

## Gathering clues

**Artists give clues to us to help us understand the person or people they depict in portraits. Can you find the clues in these portraits that tell us about the people portrayed?**

Choose a portrait of an individual person. Describe the sitter's clothes. Why is the person wearing these clothes?

Describe the sitter's facial expression. What do you think the artist wants us to think about what the sitter is feeling?

Describe the sitter's pose or gesture. What do these imply?



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Now look at the two portraits which show groups of people.  
What differences are there in the way the people are grouped?

Describe the background details of the portrait.

What does this tell you about where the group is?

What are they doing?

## Reading portraits

**Every portrait relates a message about the person or people portrayed. Some portraits depict the power associated with an important position in society, while others reflect the inner thoughts of the subject. War has provided an occasion for both kinds of portrait making.**

Choose a portrait of an individual person. Why do you think the subject was selected and an artist was commissioned to create this portrait?

Do you think this portrait was intended to be displayed in a public or a private place?

What is it in the portrait that tells you this? (Look at costume, bodily pose or gesture, facial expression, composition and background.)



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Now choose a portrait of a group of people. Has the artist made any one person in the group stand out more than the others? How was that done? Why?

Look at the photograph of the soldiers in Egypt. Why do you think this postcard photograph was taken? To whom do you think it was sent?

Why are portraits made of military subjects?

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## An invitation to look – learning resources

The **Invitation to look** package assists teachers and students as they explore together the portraits presented in the exhibition **Up front: faces of Australia at war**. The contents of the package include:

- a postcard booklet of five portrait images with details on the reverse side
- **Gathering clues** – focus questions designed for upper primary students
- **Reading portraits** – focus questions designed for lower secondary students.

The postcard booklet and questions focus students' attention on details of the visual content of portraits and elements of their production. The learning approach helps students to understand how portraits communicate messages: both those intended by the artist and commissioning agent, as well as unintended messages.

Portraits tell stories of time, place, circumstances and human experience. These stories can be uncovered by looking closely at costume, facial expression, bodily pose and gesture, backgrounds and accessories, colour, size, medium and even the frame of the portrait.

The postcard booklet contains five portraits, including commissioned portraits of notable individuals, portraits of unnamed people representing different types of military service and a photograph showing a group of soldiers at recreation.

An **Invitation to look** may encourage other projects on portraiture in the classroom or at home.

For further information on educational programs please contact:

Education and Public Programs  
National Portrait Gallery  
Old Parliament House  
Parkes ACT 2600

Education and Visitor Services  
Australian War Memorial  
GPO Box 345  
Canberra ACT 2601  
<http://www.awm.gov.au>