

ART ACTIVITY

*A Colonial Woman Who Became an American Legend***Background**

Information about individuals who lived long ago can change depending on who is telling their story and for what purpose. For some, the written and visual records are limited and it becomes difficult to paint a complete picture of their lives. Others' lives inspire fictional characters, or myths about their experiences become the popular narrative. Artist depictions of historical figures can also heavily influence the way that they are remembered. **Nancy Morgan Hart**, a woman who lived on the colonial frontier during the American Revolution, is one such figure whose story has been consistently altered and retold by artists, journalists, writers, and historians.

Task

Students will consider how women of the colonial period and the Revolutionary era have been remembered through art and storytelling. Students will begin by analyzing portraits of this time period to think about who would have had their portrait made, and who we wouldn't be able to learn about by studying this type of art. They will then read the life story of **Nancy Morgan Hart**, and analyze the accompanying work of art to make comparisons between her real story and how it was depicted after her death. Students will then create a portrait of Nancy Morgan Hart that provides a more historically accurate representation of the life and experiences of a woman living on the colonial frontier during the American Revolution.

Materials

- Sheets of cardstock
- Drawing pencils (Recommended: Staedtler)
- Kneaded erasers (recommended brands are Faber-Castell and Prismacolor)
- Colored Pencils (Recommended: Prismacolor and Derwent Academy)

Art Vocabulary

- **background:** An area of a picture plane that appears furthest from the viewer.
- **composition:** The arrangement of the elements in a painting or other work of art.
- **foreground:** The area of a picture plane that appears closest to the viewer.
- **proportion:** The principle of design concerned with the size relationship of one object to another.
- **portrait:** An artistic representation of a person in which the face and its expression is predominant.

Steps

- Begin by analyzing Henrietta Johnson's pastel portrait, ***Mrs. Pierre Bacot (Marianne Fleur de Gue)*** to give students an example of portraits made during the late colonial period and Revolutionary era. Discuss the following:
 - What do you notice about this image?
 - How did the artist depict this woman?
 - How is this woman dressed? How is her hair done? What does this tell us about her status?
 - Who might this woman be? How do you know?
 - Why do you think this woman had her portrait made?
 - Did you think everyone have their portraits done during this time period? Why or why not?
 - How does this limit who we are able to learn more about?
 - How do we create "portraits" or capture images of people today? How does it differ from the portraits of the past?
- Next, students will learn more about a woman who would not have had her portrait made while she was alive, but whose experiences are important to understanding women's lives during the Revolution. Have students read the **Nancy Morgan Hart** Life Story. As they are reading, have them circle the details of her life that are factually accurate, and underline the details that have been exaggerated or embellished over time. Have them consider:
 - Which elements of this woman's story have stayed the same as it has been told over time?
 - Which elements have been exaggerated in the retelling? Why do you think this happened? What does this tell us about the way this time period is remembered? What does this tell us about how everyday women's experiences are remembered?
 - Which details about Nancy's life are most important to her story? Why is her story worth telling? How does it give a voice to women whose stories might not often be told?
- Next, give each student a copy of Joel Chandler Harris' **"Aunt Nancy Hart Captures the Tories."** Have students circle details in the image that stand out to them. Next to each detail, have them record whether it is true to Nancy's real story, if it is exaggerated, or if it is unknown. Then discuss the following:
 - What did you notice about this image?
 - How is Nancy Morgan Hart depicted? What is she wearing? What is she doing?
 - What else did the artist choose to include in this image?

- Which elements of this image reflect the exaggerated version of Nancy's story? Which elements are more accurate? Which elements are unknown?
- How is Nancy's life remembered through this image? How accurate is the artist's representation?
- What might a portrait of Nancy look like? How would you depict her? What else would you include in your portrait to help tell her true story?
- Students will now reflect on portraiture and the life of Nancy Morgan Hart through a step-by-step drawing activity. Each student should get a drawing pencil, an eraser, and a sheet of card stock to create their commemorative portrait of Nancy.
- Students should start by drawing an oval for the head, making sure to leave room below it for the neck and shoulders. Their pencil marks should be light at first, since they are only beginning by blocking in the shapes and proportions of the face. Students can darken their lines and add more detail later.
- After drawing their oval, students should draw lines within the oval to indicate where the features of the face will be. First, they should draw a horizontal line halfway between the top of the head and the chin (see below). This line marks where the eyes will be drawn.
- Next, students should draw a vertical line down the center of the head (see below). This will help line up the features, and will also be the center point of the bridge of the nose.
- After dividing the oval into quarters, have students draw a short horizontal line halfway between the eye line and the chin. This line marks the bottom of the nose. They should then draw another short horizontal line halfway between the nose line and the chin, marking the middle of the mouth between the top and bottom lip (see below).
- Now that the students have blocked out the facial proportions, they can begin to draw the features of Nancy Morgan Hart's face. As they are doing this, students should make sure that they are paying attention to the proportions of each feature (see "Art Making Tips" below). Once they complete the features, they can draw the neck and shoulders, and add clothing, hair and accessories.
- Pass out colored pencils to each table so that students can add color to their figure and the background of their portrait.
- As they begin to think about what they will include in the background of the piece, they should consider the following:
 - Will you depict Nancy Morgan Hart in a particular setting, or will you include decorative symbols that represent aspects of her life?
 - What details will you include to tell an accurate version of her story? What will each detail say about her and how she should be remembered?
- Once students have completed their portraits, conclude the project with a reflection on the art-making process:

- What was it like to retell this woman's story through a portrait?
- How did you depict her? What is her facial expression? What is she wearing?
- What details did you include and what do they say about her life?
- What setting did you choose to place her in? Why?
- Artists often have individuals sit for portraits, or they have photographs that they can use as references. What was it like to draw a portrait of someone without any visual evidence of what they looked like?
- How does your portrait differ from the images that we analyzed at the beginning of the activity?
- Why is it so important present an accurate depiction of who Nancy Morgan Hart was? How does this give a voice to other women of the Revolutionary era who may not otherwise be remembered?

Portrait Tips

When drawing features, students should make sure that the facial proportions are correct.

- Eyes are halfway down the head
- The edges of the nostrils should line up with the inner tear ducts of the eyes
- The space between the eyes is roughly the same width as one eye
- The head is roughly five eyes across at its widest point
- The corners of the mouth should line up with the pupils of the eyes
- The top of the ears should line up with the brow line and the bottom of the ear should line up with the nose line
- The neck lines should extend down from the jaw line where the bottom of the ears meet the face

If students don't feel comfortable starting their portrait from scratch, you can print an oval or portrait template on 8 ½ x 11 cardstock to help them begin.

