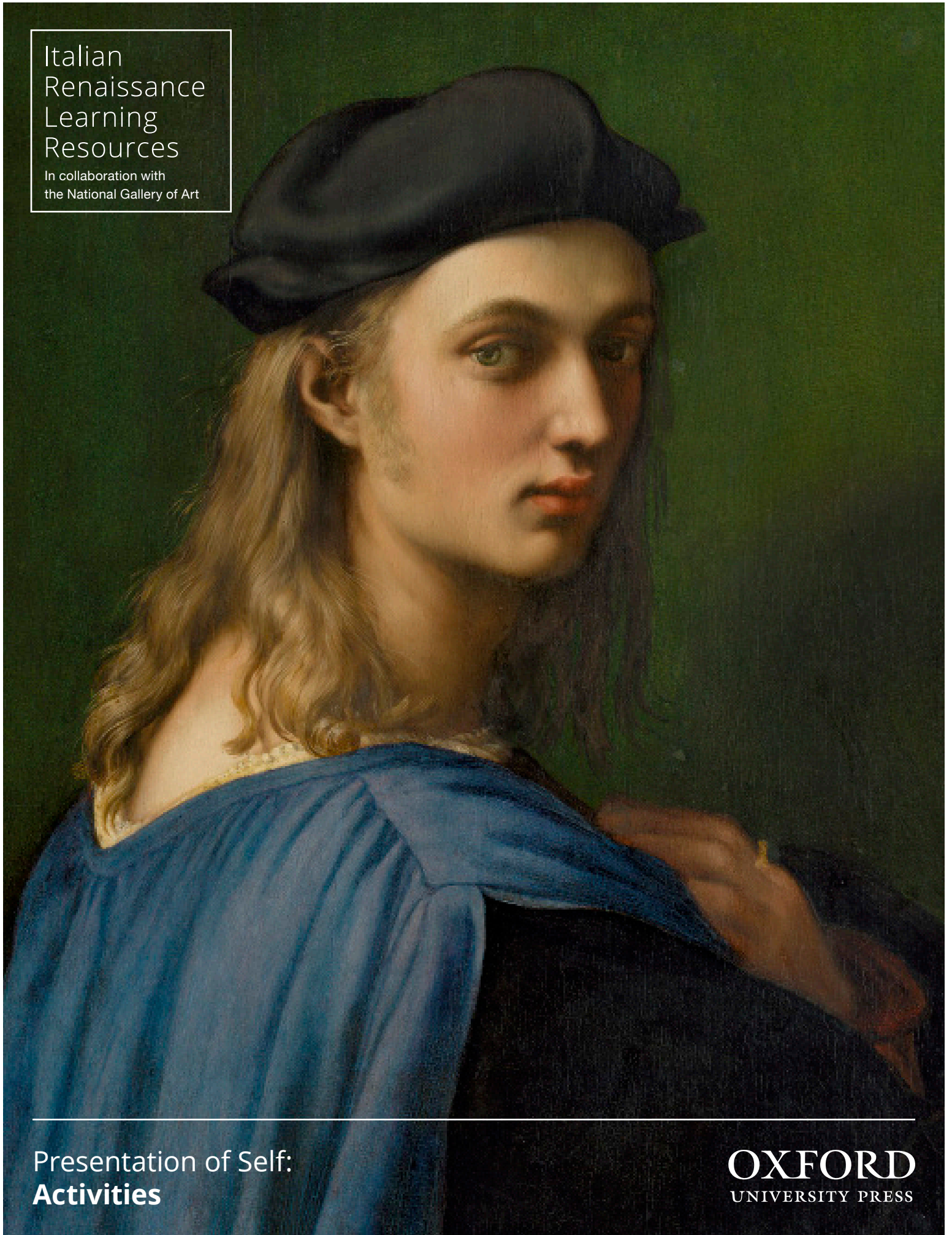


Italian
Renaissance
Learning
Resources

In collaboration with
the National Gallery of Art



Presentation of Self:
Activities

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1. Celebrating with Ceramics

In the Renaissance, the dishes on which food was served often celebrated marriage alliances, political achievements, or even the owner's scholarly erudition. In this activity, students design a series of decorative plates that would celebrate major occasions.

PURPOSE: to enable students to envision themselves living and creating during the Renaissance.

MATERIALS: image of the heraldic maiolica plate [fig. 1], paper, drawing utensils.

PROCEDURE: Display and discuss the image of the decorative plate in class. Ask students to design a series of decorative plates that would celebrate the following occasions:

- A member of the family has just graduated from college.
- A member of the family has been elected President of the United States.
- A member of the family has won the television show “Dancing with the Stars.”
- A member of the family has just been admitted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Allow students time to draw all four designs. If desired, lead students in sharing their designs with their classmates.

GLOSSARY: [maiolica](#)

1. Celebrating with Ceramics:
Image Reference



Fig. 1 Workshop of Maestro Giorgio Andreoli of Gubbio

Plate with border of foliate scrollwork with dolphin heads and cornucopias; in the center, shield of arms of Vigerio of Savona, 1524

Tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica), dimensions

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Samuel H. Kress Collection

Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art

2. Deciphering a Portrait

A striking portrait by Titian **[fig. 2]** presents a middle-aged gentleman, somberly dressed in black, looking out earnestly at the viewer and prominently displaying a slip of paper on which are written the words: “*Di Titiano Vecellio singolare amico*” (which can be translated as “Titian’s special friend”). No scholar has yet determined the reasons for the commissioning of the painting or what its function may have been. In this activity, students draw up scripts to account for the patron’s purposes in commissioning and displaying the painting.

PURPOSE: to familiarize students with the relationships that developed between patrons and artists; to introduce students to art-historical research practices.

MATERIALS: image of Titian’s *Portrait of a Friend of Titian*, paper, writing utensils

PROCEDURE: Display and discuss the *Portrait of a Friend of Titian* in class. Ask students to draw up two alternative scripts of their own devising, accounting for the patron’s purposes and reasons in commissioning and displaying the painting. Note that the patron need not be the sitter. Allow students time to draft their scripts. If desired, lead students in sharing their scripts with their classmates.

GLOSSARY: **Titian**

2. Deciphering a Portrait: Image Reference



Fig. 2 Titian

Portrait of a Friend of Titian (Portrait of a Gentleman), c. 1550

Oil on canvas, 90.2 x 72.4 cm (35 1/2 x 28 1/2 in.)

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

3. Give Me Your Hand

The joining of right hands as a significant gesture goes back to antiquity and has a Latin name, *dextrarum junctio*, which literally means “the joining of right hands.” The idea has come down to us in the handshake, which can convey a variety of meanings, from the simple “Glad to see you” to the more complex “‘Til death do us part.” In the Renaissance, marriages could be legalized with the *dextrarum junctio*.

A handsome maiolica plate [fig. 3] executed about 1500–10 incorporates this motif. It would have been meant for display in a public space of the home. The four main parts of the design are:

- the clasped hands (with different designs for the sleeves seen on the two arms).
- the pierced heart at the top of the center section.
- the curling flames at the bottom of the center section.
- the golden rays streaming down from above.

How do the four parts of the design work together to present a unified message? In a short narrative essay, students describe the message conveyed by this display plate.

PURPOSE: to highlight a link between current customs and cultural norms and those of the Renaissance.

MATERIALS: image of the maiolica plate, paper, writing utensils

PROCEDURE: Display and discuss the image of the plate. Ask students to draft a short narrative essay to describe the message this display plate conveyed to visitors entering the Renaissance owners’ home. Allow students time to draft their narrative essays. If desired, lead students in sharing their narrative essays with their classmates.

GLOSSARY: **maiolica**

3. Give Me Your Hand: Image Reference



Fig. 3 Italian 16th century

Plate with *dextratum juntio*, c. 1510

Tin-glazed earthenware, diameter 29 cm; h. 5 cm (11 2/5 in.; 2 in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Soulages Collection

4. Clothes Make the Person

“Among my first considerations as head of the family: everyone should be well-dressed, according to his station—it would be no true thrift . . . to dress them less than well.”

Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia* (*Book of the Family*), 1433.

The people of the Renaissance were well aware that “clothes make the person.” As we know from letters, account books, and inventories, every part of Renaissance dress was considered important—including accessories such as shoes, belts, and gloves.

In this activity, students will depict individuals whose clothing presents a message, and then describe that message.

PURPOSE: to give students the opportunity to practice interpreting visual cues in real-life settings.

MATERIALS: cameras or drawing utensils, paper, writing utensils

PROCEDURE: Read the quote from Alberti (above). Ask students to use a camera or drawing utensils to depict individuals—perhaps people of their acquaintance—whose clothing presents a specific message. If possible, lead students to a public area where they will encounter new people, or

instruct them use their fellow classmates as examples. Allow them time to collect examples.

Next ask students to describe the message delivered by the individual pieces of the ensemble. Some possible scripts:

- An individual who plans in two or three years to enter a public service or nonprofit program, such as the Teacher’s Corps, Peace Corps, or the like. The goals might be to visit interesting countries, to teach, to advise, or possibly to help in construction projects of various kinds.
- An individual who aspires to be a media star. If a woman, she might be torn between the over-the-top blonde bombshell look (think Madonna, Lady Gaga, or Marilyn Monroe) and the restrained, slightly haughty look (Tilda Swinton or Katherine Hepburn). If a man, he might be torn between the down-home look of Dustin Hoffman and the Iron-Man look of Robert Downey Jr.
- An individual who aspires to enter the fashion industry, either as a designer, a model, or an entrepreneur.

If desired, lead students in sharing their photos and drawings with their classmates.

GLOSSARY: [Leon Battista Alberti](#)

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