

## FEELS ART PROMPTS



Kehinde Wiley, (American, b. 1977), *Portrait of Asia-Imani, Gabrielle Esnae, and Kaya Palmer*, 2020, oil on linen, TL 42289.

**F for FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** (About 2 minutes.)

What stands out to you? Who is in the painting?  
Does the painting remind you of anything?

**E for EXAMINE DETAILS:** (5 Minutes)

What do you think the relationship is between the woman and the girls?  
What do you notice about their poses? Their expressions? Their clothing?  
What do you notice about the chair? How would you describe the background?  
How does the shape of the canvas affect the composition?

**E for EXPLORE YOUR RESPONSES:** What role does the wallpaper play in this portrait? How does Wiley integrate the figures and the background? How do the neon colors affect the portrait? How would you describe the relationship of the different poses to one another? Does this portrait express power or majesty to you?

**L for LEARN ABOUT CONTEXT:** (10-15 minutes. Feel free to write your responses or discuss them with others.)

Wiley was already known for his large paintings of black and brown men posed in the manner of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century portraiture against elaborately patterned backgrounds when he embarked on this painting. From his website, Wiley describes his engagement with "...signs and visual rhetoric of the heroic, the powerful, the majestic, and the sublime in his representations of urban, black and brown men found throughout the world."

This portrait belongs to a series he called "The Yellow Wallpaper." Working in London, Wiley recruited women and children based on their posture and attitude, asked them to pose in his studio, and later painted them against wallpaper originally designed for 19<sup>th</sup>-century British designer, William Morris. The pattern Wiley chose for "The Yellow Wallpaper" series was created by Morris's daughter, May Morris, and was originally more subdued in color.

**S for SHARE YOUR FEELINGS:** (15 Minutes or more. Feel free to write or discuss with others.)

Wiley was inspired to create this series by American novelist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, written in 1892. After giving birth, Perkins Gilman suffered from post-partum depression and was diagnosed with hysteria. She spent three months in a room without any stimulation. In her short story, she writes: "I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin. The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smoldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight. It is dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulfur tint in others. No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long."

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>.

As an art student, Wiley read Perkins Gilman's story, and later reflected upon: "...the sense of powerlessness and the sense of invention that happens in a person who's not seen, who's not respected and whose sense of autonomy is in question." He continued, "...these same issues can be seen in conversations concerning race and class. In Perkins Gilman's case it was to do with gender, but it made me want to explore the [effects of] different types of confinement. And the story provided the perfect foil for that."

Do you have memories of childhood rooms you spent time in?

Do you recall any patterns of wallpapers or fabrics from your youth?

What do you think about Wiley's exploration of different types of confinement in his *Portrait of Asia-Imani, Gabriella Esnae, and Kaya Palmer*?

## FEELS ART PROMPTS

Please help us to improve the FEELS Art Prompts as we develop new ways for museum visitors to use the collections to explore their own feelings and cultivate a greater sense of well-being. Please complete and return this page. Feel free to add any additional comments on the back. Thank you for sharing your responses as we continue to refine the FEELS Prompts. (About 5-10 minutes.)

1) Have you ever visited a museum before today? Please circle one: YES NO

How many times per year do you visit a museum?

Number of times: 1-2 3-5 6-10 Your own estimated number of visits:

Please circle your response to the statements listed below:

2) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to consider Wiley's *Portrait of Asia-Imani, Gabriella Esnae, and Kaya Palmer* in relation to my own experiences or responses.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Please provide any further thoughts or comments:

3) The FEELS Prompts offered me a way to explore an emotional connection to the work of art.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

4) The FEELS Prompts inspired reflection of my own childhood memories or experiences.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

5) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to engage with other students in the gallery.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

6) The FEELS Prompts inspired a greater sense of self-reflection.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

7) The FEELS Prompts enabled me to recall experiences of interest to me.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

8) The FEELS Prompts created a greater sense of confidence in exploring my responses to Wiley's portrait:

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

9) The quotes from Wiley and Perkins Gilman enhanced the FEELS Prompts.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

10) I would tell a friend to use the FEELS Prompts when visiting the museum.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

11) What did you find most interesting about the FEELS Prompts? What did you enjoy least?

12) What would have made the FEELS Prompts better? Feel free to use the back of the page.

If you'd like to learn more about the FEELS Art Prompts project, please reach out to: Elliot Bostwick Davis, Ph.D., at [elliott\\_davis@harvard.edu](mailto:elliott_davis@harvard.edu). Thank you for your input!

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