



Great Fire of London

Guided Portrait Discussions

These portrait discussions give questions for a teacher to ask the children, with possible suggested answers in brackets. It may be necessary for the teacher to probe a bit further with supplementary questions and to add little bits of information to arrive at the full meaning.

Samuel Pepys by John Hayls, 1666, NPG 211

Is he holding his diary?

(No, a piece of music that he has written)

Why do you think he has chosen to show this in his portrait?

(Very proud of writing the music; diaries are private things, not for showing off)

Try looking over your shoulder just like Pepys is doing – how does it feel?

(It should feel pretty uncomfortable – Pepys wrote that it felt like he was almost breaking his neck doing this, which maybe is why he looks quite so serious!)

Do you like the brown silk gown that Pepys is wearing?

(They might say it looks like a dressing gown, which it does to us today, although this was informal daywear for men at the time. Pepys couldn't afford to buy it so he hired it for having his portrait painted)

Pepys wondered about having a landscape – a picture of the countryside – painted in the background – do you think that would make his portrait look better or worse?

(Leads on to the children thinking what they'd like to show in their own portraits)