

MAP Activity Worksheet: Coded Portraits







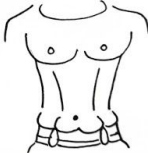



To learn how to write and read a language, you have to first learn its alphabet. That's obvious, isn't it? Now, think about how images and visuals can be a language. They can tell you things and hold information, just like text can.

So what are the ABCs of visuals?

Well, in older times, some smart people thought that they would make it easy for everyone. So they wrote detailed rulebooks on all of this stuff, including of course, how to make portraits and figures. There were different rules for different parts of the body, and they were often based on comparisons to things in real life (as you will see below).


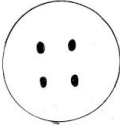

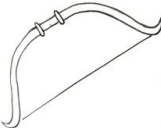
They usually described multiple ways of drawing the same body part, and taught that every type was associated with specific feelings and qualities. For example, one type of eye would show shyness, while another type would show happiness, and yet another would show anger.

Here are some examples from one such ancient rulebook called the *Chitrasutra*. This was a book written in 5th century India that deals with the classification of pictures, painting materials, rules and codes on drawing, among many other things.

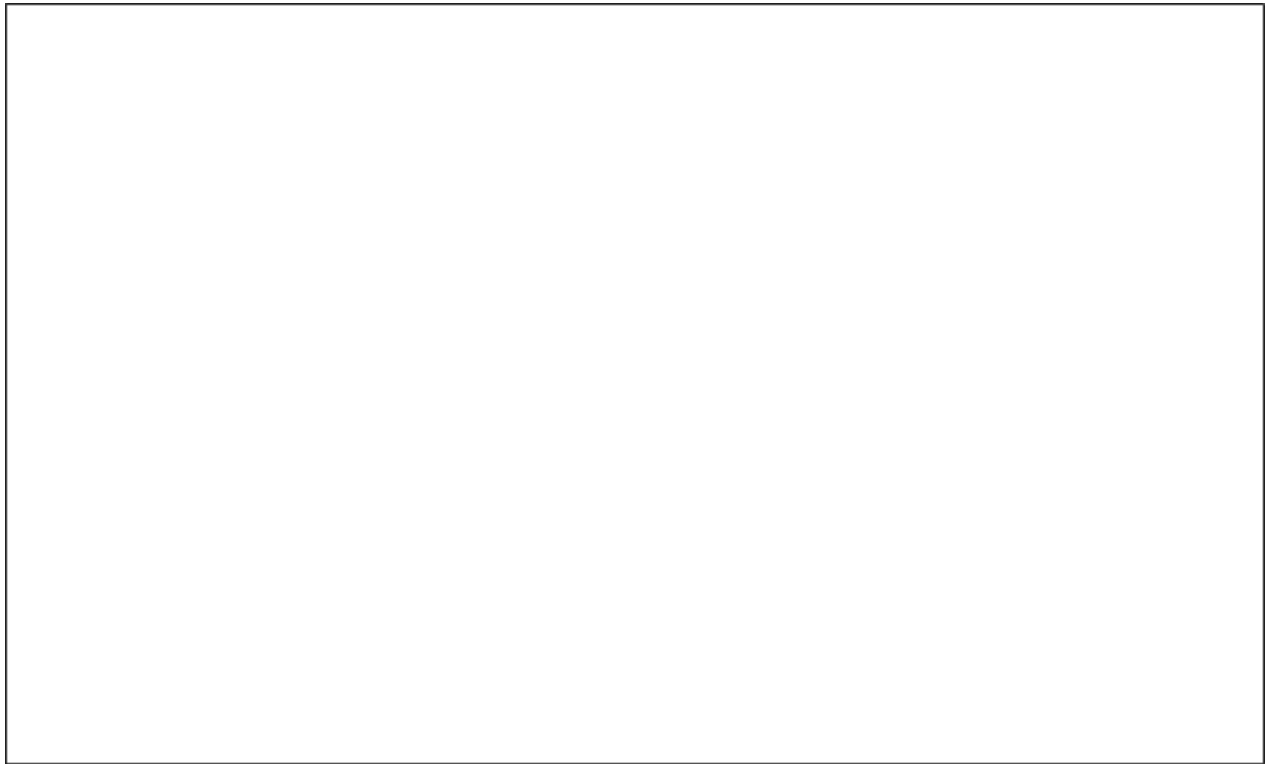
Body Part	Real World Comparison
 The eye	 A lotus bud
 The nose	 A sesame flower
 The torso	 Head of a cow
 The arm	 Shoot of a bamboo tree

Part One: Building it up

Why don't you try creating a similar rulebook for yourself now? Can you also associate these body parts with feelings or qualities? Here are some prompts to get you started.

Body Part	Real World Comparison	Associated Feeling
 Donald Duck's Eyes		
	 A Button	Anger
 Gautama Buddha's Hair		
	 A Bow	Strength

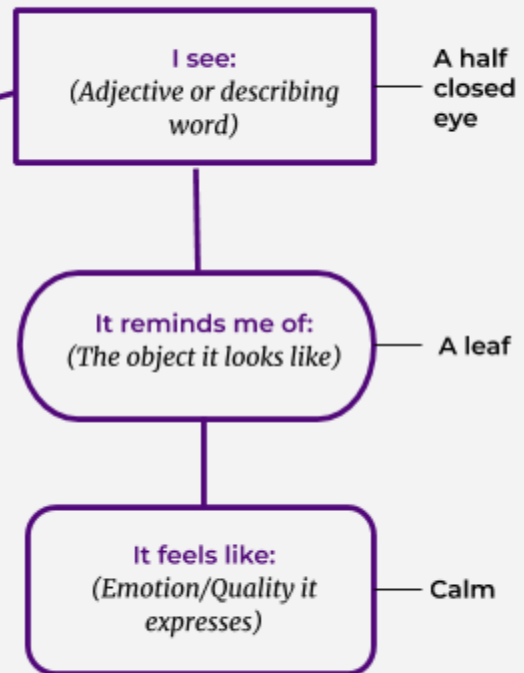
You can keep adding to this list if you feel like. After you are done making your own rulebook of drawing a human body, why don't you try making a portrait using the ABCs of portraiture you've just written? Draw it below. And remember to share it with us!



Part Two: Breaking it Down

For everyone who invented a script (what we call the written form of a language) there was someone else who learnt to read it. Now that you know how the language of stylised portraits are often developed, do you think you can work out how to read it?

Here's a painting from the MAP collection. We've focused on the eye and given you a set of prompts, as well as example answers to show how you can go about this business.



Now you can repeat this exercise with other parts of this figure. Why don't you start with some focussed code-breaking with the areas we have highlighted for you, and move ahead to challenge yourself by trying other parts such as the neck or chin?



I see:

It reminds me of:

It feels like:



I see:

It reminds me of:

It feels like:



I see:

It reminds me of:

It feels like:



I see:

It reminds me of:

It feels like: