

LANDSCAPES AND SEASCAPES

Teachers' Notes

Workshop for Key Stage 1 and 2 at the Wallace Collection

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The session supports the National Curriculum at Key Stage 2 in Art and Design.

In this 90 minute session, pupils will study several of the 17th and 18th century Old Master paintings of Land and Seascapes in the Wallace Collection.

In the days before photography, why and for whom were such paintings produced? Why would they be popular with the patrons and the artist? How is a painting of a landscape or seascape different from a photograph?

During this session, we will discuss what kind of art materials were used, the practicalities (or otherwise) of painting out of doors and the length of time needed for producing these works of art. Artists often made initial sketches from observation out-of-doors, but in the 17th and 18th century almost always painted their compositions in the studio. Mention will be made of the invention of the metal (tin) screw-top paint tube in 1841, which enabled artists to transport and preserve their paints much more effectively than when they were kept in pigs' bladders!

We look at how the artist shows the seasons, the weather and the time of day or conveys a happy or a gloomy mood. The pupils are encouraged to imagine the smells and sounds in the paintings and to consider how the landscape might have changed in the 300 years or so since the painting was made. We discuss where the horizon line is, and whether that affects the feel of the painting.

We look at how the artist creates a foreground, a middle ground and a distance and gives an impression of depth through the use of perspective and colour.

The chosen landscapes represent a wide range of artists, and contrast of painting style and location, mood and narrative – at the same time introducing pupils to several galleries of the Wallace Collection.

Drawing Activity

The pupils are then given the opportunity of drawing their own land or seascapes inspired by the paintings they have seen and with all art materials provided. Pupils will be encouraged to draw from observation an element from each painting, so that by the end of the session they will have created their own imaginary landscape. These may then be developed at school and used as a stimulus for storytelling and a further study of perspective.

The paintings we will look at might include –

*The Rainbow Landscape, Peter Paul Rubens c.1636,
Oil on Oak panel*



Pupils will be encouraged to describe the scene, its mood/feeling and to deduce the season and weather, and historical period (ie: before mechanised farm equipment).

Pupils will be encouraged to count how many ducks, horses and cows they can see and to look out for reflections in the painting. Younger pupils may like to orchestrate a 'soundscape' of the painting, incorporating the different animals they can see, as well as voices of characters in the painting.

Can you spot the tiny windmill in the background? We will examine the different ways Rubens has suggested spatial depth in this landscape – through use of colours, (warm in the foreground, cool in the background), linear perspective (clearly seen in the line of receding trees on the right-hand side and the field on the left) and extreme diminution.

What is the viewpoint in this painting? Where is the painter in relation to the landscape?

We will discuss how oil paints were prepared, look at a replica paint palette, and ground pigments of some of the colours used by Rubens. Pupils will be encouraged to identify where particular colours have been used in the painting.

Rubens was probably the most successful artist of his day, and wealthy enough to buy an estate called Het Steen, close to Antwerp where he was brought up. He painted *The Rainbow Landscape* in his retirement. It shows his own land and the surrounding countryside in a way that reveals not only what he saw, but also his deep love of his native country and people's relationship to it. This, and a companion painting in the National Gallery (*An Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*) were not commissioned, rather painted for Rubens' own use and pleasure, and were not sold until after his death.

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River Landscape with Apollo and the Cumaean Sibyl, Salvator Rosaeter, c1657-1658, Oil on Canvas



Whereas *The Rainbow Landscape* depicts a busy but gentle rural scene, the mood of Salvator Rosa's *River Landscape* is altogether more sinister. Salvator Rosa, an Italian artist, is known for his paintings of classical scenes, set within wild landscapes.

Pupils may discuss the difference in feeling between the two landscapes and how this is achieved. They will also be encouraged to identify elements of perspective and to compare the role of people in each of the paintings.

Unlike *The Rainbow Landscape*, this painting sets the scene for a Classical Greek myth. The god Apollo, identified by his pink tunic and his lyre, attempts to seduce the beautiful Cumaean Sibyl, who has come down to meet him from her cave, shown high up on the right of the picture. From this cave, she told the fortunes of the many people who valued her wisdom. The Sibyl resisted Apollo's advances for a long time, until at last Apollo promised her anything she desired to become his lover. So she scooped up a handful of sand and told him her wish: to live for as

many years as the number of grains of sand that she could hold in her hand. In the painting, a few tiny grains are shown falling from her fingers. Apollo granted her wish, but once again, the Sibyl spurned his love. In anger, Apollo reminded her that she had forgotten the most important thing – to ask for her eternal youth and beauty to last as long as her life.

So the Sibyl lived on and on, growing older and more wizened till eventually she became a voice echoing around her cave, telling the fortunes of people who came to visit her.

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Bacino di San Marco from San Giorgio Maggiore (View of Venice) Canaletto, c1734-1744, Oil on Canvas



The Venetian painter Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto ('little canal'), was the son of a theatrical scene painter. He made many sketches of Venice, often in pen and ink, out of doors, which he used as reference for his paintings. He often altered the actual perspective, and position of buildings, to achieve the composition he wanted, and added theatrical-looking characters, to add interest to his work.

In the days before photography, Canaletto's scenes have been called 'the postcards of their time', and were brought back to Britain by wealthy young men who had been on the Grand Tour. Canaletto came to London later in his career, and painted scenes of and around the River Thames.

This is one of the first paintings acquired by the 1st Marquess of Hertford, possibly direct from Canaletto's studio in Venice, and formed the start of the collection as we see it today.

Canaletto's painting style, for the most part very precise, (he often used a ruler for linear details on the buildings, and waves on the water are minutely painted) is very different from that of either Rubens or Salvator Rosa. He was assisted in his busy workshop by his father, possibly his brother Christoforo and two of his nephews, both of whom he had trained.

Venice in the time of Canaletto was a great trading city, and this is a busy, bustling scene. Pupils may like to imagine some of the sounds, including different languages, which might be heard. There are ships of all nations on the water. On the extreme right, just leaving the picture, is the golden stern of Il Bucentoro, the state galley of the Doge of Venice, Leader of the Venetian Republic. The Doge was elected for life. Il Bucentoro was only brought out on Ascension Day (39 days after Easter Sunday). The Doge was rowed out into the Adriatic sea, where he threw a ring into the water, a ceremony that symbolically wedded Venice to the sea.

Pupils may look closely at the composition of the painting, looking at foreground, middle ground and background details, the large foreground figures and the diminution of buildings and boats in the background, the prominence of the sky,

as well as the sharp angle of the quayside in the foreground, and reflections in the water.

It will be interesting to compare the mood and purpose of this painting with the others examined during the session.

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Depending on the day, we might also look at the following paintings:

A Storm with a Shipwreck, Claude-Joseph Vernet, 1754, Oil on Canvas



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Les Champs Elisées (A Picnic Party), Antoine Watteau, 1720-1721, Oil on walnut panel



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Follow up Activities:

- Look at *An Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning* by Rubens ([here](#).) The pupils could create a set of two matching landscapes, made from one point of view and then turning the opposite direction.
- Explore the seasons by making a colour drawing of *The Rainbow Landscape* but imagining how it would look at a different time of year, for example with bare trees, snow on the ground and a grey winter sky.
- Choose one of the paintings you have seen during your visit to the Wallace Collection and ask pupils to make their own version of it but as it might look in the present day, incorporating elements of our modern world (cars, telegraph poles, roads, skyscrapers in the distance etc.).
- Ask pupils to choose one of the paintings they have seen during their visit and write their own narrative or develop an adventure story around the painting.
- As a class, research some modern artists or photographers who depict the land or sea in their work and think about similarities and differences to the paintings at the Wallace Collection.
For example, you could look at landscapes by artist David Hockney.