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Reality and Myth: Writing with Bellotto

Norwich Castle Museum
and Art Gallery



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Get inspired by Bernardo Bellotto's amazing painting **The Fortress of Königstein from the North**, which is on show at Norwich Castle until 4 July 2021 and is also featured in an [ArtUK online exhibition](#).

The following pages have been designed in partnership with author and tutor Amanda Addison for you to use at home. [Find out more about Amanda](#). Explore the notion of what a castle is as you choose from several writing prompts – you can do as many as you like!

Reality and Myth: Writing with Bellotto



Bernardo Bellotto, **The Fortress of Königstein from the North**, about 1756-8 © The National Gallery, London, Oil on canvas, 132.1 × 236.2 cm (for full credits, see last page)

What is a castle? Reality, history and myth


What is a castle? Worldwide, castles have had many purposes and meanings: castles may be powerfully symbolic of sovereignty and the prevailing social order or coveted possessions of strategic and political importance. They may be places of attack, defence and vigilance, places of imprisonment; but conversely also of protection, sanctuary and refuge.

Castles feature strongly in the collective imagination in stories from around the world. An image of a ruined castle is just as evocative as that of one impregnable and whole. A ruined castle raises questions about the processes of ruin. What may appear strong and eternal may in fact be easily obliterated. Ruins may appear historic, romantic or tragic, as they crumble away into the surrounding landscape.


Francesca Vanke, Senior Curator, Norfolk Museums Service



Warm-up exercise: What is a castle?


 Set a timer for three minutes and write down as many words as possible that you associate with the word 'castle'. Here are a few to get you started:

enchanted chivalry thorny sanctuary tyranny

 When the three minutes are up, arrange your words into columns under the headings 'reality', 'history' and 'myth'. Some words may work in more than one column!

For example:

reality	history	myth
<i>museum</i>	<i>tyranny</i>	<i>ghosts</i>
<i>weddings</i>	<i>attack/defence</i>	<i>enchanted</i>
<i>Disney theme park</i>	<i>chivalry</i>	<i>fairy tale</i>

 Can you add any further nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, similes, metaphors or story titles relating to famous castles to your list? Allow yourself around five minutes for this.



Writing exercises: A picture in words

Activity 1: Cinquains



Use your list of words and phrases to write a cinquain - a form of poetry which is just five lines long. The first and last lines have two syllables, while the middle lines have more, so the poem forms a diamond-like shape.

Example structure:

Line 1 - two syllables

Line 2 - four syllables

Line 3 - six syllables

Line 4 - eight syllables

Line 5 - two syllables

Can you challenge yourself to write a second cinquain using at least one word from each header?

Below are examples of cinquains on the theme of castles:

Old Walls

Speak stones

1640's

Royalist and Roundhead

Settled in blood - scorched by fire

Listen

Reproduced with kind permission from Barbara
Marshall

Castle

enchanted, cursed,

hiding, sleeping, waiting

part thorny thicket – listen

heartbeat

Reproduced with kind permission
from Karen Francis

Activity 2: Real and imagined

Scroll back and take another look at Bellotto's painting. The work portrays the Saxon fortress of Königstein, about 25 miles southeast of Dresden in present-day Germany, silhouetted high against a pale sky. He has carefully highlighted the details of the architecture and rocks, combining this minute observation with a broad, dramatic vista bathed in strong areas of light and shade. Bellotto has adopted an unusually low viewpoint to emphasise the fortress's towering strength and its dominance within the landscape. The height at which it is placed within the canvas dwarfs everything else around and forces us, as viewers, to look up towards it. The scene is one of peace, with people shown going about their daily business, but the figures are tiny against the backdrop of this huge, imposing structure.

[Learn more about Bellotto's painting and the Königstein Fortress itself in a short video presented by Francesca Vanke, Norwich Castle's Senior Curator.](#)

Imagine you are walking into Bellotto's picture. What do you experience? There are many things to examine – the animals, the peasants, the fortress, the road, the sky...



Using the five senses as headings, write down things you might see, hear, touch, taste or smell. Write down as many words as possible.

see – example: *Pastoral*

hear – example: *Chatting*

touch – example: *Soft grass*

taste – example: *Sweet*

smell – example: *Fresh-cut grass*



Can you take some factual details from the video and weave them together with your sensory words to write a poem or a short story opening?



Writers often marry together real and imagined ideas to form a story or poem. Carol Ann Duffy, former poet laureate, was Writer in Residence at Southwark Cathedral when she wrote **A Human Haunt**. [Read the poem](#). Can you identify lines referring to the real and to the imaginary? Often, they are interwoven.

Activity 3: More inspiring castles!

Select one of the following pieces, taken from the ArtUK online exhibition [Castles in Reality, History and Myth](#), and use it to spark your imagination!



William Henry Crome (1806-73), **Landscape with Norwich Castle & Cathedral in Distance** c1843, Norfolk Museums Service. [View this image in the online Art UK exhibition.](#)

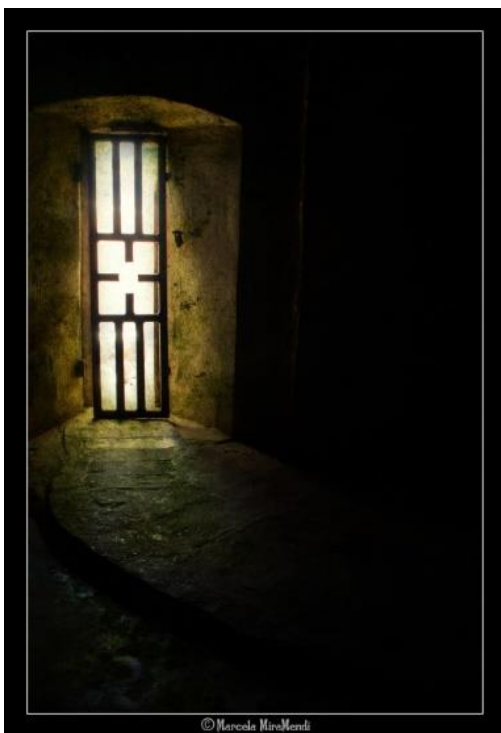


Image of the 'Door of No Return' at Elmina Castle, Ghana. Photo credit: © Marcela Miramendi, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, via Flickr. [View this image in the online Art UK exhibition.](#)



Left: Briton Riviere (1840-1920), **Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came** (1917), Norfolk Museums Service. [View this image in the online Art UK exhibition.](#)

Right: Gustave Moreau (1826-98), **Saint George and the Dragon** (1889-90) © National Gallery, London. [View this image in the online Art UK exhibition.](#)

For an image linked to a fairy tale, [view this contemporary photograph by Palestinian artist Raeda Saadeh \(b.1977\)](#), depicting herself as Rapunzel as part of a series exploring modern, political and feminist views on traditional fairy tale



Stare intently at your chosen image. Free write for six minutes. Can you write about what happened before or after the image?

Free writing is continuous writing for a set time, with no editing or critiquing.



Using your free-write as a starting point, redraft your ideas into a piece of flash fiction under 100 words. Flash fiction is a very short story form. [Read an example of castle-themed flash fiction.](#)



Enjoyed this resource?

If you have any feedback on your experience of using this resource, we'd love to hear from you. You can chat to us on Twitter by tweeting [@NorwichCastle](https://twitter.com/NorwichCastle) and using the hashtag #BellottoFortress. Or just [drop us an email!](#)



Credits



Bernardo Bellotto, **The Fortress of Königstein from the North**, about 1756-8 © The National Gallery, London, Oil on canvas, 132.1 × 236.2 cm

Bought with the support of the American Friends of the National Gallery, The National Gallery Trust, the Estate of Mrs Madeline Swallow, Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation), Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, The Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation, The Manny and Brigitta Davidson Charitable Foundation, The Sackler Trust and through private appeal, 2017.

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

