

POKER FACES

An assortment of faces from four groups--artists' self-portraits, celebrities playing poker, politicians, and cartoon characters--rigorously analyzed according to two time-tested systems: poker tells and Chinese face reading.

This project could not have existed without the following sources: *What Your Face Reveals: Chinese Secrets of Face Reading*, by Henry B. Lin (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), and *Mike Caro's Book of Tells: The Body Language of Poker*, by Mike Caro (Secaucus, NJ: Gambling Times, Inc., 1984).

Series A: Artists' Self-Portraits

FRIDA KAHLO (A-1)

Kahlo looks serious, passive, sitting away from the poker table, and thus away from her cards and chips, but is still looking around. She is trying to look as if she doesn't care what is going on, but she does. Her conservative clothes and tightly-controlled hair serve to create a conservative image, but her watchful eyes make it hard to say what is a front and what is real. Her droopy earrings offset her clothes and hair and give a clue as to how to interpret her body language. She may not have a strong tactical position in the current game, but is observing others' playing styles so as to win through long term strategy.

Kahlo has a fire-shaped face. Its red and yellow colors are auspicious and it signifies that she is hot-headed, courageous, ambitious, and an adventurer. She may do too many things too quickly and burn herself out. Her ears have strong interior circles and show her to be ambitious and aggressive, but unhealthy, as was the case due to an unfortunate car accident. Her broad forehead is good. Her joined eyebrows show her to be a worrier, often frustrated, with great misfortune. Her "cow eyes" show her to be decisive, trustworthy, hardworking, courageous, and, surprisingly, very logical with an excellent marriage, two qualities for which her life is not known; perhaps her eyes are able to fool others beyond just poker players. Her "bee nose" stands for authority, wealth, and honor, although her visible nostrils are inauspicious. Her wide-bottomed philtrum shows she had a crisis earlier in life (the third indication of this!), as well as a wealth of experience. Her "pig mouth" signifies laziness, indulgence, carelessness, and a short temper; she is someone who has to find her own way and is careless with money and speech.

ADRIAN PIPER (A-2)

Piper is staring directly at the players in front of her, facing them down. When we consider that those who try to look strong tend to have weak hands, it is obvious that she is in the middle of a major bluff. She doesn't need to look at her cards because she knows what she has--nothing. Everything is in her head now, and in her relationship with the other players--the actual cards don't matter, and she knows it. Her hands, which would be the focus of a player with a good set of cards, don't even come into play--her focus is in her upper body; she is leaning forward, interested in the game. Her dress is casual and clean, as is her game.

Piper has a fire-shaped face, which signals that she is literally a firebrand, someone who leads

the crowd, fierce and courageous, but is often misunderstood for it. She is able to come up with new ideas easily, but has trouble with trust. Her uneven “yin-yang eyebrows” signal that she has had a troubled past, and that she understands the way people are effected by imagery and visual clues. The thicker of the eyebrows is auspicious and reinforces her leadership qualities, even if they are dispassionate. Her big pupils are to be expected in an artist such as herself, as they signify emotional intelligence and a lack of care when it comes to money. Her “deer eyes” show that she can sense trouble, and is able to warn others that it is coming. Her deep philtrum is auspicious, although her pointy chin says she will die alone in the end. Her bird mouth tells us that she is very talkative, and in fact many of her works have dealt with forms of oral storytelling.

CHARLES RAY (A-3)

Ray’s hand is waiting in indecision, a bluff for his observers as he waits and looks around the table. He is looking at people, not chips. What he does will not be based on his cards, but on other people’s characters--what can he get away with? While he has a “poker face”--it shows no emotion--it can still be read by identifying the reason that he would want his face to be unreadable. He wears relatively loose-fitting clothes, but they are almost a uniform, creating mixed signals regarding what his play might be like. His hat is a distraction, as are his glasses and coat--they cover him up and add to his indecipherability.

Ray has a fire/water face combination, which is a bad combination, but his green and yellow colors are good. This means that he is an ambitious, adaptable, and adventurous person. He has survival skills in the real world, but is less successful in affairs of the heart. His “water ears” show that he will gain power, wealth, and fame, but his thin or nonexistent eyebrows show his short-tempered, impatient side. This may also explain his glasses, hat, and coat--he needs to make up for his lack of eyebrows, which act as guardians of the eyes. His “mandarin duck” eyes signify luck with money, preoccupation with sex, and extreme intelligence. His “pig nose” means honesty and naivety, which leads to instability with the money he happens into. His wide-bottomed philtrum shows a bad childhood, his “bow-shaped” mouth shows wealth, honor, friendship, and intelligence, and his round chin shows a love of food, sex, and travel, all hallmarks of an artist.

CINDY SHERMAN (A-4)

Sherman’s face is turned away from the table, but her eyes are fixed upon it, showing her true interest. She is taking her strategy of distancing and diversion (intended to make people think she has a weak hand and thus doesn’t care about the game) so far as to actually have her leg up in front of her, with a foot on the seat of her chair, dividing herself from the table. Her body language says she isn’t paying attention, but her facial language says she is. She is smoking, another sign of seeming distraction. Her hands are not on her cards either, because she knows what she is “holding” and doesn’t need to look. Her sloppy dressing adds a note of caution, showing that her flamboyant gestures may just be part of her personality and not a sign that she has a good hand. She wears sunglasses to hide her eyes when necessary, but in this case she wants the other players to see what she is doing.

Sherman’s fire-shaped face, with its auspicious red overtones, tells is she is in the forefront of her field’s ordeals and issues and that she seeks out change and excitement. Her long thin

“crescent eyebrows” are emblematic of feminine ideals, the very subject of her work for many years, and signify artistic talent. They rest above and protect her “mandarin duck eyes,” which show luck with money and preoccupation, again, with sex and power, or in her case, sexual politics. Her parallel philtrum shows diplomatic skills, and her “cow mouth” blesses her with all the sensual riches of the world, a full life of romance, and long friendships.

Series B: Celebrities

PAUL RUDD (B-1)

Rudd is smiling, a real smile that includes the muscles around his eyes, looking at a fellow player, his hands away from his cards and chips--in fact his fingers are intertwined, further creating an image of distraction. His chips are neatly stacked in columns of the same height, showing an obsessive interest in his fortune in the game. He is dressed cleanly, with a coat, but his collar is open, signaling that he is very interested in doing well, and is playing somewhat loose, but has an underlying conservatism. At this particular time he is very confident in his hand and is leaning forward, interested in the game. His clasped hands do indicate a slight worry, however.

Rudd has a fire face, signaling courage, ambition, and energy, with red and white overtones, colors that cancel out each others' effects. He has high ears, which are auspicious, and are metal-shaped, indicating an early rise to national fame, which he achieved as a character on Friends. His ears have big doors, which show that he is open-minded and generous. His thick “sword” eyebrows point out that he may be selfish in some decisions, however. His high forehead is auspicious, as is his beard. His “cat eyes” show him to be alert, and also that he will never rise to the absolute top rank of his field, but will remain a minor celebrity. His “small bladder nose” similarly indicates minor wealth. His “ram mouth” shows that he is optimistic but cautious, and his pointy chin points to an early end to his life.

TONY CURTIS (B-2)

Curtis is holding his cards with one hand while putting his new cards in with the other. The cards are tilted back slightly to hide them, a guarded move for a good hand, using all 4 fingers on both hands, making sure his property doesn't get away. He is looking up with his eyes at another player, as if he doesn't care what his new cards are, but his face is pointed down at the table. He is dressed in a shirt and tie, but the tie is loosened, although his cuffs are still buttoned. This indicates that he is a controlled player who is only letting go enough to get aggressive. He has a bit of a sneer, unusual for someone playing a good hand since they would usually want people to think that they are weak, but it makes sense for his aggressive style of guardedness.

Curtis' wood-shaped face shows him to be calm on the outside, but ambitious and even greedy on the inside. He seems to be stable, but can be rough when necessary. The red and white colors in his face cancel each others' effects. He has high ears, which is good, as well as a high forehead and high cheekbones. His “crescent eyebrows” signify being in touch with his feminine side, as he was in Some Like It Hot. His “crane eyes” show that he has a thirst for truth

and the determination to get it. His “dragon nose” is very unusual and indicates great leadership and prominence, as he achieved as one of the 20th-century’s most celebrated actors. His “bow shaped mouth” indicates intelligence and the ability to communicate effectively, as he certainly did in his long career. His prominent pointy chin indicates a rewarding retirement but a bad end.

MARTIN SHEEN (B-3)

Sheen’s hands play loosely over the chips. He is going to make a very low-key bet, one intended to keep others from noticing it. His eyes are on the others at the table, keeping their attention on his casual talk rather than his bet. He has a strong hand. He is dressed in a clean but casual manner. His chips are stacked in slightly-leaning columns, showing that he is paying attention to how he is doing, but not obsessively. He is keeping things light and using his charisma as a tool to distract from his game, but the way he is leaning in shows that he is truly interested in the game.

Sheen’s wood face shows that he takes life slow and steady but has a troubled potential lurking within. He is a man of few words but those words can be trusted. His “fire ears” with prominent inner and outer circles show that he is intelligent, with great propriety and success late in life, although possibly with some enemies; he is very ambitious and will sometimes neglect other things in pursuit of his career. The breadth and height of his forehead is very auspicious, although his thin, short eyebrows show him to be conservative and sexually timid. His “triangular eyes” show that his success sometimes comes from his cunning and occasional lack of morality. His “lion nose,” however, shows that much of his success comes from determination and grit. His shallow philtrum is inauspicious but his “tiger mouth” indicates an abundance of good things in life, material and immaterial. His square chin tells of a golden retirement.

JACK BLACK (B-4)

Black is showing his hand, as well as several cards that are falling out of his sleeve. This could be understood as an obvious attempt to cheat, but his face, which is still serious--an impossible eventuality in such an event--shows that there is more afoot. He is therefore using the “slip” as a distraction from his real strategy, which suggests that he has a weak hand. He is casually dressed and unshaven, suggesting a very casual and aggressive manner of play, as obviously evidenced by this gambit. He is holding his cards with just a couple fingers, a careful trope (conscious or unconscious) suggesting that he doesn’t care what happens. His eyes are on the table, the real focus of his attention, while his face is slightly turned away. He is smiling slightly, but the smile does not affect his eye muscles, and is part of a “mask.” In the end, his fake careless move may cover an actual carelessness.

Black has a face that mixes metal and earth shapes, which is a good combination, and suggest strength and outspokenness, energy and hot-temperedness. It also strangely indicates that he has a very quiet demeanor and is a calculator, not an emoter, qualities which seemingly have no place in his public personality. His broad forehead, thinning hair, and beard are very auspicious. His eyebrows are high and in “sword” form, indicating that he is a decision-maker, a

role he often dons in his band Tenacious D. His “monkey eyes” are alert, intelligent, and lecherous, which seem much more in tune with what we know of his life. They also show him to be open to temptations of various kinds. His small bladder nose bodes well for his fame. His “ram mouth,” oddly, shows that he would be a good accountant. These strange facial readings perhaps indicate that Black is very adept at hiding his true personality, as seen in his poker game, and that his off-stage self is very different from when he is entertaining, a fact that should not be a surprise to anyone.

Series C: Politicians

GEORGE W. BUSH (C-1)

Bush is showing his cards to his friends, although he is keeping them hidden from the other players. Hiding cards from players is a sign of a naturally cautious person, and perhaps a good hand; being willing to show them to others is an even better sign that he holds an excellent hand. He is smiling to the people around the table, and it is a natural smile, reflected in the muscles around his eyes. He is confident and secure with what he holds. He is dressed very conservatively, and doesn't feel the need to hide a good hand by bluffing. He is looking up and away from the cards with his eyes and face, signaling a seeming disinterest in what he holds. However, the truth is that he knows what his cards are, because good hands are easier to remember than incomplete hands.

Bush has a wood face, showing benevolence and tenacity and an interest in the social welfare, as expressed in his self-description as a “compassionate conservative.” His white color is bad for his face shape, however. His “mouse ears” signal a hard youth, perhaps the time he spent as an alcoholic; they also show frugality, opportunism, and calculation; his strong interior ear circles show him to be more ambitious than intelligent, and that politics is his natural field. His thin eyebrows show him to be shrewd, timid, and conservative, the last of which is, again, one of his primary self-descriptors. The eyebrows are in the “character eight” shape, which means that he is smart, but self-promoting, with great worldly desires. His “wolf eyes” show an appetite for power, a short temper, and narrow-mindedness. His “eagle nose” says that he believes that the ends justify the means, and that he is decisive and cunning in positions of high power. While his chin dimple shows that he is lewd and his shallow philtrum is inauspicious, his “character one” mouth is a sign of determination, leadership, and quick decision-making.

JOHN EDWARDS (C-2)

Edwards is signaling, “Just one card.” He is trying to make it look as if he is in a weak position--he needs “just” one, as if that weren't unusual and a sign of a strong hand. He is looking at the dealer with his eyes, but with his head turned away, to further bluff his viewers into believing he doesn't care about what comes next. However, he is pursing his lips, showing concern, and his hand is raised higher than necessary, exaggeratedly, giving mixed signals, as this would normally be understood as being aggressive. It is possible that he is a conservative player who can't help getting looser when a big hand comes along. He wears conservative clothes, which would indicate a general conservative approach, but being conservative doesn't mean that one won't aggressively go after big pots when they are in reach.

Edwards has a metal-shaped face, which indicates that he is upright and outspoken, qualities which may cause him to unintentionally offend some, and that he is a perfect match for the legal field, in which he in fact excelled before becoming a senator. It also shows that he is short-tempered, although his anger is usually reserved for abstract issues rather than people, and that he is cautious, always reading the fine print. His facial color includes both red and green, which are inauspicious for someone with his facial shape. His small forehead shows he had a difficult childhood. His “short-thick” eyebrows again show him as hot-tempered but hardworking and courageous, with a high sexual vitality (which is also signaled by his chin dimple) and a strong career in the military or the arts. His large, dark pupils show he has strong emotions and isn’t careful with money. His “mandarin duck” eyes show him to be lucky with money, however, so perhaps once he makes it he is carefree about it, as would make sense for someone of his net worth. They also show that he is occupied with success and intelligent. His pointed, thin nose with its obvious nostrils is inauspicious, however. His strong, straight cheekbones signal willpower and political authority, while his parallel philtrum shows he has administrative and diplomatic skill.

JOHN KERRY (C-3)

Kerry is signaling that he doesn’t need any cards, a bold move and a fortuitous draw indeed, or else a mighty bluff. His face is facing downwards, but his eyes are up. This is a clear sign that he is not bluffing—he is trying to signal to the other players, “Oh, don’t notice me and my not needing any cards,” while at the same time trying to focus on the action at hand in his own mind. It is a clear gesture, he doesn’t want it to be misinterpreted, but it is not flamboyant—the less people that notice it, the better. He is not trying to smile or be friendly in a fake way, further emphasizing that he is not bluffing. His conservative dress makes his seriousness all the more believable.

Kerry has a wood-shaped face, which signals beneficence and tenacity and interest in the public good, as is normal for his party. The red and yellow colors found in his face are bad, however. Furthermore, as mentioned time and again in political jokes, he has a horse-shaped face, which signifies that he is clever, able, and can often gain positions of power, but will have a bad ending in his life. His forehead is small, which is inauspicious. His thick “character eight” eyebrows show him to be selfish and mean, smart but preoccupied with power. His “fox eyes” show him to be cunning and shrewd, tense with coworkers. This perhaps reflects his remarked inability to connect personally with some voters. He has a “small bladder” nose, which shows wealth and that he married well, which he has in fact done. His “tiger mouth” also shows a large inheritance as well as perseverance, intelligence, emotion, and love of food. His long chin shows business acumen.

DICK CHENEY (C-4)

Cheney is gesturing to an opponent, “Make up your mind.” He is trying to appear strong, which is a sign of a weak hand. He is bluffing, and while he is dressed conservatively, he is playing aggressively and loose. He is leaning in to the table and interested in the game. He needs to

have this hand go his way, and isn't going to let his opponent make a decision without attempting to influence it.

Cheney has a combination metal/earth face, which communicates strength, uprightness, a position in the legal or justice field, courage, a firm conviction when his mind is made up, stability, and a hidden desire for power or money. He can keep a secret. The white color of his face is good for its shape. His broad forehead is auspicious, but his thin eyebrows are bad. He has "lion eyes," which are imposing, and show wealth, intelligence, presence of mind, and social position--all good for executive positions. It also shows that he works hard and expects the same from his subordinates. His "tiger nose" reinforces all of this. His shallow philtrum is inauspicious, but his wide red mouth is good.

Series D: Cartoon Characters

CALVIN'S DAD (D-1)

Calvin's dad is looking away from the table with both eyes and face. Normally this would be a sign that he is trying to seem disinterested while actually having a great hand, but he looks more suspicious than disinterested. He can't decide what kind of angle the other players are playing, leaving him unsure of his strategy for this hand and for the game in general. He is dressed conservatively, and seems physically scrunched up. This would further indicate that he is in a bad personal state, that he really has to think about what is going on and is focused in an interior mode, leaving him unable to devote time to thinking about how he wants to present himself to others.

Calvin's dad has a wood face, which shows him to be benevolent, resourceful, and creative, as he must be to deal with Calvin, although Calvin certainly doesn't see him that way. This constant juxtaposition of images of him--his own and Calvin's--often makes him use irony as an outlet, pointing out the inconsistency of image and reality. He has "wood ears," which are very auspicious for his face shape, and show wealth, intelligence, and longevity, as well as that there is a strong artistic vein in the family, as can be seen in Calvin. His lack of an ear door shows him to be conservative and narrow-minded, as he must often act towards Calvin. His lack of prominent ear circles is inauspicious, but is balanced by his large forehead. His lack of eyebrows shows him to be defensive, as do his small eyes and mouth. His receding chin shows a passive old age, perhaps when Calvin finally has to care for him. His slightly receding hairline is a sign of good health, however. His major facial feature, his giant nose, a "cow nose," shows wealth, creativity, and a pursuit of order, the last of which must always be foremost on his mind. These characteristics perhaps show that while he must be conservative with Calvin, he longs for the easier days he enjoyed before Calvin came along.

ROB WILCO (D-2)

Wilco is leaning back, one hand on the table, looking away from the game with both his face and his eyes. His lips are pursed, as if in thought. His other arm is behind the chair, further signifying his distance from the game. He has an excellent hand, and is trying to look disinterested. This is about as strong a signal that he has a great hand as could be found. He is

dressed casually in a t-shirt, which would indicate a casual manner of play, but his t-shirt displays a logo for an arty/intellectual public radio show, which might indicate that he is an overthinker, and that he might have donned this shirt as part of his strategy of making people think he is a more liberal player than he really is; his body language also indicates a proclivity towards large gestures planned for spectators like this.

Wilco has a wood face--benevolent, tenacious, kind, generous, resourceful, creative, and considerate of social welfare. These qualities may relate to his two "jobs": one at an advertising firm, where he always bemoans the social effects of the ads he makes, and the other as caretaker for a rambunctious pair of pets, for which he must be ever creative in his attempt to keep them out of trouble. His high ears show his intelligence, the prominent outer circle pointing out his excellence in art again, but their "mouse" shape shows that he must be frugal and work hard in order to take care of his cat and dog. His "sword eyebrows" show him to be courageous, energetic, and a far-sighted leader, able to instill faith and optimism in his followers. Once again, this seems to indicate his relationship as head of the household with his pets. His very small pupils show him to be cautious and to think too much--which relates to his t-shirt logo poker tell. His "tiger eyes" again show him to be a leader, brave, and creative. His low, pointed nose is bad, but his fleshy nostrils are good. His protruding mouth is also good. His receding chin shows a passive old age, and his scruffy hair shows him to be disorganized in his mind.

STEVE DALLAS (D-3)

Dallas is asking for one card in a somewhat showily-weak fashion, reclining or slouching backwards a bit but with one elbow still on the table, thus showing that while he wants to look disinvolved, he is actually trying to keep his connection to the game. He has a big play coming up for a lot of money, but it rests on a big risk. He is smoking, which shows nervousness, and wears sunglasses, which shows that he is aware of what others are thinking, and what they see of him. He is perhaps hiding his weakness. He is dressed somewhat conservatively, but his tie is loose, showing that he is ready to loosen up himself for the night. He will play recklessly. He seems to be showing a bit of displeasure in the shape of his mouth, not so much indicating that he has a bad hand, but that he is reacting to the energy that rises when a really good hand is just a few cards away.

Dallas has a face that is a mixture of wood and fire shapes, two shapes that go well together. This says that he is tenacious, outgoing, courageous, and cares about social welfare. Perhaps these points reflect in some way his position as a lawyer, or they foreshadow the time when his brain is "softened by aliens" and he gets a perm, because they certainly do not seem to describe his general behavior. Perhaps the permed episode truly did show his inner self. His high ears show he is intelligent and had a good childhood; the strong outer circle says that he is talented rather than ambitious, and good at art or science. Their shape is that of "fire ears," which point out his obedience to the law and again his intelligence, and even oversensitivity, which may make him seem abrasive to his enemies. His extremely small forehead shows he had a bad childhood, canceling out his ears. He has no eyebrows; eyebrows act as the protectors of the eyes, which are the window to the soul; this may be why he always needs to wear

sunglasses. It shows that he is impatient and sensitive to threats. His “goat nose” shows a strong sex drive, to which everything is subordinate. His pointy chin foretells of an unhappy end, although its protrusion points out leadership and will power. His straight black hair is also auspicious, although its thickness shows that he will have bad luck and thankless labor. Overall, this seems to be an over-positive portrait of Dallas, who is known for being a selfish boob--although some factors do indicate this aspect as well. However, these “positive” factors may, as has been said, indicate that his permed self was perhaps his true self, and at least point out that it was a major part of his personality, and that his two-facedness was not an accident, but necessary in the course of events.

RAOUL DUKE (D-4)

Duke is looking away from the action towards the player next to him. He is confident, he doesn't need to know what the details of the game are, he knows what he's got. He is well-dressed, but sitting loose, which indicates that he is either a normally-conservative person who is ready for a loose evening, or he is a more liberal player who is dressing up conservatively as a bluff. He is leaning in to the table, indicating his interest in the game. He wears sunglasses, which shows that he takes other players' observations into consideration as part of his strategy--they can't watch his eyes (but can watch the way his face turns!). His conversation is confident, loose, again like a man who knows what he has and isn't trying to come up with something to say while concentrating on a bluff. His smile is perhaps a bit fake, however, which might show that his conversation is part of a larger strategy designed to throw off other players.

Duke has a face that is a mixture of water and fire shapes, which are antagonistic to each other, but which say that he is an adventurer--adaptable, power-hungry, with strong survival skills, someone who has bad interpersonal relations because of a lack of knowledge of the heart. He has several auspicious characteristics, from a broad forehead and receding hairline to a wide mouth. His nose sends mixed signals--its lack of visible nostrils is good, but its thinness is bad. His small ears with small lobes reinforce the theme of his problems with sexual relationships and show that he has to work hard for success. He has “knife eyebrows,” which shows that he can be cruel and decisive, although the fact that they are so long, high, and smooth augurs well for him. Finally, his chin is an excellent feature; its protrusion shows that he has the strong willpower of a leader, although he will be happiest in retirement. Its length indicates that he will have a long life to enjoy that retirement, and that he has the business acumen to prepare for it. Its roundness reflects his love for material things, from food to sex to travel.