Subject: ART

Topic: PORTRAIT PAINTING (PORTRAITURE) IN RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Age of students: 16-18

Language level: B1

Time: 2 HOURS

Contents aims:
After completing the lesson, the student will be able to:
Analyze and understand the visual contents of portraits.
Interpret the aims of a portrait.
Explain the historical context of the renaissance period.
Compare different models of framing.
Explain the use of background analysis.

Language aims:
After completing the lesson, the student will be able to:
Describe the features of a portrait.
Use new expressions in describing portraits.

Pre-requisites: to be able to describe a picture.

Materials: Photos, the Net, a projector

PORTRAIT PAINTING (PORTRAITURE) IN RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Portrait has been a very important genre in history of art since ancient times and particularly in some periods like Italian and Flemish Renaissance and in Modern Art.
During XV century many important people, princes, dukes and nobles, commissioned their portraits to celebrate some aspects of their power, influence, richness and so on.
Artists, like Leonardo and others, were concerned about personality of famous and common people too.

Definition
Portrait is a likeness of a real person, especially one showing the face, not only representing the exterior aspect but also the psicological character.

Concerning the framing we have some different models.

profile	Profile portraits are reminiscent of the classical portrait medals and gives an ancient solemnity to the person represented.

Piero della Francesca, ***Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza***, 1465-1472, oil on wood, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Piero della Francesca painted a diptych, a double portrait of Dukes of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro and his wife Battista Sforza, to emphasize the role of the noble couple governing one of the most important and cultured town of Italy. The Duchess Battista Sforza is richly dressed and has an excessively high forehead, according to the fashion of the time.

The painting is particular because it's a double painting, it has two fronts and two backs. The front faces (recto) show the portraits of the dukes, and the back faces represent their triumphs.

The perfect and calm landscape tells us about the great capability of Federico as an excellent governor and a brave soldier when defending his territory.

The landscape in the background continues through the two portraits, representing symbolically the marriage between the two.

On the back of the wood (*verso*) we see the triumphs of the Duchess and Duke of Urbino. Federico da Montefeltro and his wife are represented on two antique wagons in the company of thier own Virtues.

The Duke wears his armor just like a leader, while he is crowned by the Victory; the Duchess sits in a chariot pulled by two unicorns, symbols of chastity, to emphasize her pious and gentle soul.

| **half-length** | Half-length portrait is a framing that shows only the upper body of a person: head and shoulders. It usually shows the bust in a three-quarter-turned position. |

Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of man*, 1476, oil on wood. London, National Gallery.

Antonello da Messina chose to represent a man, whose identity has been lost over the years, with a three-quarters framing, an unusual choice in Italy, but already widely used in Flanders.
The subject belonged to the middle-upper class because, as we see, he wears a red cloth beret and a white shirt which shows up from a leather blouse.
The dark background and the essential composition derived from Flemish painting school that Antonello personally learnt during his stay in Naples first and then after his trips in Italy from Florence to Venice.
Very impressive are the eyes that originally looked in a different direction as we knew from Xray analisys done during a restauration of the mastepiece.

| **half-length with hands** | Half-length with hands is a portrait showing the bust with the hands. |

Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of Lucina Brembati*, 1518-1523, oil on wood, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara.

Lorenzo Lotto depicted Lucina Brembati in half-length with hands. She is shown wearing a ring representing the coat of arms of her family in Bergamo, the Brembati family. Her exact identity can be discovered only by solving the rebus hidden in the crescent moon: the letters "CI" inscribed within the center of the the Italian word *luna* form the first name of the lady, **Lu**-ci-**na.** Lucina**,** who was Leonino Brembati's wife, is sumptuously clothed with pearls and other jewelry, including a golden toothpick, and a marten fur stole, a luxury object that also attracted fleas. The portrait combines Lotto's unswerving insistence on the truthful depiction of Lucina's somewhat unlovely features with the imaginative and even romantic idea of a nocturnal setting.

| **three-quarter length** | Three-quarter length portrait represents the subject without legs. |

Hans Holbein the Younger, *Henry VIII*, 1540, oil on wood, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini.

This painting was depicted by the German Hans Holbein the Younger who was court painter to King Henry VIII of England.
The prototype for this image is his lost mural that once decorated the Privy Chamber of Whitehall Palace in London in which the king is with his third wife Jane Seymour.
Carried out in 1537, that wall painting depicted the only one of Henry's queens to bear him a male heir. Of the numerous paintings derived from that prototype, including a copy at Windsor Castle, this is without doubt the one of highest quality. The closest example to the prototype, on the other hand, is the portrait in the Thyssen collection in Madrid, which this version approaches especially in the rendering of the details of the collar (these passages were later modified, as it is visible through reflectography).

The Barberini portrait depicts the king in the same costume that he wore for his wedding to Anne of Cleves (April, 1540). The painting can thus be related to Duren's 1539 marriage portrait of Anne of Cleves (Louvre Museum, Paris), carried out in small dimensions and on canvas as it was meant to be transported.

The attribution of the Rome version has been the subject of much discourse. It was considered to be an autograph work of Holbein, a copy of a lost original, the work of the master's workshop, the work of a close collaborator. An official engraving cut after this composition (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), adherent in its details to the Barberini picture, confirms the importance of this version of the image to the iconography of the king. Moreover, reflectographic examination of the painting has revealed features and details under the drawing that strongly suggest that the work is an autograph Holbein.

The painting bears the inscription "ANNO ETATIS SUAE XLIX" (His year of age, 49).

Full-length

Full-length portrait depicts the person's full body – head to toe – in the frame, often showing the environment around. Full length portraits are used to signify the person's importance in the society or in any other way.

Jan Van Eyck, ***The Arnolfini Portrait***, 1434**,** oil on wood, London, National Gallery.

Giovanni Arnolfini was a member of a merchant family from Lucca living in Bruges. He was represented by the Flemish painter Jan Van Eyck with his wife in a well-appointed interior with stained glass window, chandelier, ornate mirror and oriental carpet. The couple is well-dressed. The woman's robe is rimmed with ermine fur, showing a generous amount of fabric around her feet. The man's dress includes a plaited straw hat and a velvet cloak, lined with fur. These clothes place them among the wealthy citizens of Bruges, though not yet in the top rank.
Infact, the restricted size of the room, the wooden clogs on the floor worn to protect from street dirt, and the absence of ostentatious gold jewellery, all indicate bourgeois rather than noble status.
On the background the mirror reflects two figures in the doorway: two witnesses of the scene, which is supposed to be a wedding. In this way the painting also has the value of an "official" wedding document. One of the two figures is the painter himself, as the ornate Latin signature translates as 'Jan van Eyck was here 1434'. And the viewer, watching the scene but being in front of the mirror, seems to be one of the witnesses and takes on the painter's point of view.
Arnolfini raises his right hand towards them, perhaps as a greeting.
Van Eyck was deeply interested in the effects of light, and oil paint allowed him to depict it with great precision.
His attention for light details is notable on the gleaming brass chandelier.

In all kinds of portrait the background is very important too because, on analyzing it, we can see and

understand the historical period, the socio-cultural environment, the economic context and a great deal of other information.

Vocabulary
Match the words in the 2 columns

portrait	dittico
genre	disegno
framing	ritratto
to commission	sfondo
background	paesaggio
features	commissionare
depict	genere
painting	rappresentare
drawing	dipinto
landscape	inquadratura
diptych	caratteristiche

Practical consolidation

1. Using your book of history of art or some other books like catalogues of museum, find portraits with the same framing of each portrait analized during the theorical lesson and for each chosen painting you have to report: name of the author, title, year, tecnique used.

type of framing	title	author	year	tecnique
profile				
half-length				
half-length with hands				
three-quarter length				
full length				

2. Choose your favorite painting among the ones you have seen and compare it to the correspondent painting analysed during the lesson.

3. Observe carefully the painting in the picture and fill in the gaps with the words in the box.

commissioned

framed

hands

open setting

portrait

Renaissance

steady

three–quarter

Ginevra Benci was the daughter of a wealthy Florentine banker, and her _____, the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in the Americas, was probably _____ about the time of her marriage at age 16.

Some features of Ginevra's portrait reveal young Leonardo as an innovator. He placed her in an _____ at a time when women were still shown carefully sheltered within the walls of their family homes, with landscapes glimpsed only through open windows. The _____ pose, which shows her _____ reserve, is among the first in Italian portraiture, for either sex.

At some time in the past, probably because of damage, the panel was cut down by a few inches along the bottom, removing Ginevra's _____. A drawing by Leonardo survives that suggests their appearance-lightly cradled at her waist and holding a small sprig, perhaps a pink, a flower commonly used in _____ portraits to symbolize devotion or virtue. Ginevra's face is _____ by the spiky, evergreen leaves of a juniper bush, the once–brighter green turned brown with age. Juniper refers to her chastity, the greatest virtue of a Renaissance woman, and puns her name. The Italian for juniper is *ginepro*.

The vast majority of female portraits were commissioned on one of two occasions: betrothal or marriage. Wedding portraits tend to be made in pairs, with the woman on the right side. Since Ginevra faces right, this portrait is more likely to have commemorated her engagement. Her lack of obvious finery, however, is somewhat surprising. Jewels, luxurious brocades, and elaborate dresses were part of dowry exchanges and displayed a family's wealth.