

Goldie at Home: Innovative Iowans

Activity Overview: With the change of seasons, comes the brilliant colors of fall leaves. This month's Innovative Iowan activity celebrates the beauty of nature with portraits inspired by artist Ana Mendieta. Explore a yard or neighborhood and create a self-portrait of natural materials found across Iowa's landscape.

Connection to Iowa History

Iowa has been home to many artists who worked with a variety of materials to create their masterpieces. Although artist Ana Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba, she grew up in Iowa after being sent to the United States through Operation Pedro Pan. In 1966, she started her art education at the University of Iowa, eventually receiving a degree in art in 1969 and a master's degree in painting in 1972. She also enrolled in the University of Iowa's MFA Intermedia Program where she started using organic materials to create self-portraits. Her Silueta Series focuses on self-portraits featuring her entire body where she used a variety of materials, including **flowers, water, moss, sticks** and **fire**, occasionally combined with **handprints** that she branded directly into the ground.

Her work, which is sometimes mature in content, has been shown in many galleries including the Des Moines Art Center, New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., among many others.



Instructions ([Video Instructions Available](#))

- 1 **Print.** Prior to starting the activity, print or reference the attached [face template](#). Although not necessary, it may be helpful to lay out your materials. There are gray lines on the face template to help guide where your eyes, nose and mouth would be located. While Ana made portraits of her entire body, we will just make portraits of our head and face in this activity.
- 2 **Head outside.** Grab a basket, bucket or plastic bag and head to a backyard or local park. Explore the space and gather interesting natural materials to use for your self-portrait. Think about textures and shape while looking.
- 3 **Spread out the materials.** Lay out your natural materials either on the printed face guide or any flat surface, and pick and choose which pieces you want to use for your self-portrait. Make sure you pick materials for the eyes, nose, and mouth. Even consider giving your portrait some hair!
- 4 **Create your gallery.** If making multiple portraits, arrange them into a small collection like a museum exhibit. Write labels describing each piece and the materials used.
- 5 **Return to nature.** Most of Ana Mendieta's artwork was temporary. After creating your self-portrait, return the organic materials back to nature.

Materials

- [Face template](#)
- Printer paper
- Natural materials: leaves, grass, flowers, rocks, sticks, etc.
- Basket, bucket or plastic bag
- Pencil or pen

Instructions continued on next page

Goldie at Home: Innovative Iowans

Instructions continued

6 Questions to Spark Learning

- Museums sometimes have lots of portraits in their art collections. What can you learn about the past by observing portraits?
- Ana Mendieta used a variety of materials and types of media for her artwork. Besides natural materials, what other materials could you use to create a self-portrait? Why would you use those materials and how would those materials tell your personal story?
- Search the [State Historical Museum of Iowa's online collection](#) and find a portrait you enjoy. Who is this person, and what about the artwork do you enjoy? What does this portrait tell you about this historical figure?

7 Additional Resources

Explore these resources below to learn more about the involvement of Iowans in World War II.

- ["Think Like an Artist" Cards](#)
- [Visual Thinking Strategies](#)
- [Ana Mendieta Biography - Smithsonian American Art Museum](#)
- [Pedro Pan: A Children's Exodus from Cuba - Smithsonian Insider Article](#)
- [Why are Portraits so Important in Art History?](#)

