

# TRADITIONS *in Transition*

## What's in a Portrait?

### Overview

There are many examples of early American Indian portraits. Works of art and photographs can tell us many things about an individual or tribe. During the 1830s, Charles Bird King created a number of beautiful portraits of Southeastern Indians. These works show a transition between a traditional style of dress and the introduction of Anglo clothing.

### Objectives

Through research and examination, students will compare and contrast traditional and Anglo influences in 19th century Southeastern dress. In so doing, students will actively participate in the process of historical research and interpretation. In addition, students will think critically about how they represent themselves to others.

### Time Needed

One to three fifty-minute class periods for research, design, and analysis.

### Materials Needed

- Images of American Indian portraits
- Paper
- Internet access
- Colored pencils or markers

### Instructions:

1. Locate Charles Bird King portraits on the web for the students to examine.
2. Begin with a discussion on portraits. How do portraits answer these questions:
  - a. Who am I?
  - b. Why would I have my portrait made?
  - c. What is the cost involved in creating a portrait?
3. Have students research a specific individual from Charles Bird King's works. Let the students prepare a one page biography of the individual including tribe, dates, and significant events in the person's life.
4. Have students examine the individual portraits. How did the individual who set for the work mix traditional Southeastern clothing and more contemporary Anglo clothing? Does the fact that many of the portraits feature prominent tribal members mean anything?
5. Next have students design their own portrait. Students should answer the following questions:
  - a. What are the distinctive things that make me "me"?
  - b. How do I want people to see me?
  - c. How can I express my many different characteristics?
  - d. What would I wear to show others who I am?
  - e. If someone was to see just this one picture of me what would they say?
6. Once students have completed their self-portrait have them ask the same questions for the historic images.



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