

People in Pictures



LEVEL E-5 • Written by Elfrieda H. Hiebert



This portrait shows a woman's profile.

What is a portrait?

A portrait is a picture of a person. Portraits might be drawings, paintings, or photos. They might show an entire person or just a face. The person in a portrait is called the subject. Some portraits show their subjects as they really look. In others, subjects look the way the person who did the portrait sees them.

Viewers can learn something about the subjects of portraits besides how they look. Some portraits show the subjects' interests or work. For example, we can tell that a person who is wearing a military uniform served in the armed forces.

Portraits can show a subject from the front or side. A side portrait view is called a profile. Sometimes an artist does a portrait of himself or herself, which is called a self-portrait.

Key Notes:

What can portraits show?



This is a portrait
of a family.

Paintings

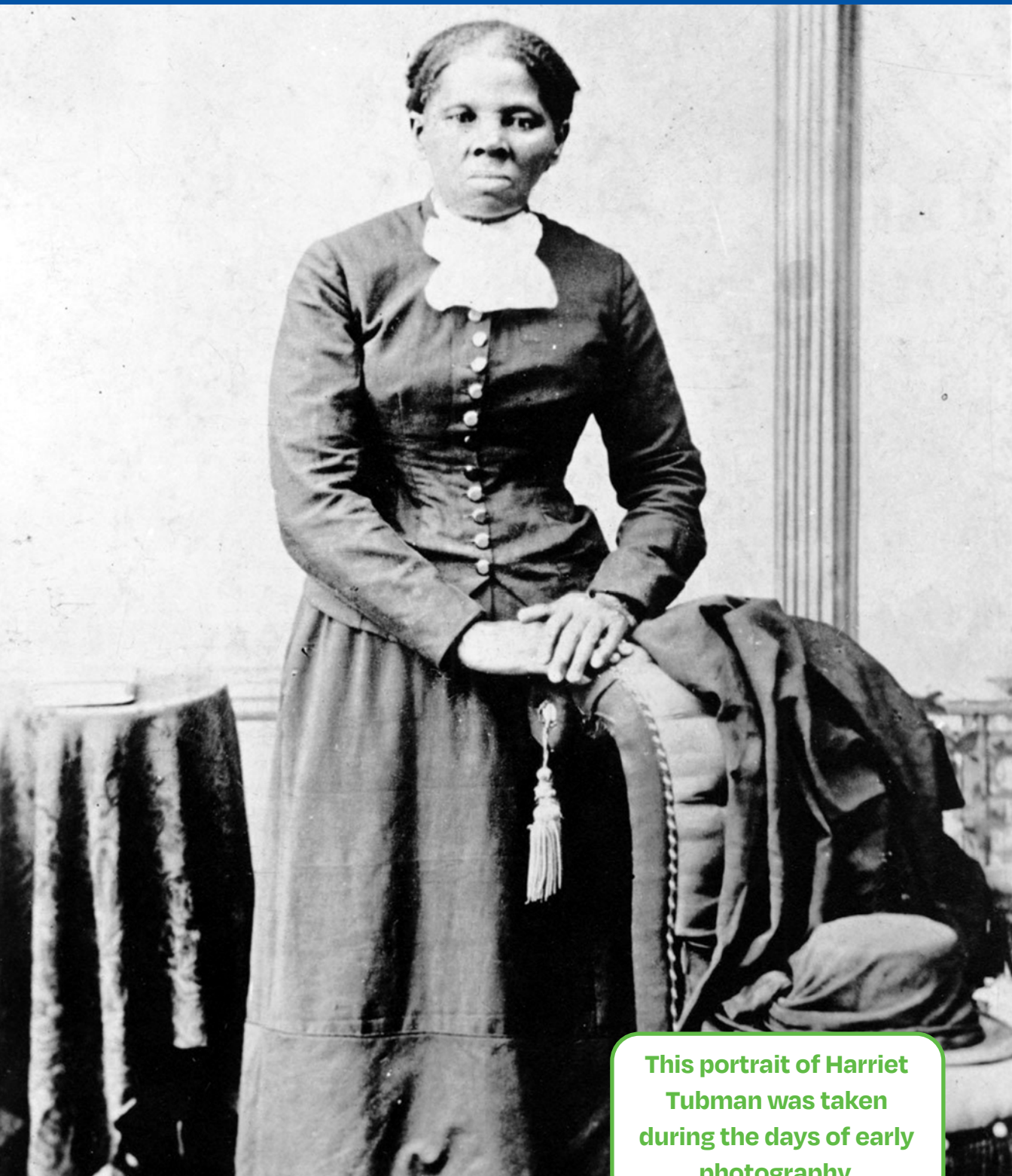
Hundreds of years ago, most portraits were paintings. People who wanted pictures of themselves hired an artist to paint their portrait. Because most people could not afford to do this, many portraits were pictures of people who were rich or famous. These paintings were often realistic. That means the artists showed people as they really looked.

Some portraits show groups of people, such as a married couple or a family. Group portraits provide extra information because we learn about the important people in the subject's life.

When we look at realistic paintings, we get an idea about what life was like in the time and place the person lived. For example, the clothing a person is wearing in a portrait tells us what people wore at the time the portrait was painted.

Key Notes:

What are realistic paintings?



This portrait of Harriet Tubman was taken during the days of early photography.

Photographs

In the 1800s, a new invention made it easier to create portraits. That invention was the camera. It was faster and easier to take a photograph than it was to paint a picture.

The first photographs were in black and white. Photographers didn't have to decide what colors to use or how to paint someone's face. However, they did decide on the background or what things would be in the photograph. In this way, photographers helped determine what information people learned about the photograph's subject.

At the time of the U.S. Civil War, the camera was still a new invention. One early photographer became famous by taking pictures of soldiers. His work helped make photography more common and more popular. Today, photography is one of the main ways portraits are created.

Key Notes:

How do photographers help people learn about their subjects?



**A caricature artist
works on a drawing.**

Caricatures

One kind of portrait is called a caricature. A caricature uses exaggeration to tell us about a person. The artist takes something about the person that stands out and makes it stand out even more. For example, if someone has a tiny nose, huge ears, a large jaw, unusual eyes, or a certain kind of hair, the artist may exaggerate that part of the person. This is usually done with humor. Sometimes artists exaggerate the way people act as well as how they look.

Famous people are often the subjects of caricatures. You may have seen caricatures of world leaders or people in show business. Newspapers often have caricatures of famous people that are drawn so well that you know who the person is as soon as you look at the picture.

Key Notes:

What is a caricature?

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