

castle writers goes digital

Norwich Castle Museum
and Art Gallery



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Welcome to Castle Writers - online! Our monthly creative writing workshop, inspired by items in the museum's collection, has gone digital. The following pages have been designed in partnership with author and tutor Amanda Addison, and are for you to use at home. There are several writing prompts for you to choose from – you can do as many as you like.

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October 2020: The Coast



Alfred Cohen, **Evening Sky – Wells** (1991) © [Alfred Cohen Foundation](#) / Norfolk Museums Service

This month we're focusing on the East Anglian coastline as inspiration. Using the coastline and sea as settings, or even almost as characters in their own right, is a familiar idea. Think of **The Owl and the Pussycat** by Edward Lear and **The Sea, The Sea** by Iris Murdoch.

The sea and coastal places are fantastic devices for creating exciting and characterful settings and talking about human emotions which we often relate to place. Much of Helen Dunmore's writing, both prose and poetry, was inspired by coastlines around the UK. [Watch this video to hear more about Dunmore's last poetry collection, Inside the Wave.](#)

Warm-up Exercise: Remembering

Allow yourself five to ten minutes for this exercise. Take a few moments to locate in your memory a visit to the seaside. Write about your arrival. Consider the sound and smell of the place. Pan out, as if your mind's eye were a camera. Describe the immediate location.



David James, **Seascape, Stormbreakers 1892**, painting (1892) © Norfolk Museums Service



Writing Exercises: Using the Collection

Now you have warmed up your writing muscles and are hopefully in a 'seaside-aware' state of mind, take a look at the images from the collection. In this resource you will find four very different items from the museum's collection, which you will use to develop your writing about the East Anglian coast. Select one (or more) images as your writing inspiration and list as many words as possible for each of the headers below.

colour – example: steely grey

sound – example: crashing

touch – example: splash

smell / taste – example: salty

weather condition – example: balmy



Writing Exercises: A Picture in Words

Write a sea-themed haiku, mixing and matching words from your lists.

The haiku is a traditional Japanese short poetic form, usually taking nature as its theme. There are different haiku forms, and one of the most common uses three lines. The first and last lines have five syllables each and the middle line has seven syllables. The lines rarely rhyme.

Examples:

Wind lifts salty air (5)

Scent of the sea fills my hair (7)

Fishing without care (5)

Cloudy cobalt sky (5)

Orange-y horizon glows (7)

The sea mirroring (5)



Alfred Munnings, **Caley's Sea Shore Crackers** (lithograph) © Norfolk Museums Service

About the Artists

Alfred Cohen

American-born painter and print-maker Alfred Cohen spent most of his life in Europe, living in France, Germany and the UK, and garnering wide acclaim for his art. His striking, impressionistic work features strong use of colour and texture, and covers a broad spectrum of topics, including portraiture, seascapes and the *commedia dell'arte*, which was a particular inspiration. Cohen spent the latter portion of his life in Norfolk, and a new exhibition of his work – including **Evening Sky** – will be on show at Norwich Castle until 14 March 2021. You can [find out more on the website of the Alfred Cohen Art Foundation](#).

David James

David James (1853-1904) was born in Ireland as Joseph Donahue, but moved to England in his twenties, when he changed his name. He was greatly interested in seascapes, and particularly in studies of the sea itself (that is, without the interference of coastline, ships and so on). He painted the sea around the UK, including East Anglia, but focused on Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. His stunning

work **Seascape, Stormbreakers 1892**, which is featured here, was chosen for The People's Choice exhibition at Norwich Castle in 2008 by inmates of HMP Norwich.

Alfred Munnings

Suffolk artist Sir Alfred Munnings was a noted painter of horses (you can see **Sunny June** at Norwich Castle). He attended Norwich School of Art as a young man while also working as an apprentice, before becoming a full-time painter. Over the course of his varied career he worked as an official war artist during the First World War, was associated with the Newlyn School of artists, featured art at the Summer Olympics in 1928, 1932 and 1948, and was president of the Royal Academy of Arts. During his term as RA president he attacked the modernist art movement (including the work of Picasso). After his death, his second wife, Violet McBride, converted their home and studio into a museum of his work.



Further Inspiration and Resources

WG Sebald used the East Anglian coast as inspiration for his writing in his book **The Rings of Saturn** (1995), which traces a journey through East Anglia. Sebald and his work were celebrated in a 2019 exhibition at the Castle, which explored his inspirations and thought processes. It also included a large number of his own photographs. You may find taking photographs to be useful as inspiration and memory-jogger.

Here is a short extract from **The Rings of Saturn** which appeared in **Like the Sea I Think** (UEA Publishing Project, 2019), a collection of marine writing from East Anglia edited by Sarah Lowndes. This extract is by kind permission of the literary translator Erin Bradshaw.

‘Three or four miles south of Lowestoft the coastline sweeps inland in a broad, gentle curve. From the footpath which runs over the grass dunes and the low cliffs the beach below, crossed by shallow gravel banks, can be seen. On these there are, as I could after several occasions already affirm, at every hour of night and day and at every time of year, an assorted number of tent-like shelters made of rods and rope, canvas and tarpaulin. In a long row and at fairly even intervals from each other, they trace the shoreline. It is as though the last remnants of a wandering people had settled here at the outermost edge of the earth, in anticipation of the wonder that people have always sought, that justifies all deprivations and wrong turnings in the end.’



Beach sandal, 1930s © Norfolk Museums Service

Using some of your list words, write a paragraph or two of prose in response to your chosen image. Explore how you can combine descriptions of the coast with an imaginative interpretation of what something reminds you of. You may want to emulate Sebald and begin with: 'It is as though...'

Enjoyed this resource?

If you have suggestions for improvements for this resource, or simply have some feedback on your experience of using it, please let us know. You can [chat to us on Twitter by tweeting at @NorwichCastle](#) and using the hashtag #NorwichCastleWriters. Or just [drop us an email!](#)

Norfolk Museums Service is a partnership between Norfolk County Council and Norfolk's District Councils, funded through council tax, earned income and grants.

