*His Excellency arrives in Mexico City to oversee the development of the Spanish colonies.*

**When:** About sixty years after Cortés invaded Mexico in 1519

**Where:** Mexico

**Who:** His Excellency Señor Doctor Don Pedro Moya de Contreras—or Mr. Moya—a powerful official in the Catholic Church and Spanish government

**What:** Portrait painting—documents how people look or how they want to appear

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### History connection

The writing at the bottom of this painting states that Señor Moya became the **visitador, viceroy, and archbishop** of New Spain on August 18, 1570. As archbishop and visitador, Señor Moya was the head of the Catholic Church in the areas we now know as Arizona, New Mexico, Mexico, Cuba, and Florida. Señor Moya had three main responsibilities. First, he helped the church to grow by sending priests to convert the native people of Mexico. Second, he ensured that the church made money from the mines and farms in the areas under his control. Third, he oversaw all the people who worked for the Catholic Church. If a priest was not doing a good job, Señor Moya could fire the priest without asking the church officials in Rome. Communication between the colonies and Spain was very slow. Sending a letter to Europe could take two to four months. By giving Señor Moya the authority to make important decisions, church officials maintained their power in the colonies.

As viceroy, Señor Moya worked for the Spanish government. The viceroy oversaw tax collection and building construction in the Spanish colonies. He also made sure that public order was maintained. In addition, it was Señor Moya’s responsibility to protect Spanish settlements from invasion by other European countries. Only two other men, besides Señor Moya, held all three positions of archbishop, visitador, and viceroy at the same time. Known as a fair leader, Señor Moya fought to outlaw slavery of the native people of Mexico.

### About the artist

This portrait was painted in the 1800s. It is an exact copy of the original portrait painted at the end of the 1500s. The artist who painted the original portrait probably painted it just before or very soon after Señor Doctor Don Pedro Moya de Contreras arrived in Mexico. Many European artists were living in Mexico City at the end of the 1500s. As the colony grew, the Catholic Church built large cathedrals that needed both painted and sculpted decorations. European artists opened their own studios and trained local students. Possibly one of these artists painted this portrait.
I notice. . .

I wonder. . .

Colonial Object Information Sheet 5th Grade
Looking closely
Meet the Mason children. David, age eight, appears to the left and Joanna, age six, stands in the middle. Abigail, who is only four years old, appears at the far right. We know the ages of the children because the numbers are written in gold paint just to the left of their heads. Can you find any other writing on the canvas? In between David and Joanna appears the phrase “Anno Dom 1670.” These Latin words mean “in the year of our lord.” This tells us two significant facts. First, religion was very important during the time when this picture was made. The date 1670 tells us this portrait was painted around 335 years ago.

The Mason children’s clothes are unlike what you and your friends wear today. How would it feel to wear David’s collar? Would it be hard to run in Joanna’s and Abigail’s long skirts? Notice the delicate lace and red bows decorating their clothing. These details show us that the Mason children’s clothes are expensive.

Today, we dress up to be photographed. In 1670, there were no cameras. The Mason children dressed up so an artist could paint their picture.

Each detail in this painting tells us about the Mason children. Notice David’s leather gloves and his walking stick with the silver top. During the colonial period, gloves and walking sticks represented a man’s gentlemanly status. By holding these items, it is suggested that David will one day hold a position of wealth and prestige. The fan Joanna holds is a sign that she will one day be a woman of privilege. The rose in Abigail’s hand is a symbol of innocence and goodness. The two sisters also wear red coral necklaces. Three hundred years ago, parents thought coral could keep their children from getting sick. Without modern medicines, it was even more important to stay healthy.

History connection
Portraits can show us more than just how someone looked. Portraits also tell us what it was like to live in a different time and place. We know the Mason children grew up in Boston. Boston was first known as the Massachusetts Bay Colony. John Winthrop and a group of 700 people started the colony in 1630. When this painting was made, the colony was only forty years old.

Boston was started as a strict Puritan community. Puritans did not think of childhood as we do today; they thought children were naturally wild and wicked. Education and hard work were thought to be the only ways to save the young. Children spent their time either at school learning to read and write or at home doing chores. There was very little time for play or recreation. As early as age seven or eight, children began to have adult responsibilities. As “adults in training,” Puritan children began to copy their parents. They even wore similar clothes. Notice the outfit David wears; it is probably very similar to what his father wore.

Puritans claimed to disapprove of showing off their wealth, yet the Mason children stand in a room decorated with costly green fabric, and they wear very expensive clothes. These details show that life in the colonies was changing. By 1670, Boston had become a busy shipping port. The wealthy were happy to enjoy the new luxury goods that arrived from all corners of the world. The slashed sleeves worn by the Mason children were one such luxury. Cut to show the white fabric beneath, these sleeves were worn by only the very wealthy. This portrait of the Mason children shows us that Boston was no longer a strict Puritan village. It was a growing town with a class system that divided the rich from the poor.

About the artist
We do not know who painted this portrait, because the painting is not signed. It looks similar to seven other pictures made about the same time that represent members of the Freake and Gibbs families. The figures in these paintings appear flat and stiff, and they are all shown wearing very detailed clothing. Art historians think that one person might have painted all eight pictures. They named this mystery artist the “Freake-Gibbs Painter.” Maybe someday you will solve the mystery of this artist’s identity!

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