

unique and united

I AM—WE ARE: A PORTRAIT OF US



Why Unique and United?

Students Rebuild: Unique and United invites students to explore their identities—what makes them different, what shapes their perspectives—and use that discovery to build bridges across cultures, communities, and experiences. It's rooted in the belief that who we are, our traits, experiences, and stories—when truly understood, embraced, and brought to life—can become a powerful force for empathy, unity, and bold ideas capable of making a positive impact on our communities and the world.

Through creative expression, students will explore their identities, challenge assumptions, spark dialogue, and help shape a more united world.

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.

What's in This Guide?

This guide provides two implementation options: a streamlined single-period version for quick implementation and an extended multi-day version for deeper exploration. Both versions address the unique developmental needs of middle school students while maintaining psychological safety and educational rigor.

Important: The safety guidelines below are essential for creating an appropriate learning environment when students share personal information.

Materials Needed

- Dan Eldon's Creative Works (on Page 10)
- Student photographs or digital self-portrait options
- 12" x 12" or larger canvas/poster board for mixed media
- Advanced art supplies (acrylic paints, charcoal, pastels, fabric, found objects)
- Digital devices with video/audio editing capabilities (Option 2)
- Magazines, newspapers, printed materials for collage
- Access to online research databases and digital resources
- Presentation equipment for final showcase



CREATING A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Before beginning this project, it's essential to establish clear guidelines for maintaining a respectful and safe classroom community. This section should be reviewed with students before starting the activity.

Sharing Guidelines for Students

Authentic Boundaries: You control your narrative. Share what feels meaningful and appropriate for a diverse audience that may include peers, educators, family members, and community members.

Consider Your Digital Footprint: Remember that your work may be photographed or shared. Include only content you're comfortable having associated with your name and image.

Respect Privacy: Avoid sharing details about others' private lives, family situations, or sensitive information about friends or family members.

Community Agreements

Teacher Script: *Before we begin this meaningful project, let's establish some agreements to help us create a space where everyone feels safe to share authentically. These aren't just rules—they're commitments we make to each other.*

- **Thoughtful Conversations:** We engage with diverse topics and perspectives with respect and intellectual curiosity
- **Constructive Dialogue:** We offer thoughtful feedback that builds up rather than tears down
- **Digital Citizenship:** We follow ethical guidelines when sharing or discussing each other's work
- **Welcoming Space:** We actively work to ensure all voices are heard and valued
- **Growth Mindset:** We approach differences of opinion as opportunities for learning and growth

Teacher Guidelines

- Preview all work before public display, offering guidance on content that maintains appropriate boundaries.
- Facilitate discussions that encourage thoughtful analysis while maintaining psychological safety.
- Provide alternative options for students who prefer not to share personal information publicly.
- Model respectful interaction with diverse perspectives and complex topics
- Connect student work to broader academic and social contexts when appropriate
- Prepare to address sensitive topics that may emerge, and have resources available for student support.



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OPTION 1 | SINGLE CLASS PERIOD | 50 minutes

Best For: Introduction to authentic self-expression, quick implementation

Phase 1: Opening and Inspiration | 10 minutes

Teacher Script: *Today, we will create something powerful—portraits that show who you really are. But before we start, I want to ask you a question that might seem simple but is actually pretty complex. What aspects of yourself, your personality, experiences, and perspective, do you want others to understand better?*

Take a moment to think about this. Maybe there's something about you that people often misunderstand or a part of your story that you wish more people knew. We'll return to this idea as we work on our portraits.

Teacher Instruction: Show examples of Dan Eldon's Creative Works, which can be found on Page 10 of this guide. Eldon was a young creative changemaker who used art to explore social issues and connect personal expression with social participation.

Teacher Script: *I want to show you the work of someone who understood that art could be a powerful way to share who you are and what you care about. Dan Eldon was only a few years older than you when he created these incredible collages. The project you will complete today continues Dan's mission of connecting personal authenticity to broader social impact.*



Global Impact: Dan Eldon was killed in Somalia while documenting a civil war and the humanitarian crisis it created. His mother, Kathy, and sister, Amy, founded Creative Visions Foundation, the organization behind Students Rebuild. They pioneered the concept of "creative changemaking"—using art, media, and storytelling to explore social issues and drive social participation.

Phase 2: Create Your Portrait | 25 minutes

Teacher Script: *Now it's your turn. You have 25 minutes to create a portrait that goes way beyond just a photo of yourself. This is your chance to show the complexity of who you are.*

Student Instructions:

1. Cut out your photo and place it on your canvas.
2. Surround it with drawings, words, images, and symbols that represent who you are.
3. Include elements that show your values, interests, growth, and dreams.
4. Consider how your story connects to broader themes of personal uniqueness and community.

Teacher Script: *Remember, your photo is just one piece of this puzzle. The magic happens in everything you choose to surround it with. Think about symbols, colors, words, or images that tell your story. What would help someone really understand you?*

You have complete creative freedom. You might highlight your family heritage, future goals, challenges you've overcome, or causes you care about. There's no wrong way to approach this.

Phase 3: Set Up Gallery | 5 minutes

Teacher Script: *Alright, let's transform our classroom into a gallery space. When I call your table, please bring your portrait up and find a spot to display it. We're creating our "I Am—We Are: A Portrait of Us" gallery.*

Setup Instructions:

- Students post their portraits around the room
- Arrange portraits for easy viewing flow
- Ensure all work is visible and accessible

Teacher Script: *As you put up your portrait, take a moment to see it in the context of everyone else's work. Notice how your individual story becomes part of a larger narrative about our class community.*

Phase 4: Gallery Walk and Reflection | 10 minutes

Teacher Script: *Let's take a moment to appreciate what we've created together. As you walk around and look at each other's portraits, I want you to notice not just what you see, but what you learn about your classmates that you might not have known before.*

Gallery Walk: Have students take a gallery walk to view each other's work.

Teacher Script: *Take your time as you move around the room. You might want to jot down notes about techniques that catch your eye or stories that resonate with you. Remember our community agreements—we're here to appreciate and learn from each other.*

Closing Discussion: How do our individual stories create a stronger community together?

Teacher Script: *What did you notice as you looked at everyone's work? How do these different stories and perspectives enrich our classroom community? What would our community be missing if any one of these voices wasn't here?*

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

Best For: Deep self-reflection, comprehensive social impact exploration

Day 1: Identity Investigation and Artistic Research | 50 minutes

Opening: Understanding Personal Uniqueness in Context
15 minutes

Teacher Script: *Over the next few days, we'll dive deep into questions about what makes you unique—your personal qualities, and how they connect to the bigger picture of our community and world. These aren't easy questions, and there aren't right or wrong answers. What matters is that you're thinking thoughtfully about them.*



Teacher Script: *Let's start by exploring some questions that might challenge you to think about your uniqueness in new ways. Take a few minutes to consider these, and then we'll discuss them together.*

- What aspects define who you are, and how do these make you unique?
- How do different aspects of your personality intersect and influence each other?
- How has your understanding of your own unique qualities evolved throughout high school?
- What role does authentic self-expression play in creating positive community involvement?
- How might sharing your story contribute to broader conversations about understanding and appreciation?
- In what ways do our unique qualities bring us together as a community?

Teacher Script: *These questions don't have simple answers, and your responses might change as you grow and learn. That's exactly what we want—thinking that evolves and deepens over time."*

Deep Dive: Dan Eldon as Creative Changemaker | 20 minutes

Teacher Script: *Now I want to introduce you to someone whose story might inspire how you approach your own creative work. Dan Eldon was just a little older than you when he realized something powerful: that art could be more than just self-expression—it could be a way to explore social issues and connect with others about the world around us.*

Dan Eldon was more than an artist—he was a young person who understood that creativity could be a powerful tool for exploring social issues. His artwork wasn't just personal documentation; it was a form of commentary that connected individual experience to global issues.

Look at these examples of Dan's work. What do you notice about how he combines personal elements—his own photos, experiences, thoughts—with larger themes about the world around him? How does his art tell both his individual story and speak to broader human experiences?

Global Impact: Dan Eldon was killed in Somalia while documenting a civil war and the humanitarian crisis it created. His mother, Kathy, and sister, Amy, founded Creative Visions Foundation, the organization behind Students Rebuild. They pioneered the concept of "creative changemaking"—using art, media, and storytelling to explore social issues and drive social participation. Creative Visions has since supported projects worldwide, demonstrating that individual creative voices can spark movements for understanding, equality, and human rights.

Teacher Script: *As we look at Dan's legacy, I want you to think about these questions. We'll discuss some of them together, but I also want you to reflect on them personally as you work on your own portraits.*

Analysis Questions:

- What does Dan Eldon's artwork reveal about him?
- How did Dan use his art to bridge personal experience and social commentary?
- How did his work challenge viewers to think differently about global issues?
- In what ways can contemporary artists and changemakers use similar approaches to explore current social issues?
- How might your generation's unique perspectives contribute to conversations happening locally, nationally, or globally about important issues?

Teacher Script: *These questions will help guide your thinking as you create your own work. You don't have to answer them all directly in your portrait, but they might spark ideas about how your personal story connects to bigger themes.*

Personal Qualities Analysis Mapping | 15 minutes

Teacher Script: *Before you start creating your portrait, I want you to spend some time mapping out the different aspects of what makes you unique. This is private work—just for you to think through what you might want to include in your public portrait. You're in complete control of what you choose to share.*

Students complete a focused analysis exploring key areas:

- **Background & Heritage:** Cultural traditions, family history, community connections, places that shaped you
- **Personal Values:** Core beliefs that guide decision-making
- **Future Aspirations:** Career goals, desired impact on the world
- **Personal Growth:** How you've changed and continue to grow

Teacher Script: *Think of this as brainstorming for your portrait. You might discover that some aspects of your uniqueness feel more important to share than others, and that's perfectly fine. The goal is to help you think deeply about who you are so you can make intentional choices about what to include in your artistic work.*

Note: This mapping is for personal reflection—students choose what to include in their public portrait based on their comfort level and goals.

Day 2: Creating Multimedia Self-Portraits | 50 minutes

Portrait Creation Process | 35 minutes

Teacher Script: *Today is creation day! You have 35 minutes to bring your vision to life. Remember, this isn't just about making something pretty—it's about creating something meaningful. Think about what you discovered about yourself yesterday and how you want to share that story with others.*

As you work, keep these ideas in mind to help your portrait communicate effectively.

Guidelines for Meaningful Expression:

- Incorporate your photograph as one element among many, using it as a starting point rather than the focal point.
- Layer multiple media to create depth and complexity that reflects your multifaceted personality.
- Include elements that demonstrate growth, challenge assumptions, or highlight lesser-known aspects of who you are.
- Consider incorporating symbols, imagery, or text that connect your personal story to broader social themes.
- Experiment with contrast, juxtaposition, and visual metaphor to communicate complex ideas.
- Balance individual expression with awareness of your audience and community.

Teacher Script: *Don't be afraid to take creative risks. Some of the most powerful portraits will be ones that surprise us—including surprising you as you create them.*

Additional Elements to Consider:

- Cultural symbols and family heritage alongside personal interests and future goals
- Visual representations of challenges you've overcome and lessons you've learned
- Connections between your individual story and broader historical or social movements
- Artistic techniques that reinforce your message (color psychology, composition, symbolism)
- Integration of text, quotes, or original writing that adds depth to visual elements
- Elements that challenge viewers' assumptions or invite deeper conversation

Reflection Questions:

- How can your portrait share your personal story while also helping others see new perspectives?
- What aspects of your uniqueness do you want to highlight to create greater understanding or empathy?
- How might your story inspire others or contribute to meaningful conversations in your community?
- What visual techniques best communicate the complexity of your experience?

Digital Storytelling Component | 15 minutes

Students create a 90-second multimedia reflection combining audio narration with their visual art piece.

Teacher Script: *Now we will add another layer to your portrait—your voice. You will create a short digital story that gives us insight into your thinking and identity. This is your chance to speak directly to viewers about your portrait's meaning.*

Use your Chromebook or other device to record a short 90-second audio or video reflection. You can use the built-in recording app, Voice Recorder, or any recording software available on your device.

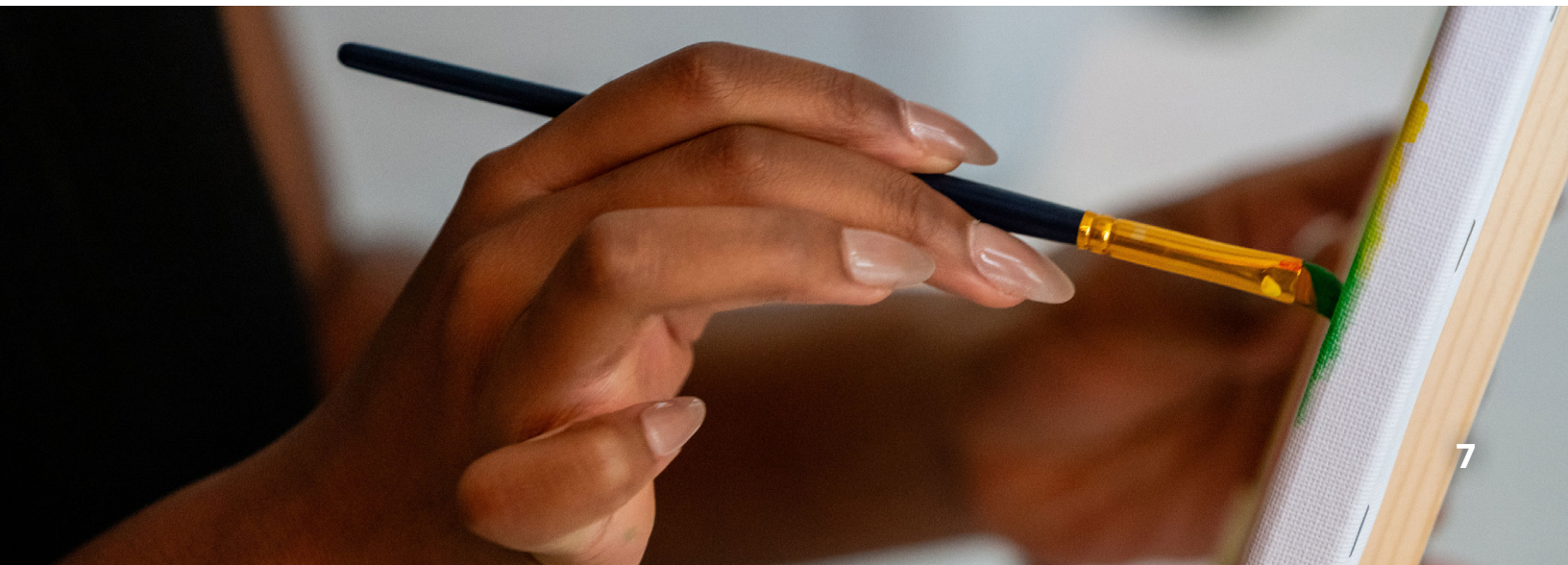
Finally, use a QR code generator to link the audio file to your portrait. Tape or glue the QR code to the corner of your paper.

Teacher Instruction: Direct students to review the following prompts before recording.

Teacher Script: *Choose the prompt that resonates most with you. Remember that you only have 90 seconds, so focus on one clear message you want to share.*

- Advanced Storytelling Prompts:
- A misconception about people like me that I want to address is...
- My unique qualities are a benefit to my community, because...
- My story connects to broader social issues because...
- I want my generation to be known for...
- The positive community involvement I want to see in my community is...
- My portrait represents my values in action because...

Teacher Script: *Your digital story doesn't have to explain everything in your portrait—it should add another dimension to help viewers understand your perspective. Think of it as a conversation you're having with someone viewing your work.*



Day 3: Gallery Exhibition and Social Impact Dialogue | 50 minutes

Gallery Setup and Connection to Lozano-Hemmer | 10 minutes

Quick Gallery Setup:

- Post portraits as a gallery titled “I Am—We Are: A Portrait of Us.”
- Include QR codes for digital storytelling components.

Connect to Pulse Topology: Briefly show Lozano-Hemmer's installation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zy39kMf_3o) and discuss how individual authenticity creates collective power, just like individual heartbeats create beautiful collective experiences.

Structured Gallery Walk and Community Dialogue 25 minutes

Gallery Walk Protocol:

- **Individual Reflection (8 minutes):** Students move through the gallery, taking notes on artistic techniques and thematic connections
- **Digital Story Sampling (7 minutes):** Students engage with selected multimedia components
- **Peer Dialogue (10 minutes):** Structured conversations about observations and connections to broader themes



Community Impact Discussion | 15 minutes

Teacher Script: *Now that you've seen everyone's incredible work and heard some of their stories, let's talk about what this all means. What patterns are you noticing? What have you learned—not just about your classmates, but about identity and community in general?*

Teacher Script: *I'm going to ask you some big-picture questions. There aren't right or wrong answers—I want to hear your genuine thoughts and observations.*

Discussion Questions:

- What patterns emerge across our portraits that reflect our generation's unique perspectives and experiences?
- How do the stories here challenge or complicate common narratives about young people?
- What insights from this project could inform efforts to create more welcoming environments in our school and community?
- How might the courage demonstrated in these portraits inspire action on issues we care about?
- What responsibility do we have to use our voices to address issues in our school or community?
- How can we support each other in continuing to express our authentic selves as we move into adulthood?

Teacher Script: *These questions are meant to help you think about how this project connects to your life beyond our classroom. How might what you've learned here influence how you interact with others, how you see your community, or how you think about your own role in creating positive change?*

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at Studentsrebuild.org. Creative Visionswill donate \$5, up to \$1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open fromSeptember 15, 2025 - June 1, 2026.

extensions and community engagement

Interactive Elements for Community Members

"Perspective Expansion" Station:

- Provide reflection prompts about personal uniqueness, authenticity, and community belonging
- Invite visitors to share how the portraits challenged their thinking or expanded their understanding
- Create space for intergenerational dialogue about personal qualities and social participation

"You Belong Here Too" Interactive Mirror

- Place a mirror at the center of the gallery with a sign: "You belong here too."
- This reinforces that every community member's authenticity contributes to collective strength
- Provide space for visitors to write reflections on what makes them unique and how they contribute to community
- Include prompts for visitors to commit to actions that support authentic expression in others

Family and Community Dialogue

- Facilitate conversations about personal uniqueness, authenticity, and social participation between students and adults.
- Provide discussion guides for families to continue conversations at home
- Connect the project to broader community initiatives around understanding and appreciation.

Cross-Curricular Extensions

- **Social Studies:** Research movements throughout history where people have used creative expression to share their unique perspectives and advocate for understanding
- **English Language Arts:** Write analytical essays examining how personal uniqueness is constructed and represented in literature
- **Psychology:** Investigate adolescent personal development, intersectionality theory, and the psychology of bias and prejudice
- **Art:** Study contemporary artists who use their work to address social issues and explore personal uniqueness
- **Digital Media:** Develop podcasts, documentaries, or social media campaigns that amplify authentic voices
- **Civic Participation:** Connect with local organizations working on issues related to personal expression and community building



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DAN ELDON'S CREATIVE WORKS











