

# Facing The Figure

## ART TECHNIQUE

Drawing & Painting

## AGE GROUP

Appropriate for students 14–18 years old

## CONCEPT

Students will create a figurative painting of someone “unseen” in their neighborhood, based on their own personal photos and sketches, inspired by the work of Jordan Casteel.

## SESSIONS

4 x 60 minute sessions

## MATERIALS

- Smart phone or camera, plus large prints of selected images
- 8.5” x 11” pieces of charcoal paper for sketches
- Atelier A2 Lightfast Heavy Body Acrylic 8-Tube Set containing the following colors: Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow Light Hue, Cadmium Orange Hue, Cadmium Red Medium, Alizarine Crimson, Dioxazine Purple, Phthalo Blue, and Phthalo Green. Use additional colors as needed for the class.
- 1 pint Chromacryl Painting Medium/ Varnish, per class
- 1 round paint brush per student
- 1 flat paint brush per student
- Vine charcoal or charcoal pencil per student
- 16” x 20” canvas, or larger, per student
- Standing easels or table easels
- 1 bucket to wash brushes in, per table

Other Chroma paints, such as Chromacryl Students’ Acrylic or Chromacryl Acrylic Essentials, can be substituted in this lesson.



*Jordan Casteel’s paintings celebrate the everyday individual. In her life size and larger than life size portraits, she paints those who typically are not seen in the neighborhood, typically Black men, women, children, small business owners, strangers on the subway. Her subjects’ gaze is directed at the viewer, forcing the viewer to confront and address the painting.*

*In this lesson, students will use Atelier A2 Lightfast Heavy Body Acrylics to create a figurative painting based on their photos of someone who is “unseen” in their family, school or neighborhood, based on the techniques and aesthetics of Jordan Casteel. Students will learn basic facial proportions as a guide to mapping the face. Students will reflect and write a statement on why they chose their subject and why that person should be “seen.”*

## NATIONAL CORE ART STANDARDS

*Creating Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.*

*Responding Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.*

*Connecting Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding*



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## OBJECTIVE

By creating a figurative painting of someone perceived as “unseen,” students will learn the fundamentals of facial proportions and describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

## VISUAL REFERENCES

Visit [www.jordancasteel.com](http://www.jordancasteel.com) to curate works for inspiration. As a contemporary painter, there are many great artist talks and interviews online.

## FIRST SESSION

Review Jordan Casteel’s life and works. Born in 1989, Jordan Casteel is a contemporary figurative painter. After receiving her MFA from Yale, she had a residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, several museum shows and currently teaches at Rutgers University. She received a MacArthur Fellowship award in 2021.

As part of her practice, she walks around her neighborhood, introduces herself to people and asks them to pose for her. Casteel said, “It is through empathy that we gain an understanding of the lives of others.” She often takes hundreds of photos in order to “know” her subjects and that in itself is one approach to empathy. She does not pose her sitters in the studio; instead it is a collaborative experience, and her subjects choose where to pose. She then uses these photos as the basis for her representationally based, but not realist, paintings. As you review Casteel’s work with students, key elements to note are:

- Casteel’s sitters often have a direct gaze, meaning they look at you, not off to the side
- Her figurative works make use of lines, angles and contours, not soft and subtle transitions of color

- Casteel paints everyday people, not those who are particularly rich or famous

- Her palette is generally bright colors.

She deliberately leaves parts unpainted, which brings more attention to those parts

For additional comparisons, consider and compare Casteel’s works to painters such as Alice Neel and Beauford Delaney. Ask questions such as:

- Who are subjects?
- How does Casteel render the figure in space?
- What type of colors does she use?

Further the discussion by asking:

- Who has the right to paint the sitter?
- Who tells the story – the painter or the sitter?
- How do you, as the viewer, participate in the story?

After the discussion, students will choose an everyday or “unseen” subject from school, neighborhood or family – perhaps a teacher, a school worker, someone in their community, a fellow classmate that they don’t know as well, a sibling. Prior to the first session, use a smart phone or camera to take pictures of the subject. This is not selfie time; this is a “no filter” zone! Invite the sitter to pose in a natural way in a setting of their choice, but the sitter’s gaze should be direct. Take 10-20 photos. Print 4-5 of these photos on letter size paper to use as reference.

## SECOND SESSION

Using Atelier A2 Lightfast Heavy Body Acrylic, paint the background



Andres, by Jordan Casteel, 2021  
 From [www.instagram.com/jordancasteel](http://www.instagram.com/jordancasteel)



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of your canvas a light color such as pale yellow (Cadmium Yellow Light Hue + Titanium White) or a light wash of Burnt Sienna. This color will subtly influence the subsequent colors in the painting, and also provide some interest in areas that are left unpainted. Casteel calls this background the “aura” of the a painting. Let dry.

On a piece of paper scaled for the final painting surface, create a gestural sketch of the composition. Advanced students can use the entire figure in the composition; beginner/intermediate students can focus on a ½ to ¾ pose in order to gain experience in painting faces.. On a separate piece of paper, create a sketch of the sitter’s face using facial proportions guidelines. Remember these key points:

- Eyes are halfway between the head.
- The head is about 5 eyes wide.
- Bottom of nose is halfway between the eyes and chin.
- The edges of the nostrils line up with the inner corners of the eyes
- The mouthline is halfway between the nose and chin.
- The edges of the mouth line up with middle of the pupil.
- The hair starts above the top of the head.

See attached cheat sheet. These are just guidelines as every person is different.

When the canvas is dry, use vine charcoal to draw the composition based on the printed photos and sketches as a guide. Pay attention to the faces and map them appropriately and proportionately, but do not get hung up on detail. Casteel is not a photorealist and she works quickly; encourage the students to approach their subject energetically and empathetically.

### THIRD SESSION

Using Atelier A2 Lightfast Heavy Body Acrylic, students will set up a palette of colors, such as those included in the 8-Tube Set:

- Titanium White
- Cadmium Yellow Light Hue
- Cadmium Orange Hue
- Cadmium Red Medium Hue
- Alizarine Crimson
- Dioxazine Purple
- Pthalo Blue
- Pthalo Green

Use other colors as needed. Create a fluid, thin mix of medium value color by mixing complementary colors + Titanium White with a painting medium such as Chromacryl Painting Medium. Trace the vine charcoal lines so there is a painted map of your drawing.



*Charcoal drawing of figure on toned canvas*



*Beginning of the second session, with outlines and initial color blocked in*

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Facial values

Begin painting the face using a flat or filbert brush. For the dominant skin color (and it does not need to be representational) mix a light, mid and dark value. Many painters will begin with a mid value color and work up to the lights and down to the darks. Light reflects off skin, and as general rules, the center of the forehead and the tip of the nose will be lightest value, the eyelids and pupils are the darkest values.

The great thing about acrylics is that you can always paint over a color that reads "wrong." Do not overthink and do not overpaint. Use angles and lines of color to build the planes of the face; flat brushes will help create these marks. Use small round brushes as needed for the eyes. Paint the rest of the figure and the background. Use larger brushes for the larger areas, such as arms, legs and clothes. Leave some areas unfinished if desired as a way to call attention to that area.



## FOURTH SESSION

Finish the painting correcting elements that are off by overpainting. Add selective detail. Because acrylics naturally dry darker, rebuild the lightest lights and adjust any areas that have "sunk" in value. Students can compensate for this value shift by mixing light colors a step or step and a half lighter in value. If desired, use contour lines around the figures to build a cohesive, unified painting. Make a very fluid mixture with Chromacryl Pouring Medium or use a fluid paint such as Chromacryl Fluid Acrylic or Chroma Drawing Ink and a round brush for these lines.

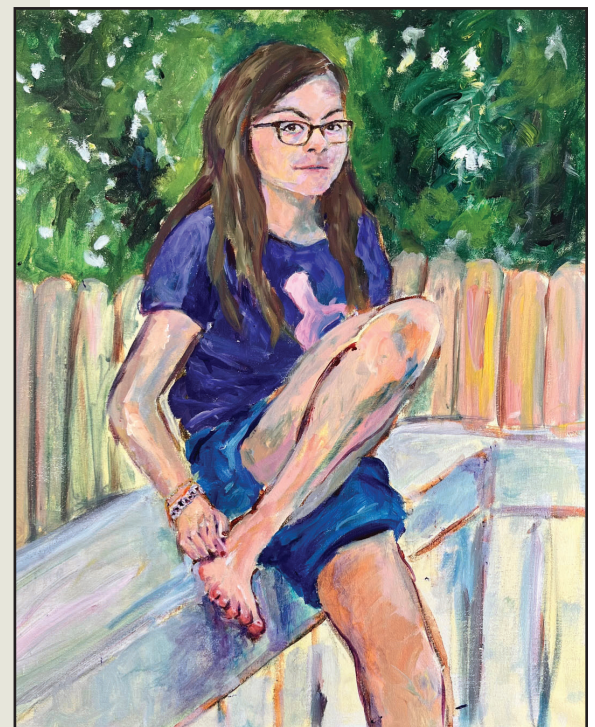
## REFLECTION

Hang or display the students' work around the room. Have your students reflect and answer these questions about their own and other students' painting:

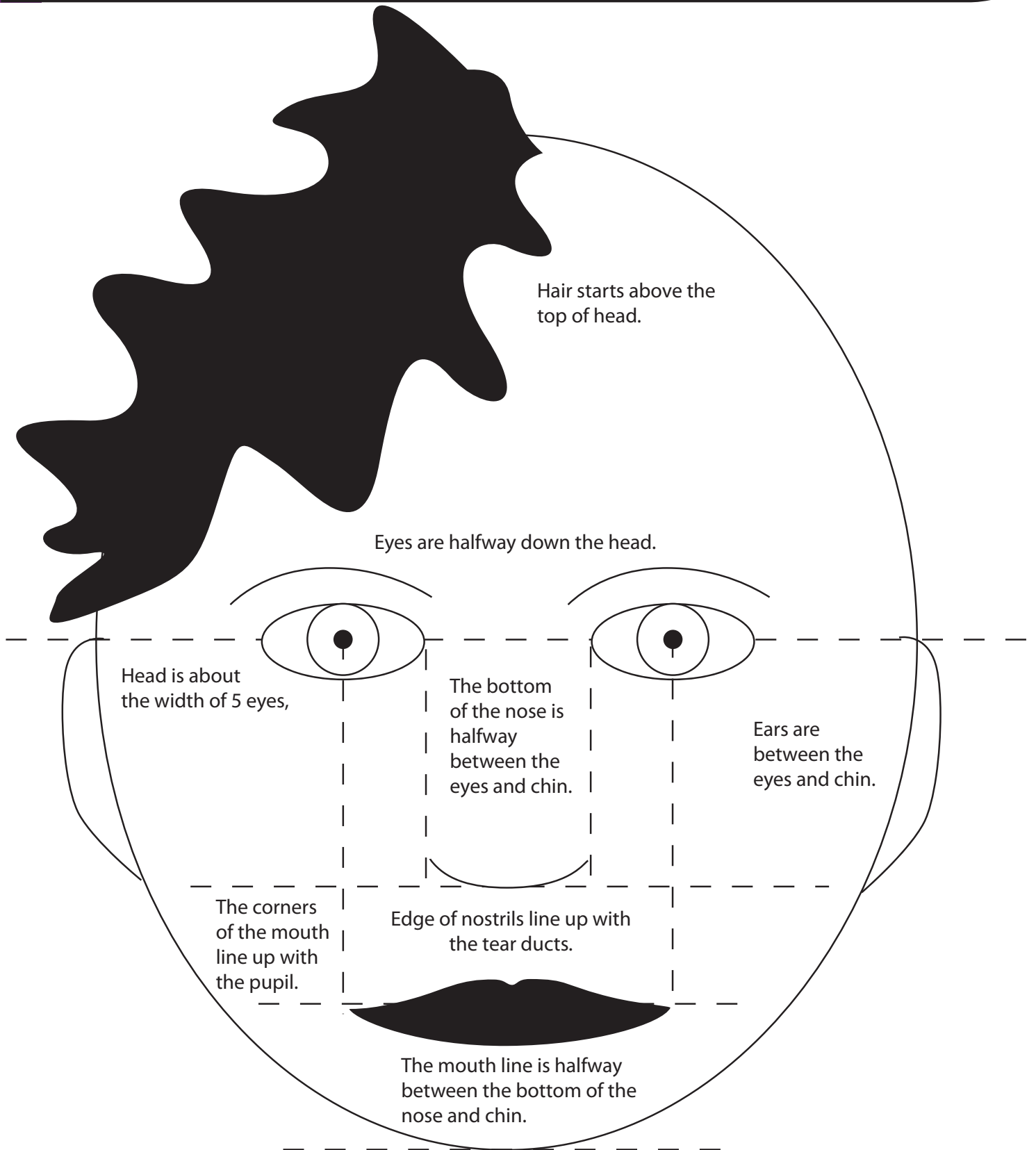
*Why did you choose the subject you did? Why was the person "unseen?"*

*Casteel's has said "I genuinely believe in the notion of there being a difference between symbols, which artists tend to traffic in, and substance." What do you think this means? Is your work more "substance" or "symbol?"*

*Casteel has also said "I've found throughout my young practice that people find ways of accessing the work through things they understand. They'll find language or concepts that feel tangible and sink their teeth into them, then never let go. For some, it's what my gender is or what the genders of my sitters are." Do you feel that your gender or cultural background influenced the way you created the work? Does your gender or cultural background influence the way you approach and engage with others' works?*



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General Facial Proportions



CHROMA

# CHROMA PAINTS AT A GLANCE

The below chart can help you determine which paints will suit the classroom purposes best. While most of Chroma's Educational lines could be used at any grade level for a variety of projects, particular Chroma brands will meet students' growing skills and provide richer, more sophisticated painting experiences.

Product	Color Range	Acrylic	Tempera	Heavy Body Consistency	Medium Body Consistency	Lightfast	Washable	Indoor/Outdoor	Best for Elementary	Best for Middle School	Best for High School	Canvas	Paper	Canvas Board	Wood	Murals/Sets	General Crafts	Paper Mâché	Printmaking
A2 Lightfast Heavy Body Acrylic	40	x		x		x					x	x	x	x	x				
Chromacryl Students' Acrylics	31	x			x					x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Chromacryl Acrylic Essentials	20	x			x				x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Molten Metals Metallic Acrylics	10	x			x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Chroma Mural Paint	37	x			x	x		x			x					x			x
Chroma Mural Paint Markers	25	x			x	x		x			x					x			x
Chroma Drawing Ink	12	x				x				x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Chroma 2 Intense & Opaque Heavy Bodied Washable Tempera	14		x	x			x		x	x	x		x				x	x	x
Chromatemp Artists' Tempera	32		x	x					x	x			x				x	x	
Chroma Glitter Paint	12		x		x		x		x				x				x	x	
Chromacryl Fluid Acrylic	16	x								x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	

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