

# CreativeConnections

Art Themes + Works

## EXPRESSION + DUBUFFET

### VIEW



**Let us begin with careful looking.** Spend one whole minute quietly figuring out what we see. Scan the image. What stands out? What are you drawn to? Look for colors, shapes and lines. What is in the background, the foreground? What objects can you identify? What appears mysterious? Is there anything you notice after looking for one minute that you did not see at first glance?

**Jean Dubuffet** (French, 1901 - 1985)

Le Villageois aux Cheveux Ras  
(The Villager with Close-Cropped  
Hair), 1947

oil on canvas

50 5/8 x 37 7/8 in.

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts  
Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the  
Des Moines Art Center, 1981.41

Photo Credit: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

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## DIG

Looking at a piece of artwork activates our eyes and brains. Look at the artwork on page one again, and write down things that you see by answering “what is going on in this work of art?” Then listen to what your brain thinks and answer the question “what makes you say that?” to help you look for supporting clues and to help you understand what you see and think about this work of art.

What is going on in this work of art?	What makes you say that?

Which question was more difficult to answer? Why do you think that is?

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## DISCUSS

Look closely at the Villager's face. Describe the facial features that you see. What kind of expression do you see in his face? Does he look sad, mad, and confused or something else? Why do you think that?

Body language is a way of expressing how we feel by using our bodies. How we stand or hold our arms are two examples of this. Do you notice anything expressive about the Villager's clothes and body? What might his body be telling us? What kinds of things can we express or say with our own bodies?

Look close at the village scene behind the villager. Why do you think the artist painted the man so large in comparison to the village behind him?

If you were going to write a story about the villager in the painting what would your story be about? How would the villager talk or behave?

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## CREATE

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Scratch Portraits | Visual Art

Make your own expressive portrait in the style of Dubuffet.

### MATERIALS

Sturdy Paper  
Oil Pastels or Crayons  
Black Paint – acrylic or tempera  
Toothpicks and/or Q-Tips  
Paper Towels

### INSTRUCTIONS

First you will start by coloring the entire paper with your crayons or pastels. You will color every inch of the paper's surface, so if your paper is too big you might want to cut it in half or smaller. Whatever you draw here will be hidden with black paint and your finished portrait, so consider this while you are drawing. Do you want to fill the page with big blocks of your favorite colors? Do you want to draw a hidden city? Color a great big rainbow or write a secret message? It is up to you – just be sure to cover the entire sheet of paper.

When you're finished, you will carefully paint over you entire drawing with black paint – again cover every inch.

While the paint is still wet you will scratch a portrait into your layer of paint. A portrait is another word for a drawing of a person, like the Villager that Dubuffet painted. Use your toothpick and/ or Q-Tip like a pencil to make lines in the wet black paint.

Draw a person. It could be an entire body or just a face. It could be a self-portrait (a picture of you) or a portrait of someone else. What kinds of clothes will you draw on them? What will their hair look like? Very importantly, what will their expression be? Will they be smiling or sleeping? Will they be worried or excited? How will you draw their eyes and mouth to show their expression? A big open mouth might mean they are scared or singing.

Be sure to give your portrait plenty of details: do they have pockets, patterns or a pet with them? What will you draw in the background? Is the person inside or outside? Dubuffet drew an incredibly detailed village behind the villager. Where will you place yours? Perhaps they're on a beach or in space. It is entirely up to you. You are the artist!

You made need to wipe your drawing tool (toothpick/Q-tip) off with a paper towel as you work if there's too much paint on the end, or just grab a fresh drawing tool and keep adding more details. When you are all done, lay your artwork somewhere flat and safe to dry, Ta-Da!

## ASSIGNMENT #2

Reading People | Social Science

Looking at images of people, what can be learned based on what we see.

## MATERIALS

Books  
Magazines  
Photographs  
Internet Images

## INSTRUCTIONS

First will you gather 5 different images of people. You can find the images in many different places: in books, magazines, your family photographs, or online. Select pictures of people that you find interesting and that you don't already know. Find five people that you would like to know more about or understand better.

Looking at your pictures one at a time, what do you notice about this person? What emotions might they be feeling? What makes you say that? Is their body language telling you anything? What do you think their clothes may be expressing? Do you get an idea of what kinds of things they might like or not like? Is this an old photo? When do you think this person was alive? Can you make any guesses about their job, hobbies or family? What state or part of the world do you think they live in?

After you've looked at, thought and wondered about one image, move on to the next until you have spent time reviewing all five images.

Lastly, pick one of your images and share with someone else or with your whole class. Ask the other person to "read" the photo and tell you what they see, think and wonder about this person. Listen to what the other person or class says, and then tell them what you thought. Did you come up with the same things? Did they point out something you did not notice? Did you show them something they didn't see? How much do you think we could learn about a person just by looking at them? How likely are we to be wrong about the things that we guess about them?

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## RELATE

Jean Dubuffet loved and appreciated art made by children and people with mental illness. He worked hard to promote their work, collected it, and even invented a name for it: Art Brut, which means “Raw Art” in French. Art Brut became an artistic style that was inspired by artwork composed by people who were not formally trained in art but still created amazing works!

***Do have any friends or family that are not professional artists but still produce creative things? What kinds of things do they make?***

Dubuffet is known for the thick textured and gritty surfaces of his pictures from the 1940s and '50s. Dubuffet painted in ways inspired by children and he also used non-traditional materials and tools to paint. He incorporated mud, sand, gravel, glass and string with his oil paint. See if you can see evidence of these materials in [this painting](#) by Dubuffet. Where can you see the materials? Did he hide them well or are they easy to find?

Jean Dubuffet once said “*Look at what lies at your feet!... A crack in the ground, sparkling gravel, a tuft of grass, some crushed debris, offer equally worthy subjects for your applause and admiration.*” What do you think he meant by this? How did he express this idea in his artwork?

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## WONDER

Now that you have spent time viewing and thinking about Jean Dubuffet's painting *Villager with Close Cropped Hair*, what do you still wonder about this work? If you could ask the artist or the painting anything what would you want to know most? Use the question starters below to write three questions.

Why is...	I am curious about...	What part....	Are we...
Who is...	How did you...	What if...	Is she...
Where...	Did you know...	Suppose that...	Do you...

My questions about Jean Dubuffet's *Villager with Close Cropped Hair*

1.

2.

3.