

# TRAVEL WRITING JOURNEYS

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## Teachers' Notes

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Creative Writing Workshops for  
Keystage 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**

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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 makes good travel writing?**

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To clarify the aims and objectives of the day, a discussion will follow on what constitutes good travel writing, including thoughts on why people travel:

- Pleasure, holidays
- Widening horizons
- War and conflict - refugees
- Business and commerce
- Meeting people

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 for a lively piece of travel writing. The tour is interactive and students will be encouraged to voice opinions, ask questions and make notes.



## Canaletto, *Bacino di San Marco*, c. 1735 – 1744, Oil on Canvas

The 1st Marquess of Hertford bought this picture as a souvenir of his Grand Tour. It depicts the Bacino di San Marco in Venice, and the viewer is placed on the steps of the church of San Giorgio Maggiore looking, with a partly imaginary view, across the Canale della Giudecca on the left, with the opening of the Grand Canal in the centre, and the Campanile (bell-tower), the Piazzetta and the Doge's palace on the right. It is an attractive, clearly identifiable view of a type calculated to appear to the Grand, or indeed any other, Tourist, with picturesque elements of local colour reinforcing the 18th century idea of Venice as an exciting cosmopolitan centre and a place where trade flourished.



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## Adriaen van de Velde, *The Migration of Jacob*, 1663, Oil on canvas

In the Old Testament story, Jacob flees in fear of Esau, traveling to the house of his uncle Laban in upper Mesopotamia. En route, Jacob dreams of a stairway leading up to heaven, where angels and God reside. In the dream, God promises Jacob the same covenant he previously made with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob arrives at Laban's house, where he agrees to work for his uncle in exchange for the hand of Laban's daughter, Rachel, in marriage. Laban deceives Jacob into marrying Leah, Rachel's older sister, before marrying Rachel. The two wives compete for Jacob's favor and, along with their maids, give birth to eleven sons and a daughter.

After twenty years, Jacob heeds God's urging and leaves to return to Canaan, taking his family, his flocks, and Laban's collection of idols, or miniature representations of gods. Rachel, who has stolen the figurines from her father, hides them under her skirt when Laban tracks down the fleeing clan in the desert. Unable to procure his belongings, Laban settles his differences with Jacob, who erects a pillar of stone as a "witness" to God of their peaceful resolution.

In Van de Velde's painting, Jacob is pictured as an eastern potentate, his caravan loaded with his worldly goods. But this 17th century depiction of the Old Testament story focuses on the relationships of a prosperous family still

riddled with tension and deception being forced to flee. The artist has paid great attention to detail – the Bible states that Jacob owned camels, for instance – and the picture would have been intended as an entertaining character study full of exotic detail, but also as a moral warning



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## Augsburg toilet service, German, 1771 – 1773

Toilet services were an integral part of the levée (French) or lever (German), the elaborate morning ritual at which wealthy members of society received favoured guests. The German city of Augsburg became the leading centre of their production in the eighteenth century.

The set contains fifty-five pieces for both the toilet and the breakfast meal, but would have had some additional porcelain items now missing. Among the toilet items are the mirror, candlesticks and snuffers as well as various boxes, bottles and a wig brush. The breakfast items include coffee and teapots, a hot-milk jug and an individual setting with knife, fork and spoon.

Although it isn't known who owned this fabulous toilet set, whoever it was had servants aplenty to look after both them and it. Security must have been a nightmare on a journey but the set has survived and is one of the finest in existence, decorated in the full-blown German 'rokoko' style



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## Clock and pedestal, French, c. 1720 - c. 1725

Andre-Charles Boulle was cabinetmaker to the King of France from 1672. The clock and pedestal are made of oak veneered marquetry of brass and turtle-shell, a distinctive technique, which Boulle developed and gave his name to.

The theme of the main mounts on the corners of this clock is the Four Continents, with, from left to right, the figures representing Africa, Europe, Asia and America. On either side two oval medallions, representing an alligator on the left and a horse on the right, allude respectively to America and Europe. The theme of the world is continued by the medallion on the front of the pedestal, showing Hercules relieving Atlas of the globe.



The interest in the Four Continents developed from the 15th century with the voyages of discovery. It is linked here to the concept of the sun represented by the Apollo mask on a sunburst on the pendulum. Love is represented by Cupid, at the top of the clock, (missing his bow and arrow). The clock therefore illustrates Love triumphing over Time but also signifies the burgeoning interest in distant travel at the time, not solely for exploration but for commerce and power too.

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## Nicolas Noël Boutet, Pair of pistols, c. 1810

A pair of flintlock pocket pistols made from engraved steel and ebony with gold decoration. These pistols were made in Versailles in about 1810. Travelling then and now can involve danger, which might include being caught up in a war, being mugged or, in 1810, being challenged to a duel. Travelling can also provide an opportunity to display real or imagined wealth and status and these little pistols would have been very costly, unlike the cumbersome guns and rifles carried by the person holding you up. Which would have been more effective as a weapon? How efficient would they have been in a duel?



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## Louise-Eugène-Gabriel Isabey, A Promenade by the Sea, 1846, Oil on canvas

Under a bright but cloudy sky, three young mothers stand on the sand dunes in full crinoline dress with smart hats, ribbons fluttering in the sea breeze. One holds a baby another a dog.



At their feet, two little girls play with other dogs, sitting on a cloth, a basket beside them. The children too, wear crinolines, their hair in chignons and ringlets. In spite of the encumbrance of their clothes, the little party are clearly enjoying the day in this charming image. Behind them, a couple trudges up the dunes towards them and in the distance, sailing boats scud before the wind out at sea.

A visit to the seaside for pleasure was a new phenomenon in mid-19th century life, at first the prerogative of the wealthy but with the coming of the train, available to many more. But in this 1846 painting, the crowds haven't yet arrived and the women almost have the beach to themselves, deep in conversation, their elegant headgear outlined against the sky, their expensively dressed children sitting quietly, a strong and to us perhaps, bizarre contrast to the coarse grass whispering on the sandy hillocks.

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## Horace Vernet, Arabs Travelling in the Desert, 1843, Oil on Canvas

Painted in Russia, this picture shows an idealised image of Arab travellers. Vernet travelled extensively but was famous for his phenomenal memory and ability to paint direct without



sketches. Vernet was extremely popular for his paintings of both military and historical events and also his exciting but romanticised and exotic depictions of the lives of the people of the Middle East and North Africa, which had just been conquered by the French. This genre of painting was fashionable in Europe, particularly in countries with an empire. Here, the remarkably clean and colourfully dressed Arabs journey across the desert, armed and with a sense of urgency, the skeleton of a longdead camel barely discernible in the background.

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## Ary Scheffer, *Francesca da Rimini*, 1835, Oil on canvas

The painting shows Dante and his guide, the Roman poet Virgil, during their passage through Hell. They look on the tragic figures of Paolo and Francesca, condemned with the souls of the lustful to the stormy darkness of Hell's second circle and forever doomed to be clasped together in an eternal embrace. Francesca had been forced to marry the hideous Gianciotto da Rimini, but had fallen in love with his handsome younger brother, Paolo. In 1285 they were murdered by Gianciotto. He had seen Paolo kiss Francesca while they were reading together an account of the love of Sir Lancelot for Queen Guinevere.

At the top centre of the frame is a model of Dante's *Inferno* and the bottom shows the tower of Rimini. The top corners show the crossed arrows and flaming torches of love, and the bottom corners an open book – a reference to the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere which Paolo and Francesca were reading when they were discovered in their love and a chain ring for eternal union. These features are connected with oak leaves, acorns, pomegranates, doves and a winding scroll revealing parts of Dante's text (Canto V lines 80–137).



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## Manufacture de Sèvres, *Tray and tea service*, 1779, Porcelain

The tray and tea service are decorated in enamel colours and outlined in gilding with chinoiserie and were made at the Sèvres factory, close to Versailles. The factory was a special interest of Mme de Pompadour, the official mistress of Louis XV of France, who loved porcelain. There is a marine battle



on the tray; battle scenes, port scenes, buildings and landscapes with figures on the other pieces. Chinoiserie was a very popular style in the 18th century, when English and European factories and workshops copied imported goods from exotic lands.

Drinking tea became fashionable during the period. It was extremely expensive and the prerogative of the rich, though earlier, Samuel Pepys had tried it and felt that tea drinking 'wouldn't catch on'.

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## Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun, *Mme Perregaux*, 1789, Oil on Canvas

Painted in 1789, the year of the French Revolution, this animated portrait of the young Adelaide de Perregaux shows the sitter wearing an alluring costume that recalls the 18th century fashion for variations on earlier Spanish dress. She is seen three quarter length, leaning through a window to peek out, pushing a heavy, green velvet curtain aside. Although her bright eyes and lively expression tell of a vivacious personality and a fascination with the world, the portrait is largely fictional as this is not the behaviour of a fashionable woman of the time who would have presented herself in public as far more staid and circumspect than the picture suggests.



But the world of both sitter and artist was about to change. Mme Perregaux's husband was banker to both the artist and the 2nd Marquess of Hertford. Although they were not harmed in the Revolution about to break around her, she was devastated by the death of her friend, Queen Marie Antoinette. The artist herself, who had also been a friend of the Queen, was forced to flee from France during the Revolution and go into exile first in Russia and later in England.

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## Writing Exercises

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The last session of the day is spent writing a series of short pieces using the objects and images encountered on the tour as a basis. The exercises will vary from session to session but will cover:

- Description – landscape and a specific, such as a building or other architectural detail. The use of evocative and vivid language.
- Diary entry or other reporting of an event – enjoyable, comic or otherwise.
- Radio interview with someone met on the journey.
- Outline for a television travel series.
- Reminiscence of a revisit to a place after many years.
- The importance of editing and research will be discussed.

## Suggested follow up activities:

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- Think about a journey taken often, fairly mundane perhaps purely because it's taken so often. Take one section of it, or a particular building encountered, and try to bring it to life.
- Find a piece of travel writing from the past and bring it up to date. What are the changes in the things encountered and in the writing style?
- Write a piece of blurb for the Rough Guide about a particular landmark or town.
- Make a flipbook of a journey with thought bubbles of the people travelling.

## Recommended Reading

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**Strunk Jr & White:** *The Elements of Style*

This excellent little book is a classic on good writing, succinct and authoritative and highly recommended.