STUDIO FIELDNOTES / MODERN & CONTEMPORARY BLACK ARTISTS / 9–12

Portraits with Agency | Zanele Muholi

Teacher guide · 9–12 · 50–65 minutes × 3–5 sessions

Essential question

Who controls the meaning of a portrait?

Why this investigation matters

Affirm privacy, identity, and self-selection; no compulsory disclosure

The finished work

Consent-based self-portrait and authored caption

Methods and material suggestions

photographic lighting, self-representation, caption; choose materials suitable for your space: drawing and collage materials, paper, water-based media, or clean reclaimed objects as appropriate.

Learning targets

Students will: analyze a relevant visual or disciplinary source; experiment with photographic lighting, self-representation, caption; create an original response; give and use evidence-based feedback; and explain one artistic choice.

Teaching progression

01 / Engage

Show the inquiry question: Who controls the meaning of a portrait? Invite a noticing, a wonder, and an initial interpretation.

02 / Investigate

Study at least two credited examples associated with Zanele Muholi. Affirm privacy, identity, and self-selection; no compulsory disclosure Students annotate the evidence that supports their thinking.

03 / Skill Studio

Demonstrate photographic lighting, self-representation with a short material experiment. Students test the technique and record what changes.

04 / Generate

Produce at least two distinct visual approaches to the challenge. Compare how each communicates the idea.

05 / Plan

Choose an approach, identify materials and sketch a sequence of actions. Name one foreseeable difficulty.

06 / Produce

Create the original artwork or design: Consent-based self-portrait and authored caption. Photograph or annotate work in progress.

07 / Critique

Use evidence-based peer feedback: one element that communicates, one question, one suggested next move.

08 / Revise

Make one visible revision in response to critique or new evidence. Record before-and-after choices.

09 / Present

Display or share the result with a student-authored explanation and credits for research sources.

10 / Reflect

Return to the inquiry question and explain what the work now communicates, what changed and what could improve next time.

Standards and adaptation

NCAS Visual Arts Creating, Responding and Connecting (anchor-level alignment); match grade-specific performance standards before instruction.

Students study the artist as a source of artistic inquiry and make an original response rather than a copy.

Differentiation and access

Offer visual exemplars, tactile or large-print materials, verbal/audio explanations, partner brainstorming, alternate motor tools, and choice in subject matter. Expect a written inquiry question, evidence-based comparison, process portfolio, iterative critique, and a defended artistic decision.

Teacher checks

Before: Ask students to answer: Who controls the meaning of a portrait? Record a drawing, annotation or discussion response.

During: Look for purposeful use of photographic lighting and a clear link between research evidence and design choices. Ask students to explain an alternative.

After: Compare first plan and revised result; collect a student statement naming one choice, one change, and the evidence that motivated it.

Source and representation care

Research original works using the cited museum or artist resources. Do not imply the supplied editorial cover graphic depicts the artist or their copyrighted artwork. Credit creators and seek permissions for reproductions. No student should have to disclose private identity or family history.