

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS FAR OFF PLACES

Teachers' Notes

Creative Writing Workshops for
Keystage 2 at the Wallace Collection



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'A writer lives, at best, in a state of astonishment...To transmit that feeling, he writes'.

William Sansom

And where better to experience a state of astonishment than at the Wallace Collection?

A two hour workshop based on a selection from eight of the treasures in the Collection is an exciting and memorable source for creative writing and will help to instil in young people an awareness of an environment like the Wallace as an abiding source for creativity.

These notes are designed to accompany the KS2 workshops on creative writing at The Wallace Collection. The notes provide a summary of the sessions, some information on the images used as sources and some ideas on follow-up work.

Students take away with them a notebook of ideas and reminders of the day and some starting points for the completion of finished pieces of writing to be done at school or in their own time. Sessions are two hours duration and are based on one of the three themes listed below. A selection of four of the eight art objects in the list will be explored by the students preparatory to some short creative writing exercises in their own 'Writer's Notebook', provided by the Wallace Collection.

The Workshops

The introduction to the session will look briefly at the history of the Collection and its collectors, a discussion of the chosen theme and its attendant activities, and a 'warm-up' word game.

The students will then go up into the galleries, passing through the magnificent rooms to focus on the four art objects that will stimulate their writing. The tour is interactive and students will be encouraged to voice opinions and ask questions. Two stops will be made for some short writing exercises, some of which will be shared but all of which can be the basis of more finished work later on.

The Writing Exercises will include a selection from:

- description
- dialogue/monologue
- voice and point of view
- vocabulary building
- persuasive writing

and will trigger thoughts on editing and research.

The theme you have selected for your school is Far Off Places and the children will look at four of the following pictures and objects:

- *Calm: Dutch Ships coming to Anchor* – Van der Velde
- *Mlle de Clermont en Sultane* – Nattier
- *The Arab Storyteller* – Horace Vernet
- Incense burner in the form of an Elephant
- The 4 Continents Clock
- Japanese Lacquer Cabinet
- African Ceremonial Mask
- Ceremonial Shield

Calm: Dutch Ships coming to Anchor, Willem van de Velde the Younger, c. 1655

When this enormous picture was painted, England was at war with Holland. The artist shows the flagship of the Dutch fleet, flying the flag of the Commander, Admiral van Tromp. The puff of smoke comes from a cannon fired to greet the arrival of the Admiral on board the ship. The crew would have had boys as young as ten years old among them, so although the scene appears serene and the sea calm, there is an air of activity and the threat of danger. It would have been an exciting and noisy place to be.



Arab Tale Teller, Horace Vernet, 1833

Just as the Tale Teller in the centre of the picture is making up stories to entertain his listeners, so Horace Vernet the artist, is making up the scene he portrays. He had travelled widely in North Africa and met nomad people but he shows them as European people liked to imagine them. Their life was really much harsher than the painting suggests. The desert can be an inhospitable place. But there was and still is a great tradition of oral story-telling among Arab people, as there once was in this country. Many of their tales like the Arabian Nights are written down now, and are still read today.



Mlle de Clermont en Sultane, Jean Marc Nattier, 1733

Marie-Anne de Bourbon, called Mlle de Clermont, was the daughter of a French Royal Duke. Her portrait shows her enjoying her riches, pretending to be a Turkish princess, which was a fashionable thing to do at the time. Being portrayed wearing very little, but surrounded

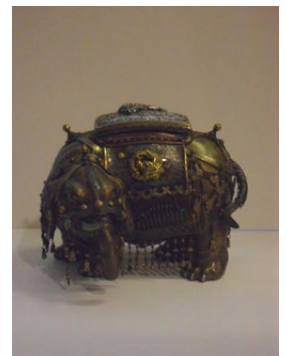


by slaves or servants preparing your perfumed bath, beautiful clothes and jewellery was also fashionable – for the lucky few. In the picture, Mlle de Clermont's servants seem content and full of admiration for her and her lovely things, but was that really how it was? It wasn't till nearly 100 years later that slavery was abolished and such a painting would gradually have become unacceptable.

Elephant Incense Burner, Artist/maker unknown, Japan, 1868 – 80

The fearsome-looking elephant is not what he seems. In Japan, where he was made, the elephant was a sign of peace and all the things he carries are signs of good fortune, power, and beauty. The dragon on his side was thought to have power over water, rainfall and floods and was a symbol of royalty.

On the cushion on his back is a tiger that stands for courage. The lion dog is a guardian and protector. The peony stands for nobility but also for beauty and fertility. Within him, the elephant would have held burning incense to fill a room with delicious scents. He might have been carried in procession, to spread happiness over everyone that he passed.



Japanese lacquer cabinet, Unknown artist/maker, c. 1680

The Japanese cabinet is made of exotic woods and precious metals, but it is perhaps the tiny figures on the surface that are perhaps the most fascinating things of all. They live in a miniature world of strange trees and buildings, some of them striding along on a lonely journey, some riding or tending their horses, others rowing down a river or swimming, throwing up their arms as they duck under the water. There may be traditional stories attached to these little figures, or perhaps they simply portray the kind of life lived in the Japanese countryside four hundred years ago.



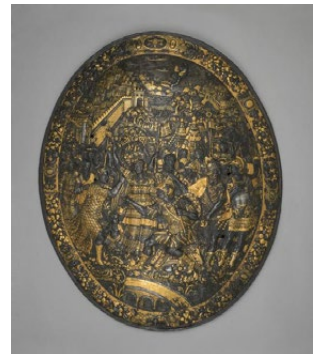
African ceremonial mask, Unknown artist/maker, Africa, 19th century or earlier

The trophy head is made of pure gold and would have been carried in ceremonial processions. It is part of the fabulous treasure of King Kofi Kakari of Ashanti (Asante), an ancient kingdom in Ghana, West Africa. The treasure was seized by British soldiers on the orders of their commander, Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley, during the Ashanti campaign of 1873. Sir Richard Wallace brought the Ashanti treasure at a charitable auction in London, the proceeds of which were given to the wives and families of soldiers killed or incapacitated during the 1873 Ashanti War.



Ceremonial shield, Unknown Artist/Maker, Italy, probably Milan, c. 155 - 9

Entwined above the central picture on the shield are the initials of Henri II of France and Diane de Poitiers, suggesting that it was made for the king. The decoration is enriched with gold and depicts the story of Scipio Africanus receiving the keys of the city of Carthage from Hannibal, the Carthaginian commander, after the Battle of Zama in 202 BC, the subject possibly chosen to celebrate the French victory over the English at Calais in 1558. The shield would not have been used in battle, but carried in ceremonies and processions.



Follow up Activities

- Choose the 'starter' you did at the Gallery that interests you most and turn it into a finished piece of writing.
- Sir Richard Wallace looked after the Collection for his father, the 4th Marquess of Hertford. Think of one of the pictures or objects you have seen, and imagine that it hasn't arrived in the Collection yet. The Marquess is thinking of buying it. Does Sir Richard like it or not? Does he think it is a good addition to the Collection? Will he persuade his father to buy it, or will he try to put him off? Write their conversation.
- Several of the things you have seen were probably carried in a procession: the shield, the African mask, the incense burner. The Dutch fleet would have made an exciting sight sailing in formation. The Arabs in the picture of the story-teller travelled together across the desert on strange animals. Write a description of a procession to broadcast on the radio, making it seem as if you are watching it go by. Think about where the procession takes place, what people wear, what the procession is for, how are the people feeling both in the procession and the crowd watching it.
- If you were going to visit one of the places you have thought about in the Gallery, which would it be and why. Write a travel advertisement for your favourite place and add some pictures.
- Think about some of the textures and smells you found in the pictures and objects. Find some words that describe them, pleasant and unpleasant! Perhaps you can find some similes. Turn them into phrases that you can keep to put into other stories later on.
- Choose two favourite things you have seen. Make a flip book about them, combining them in a story with pictures and speech bubbles