

KO: To explore the hidden
messages in portraits of
Elizabeth I

Key Vocabulary:

1. Elizabeth I
2. portrait
3. Rainbow Portrait
4. symbols

Elizabeth stayed queen of England for so long because she made sure everybody knew how powerful she was by having her portraits painted. Each portrait has special symbols painted on it to show Elizabeth's strengths.

Painted in 1546 when Elizabeth was 13 years old and not expected to become queen.



Eyes and ears

These show that Elizabeth hears and sees everything and so knows what is happening in her country.

Rainbow

This shows Elizabeth brings peace after stormy times.

Flowers and Pearls

These are signs of youth and chastity (ie she is pure not married).

The Jewelled globe

This means Elizabeth is wise in both affairs of the heart and mind.

Jewelled Glove

This shows that men are prepared to throw down the gauntlet for Elizabeth. They will fight a duel for her honour.

Bridal hair

This is a sign of Elizabeth's youth and virginity.

Huge head dress

This is to show that Elizabeth will always bring food to her people. It supports her royal crown.

The serpent and heart

The serpent is a sign of wisdom. The heart is a symbol that Elizabeth loves and possesses her people. Together they show that Elizabeth has the wisdom to control her heart.

Angel's wings

These show that Elizabeth has heavenly knowledge. She has been given her power by God.



Symbolism in the Armada Portrait

Pearls - Pearls symbolise Elizabeth's purity and connect her to Cynthia, the Greek goddess of the Moon, who was seen as 'pure'.

Globe - The Globe represents England's striving for imperial power in the Americas. In the painting, Elizabeth is pointing to Virginia, which was named after her.

Hair, ruff, and embroidery - The circle of ruff extends from Elizabeth's face like the Sun's rays. She is shown as the centre and source of warmth, beauty and goodness.

Sea scenes - In the Armada Portrait, Elizabeth faces toward the calm seas on her right and turns away from the stormy waters where the Spanish ships are floundering. She is positioned as a calm force for good, in contrast with the chaos of Catholic Europe.

Crown - The crown represents royal power.

Task: Explain why symbols were used in portraits of Elizabeth I. Give examples of what symbols were used and what they meant.

Step for Depth: Design your own portrait of a person of your choice, with hidden messages.