

NATIONAL PHOTO- GRAPHIC PORTRAIT PRIZE 2025

SECONDARY TEACHERS
RESOURCE

**NATIONAL
PORTRAIT
GALLERY**

Let's take a look at the *National Photographic Portrait Prize* for 2025! This year, the judges – Benjamin Law (writer and broadcaster), Serena Bentley (Senior Curator at the National Portrait Gallery) and Leigh Robb (Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia) – selected 48 portraits from over 1400 entries. The finalists show the different ways portraits can tell stories, challenge stereotypes, look at identity and expand the ways we think about ourselves, each other and the world we live in.

How to use this resource

The portraits in this resource have been chosen to prompt discussion, critical reflection and creative responses from students in secondary years.

Each activity is designed to be flexible, whether you're planning a full lesson or integrating a short task into your existing program. Students can work in pairs, small groups or as a whole class, allowing for collaborative learning and diverse viewpoints.

The resource supports students to explore identity, culture and representation through multiple lenses, fostering respectful dialogue and deeper understanding of themselves and others.



Michael Cook, Bidjara, *Individuation – Persona* 2024. National Photographic Portrait Prize 2025 finalist © Michael Cook

Discuss

Bidjara artist Michael Cook photographed *Individuation – Persona* in London. The work explores First Nations identity in a postcolonial world. Working in groups of three, use the following prompts to discuss the work:

1. What do you notice about the people holding masks? What might they represent when it comes to identity, hiding and culture?
2. Look closely at the three images of the First Nations man. What differences or similarities do you see between them? How might these images reflect different aspects of identity or experience?
3. What messages or questions do you think the artist is exploring? How does the setting (London) influence your understanding of the work?
4. Think about the title: *Individuation – Persona*. Why do you think the artist called it that?
5. Reflect and share: How does this artwork make you think differently about identity, especially in a postcolonial context?



Hoda Afshar *Untitled #01* (from the series *Code Black/Riot*) 2024.
National Photographic Portrait Prize 2025 winner © Hoda Afshar

Investigate

This portrait is part of a series called *Code Black/Riot* that interrogates the youth justice system. It was made in collaboration with young First Nations people in Far North Queensland, who were invited to conceal their faces using a method of their own choosing.

Working in pairs, investigate and discuss the following questions:

1. Why is it important that the artist gave agency to the people in the portrait? How might this affect the way the subjects are portrayed and how viewers connect with the work?
2. What do you notice about what's in focus and what's blurred? How do these choices affect the mood or message of the portrait?
3. Explore the National Portrait Gallery collection online. Find a portrait that highlights First Nations perspectives and identify three things the artist has done to help tell the sitter's story.
4. Reflect and respond: How do these portraits challenge or expand your understanding of identity, representation and storytelling in art? Why is it important for First Nations people to be able to tell their own stories through portraiture?



Em Jensen *Thelma Plum* 2024.
National Photographic Portrait Prize 2025 People's Choice winner © Em Jensen

Make

This portrait of Thelma Plum, a Gamilaraay singer-songwriter, invites us to think about how location, pose, clothing and composition can express identity, mood and story.

Spend time looking at the portrait, then working in pairs discuss the following prompts:

1. How does the setting contribute to the mood or possible messages of the portrait?
2. What might the portrait say about Thelma Plum's identity or story?
3. How do pose and clothing influence your interpretation of the portrait?
4. Looking at the composition, what stands out in the way the image is framed or arranged?

Now create a photographic self portrait inspired by this work. Things to consider include:

- Where are you?
- How are you posing and what are you wearing?
- What objects are you going to include? What will they say about you?
- How are you arranging elements in the composition?

When you're finished, write a 200-word artist's statement describing your conceptual and artistic choices.

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