

## Teachers' Notes

*Hope*, 1896

Simeon Solomon (1840-1905)

Pencil on paper, 38 x 27 cm

### Content and Ideas

**What is the relationship between the portrait and the word 'Hope' written prominently at the bottom?**

It was Solomon's intention to let the portrait head personify (i.e. stand for) the abstract theme of 'Hope'. Solomon's heads that he produced towards the end of his life often personified abstract themes; other themes were Night, Love and Death.



**Do you think this is a picture of a man or a woman?**

It is difficult to be certain.

It has androgynous qualities (qualities that are both masculine and feminine).

**Describe the expression on the face**

The face is both rapt and withdrawn and has a dreamlike quality. The sitter does not make eye contact with the viewer but rather seems remote, lost in their own thoughts.

**We know that Solomon was going through a very difficult time in his life when this was drawn. Does the figure express anguish or distress?**

On balance, it is a positive image that appears to search for 'hope'. It is perhaps however created as a result of the difficult time he was having.

**Discuss if there is identifiable sadness or melancholy in the face.**

### Form and Composition

**Describe the contours (i.e. edges)**

The contours are blurred to a melting softness.

**What view of the face is this?**

It is a profile – which means, side view

**Which areas are most defined?**

The eye, the mouth and the nostrils.

## Materials and Techniques

### What materials has Solomon used in this work?

Pencils and paper and possibly chalks, pastels and rubbers.

### Has Solomon used soft pencils or hard pencils?

Soft pencils produce a dark, softer look and hard pencils produce a more precise and lighter mark.

### Describe the range of mark making in this work.

Solomon uses soft diagonal lines on the clothing and the hair to suggest texture. The contours are soft and the weave of the paper shows through in places.

## About the Artist

Born in to an artistic family, Solomon possessed by far the greatest artistic talent of the family and was something of a prodigy. He was self-taught and achieved early success.

Having lost his father in early childhood, he looked to his brother, Abraham Solomon both as substitute father and artistic mentor. He attended F. S. Cary's Academy in 1852 and followed his brother into the Royal Academy Schools in 1856. However, he preferred the increasingly fashionable Pre-Raphaelite style to the manner of Abraham's genre subjects.

Through Dante Gabriel Rossetti's influence, he soon mastered the delicacy of Pre-Raphaelite draftsmanship, a talent that is abundantly evident in the pen-and-ink drawing 'Dante's First Meeting with Beatrice' (1863; London, Tate). His sister, Rebecca's deep Jewish spirituality influenced Solomon's choice of subjects from the Old Testament and contemporary Jewish life, and he never fully abandoned religious themes. Such biblical oil paintings as the 'Mother of Moses' (1860; private collection) reveal his profound spiritual grasp of Hebraic mysticism.

In the mid-1860s, deeply influenced by Burne-Jones, Solomon changed his style and subject-matter to classical pagan themes rich with mythological imagery. 'Habet' - a classical oil of 1865, brought him fame, while his charm and precocity soon led him into the aesthetic and literary circle of Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater. Albert Moore's Arts and Crafts aestheticism also became a strong influence on his work. In 1863 he produced designs for Morris & Co.

Trips to Italy in 1866–7, 1869 and 1870 broadened his artistic horizons, introducing an Italianate beauty to his idealized figures. In the late 1860s he painted a number of exquisite oils, representing classical male beauty and languorous groups of androgynous youths and maidens. These paintings met with delight among his supporters in the Aesthetic Movement but dismay from Simeon's family and wider public.

A limited edition of his prose poem 'A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep' was published in 1871, a blend of Hebraic mysticism and pagan hedonism, encompassing many of his favourite pictorial themes. It was violently attacked by Robert Buchanan in 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' (1872). Solomon was homosexual and this caused grave embarrassment even to those closest to him. Shunned by family and friends alike, he was unable to sell his pictures and took refuge in alcoholism.

Penury soon reduced him to a nomadic life, work as a pavement artist, a brief stay in a lunatic asylum and finally many years in a poorhouse. He continued painting, but most of his later works, chiefly pastel drawings of profile heads, do not match the quality of his earlier oeuvre. Exceptions, however, exist where he briefly regained his original power and inspiration. The aging vagrant lived into the 20th century, dying finally of a heart attack at Holborn, London.