

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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September 2020: Birds

This month, we're using bird-related exhibits from Norwich Castle's collection to inspire our creative writing. The use of birds in storytelling has a long history. Many cultures have traditional fables with anthropomorphised (when non-human entities are attributed human traits, emotions or intentions) creatures as characters - think of **The Hare and the Tortoise**, **The Firebird** and **The Ugly Duckling**.

Birds are a fantastic device for both marvelling at the natural world and talking about human emotions and personality traits.

Amanda says, "When researching my picture book, **Boundless Sky**, I read accounts of swallow migrations. I discovered that in the past people didn't believe it was possible for a bird so small to migrate, and so they thought that swallows hibernated underground! I used this information to inform the beginning of the story".

You can read the opening lines of **Boundless Sky** on the next page:

'Nobody knew,
nobody dreamed,
nobody even considered the possibility
that a bird which fits in your hand
might fly halfway around the world -
and back again.'

From **Boundless Sky**, written by Amanda Addison and illustrated by Manuela Adreani (2020)

Warm-up Exercise

For each key word below, list five to ten words which come to mind. After you have added a few words for each key word, set a timer for five minutes. Use the time to write about birds, using some of the words from your list. This could be a paragraph of prose, or a verse or two of poetic form.

bird – example: of the air

wing – example: aerodynamic

flight – example: soar

nest/migrate – example: home and away

feather – example: fluffy



Maggi Hambling, **Heron in the Shallows** (2013), oil on canvas © The Artist



Writing Exercises

Now that you have warmed up your writing muscles and are hopefully in a 'bird-aware' state of mind, it's time to take a look at some artwork and objects from the museum's collection.

1

Select one of the pieces and imagine you are describing it to someone on the telephone. Spend five minutes or so writing this imaginary monologue. In addition to descriptive language, you will probably need to use a metaphor or simile (or two!) to best communicate what you see.

2

Which bird from the four images in this resource is most like you, or someone you know? The link could be physical, emotional, related to a personality trait or just an association.

Hold on to this thought as you [listen to *Birding* by local poet Julia Webb.](#)

3

Write a poem or a few paragraphs of prose, inspired by your chosen bird and its relationship to you or someone you know.



Breydon Water diorama in the Ted Ellis Norfolk Wildlife Room at Norwich Castle. Taxidermy by BB Riviere and background art by Ernest Whatley © Norfolk Museums Service

About the Artists

Maggi Hambling

Award-winning painter and sculptor Maggi Hambling was born and currently lives in Suffolk. Alongside a wide body of painting and sculpture, she has created public art to commemorate Oscar Wilde and Benjamin Britten, and has been commissioned to create a piece inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft. She has also been involved in political campaigns.

Anna-Maria Stannard

Anna-Maria Stannard (1828-c.1885) was an accomplished Norfolk artist. Her father was Norwich School of Painters artist David Hodgson and she grew up to marry Alfred George Stannard, a landscape painter and member of the Stannard family, which included several noted artists. Unfortunately, little is known of her life, but a small body of impressive works remains.

Further Inspiration and Resources

As an extension activity, why not head outdoors, or look out of your window, and write about any birds you see?



Horn brooch of a bird in flight with wings outspread, date unknown

© Norfolk Museums Service

My Owl Sister Pays Me A Visit by Julia Webb
From *Bird Sisters*, published by Nine Arches Press (2016)

She moves restlessly around the room
examining every object, flexes her wings,

lingers by the double-glazed window,
shields her eyes as if the day is too bright.

I know she hates hospitals,
and I have interrupted her schedule,

she has chicks to feed,
important things to do.

She plucks a vole from her breast pocket,
and drops it onto my blanket,

turns on her claw.
Her hoot echoes along the ward.

Reproduced with kind permission from Julia Webb. Find out more about Julia and her work by [visiting her website](#).



Anna Maria Stannard, **Winter Scene** (undated), oil on millboard © Norfolk Museums Service

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.

