Elizabeth I's qualities	Brand logos or emoji symbols

Public: who you are or how you wish to be seen outwardly by people who don't know you.		Personal: who you are in private or want to be, personal passions and significant moments, qualities that are important to you.	
Quality or important idea	Drawing or description of Symbol	Quality or important idea	Drawing or description of Symbol

Elizabeth I - the last Tudor monarch - was the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

Her 45-year reign is generally considered one of the most glorious in English history. It was a time of extravagance and luxury. A flourishing popular culture was expressed through writers such as William Shakespeare, while explorers like Sir Walter Raleigh sought to expand England's territory overseas.

England's sense of wellbeing was embodied by Queen Elizabeth herself, who liked to wear sumptuous dresses and jewellery, and be entertained in style at her court. **The Queen was often called 'Gloriana', 'Good Queen Bess' and 'The Virgin Queen'. However, Elizabeth's reign was one of considerable danger, with threats of invasion from Spain through Ireland, and from France through Scotland.**

Elizabeth's mother's fate had been sealed when she failed to provide her husband Henry VIII with what he desperately wanted - a son to succeed him as king. Everyone, from court astrologers to Henry himself, had been convinced Anne would give birth to a boy. After Elizabeth was born, Henry had not attended her christening. When Elizabeth was just two years old, her mother was beheaded at the Tower of London on her father's orders for supposedly committing adultery - probably just an excuse Henry made up to be rid of Anne.

Young Elizabeth was brought up by governesses and tutors, largely ignored by her father. She spent her days studying Greek, Latin, maths, geography and music and was educated to the highest standards. Elizabeth was even taught the art of public speaking, unheard of for women at the time. Her ability to address a large crowd of people, from ministers in Parliament to troops on the battlefield, stood Elizabeth in good stead for the future. She learnt how to turn the tide of opinion in her favour, and this became one of her most effective weapons.

After the death of her father and younger brother Edward V, Princess Elizabeth was imprisoned in the Tower of London by her half-sister Mary (known as Bloody Mary) who was now Queen. Mary accused Elizabeth of being involved in a plot to make herself queen and she narrowly escaped execution.

When Mary died in 1558, hated and feared by the people, Elizabeth became Queen of England at the age of 25. As Elizabeth walked along a carpet to her coronation at Westminster Abbey, the crowds rushed forward to cut out pieces as souvenirs. But Elizabeth was a woman in what was very much a man's world at that time. The year Elizabeth was crowned, the Protestant preacher John Knox wrote, *'It is more than a monster in nature that a woman should reign and bear empire over man.'*

Elizabeth was quick-witted, clever (she spoke five languages) and able to use feminine wiles to get her own way. She could be as ruthless and calculating as her father Henry VIII before her; for example, when she had her own cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, executed for plotting against her. However, Elizabeth could also be vain, sentimental and easily swayed by flattery. She liked to surround herself with attractive people and her portraits were carefully vetted to make sure that no physical flaws were ever revealed. Aged only 29, Elizabeth had almost died of smallpox, which left her face permanently scarred – for the rest of her life she covered the scars with thick white makeup made of white lead (which is very poisonous).

The welfare of her people was of paramount importance to Elizabeth and she once remarked, *'I am already bound unto a husband which is the Kingdom of England.'* Her reluctance to marry was to become a lifelong issue for her ministers. Women were not supposed to rule alone, and marriage was a way of forming a useful political alliance with a European power.

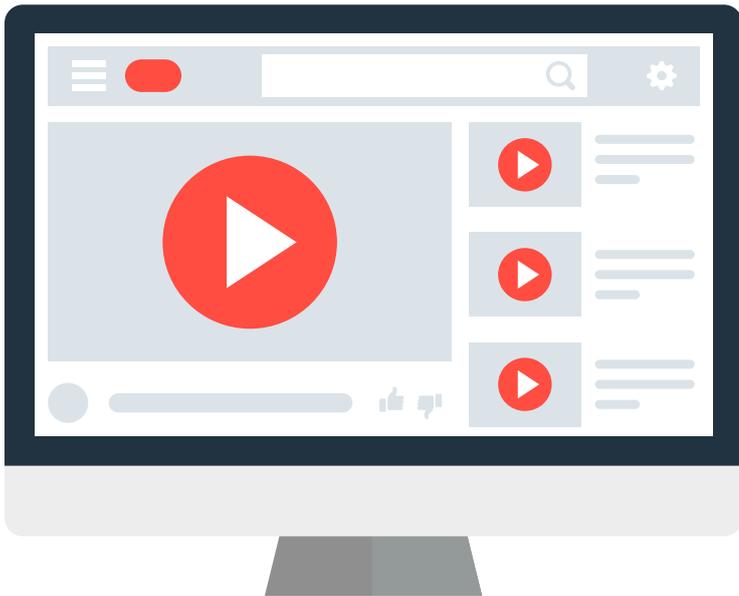
When Elizabeth was 33 years old, Parliament refused to grant her any more money until she agreed to marry. This was a big mistake. Elizabeth addressed the all-male Parliament, telling them that the country's welfare was her priority. She told them she would marry only when it was convenient and would thank Parliament to keep out of what was a personal matter. This was clever - she had effectively banned further discussion. Elizabeth enjoyed flirting with handsome men in her court and may even have had lovers, but she simply did not want to be married and hand over her own power to a husband. *'If I followed the inclination of my nature, it is this,' she said, 'beggar woman and single, far rather than queen and married.'*

Elizabeth's greatest achievement lies in the relationship she forged with her people. She was ahead of her time in her grasp of public relations, and her popularity remained undimmed. *'This I account the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves,'* she said in a speech to Parliament in 1601.

Elizabeth died in 1603, aged 69. She had sensed that death was near but, with her characteristic iron will, was determined to face it off, refusing to eat, drink or lie on her bed for the final three days of her life.

Elizabeth's blend of shrewdness, courage and charisma inspired deep loyalty and helped unite the nation against outside enemies. The admiration bestowed upon her in her lifetime and in the centuries after is the result of a carefully crafted, brilliantly executed campaign in which Elizabeth fashioned herself as the glittering symbol of the nation's destiny.

(Adapted from [BBC - History - Elizabeth I: An Overview](#) and [Elizabeth I \(r.1558-1603\) | The Royal Family](#))



Introducing Elizabeth I

(582) [Who was Elizabeth I? | Hunting for History | BBC Teach - YouTube](#)

(582) [Elizabeth I: Ruled England for 44 Years - Fast Facts | History - YouTube](#)

(582) [“I, too can command the wind, sir!” \(Cate Blanchett\) - YouTube](#)

Rainbow Portrait

(582) [Lucy Worsley on the “Rainbow” portrait - YouTube](#)

(582) [Dr Kat and The Rainbow Portrait - YouTube](#)

(582) [Elizabeth I’s dress from the Rainbow Portrait is recreated - YouTube](#)

Bacton Altar Cloth

(582) [The Lost Dress of Elizabeth I - YouTube](#)

Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I

(582) [Sophie Bostock: Orientalist Encounters | صوفي بوستوك: لقاءات المستشرقين - YouTube](#)



Queen Elizabeth I (The Rainbow Portrait), artist unknown, circa 1602. © Bridgeman Images

FLOWERS

Beauty, youthfulness, growth and fertility.

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

Elizabeth I was described as the 'Empresse of flowers', by the poet Sir John Davies and was associated with English flowers that bloom in spring and summer.

Individual flowers also had their own meanings:

- **Honeysuckle** - love and devotion
- **Pansy** - thought, thoughtfulness, remembrance and meditation
- **Pink Carnation** - young love, fidelity and maternal love
- **White Carnation** - pure or spiritual love
- **Lily** - purity, innocence, rebirth, royalty

Flowers designs were also used just to be decorative...

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 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.

EARS AND EYES

The Queen sees and hears everything.

Elizabeth had a network of spies working for her in Britain and in Europe.

ARMILLARY SPHERE

Queen's wisdom in both heavenly and earthly matters. Higher knowledge and religious devotion.

The symbol is also used by Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn and seen in paintings of the queen's royal champions.

(An armillary sphere is a model of objects around the Earth or the sun and in the sky, constructed from rings and hoops representing the equator, the tropics, and other celestial circles, and able to revolve on its axis.)

RAINBOW

Peace and prosperity.

The inscription on the portrait says, "non sine sole iris" or "Without the sun, there can be no rainbow". Elizabeth is the sun - without her, there is no peace.

PEARLS

Purity

Positive morals and good values

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

SNAKE

Wisdom – serpents are cunning creatures in the Bible.

GAUNTLET

The armoured glove worn by knights in battle.

Elizabeth is Defender of England and the Faith (Church of England).

JEWELS

Wealth

Power

CLOTH OF SILVER

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

GOLD

Wealth and power.

HEART

Advice that comes from the heart.

(Often paired with a snake symbol, because giving good advice needs wisdom.)

MOON

Virginity

Purity

The moon was also a symbol of Diana, Roman goddess of the hunt.

Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I, unknown artist, 1600.

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/portrait-of-the-moorish-ambassador-to-queen-elizabeth-i>

Portrait of an African Woman, circa 1583-1585.

<https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/en/Explore/highlights-of-the-collection/portrait-of-an-african-woman>

Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I, unknown artist, 1600. Oil on oak panel.

Abd al-Wahid bin Masoud bin Muhammad al-Annuri was the ambassador for the Moroccan sultan, Mulay Ahmad al-Mansur.

Al-Annuri wears a white linen turban that shows his high rank and he is carrying a decorated curved North African sword known as a nimcha. The way he wraps his turban would show to fellow Muslims his beliefs, status and the region he was from.

In 1585 England had formed the Barbary company to trade exclusively with Morocco in North Africa. Al-Annuri's Moroccan embassy came to England in 1600 looking to strengthen ties with the Elizabethan court. The embassy consisted of the ambassador (al-Annuri himself) and at least fourteen fellow Muslims.

They arrived in Dover on 8 August 1600 from where they travelled to London, taking up residence in the household of the merchant Anthony Radcliffe on the Strand. They had an audience with Queen Elizabeth I five days later at Nonsuch Palace in Surrey. This was an important meeting for Elizabeth as Morocco was potentially an important trading partner and ally against hostile regional powers (including Spain). Al-Annuri wanted to negotiate an alliance between the Sultan and Elizabeth I.

This portrait is the earliest known painting of a Muslim in England.

**Portrait of an African Woman, attributed to Annibale Carracci, circa 1583-1585.
Oil on canvas.**

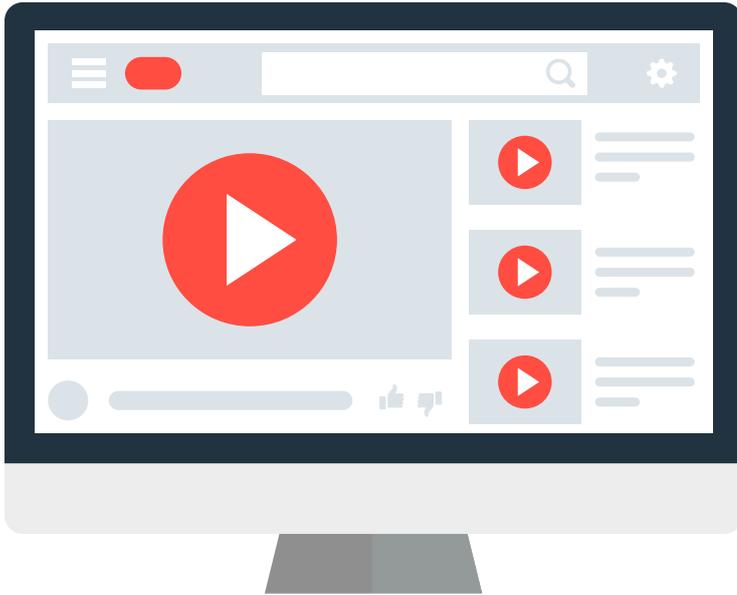
This beautiful portrait is the only surviving part of a larger painting that has been cut down. You can still see the shape of another person on the right-hand side.

This African woman wouldn't have been the focus of the original painting (that must have someone in the missing section). Unlike other portraits of the time, she doesn't seem to have been included just as an 'accessory' to represent the wealth and sophistication of the main sitter.

The woman is dressed sensibly, in what would have been a middle-class woman's best set of day clothes in Tudor-era Europe. Black dyes were extremely expensive - black clothes were only worn by people who were wealthy and had some status. However, these are not typical of the clothes we usually see wealthy Tudor-era women wearing in portraits, which tend to show off expensive fabrics decorated with embroidery and jewels. That is not to say that she isn't displaying some wealth, as she is wearing a red coral necklace, gold earrings and silver-lined lace. The artist has painted her with dress pins, so she may be a seamstress or a domestic attendant for the other sitter.

We can only guess at who this woman was but she may have been a valued member of the household, and known well enough by the main subject of the full-sized painting to be included in it.





Video about the Bacton Altar Cloth:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjai9PoRMo8>