

Google Arts & Culture

Learn Together: Community and Cultural Identity

National  
Portrait  
Gallery



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*Henrietta Lacks, (HeLa): The Mother of Modern Medicine, (detail), by Kadir Nelson, 2017.*  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

## Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture Stories and exhibitions related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website and app. As the lesson uses only resources found on GA&C, it cannot present every aspect of a given topic. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser or the Google Arts & Culture app. You may want to take notes, either digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. A **quiz** and a link for **exploring the topic further** are followed by **ideas for projects** related to the lesson topic that you can do at home or in the classroom.

As noted, the lesson plan includes **questions** about the main Stories, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then, you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

**Resources on the Google Arts & Culture** website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items, and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together Stories, exhibitions, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, clicking on the arrows on the right and left sides of a slide will move you forward and backward. Just keep clicking to keep moving forward. (Note that in some Stories, you scroll up and down.) Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the image.



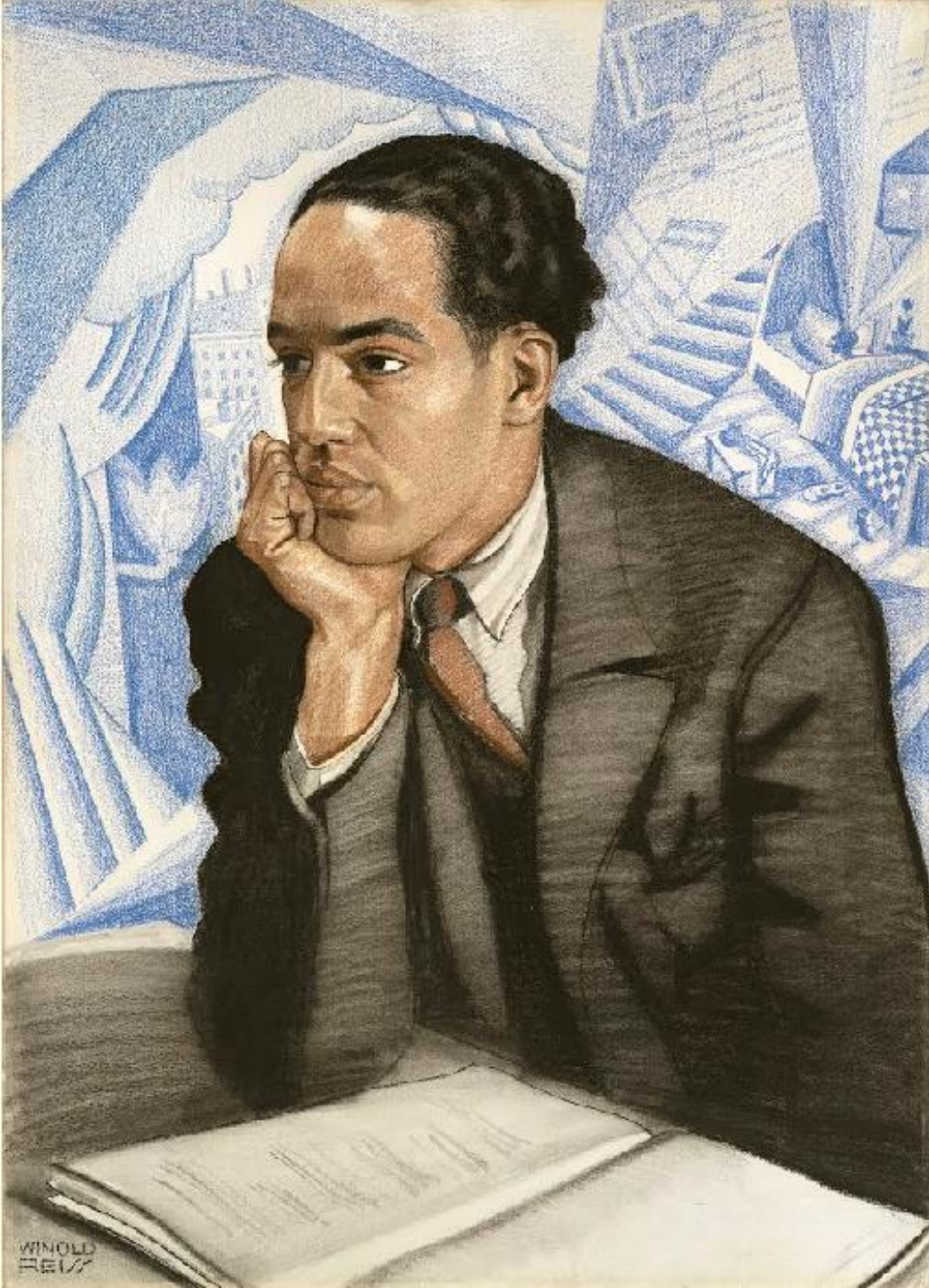
## In this lesson, you will learn:

- ❖ How portrait artists have depicted people from various cultures and communities.
- ❖ How the people in the portraits (the *subjects*) identified themselves and represented their cultures.
- ❖ How culture and community helped form the identities of the people in the portraits.
- ❖ How the subjects interacted with people from other communities.

## You will:

- ❖ View Stories and exhibitions about identities representing several communities within the United States.
- ❖ Answer questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.



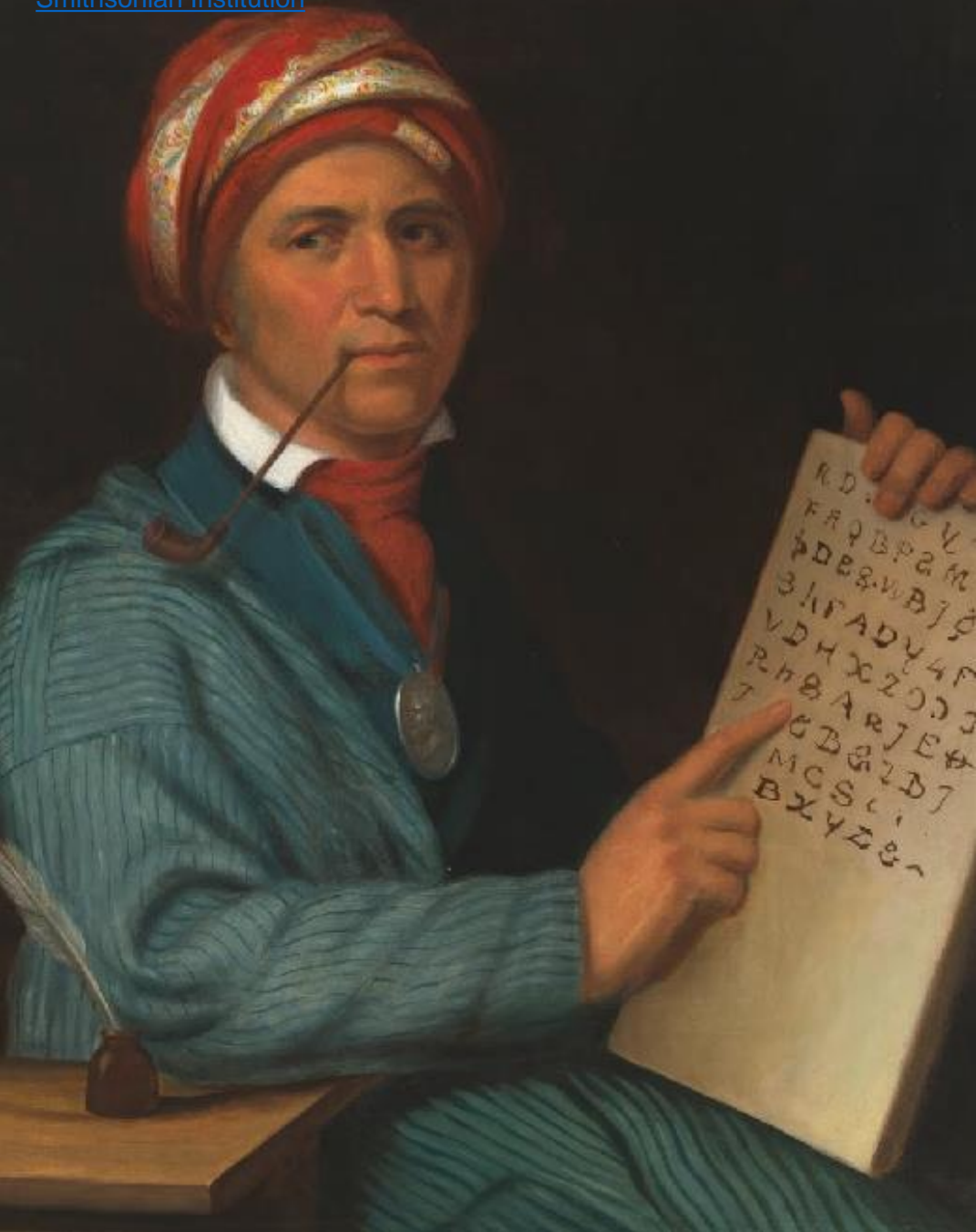
## Learn Together: Community and Cultural Identity

Your culture is your way of life—it may encompass your language, customs, traditions, religion, and more. Your culture, and the community that upholds it, help form your identity, or who you are. In this lesson, you'll look at portraits of individuals from many communities, past and present.

Every person belongs to and interacts with multiple communities. The portrait subjects in this lesson include warriors, orators, scholars, artists, writers, musicians, educators, and scientists from many different cultures and communities. All of these subjects convey aspects of their communities and cultures through their individual identities and, in turn, help shape the identity of our nation.

**Think about these questions as you view the exhibits and Stories in this lesson:**

- ❖ What do the portraits reveal about the subjects?
- ❖ What do portraits reveal about each subject's cultural or community identities?
- ❖ How do the subjects' cultures and communities help shape their identities?
- ❖ How do portraits both reflect a sitter's culture and influence their and other communities?



## Two Portraits of Native Americans

Sagoyewatha (p. 3) and Sequoyah belonged to different Native nations, but they had much in common. Both were descendants of people who lived in North America before Europeans arrived. Both lived during times of conflict with outsiders who laid claim to their ancestral lands to create the United States.

**Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha) (c.1758–1830)** was a Seneca leader and orator who spoke for his people in their dealings with Great Britain and the United States of America. He was a gifted, but complex, leader.

Click [here](#) to view Sagoyewatha’s portrait and learn about him.

**Sequoyah (c.1775–1843)** was the son of a Cherokee woman and a fur trader from Virginia. He earned lasting fame by creating a writing system called a syllabary for the Cherokee language.

Click [here](#) to view Sequoyah’s portrait and learn more about him.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. How do the portraits of Red Jacket and Sequoyah compare? List two ways the portraits are alike and two ways they are different.
2. What objects does each portrait include, and what information can they give you?
3. What communities did each man belong to and interact with? How might these interactions have affected their identities?

To view more portraits of Native Americans from the 1800s, click [here](#) and [here](#).

## Three Portraits of Mary Church Terrell

**Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954)** was the daughter of once-enslaved parents who became successful business owners. She graduated from Oberlin College, one of the first colleges in the United States to admit women and students of African descent. She went on to become a well-known educator and activist, dedicating her life to racial and gender equality.

These three portraits—two photographs and one painting—show the subject at age twenty-one, as a young married woman, and in old age. Answer the questions after you have looked at the portraits.

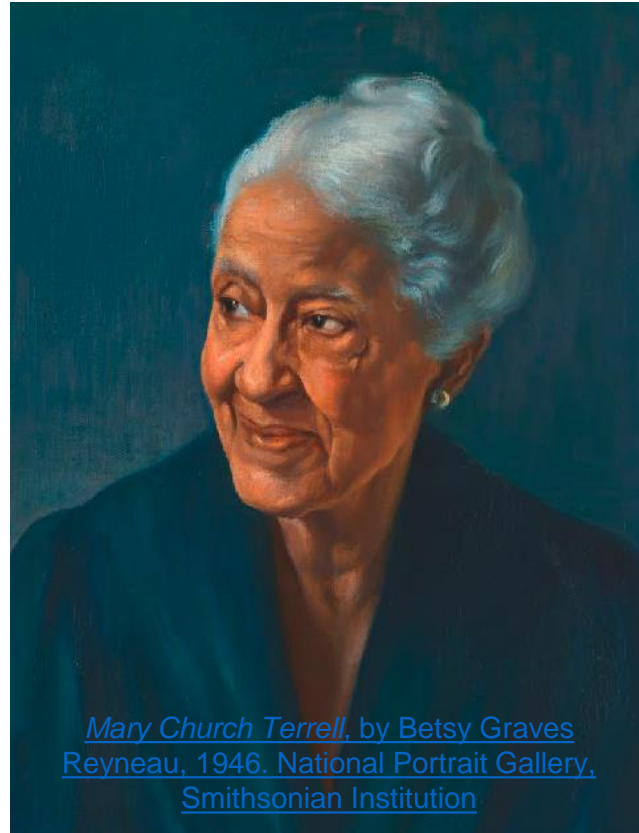


[Mary Church Terrell, by H.M. Platt, 1884.](#)  
[National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution](#)

*Mary Church Terrell, by H.M. Platt.*  
Click [here](#).

*Mary Church Terrell, by an unknown photographer.* Click [here](#).

*Mary Church Terrell, by Betsy Graves Reyneau.* Click [here](#).



[Mary Church Terrell, by Betsy Graves Reyneau, 1946.](#)  
[National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution](#)



[Mary Church Terrell, by Unknown, c. 1890.](#)  
[National Women's History Museum](#)

1. How did Terrell's appearance change over the years? Consider her clothing and hairstyle.
2. Choose one portrait. Describe how the artist tried to portray Terrell's character and values.
3. How did Terrell's family and community values affect her identity, and how did she affect her community in turn?

This [short video](#) focuses on Terrell's fight for the right to vote.



## The Harlem Renaissance

Harlem was historically a Dutch neighborhood in Manhattan, part of New York City. Starting in the late 1800s, people of African descent moved to Harlem from the South and central United States, from the Caribbean, and from Brazil in search of new opportunities. By the 1920s, the people of Harlem began creating their own distinctive identity. The neighborhood's novelists, poets, scholars, musicians, dancers, and educators became the energizing force within the cultural movement known as the "Harlem Renaissance." Their contributions shaped American identities and changed history.

Click [here](#) to view portraits of prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance by artist Winold Reiss.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What is unusual about the artist's use of colors, lines, and materials?
2. How do the artist's choices affect the way the viewer sees the subjects and their community?
3. What do you think is the artist's attitude toward the artists of the Harlem Renaissance? Use details from the portraits to support your opinions.

To see more portraits of Mary McLeod Bethune, one of the women portrayed by Reiss, click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

## Immortalized in Medicine and on Canvas

**Henrietta Lacks (1920–1951)** was an African American woman raised on a farm in Virginia. She was only fourteen years old when the first of her five children was born, and she died of cancer at the age of thirty-one. Before she died, and without her knowledge or permission, scientists removed some cells from her body. Those cells went on to help build the foundations of modern medical science. Her life story reflects a pattern of discrimination and mistreatment of African American people, especially women, by the medical and scientific community. In 2017, the artist Kadir Nelson painted a vibrant portrait of Henrietta Lacks to honor her life.

Click [here](#) to learn about the life and legacy of Henrietta Lacks.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What are the dominant colors in this painting, and what might they represent?
2. How does the artist use symbols to tell the story of Henrietta Lacks? Use evidence from the story and the painting to support your answer.
3. How does the portrait both reflect and counteract how medicine and science mistreated Henrietta Lacks and her communities?

[Henrietta Lacks, \(HeLa\): The Mother of Modern Medicine, by Kadir Nelson, 2017. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution](#)





## Quiz

Read the questions and write your answer in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. What details did Thomas Hicks use to portray the Seneca identity of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)?
2. How does Sequoyah's portrait show his contribution to the Cherokee Nation?
3. How do the portraits of Mary Church Terrell differ from one another?
4. How do Mary Church Terrell's portraits reflect her contributions to her community?
5. What made Reiss's portraits of Harlem Renaissance figures different from previous portraits of African American people?
6. How did Reiss's portraits show the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance community?
7. How did Henrietta Lacks contribute to the science community, and how did science shape the way we view Lacks today?
8. How does Nelson's portrait of Henrietta Lacks represent cultural and community identity?

## Explore Further

This lesson has given you some examples of how community and culture shape identity, and how portraits can express a subject's community and cultural identity. To learn about a contemporary portrait expressing community identity, click [here](#).

## It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned how portraits reflect their subjects' communities and cultures. Now it's your turn to do something. Here are some ideas for projects that you can do at home or in the classroom.

- ❖ Create symbols that represent your identity. Draw or paint objects that express the personal interests, culture, and identity of yourself or of another person. Repeat the objects to create colorful patterns.
- ❖ Sketch a community space. Fill a piece of paper with details from your neighborhood, school, a group or club, or a place that has meaning to your culture or community.
- ❖ Create a community portrait. Combine photos or drawings of several people to make a group portrait. Incorporate the symbols of identity and the community space sketch.



## Sample Answers

Student answers will vary. The responses below are sample answers and are not meant to be the one conclusive answer. Use the rubric on page 13 for a guide on evaluating student interpretations of portraits.

### Two Portraits of Native Americans

1. *Both portraits show their subjects in the dress of their people, and both men are also wearing medals from the United States government. The portrait of Red Jacket is full length and has a natural setting, while the Sequoyah portrait is set indoors and shows only his head and torso.*
2. *Red Jacket wears a medal he received as a symbol of peace during a meeting with General Washington. A hatchet is often a symbol of Native warriors. Sequoyah is smoking a pipe and holding a copy of the Cherokee syllabary, or writing system, which reflect his contributions and Native identity. He is also wearing a medal that may have come from the United States government.*
3. *Red Jacket was a Seneca and Sequoyah was a Cherokee. Red Jacket interacted with representatives of Britain and the United States. In those interactions, he presented himself as the leader of his people. Sequoyah interacted with European Americans in the United States. His experiences reinforced the value of a written language, which led him to invent a Cherokee writing system.*

### Three Portraits of Mary Church Terrell

1. *In the earliest photograph, Terrell appears young, she wears dark, patterned clothing, and her hair is pulled back tightly. In the second photograph, she wears clothing with lace and her hair is up in curls. In the painting, she is older with gray hair held up loosely. Her dress is simple and more modern.*
2. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: The photograph of Terrell in white shows her as elegant and thoughtful. I think she looks elegant because of her lacy white dress, and she looks thoughtful because she is sitting with her hand on her chin like she is thinking.*

3. *Although Terrell's life was relatively privileged, she still experienced racism and sexism as a woman of African descent. This led to her lifelong activism for education, women's suffrage, and civil rights.*

### Winold Reiss & the Harlem Renaissance

1. *In most of the portraits, Reiss shows the head and sometimes the hands in color and detail, while the clothing and background are composed of simple lines with few colors.*
2. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: I think the artist used color only on the face to have the viewer focus on the identity and humanity of each person. This shows how their talents contributed to the African American community.*
3. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: The artist thought the subjects were interesting, and that the Harlem Renaissance was an important movement. He paid a lot of attention to the artists' facial expressions and how they held their hands, which shows he is interested in how they feel and act.*

### Immortalized in Medicine and on Canvas

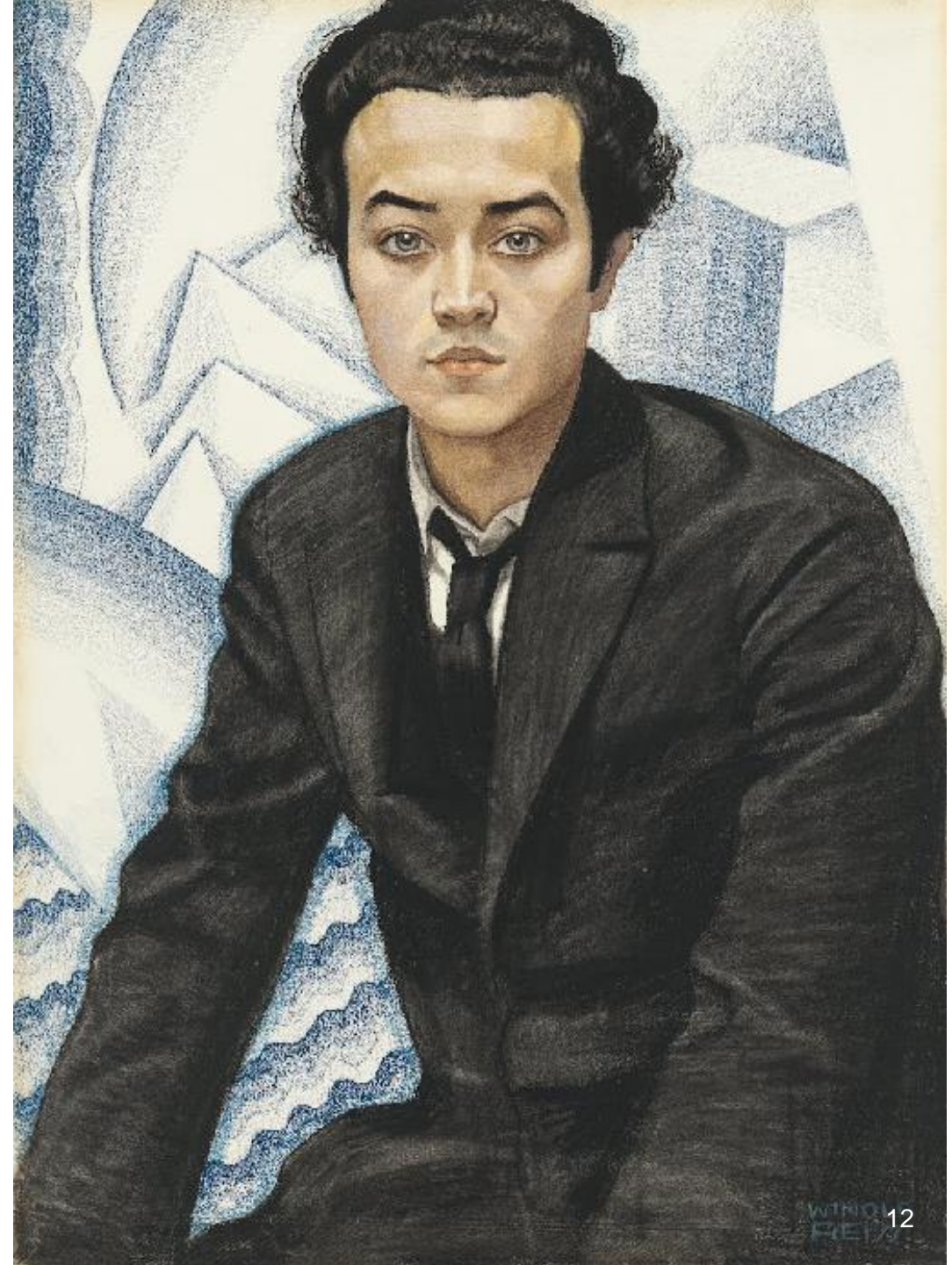
1. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: The dominant colors are red, white, and blue. Red could stand for life, or for Lacks's cells.*
2. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: The artist showed her with a bible, to symbolize faith, holding it over her womb, which symbolized the source of the cells.*
3. *Answers will vary. Sample answer: The painting counteracts Lacks's treatment by showing her individual identity through her smiling, upturned face and giving a tone of hope with the light, bright colors. It also reflects how medicine and science mistreated her and other African American women through the missing buttons, which the artist says symbolize the cells that were taken from her.*

## Sample Answers

Student answers will vary. The responses below are sample answers and are not meant to be the one conclusive answer. Use the rubric on page 13 for a guide on evaluating student interpretations of portraits.

## Quiz

1. Hicks showed Red Jacket dressed in the traditional clothing of his people, holding a hatchet and looking fierce. He is standing in a wilderness setting.
2. Sequoyah's portrait includes the Cherokee writing system, which he created to help his Cherokee community communicate in their own language.
3. Sample answer: The painting shows Terrell much older than the photographs. It also uses deep blue colors that emphasize her face. She is smiling in this portrait.
4. Terrell's portraits often show her in elegant clothing that suggests a degree of affluence, and with a thoughtful expression, which helps reflect her dedication to education and to gaining respect and rights for women and African American people.
5. Reiss's portraits focused on the dignity and individual humanity of his subjects at a time when most portrayals of people of African descent were stereotypes.
6. Reiss's portraits often focused on his subject's hands, which suggests their skillful way of using them to make art, write, or play music.
7. Without her consent, scientists took Henrietta Lacks's cells for medical research, and scientists are still using them today, though they now acknowledge her individual identity and how they mistreated her communities.
8. Nelson shows Henrietta Lacks holding a Bible, indicating that she was part of a religious community, while the pattern behind her shows how her cells became part of the scientific community.



[Isamu Noguchi, by Winold Reiss, c. 1929. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution](#)

Rubric for evaluating student interpretations of portraits

	<b>Strong Interpretation</b>	<b>Fair Interpretation</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Answer includes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clearly stated inference, conclusion, interpretation, or supported opinion.</li> <li>• Accurate evidence using significant details from the image or text.</li> <li>• A logical relationship between the evidence and the conclusion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stated interpretation or opinion.</li> <li>• Some evidence, or evidence that relies on less significant or more ambiguous details from the image or text.</li> <li>• Interpretations that rely on ideas or opinions not found in the image or text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A simple opinion or statement of fact about the image or text.</li> <li>• No evidence of inference, interpretation, or drawing conclusions.</li> <li>• No relationship between the opinion or statement and the text or image.</li> <li>• No specific evidence from the text or image.</li> </ul>
Sample answer:	<p><i>I think the portrait of Henrietta Lacks is trying to communicate hope. The artist uses light, bright colors, which feel like a sunny day, and Henrietta is smiling, which makes her seem content.</i></p>	<p><i>The portrait of Henrietta Lacks is very hopeful. The bright colors and flowers are happy symbols.</i></p>	<p><i>I like the picture of Henrietta Lacks. I think she looks pretty.</i></p>