

WRITING A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

Teachers' Notes

Creative Writing Workshops for
Keystages 4 & 5 at the Wallace Collection



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'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write'.

Sir Philip Sidney

But, apart from the heart, another inspirational place to look for a spur towards writing is the magnificent collection of art objects at the Wallace Collection. A four hour workshop based on a selection from ten of the treasures the Collection contains is not only an exciting and memorable source for creative writing, but will help to instil a sense of awareness of an environment like the Wallace as an abiding source for creativity.

These notes are designed to accompany the KS4 and KS5 workshops on Writing a Dramatic Monologue 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 a dramatic monologue at school or in their own time. Sessions are usually four hours duration, but in special circumstances the session can be abridged to two or three, when a shortened Gallery tour with a smaller selection from the ten treasures will be made.

The Workshops

The introduction to the day will look briefly at the history of the Collection and its collectors, an idiosyncratic and fascinating family, each member worthy of a dramatic monologue of their own.

What is a monologue?

To clarify the aims and objectives of the day, a discussion will follow on what constitutes a dramatic monologue:

- soliloquy
- public oratory
- 'talking heads'
- the narrated report of an event or place within a dramatic setting
- a diary, journal or blog
- a ballad

and others, all using heightened emotions and language for dramatic effect.

The discussion will be followed by an hour's tour of the galleries focusing on a selection from ten objects and images that evoke the circumstances and atmosphere in which a dramatic monologue might take place. The tour is interactive and students will be encouraged to voice opinions, ask questions and make notes.

Jan Weenix, *Flowers on a Fountain with a Peacock*, c. 1700 – 1710, Oil on Canvas

Weenix is one of a number of 17th and 18th century artists who depicted lush groups of fruit and flowers in an opulent setting, in this case a classical landscape. Sometimes, a moral lesson was drawn from the symbols contained in the picture. This complicated and visually stunning image introduces students to the



idea of discovering what this kind of painting may hold and its meaning. It makes an excellent introduction to any tour, but several of the elements 'speak to each other' in hidden ways that need time and a questioning eye to reveal themselves. The painting encourages students to look and read the painting, and to place a personal interpretation. They will also begin to use imagery to define character and perhaps find a hidden moral.

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Willem van de Velde the Younger, *The Burning of the Andrew at the Battle of Scheveningen*, c. 1653 – 1654, Oil on Canvas

One of many of the popular and evocative battle and marine scenes painted by the van de Veldes at this period and noted for their accuracy and detail. A slice of real



life, *The Battle of Scheveningen* depicts a highly dramatic moment in history, in which real people were once involved. Possibly, the artist himself was there. A Dutch fireship rams the British battleship, the Andrew, while the escaping two crews demonstrate very different reactions to the event. But the subject is timeless. War has far reaching effects not only on soldiers, sailors, officers and men but politicians, the clergy, doctors, wives and mothers.

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Govaert Flinck, *A Young Archer* c. 1639 – 40, Oil on Canvas

The *Young Archer* is a single portrait, extremely unusual in its time as depicting a black youth on his own, carrying a quiver of arrows and holding a bow, and not as a servant as would normally have been the case. The young man's expression, profession and accoutrements are open to question and so to interpretation. Students will find this moving image a subject for debate and one that offers the opportunity for the expression of heightened emotion.



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Raffaele Monti, *Circassian Slave* c. 1851 or later, Marble

The small figure of the slave sits with her legs tucked to one side, modestly attempting to hide her nudity under a drape, her face veiled. Only with carefully scrutiny do we see the shackle tying her to the rock on which she sits. Elegant and eminently tactile, Monti's beautifully carved little marble was once an object of delight to a discerning purchaser. But today it hides secrets about Victorian society that will stir up strong opinions.



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Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Miss Nellie O'Brien* c. 1762 – 1764, Oil on Canvas

Nellie O'Brien sits in a shady woodland glade, dressed in satin and lace. Her little curly-haired lapdog is on her knee, her beautiful pearls glowing in the evening sun. Who was Miss O'Brien? How can we tell what kind of woman she was? Why did Reynolds choose to paint her – what was his relationship with her?



Nellie O'Brien gazes very directly out at us. What are her thoughts and what does the gaze reveal?

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Paul Delaroche, *The State Barge of Cardinal Richelieu on the Rhone*, 1839, Oil on Canvas

Two boats journey down the river. In the first, in a richly draped bed, lies the old Cardinal, ashen-faced and alone amongst a crowd of soldiers and courtiers. The boat is propelled by two men reminiscent of Charon's crew rowing dead souls across the river Styx in Greek mythology. In the second boat are three traitors, going to their death. Delaroche has chosen an important moment in French history to make a dramatic narrative painting. A powerful man is dying – what are the political intrigues surrounding him? What are his thoughts as he thinks back over his life and career. The painting is a fictional interpretation of true events, with a crowd of interesting and theatrical characters to be explored.



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Dagger, Iran, c. 1720 – 1829, Ivory and steel

The handle of the Persian dagger is carved in ivory, depicting a central male figure with a woman on either side, other figures behind him. At his feet are four naked children at play. The curved blade is made of steel, decorated with a gold pattern. The intricate carving on the handle tells its story, but it's a story not completely revealed to us. Glimpses of a different culture again leave us wondering. But the questions the image raises will stimulate students to interpret and express both their own views and the views of the characters portrayed.



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Dish, *Bust of a Woman*, Deruta, Italy, c. 1500 – 1515, Ceramic

The bust of an unknown young woman painted in soft subdued colours on a ceramic surface is the oldest of the chosen artefacts. She sits in profile, a single tendril of hair curling down over her cheek. Round the young woman's neck, a locket frames an unknown face. Beside her, a motto in archaic Italian is suspended in space on a scroll – 'My heart has only hope'. This tender and poignant image makes an enigmatic source for imaginative and sensitive writing.



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Manufacture de Sèvres, *Tray with tea service*, 1758 - 1759, Porcelain

The tea service was made at Sèvres, the new and innovative porcelain factory whose patron was Madame de Pompadour, the official mistress of King Louis XV of France. Decorated with charming pictures of peasant children, the tea service evokes notions of an idyllic childhood quite at odds with their real lives. It also suggests a life of leisure and frivolousness led by the owner, hours of gossip and empty-headed chat over tea and sweetmeats. This may have been so in general in the court of Louis XV, yet Pompadour herself was clever and talented, highly educated and accomplished, and often her opinion was sought in matters of state.



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Jacob Halder, *Armour of Sir Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst*, c. 1587 - 89 Steel, leather, gold and copper alloy

Made for the arrival of the Spanish Armada that never came, this full suit of battle armour probably never saw active service, and was used afterwards for ceremonial occasions. The armour was made-to-measure and extremely costly – the equivalent money could today buy a private jet. Weighing 30 kilos, it is only half the weight of equipment and protective clothing carried by today's soldiers.



Lord Buckhurst was an important administrator in the spy ring run by Sir Francis Walsingham. This sinister organisation, it is thought, was responsible for the death of the playwright Christopher Marlowe. If the Armada had materialised, Buckhurst would have been the commander of a large body of men preparing to fight. What might he have said to them, and what were his real thoughts?

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Writing Exercises

The last session of the day is spent writing a series of short pieces using the characters encountered on the tour as a basis. The pieces suggest characterisation, setting and purpose. The exercises will vary from session to session but will cover:

- the first lines of a monologue
- thoughts on content
- reactions to or relating an event
- a political speech
- vocabulary building
- finding an authentic voice

The value of research and editing will be discussed.

Follow up Activities

- Further discussion on which of the images encountered at the Wallace Collection lends itself most to interpretation by a single voice. (Each student will make their own individual choice.)
- Discussion of 'the audience'. Who or what in the dramatic situation is listening to the monologue and what does the monologue achieve within that situation.
- Once the choice is made, what further research will enhance the dramatic strength of the monologue by knowledge and understanding of the character's background?

Questions to help build the character

If the character has been suggested by rather than seen in the image, what do they look like?

If the character is in the image, how will they be dressed for the monologue? Are they the same age as in the image?

Where is the character? When does the monologue take place – both period and time of day? Perhaps someone from our own day is commenting on the past.

What is the character's emotional state? Will they be articulate or hesitant?

How does the character's reaction to a situation reveal aspects of their personality even they may be unaware of

Some ideas for further reading:

Strunk Jr & White *The Elements of Style* – this excellent little book is a classic on good writing, succinct and authoritative and highly recommended.

Katy Hickman: *Courtesans: money, sex & fame in the 19th century*

Peter Hughes: *The Founders of the Wallace Collection*

J.R. Jones: *The Anglo-Dutch Wars of the 17th Century*

Antony Levi: *Cardinal Richelieu and the Making of France*

Edward Said: *Orientalism*

Simon Schama: *Rough Crossings: Britain, the slaves & the American Revolution*

Richard Wendorf Sir Joshua Reynolds: *The Painter in Society*

In the Wallace Collection bookshop you will find several helpful books on the various sections of the collection: clocks, Sèvres porcelain, bronzes and of course, the paintings.

Briefer versions of the information can be found on The Wallace Collection website: www.wallacecollection.org