

# All about image

**1 Work in groups. Discuss the questions.**

- Do you take selfies?
- What's your favourite selfie technique? Do you use a selfie stick?
- Do you post selfies on social media?
- Do you think selfies are a relatively new phenomenon?

**2 Read the text. Who are the two people in the pictures and when were they painted?**



Self-portrait at the Age of 63

**Artists in every era show rich details about their lives and work through self-portraits**

How do you select the selfies you put on Instagram? You might think about your facial expression, your hairstyle, and even what you're wearing. Each of these details says something about you to the people who look at your page. Knowing this, you probably make careful choices about the pictures you post.

## BEYOND THE SELFIE

Posting selfies is a recent phenomenon. But how people choose to represent themselves is not. Self-portraits, from all periods in history, are documents of the choices artists make about how to present themselves to others. From their clothing to the colour scheme and the composition, every detail in a self-portrait has meaning.

Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn painted nearly 100 self-portraits during his life. These works provide a visual record of Rembrandt's technical development and ageing face. The example above, painted in 1669, is one of Rembrandt's last. He uses a realistic style to capture every detail. Recognised for his innovative method of painting light, Rembrandt uses highlights and shadows to draw the viewer's eye to his face. This emphasis on the artist's expression fills the work with emotional depth.

French painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun created the self-portrait below more than a century later, in 1782. From the folds of her clothing to the delicate feather in her hat, Vigée Le Brun uses rich colours and varied textures. Her formal attire seems out of place for someone in the messy act of oil painting. Do you think she really painted while wearing such fancy garments? Or did she choose to represent herself fashionably to make a statement about her social status?



Self-portrait in a Straw Hat

**3a Find words or phrases in the text which describe ...**

- a) face: .....
- b) clothes: *what you're wearing*, .....
- c) colour: .....

**3b Work in pairs. Discuss why Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun is shown in the clothes she is.**

**Vocabulary tip**

Writers often use synonyms, words with a similar meaning, to avoid repeating the same word. This can help you work out the meaning of unknown words. For example, you may not know the words *attire* and *garment*, but you can guess their meaning because you know the writer is talking about *clothing*.

**4 Underline two synonyms of the word in bold in each extract.**

**A** The project aims to document the lives of ordinary people in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are using film and audio to **record** everyday encounters in homes and workplaces, hoping to capture a wide range of lifestyles and experiences.

**B** Political cartoonists **represent** well-known figures in a way that draws out particular traits. They might depict a political leader as a donkey, for example, because they want to present them as being stubborn and unwilling to change their position.

**C** The prize is awarded for **innovative** new ideas in the field of engineering. This year's focus is on engineering projects in the developing world. The judges are looking for original designs, especially those which make ingenious use of limited resources.

**D** As a forensic scientist, it's my job to be concerned with the individual particulars of a case. We carefully examine all the evidence available, from the **details** of victims' phone records to the minutiae of their personal finances.

**E** Many of the documents stored in the archive are incredibly **delicate** and need to be handled with extreme care. Archivists wear cotton gloves to avoid damaging the fragile paper. Some of the earliest records are on parchment scrolls which are too flimsy to be moved and are now protected under glass.

**5 Choose the best word to complete the sentences.**

- a) The design uses a very simple colour *scheme / style* of black, white and grey.
- b) If you look closely, you can see the individual *facial / visual* expressions of each of the characters.
- c) She uses a very *authentic / realistic* style to make the viewer feel as if they are actually walking through the city.
- d) His photographs are designed to elicit a(n) *deep / emotional* response from the viewer.
- e) Visitors to the museum are able to touch the fabrics, so they can feel the variety of *textures / highlights*.
- f) When thinking about the *composition / scheme* of a photograph, try not to put the subject right in the centre.

**EXAM TASK: Reading (multiple choice)**

**6 Look back at the article opposite and answer the questions according to the text.**

- 1 The writer compares selfies and self-portraits because:
  - a they both tell us about how people choose to present themselves to others.
  - b they were both a popular medium of expression during their time.
  - c they show how fashions have changed over the centuries.
- 2 Rembrandt uses light and shade to:
  - a make the picture more realistic.
  - b focus attention on his face and facial expression.
  - c create a feeling of sadness.
- 3 Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun chose to present herself wearing formal clothes because:
  - a they were what she was wearing to paint the picture.
  - b they were delicate and colourful.
  - c they were fashionable and reflected her social status.

**Exam tip**

Make sure you can find the correct answer to a multiple choice question in the text. Don't choose an answer based on your own knowledge.