

unique and united

I AM—WE ARE: A PORTRAIT OF US



Why Unique and United?

Students Rebuild: Unique and United helps students explore what makes them special while celebrating how everyone is different in wonderful ways. Through art and sharing, students will learn that being unique is something to be proud of and that differences make communities stronger and more interesting

Educational Objectives

Through this activity, students will:

- Reflect on what makes them unique.
- Recognize shared humanity between individuals, cultures, and communities.
- Use creativity to spark dialogue, challenge assumptions, foster connection, and ignite bold ideas that can change the world.

Teacher Overview

This guide offers two implementation options: a streamlined single-period version for quick implementation and an extended multi-day version for deeper exploration. Both maintain age-appropriate content while building understanding of identity and community belonging.

Important: Before beginning this activity, review the safety guidelines below with students to ensure a supportive and appropriate sharing environment.

Materials

- Dan Eldon's Creative Works (on Page 7)
- Student photos (one per child)
- 8" x 8" paper
- Glue sticks, safety scissors
- Crayons, markers
- Stickers (optional)



CREATING A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Guidelines for Teachers to Share with Students

Before starting the activity, provide the following privacy guidelines to the students. These are designed to make all students feel comfortable and to protect their privacy and the privacy of their families.

Before We Begin - Our Sharing Rules

What's Okay to Share: When we make our portraits, we want to share things that make us feel special, happy, or proud.

- Your favorite toys, colors, or foods
- The pets you own
- The places you've visited
- Things you're good at
- Things you're learning about
- Your hobbies and interests

What We Keep Private: Some things are private, meaning they are still special, but they are only meant to be shared with our family members. We don't need to share these things in today's project.

- Information about family members
- Things that might make you feel uncomfortable
- Personal information like addresses or phone numbers

How We Look at Each Other's Art: When we look at our friends' portraits, we:

- Use kind eyes and kind words
- Ask questions in a friendly way
- Say nice things about what we see
- Don't make jokes about anyone's artwork
- Remember that everyone's portrait is special to them

If Something Doesn't Feel Right: If you're unsure about something you want to include in your portrait, ask a grown-up. If someone says something about your portrait that doesn't feel good, tell a teacher immediately.

Teacher Guidelines

- Preview student work during creation and before display
- Guide students away from sharing overly personal family information
- Model positive responses to student artwork during sharing time
- Intervene immediately if any negative comments or teasing occur
- Have conversations with students who may be sharing inappropriate information
- Create alternatives for students who prefer not to share personal information
- Be prepared to redirect students who include concerning content



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OPTION 1 | SINGLE CLASS PERIOD | 45-50 minutes

Best For: Quick implementation, introduction to identity concepts

Phase 1: Opening Circle | 10 minutes

Teacher Setup:

- Gather students in circle
- Have Dan Eldon's Creative Works ready to go, which can be found on Page 7.
- Prepare discussion questions

Teacher Script: *Today we're going to make our own special pictures that show who YOU are! Look at Dan's artwork - he used lots of colors and pictures to tell his story. What do you notice about his art?*



Dan's Connection for Teachers: Dan Eldon was a young artist who used creative expression to connect with others and make positive change. After his death, his family started Creative Visions Foundation (home of Students Rebuild) to help other young people use art to share their stories and build understanding.

Discussion Questions:

- "What makes you special and different from your friends?"
- "What are some of your favorite things?"
- "Why is it good that we're all different?"

Phase 2: Create Your Portrait | 25 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Have students cut out their photos and glue them in the center of their paper. Encourage them to fill the space around their photo with drawings and decorations.

Teacher Script: *Cut out your picture and put it right in the middle of your paper. Now fill up all the space around your picture with drawings of things that show who you are!*

Ideas to Share with Students:

- Draw your favorite animals, foods, or toys
- Use your favorite colors
- Draw your family or pets
- Add stickers that make you happy

Phase 3: Gallery Time | 10 minutes

Setup: Post all portraits on the wall under a sign reading "We Are Special!"

Teacher Script: *Look at all our pictures together! Every single one is different and special. When we put them all together, they show how awesome our class is because we're all unique!*

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OPTION 2 | EXTENDED MULTI-DAY VERSION | 2-3 CLASS PERIODS

Best For: Deeper exploration, stronger community building

Day 1: Introduction and Planning | 30-40 minutes

Opening Circle with Dan's Art | 15 minutes

Teacher Setup: Display Dan Eldon's Creative Works, which can be found on Page 7.

Teacher Script: *An artist named Dan Eldon made these special collage pictures when he was young. He traveled to many places and used his art to show people who he was and to help others understand different parts of the world. How does showing others different parts of the world help make the world a better place?*

Dan's mom and sister loved his art so much that after he died, they started a special organization called Creative Visions that helps kids and grown-ups use art to share their stories and make the world better. That's the same organization that created this project for you!

Extended Discussion Questions:

- What colors, objects, and people do you see in Dan Eldon's Creative Works?
- What do you see in Dan's artwork that tells you about him?
- How do you think he felt when he was making these pictures?
- What would you put in your artwork to tell people about yourself?

Planning Your Portrait | 15-20 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Give students time to think and plan before creating.

Teacher Script: *Before we make our portraits, let's think about what makes you YOU. Close your eyes and think about your favorite things, what makes you happy, and what you want your friends to know about you.*

Planning Questions for Students:

- "What are three things that make you really happy?"
- "What's something special about your family?"
- "What do you love to do when you're not at school?"
- "What's your biggest dream?"

Teacher Note: Have students draw or write simple planning notes they can refer to during creation.

Day 2: Create Your Portrait | 40-45 minutes

Review and Begin | 5 minutes

Teacher Script: *Yesterday, we thought about what makes us special. Today we're going to create our portraits! Remember, this is YOUR space to show everyone who you are.*

Extended Creation Time | 35 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Allow more time for detailed work, individual conferences, and creative exploration.

Guidance for Students:

- "Take your time and make it really show who you are."
- "If you want to add words, ask a grown-up to help you spell them."
- "Remember, there's no wrong way to do this - it's YOUR story."

Teacher Support: Circulate and have brief conversations with students about their choices, helping them think about how their elements represent them.

Wrap-Up | 5 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Let students share one thing they're excited about in their portrait with the class.

Day 3: Gallery and Community Building | 30-40 minutes

Create Our Gallery | 10 minutes

Teacher Script: *Let's put all our portraits together to make a special gallery called 'We Are Unique and United!' Look how every single portrait is different, but together they show what an amazing class we are.*

Gallery Walk | 15 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Guide students through a structured viewing of each other's work.

Teacher Script: *We will walk around quietly and look at everyone's portraits. Think about what you notice and what you'd like to say to your classmates about their artwork.*

Community Circle Discussion | 10-15 minutes

Teacher Instructions: Gather students in a circle for reflection.

Discussion Questions for Students:

- "What did you notice about your friends' portraits that surprised you?"
- "Did you find anything you have in common with someone else?"
- "How does it feel to see all our portraits together?"
- "What makes our class special when we're all together?"
- "How can we make sure everyone feels good about being different?"



Closing Message for Students: *Just like Dan used his art to connect with people and make the world better, you've used your art to help us understand each other better. Every one of you is unique and special, and that's exactly what makes our class stronger and more wonderful!*

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at [Studentsrebuild.org](https://www.studentsrebuild.org). Creative Visions will donate \$5, up to \$1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open from September 15, 2025 - June 1, 2026.

extensions and community engagement

For Classroom Visitors:

"You Belong Here Too" Mirror:

- Place a child-safe mirror next to the gallery with a sign: "You belong here too!"
- Provide paper and crayons, and ask visitors to reply to the following prompts:
 - What makes you unique?
 - Draw or write something special about yourself!
- Encourage visitors to create their own simple portraits to add to a "Community Wall"

Take-Home Connection: Send home a simple worksheet asking families: "What makes our family unique and special?"

Cross-Curricular Extensions

- **Reading Connection:** Read books about differences and identity, then connect to student portraits
- **Music Connection:** Have students choose a song that represents them to share with their portrait
- **Science Connection:** Explore how every person (like every fingerprint) is unique
- **Community Connection:** Invite community helpers to share what makes them unique



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DAN ELDON'S CREATIVE WORKS











