MY NAME IS AMELIA EARHART...

Include Me In!

I was one of the first women fliers and a pioneer in the early days of air travel. I showed that women could do the same things men could do—fly airplanes—and do them as well and sometimes a lot better.

I was the second person to fly solo (that means all by myself) over the Atlantic Ocean. I made the flight from 8,000 miles between Mexico City and New Jersey and between Hawaii and California. I spoke out for air travel, for women's rights, and for women taking up flying. I worked for the cause I believed in. I wrote books and some poetry. As a popular heroine I was looked up to by thousands of girls who wanted to be like me.

I dreamed of flying around the world. Every time I tried there was an accident, engine trouble, or bad weather that stopped me. On my last attempt, I had made it halfway round the world when my plane with me in the pilot's seat disappeared in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Even though a great search was made, I was never found. I think I was so important that you should vote to "Include Me In" the National Portrait Gallery!

MY NAME IS JOHN WILKES BOOTH...

Include Me In!

I shot and killed Abraham Lincoln, America's most beloved president. Playing a part in such a momentous event was a major part of my life. I was a great actor and I believed that my role was to portray Lincoln, and I did it with passion and effort.

I was one of the highest paid athletes of my time. I could hit more than thirty, forty, fifty home runs in a season. One year I hit sixty. I was known as the 'hit king' and was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame! Despite tough rules, the National Portrait Gallery has amassed, during the ten years of its history, more than 200 portraits, including not just head and shoulders oil paintings (although there are plenty of those) but oils in full length and group portraits, as well as watercolors, drawings in ink, charcoal, marbles, and wood. Portraits are not portraits, but that photographs, sculptures, and silhouettes as well as images of real people appearing on packages, labels, and money are.

The decision of whether the portrait of a particular person should be represented in the National Portrait Gallery rests in the hands of the National Portrait Gallery Commission, a group of men and women from business, the arts, and government who make policy for the museum. The commission's job is to be sure that the National Portrait Gallery lives up to its twofold mission: to tell the story of America's history in the terms of the men and women who made that history, and to study, display, and preserve the art of portraiture. To each portrait that comes up for acquisition, the commission applies these four tests:

- has the subject of the portrait been dead ten years or more (presidents excepted)?
- did the sitter make a significant contribution to American life and culture?
- was the portrait made from life?
- is a better likeness of the subject available?

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“Include Me In!”

Now students are ready to play “Include Me In!” Here you might use either the National Portrait Gallery materials on Amelia Earhart, George Armstrong Custer, John Wilkes Booth, and Babe Ruth featured in this issue of Art to Zoo ... or other materials relating directly to some particular aspect of your school curriculum. (These “other” materials may be gathered from sources like illustrated history books and magazines.) Again the children will be working in small groups.

Explain to them that each group is to assume the role of the National Portrait Gallery Commission as it meets to decide whether a particular candidate should be represented in the museum’s collection; and this decision is to be based solely on the contents of a “dossier”—or bundle—of written and visual materials constituting the candidate’s application for inclusion in the National Portrait Gallery. Along with a brief biographical sketch of the candidate, each dossier has a selection of labeled photographs of portraits of the candidate done in various media and (whenever possible) photographs of objects relating to the candidate’s career and deeds. (See the biographical materials at left and on page 4 of this issue of Art to Zoo. The issue has been designed to be opened flat and hung on your bulletin board so that the dossier materials for each person can be viewed as a package.)

After each group of students has carefully read the biographical sketch of its assigned candidate, the children should examine their candidate’s portrait materials for further clues (to be found in facial expression, clothing, posture, “props”) to the candidate’s character and accomplishments. From this evidence, the children must now decide how well their candidate measures up against the following criteria:

Criteria (Who Should Be Included in the National Portrait Gallery)

• People who have made an important difference to their times or to American history.
• People whose lives ought to be known to all Americans today.

For example, should a man like Custer, noted more for his valiant fighting Indians, be honored? His death was a big event, but was his life really that important? And if Custer is to be included, which one of the portraits in his dossier should be chosen to represent him?

Now have the children voice their opinions on these matters in letters to National Portrait Gallery Director, Marvin Sadik.* Then have them read and discuss the interview with Mr. Sadik on page 3 of this issue of Art to Zoo to find out who really is represented in the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery—and why.

Your Own Portrait Gallery

A good follow-up activity to “Include Me In!” is to have students create a portrait gallery of their own containing likenesses of important people in their school or community. Here research, art, language arts, and decision-making skills may be brought into play as each of your previously focused groups of students works as a team to accomplish one of the following tasks:

• Draw up criteria for the class as a whole to use in deciding whose portraits to include in the gallery.
• Screen applicant and come up with a final slate of candidates for the entire class to vote on.
• Research and write labels.
• Create an over-all plan for the exhibition, in which finished works of art and accompanying objects (if any) are arranged so as to convey a message or tell a story.

Together the class can then install the exhibition.

Research for such a project might involve searching the files of local newspapers and conducting tape-recorded interviews with school or community figures. Writing the labels for the exhibition is an important step requiring advance planning and concentration of effort. A museum label, students will find, can be every bit as demanding to write as a poem or an essay. The challenge in label writing is to present the really vital information about the person in the portrait as concisely, as objectively, and as interestingly as possible.

No doubt there are many more ways you can think of in which portraits can be made a working part of your curriculum. Always the object is to bring a visual dimension to what the children are studying, and to make students more aware of people and the roles people play in history.

Materials to Order

Portraits of the Presidents. From the National Portrait Gallery and the White House collections, these portraits of all the United States presidents from Washington to Ford. A capsule biography of each president is included along with artistic information on each portrait. To order, send a $25.00 check or money order to Photographic Services, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560.

*With thanks to Marvin Sadik, Director, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 20560.

How to Look at a Snakeskin

By MARLENE ROBINSON

When a healthy snake outgrows its skin, it "sheds" it, or sloughs off. The old skin loosens around the snake’s nose and chin, and the snake rubs itself against some rough surface like a tree trunk—and then wriggles out. The skin usually comes off inside out, like an old sock. Such shedding is perfectly natural and does not hurt the snake.

What Is a Snakeskin Made Of?

Feel the snakeskin. Is it wet or dry? Now hold it up to the light. It is thin enough to see through.

Snakeskin is made of a tough material called keratin. Hair, fingernails, and feathers are also made of keratin. The outside wrapping of a snake must be tough enough for the creature to crawl around in the hard ground. Keratin protects a snake from the wear and tear of daily life.

What Shape is a Snakeskin?

Snakes have heads and tails, and long skin bodies in between. Not much else. No legs. No outside ears.

Find the head of your snake’s skin. Now find the eye scales. (Remember the skin is probably inside out.) Snakes do not have eyelids, scales protect the eyes from damage. A snake’s eye scales are like the lenses of human being’s eyeglasses. Can you find scratchers on the snake’s eye scales? Sometimes a snake’s eye scales will get scratched just as a person’s eyeglasses might.

Now find the tail of your snake’s skin. Look along the belly side until you find a slit. Sometimes there is an unusually large scale just above the slit. Everything after the slit is the tail.


Use a ruler to measure your snake’s skin. How long is your tail? More than six inches (15.3 centimeters)? As much as twelve inches (30.5 centimeters)? How long is your body? Is your snake all tail ... or both tail and head body ... or mostly body with only a little tail?

People often ask: Can you tell the length of a snake by examining its can-off snack skin? The answer is No, you cannot. In the act of shedding, a snake stretches its skin, which means that a snake is always a little smaller than its cast-off skin.

A Snake Is Covered with Scales

The skin of a snake is like a form or mold, which shows all of a snake’s body. Selsam, often asks:

• A snake stretches its skin, which is bunched together to give the snake “stretch.”

A Snake Is Expandable

This picture shows a snake swallowing an egg. See how the skin of the snake has to expand around the food as the food goes down? Look closely at the snake skin which the scales are bunched together to give the snake “stretch.”

Books On Snakes


Introducing......

There is just one place to go if you want to get to know Pocahontas, Albert Einstein, George Washington, and Davy Crockett personally, all in the space of a single visit, and that place is the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

To walk through the halls of this museum is to see history not in terms of historical events but in terms of the people who in some high moment of thought or act made those events happen. Recently we were treated to a tour of the National Portrait Gallery by Marvin Sadik, the director.

"The idea of the National Portrait Gallery is to tell through visual means the whole story of our nation's history in terms of the men and women who made that history," Mr. Sadik explained to us. And since the National Portrait Gallery is trying to do this as fairly and as objectively as possible, "all kinds of people from every conceivable walk of life are represented in the collection, including even some people whose contributions to American history have not been exactly positive."

Thus, George Armstrong Custer can indeed be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, in a large group portrait called "Grant and His Generals." And off in another part of the museum we found Amelia Earhart, represented by a small, signed photograph and a half-length oil painting. All of the presidents are represented as well as leaders in science, arts, business and sports figures, poets, politicians, business executives, and many more people you can think of. As for Babe Ruth and John Wilkes Booth—they are not represented yet, but both are on the gallery's "shopping list" of wanted portraits.

Although always on the lookout for wanted portraits, the National Portrait Gallery is very particular about who may be represented in its collection. The rule is that objects must have been very important in history, the subject of a portrait must also have been dead ten or more years before his or her portrait can be part of the permanent collection. The one exception to this rule is United States presidents, who enter the collection while in office.

In the National Portrait Gallery, objects—such as letters or posters—that are connected in one way or another with the people in the paintings are shown along with the portraits, and the works often are exhibited in rooms decorated to suggest the time in which the people lived. In addition, each portrait is labeled. The label gives the names and dates of both the sitter and the artist and tells you in just a paragraph or two why the person in the portrait is important in history.

Somebody once said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and this certainly is true of portraits. As we toured the National Portrait Gallery, Mr. Sadik pointed out that many artists place in their portraits clues to the sitter's occupation, deeds, and interests. He said that with a little practice, you and I can learn to read these clues—to find in clothing, facial expression, posture, props, furniture, and other details many interesting things about the person in a portrait. He gave as an example the gallery's photograph of Amelia Earhart, reproduced on page four of this issue of Art to Zoo. When you have a chance, look carefully at this portrait. What clues can you find there to Earhart's life and work?

"To mirror the whole idea of America, including the voices of dissent that have helped to shape the nation" is the job of the National Portrait Gallery, according to Marvin Sadik, the director. For only by looking at the entire picture, the good as well as the bad, can we at last begin to see this country for what it really is.
Amelia Earhart autographed photograph and her husband, George Putnam, talking to reporters after one of her flights; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Oil painting of Amelia Earhart, by Edith Scott; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Bronze sculpture of Amelia Earhart by Grace Wells Parkinson; National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Amelia Earhart airmail stamp—issued by the United States Postal Service.

Oil painting of Amelia Earhart, by Edith Scott; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Tom Thumb as in a thoughtful mood; photo courtesy Library of Congress.

John Wilkes Booth (far right) on stage, in the play Julius Caesar, with his brothers, Edwin and Junius Brutus, Jr.; McClanahan Lincoln Collection, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.

George Armstrong Custer (second from left, hatless), shown in "Grant and His Generals," an oil painting; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

George Armstrong Custer (center, bullet), shown in a detail of the oil painting, "Grant and His Generals"; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Flag belonging to the 7th Cavalry, found on the battlefield at the Little Big Horn; National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Babe Ruth showing his classic home run swing; photo courtesy Boston American Sunday Advertiser.

Babe Ruth and New York Yankee owner Jacob Ruppert during the historic contract in baseball history at that time; photo courtesy New York Daily Mirror.