

Narratives



Narratives

Welcome to this learning resource

This has been designed for Key Stages 3 and 4.

This is part of a series of resources designed to be used in your classroom or as a virtual resource for home learning.

Each resource provides a set of learning materials to invite your students to critically examine (*Close Encounter*), think and discuss ideas (*Discuss*), develop their own artwork through artist-led virtual workshops or ideas (*Create*), and conclude with an opportunity to reflect and evaluate their work (*Reflect*). There are hyperlinks for students to research in greater depth.

This session is designed to meet these learning objectives:

- Sustained investigation of an artwork. Understanding composition, perspective, symbolism and artist narratives.
- Learning technical language and communicating appropriate responses.
- Reflecting on reasoned understandings of cultural context and historical timeframes, and cultural, moral and spiritual context.
- Reflecting on how this artwork inspires students' own artwork.

Narratives

Key artworks

Alfred Elmore (1815-1881), *'On the Brink'* (1865) (right)

Domenico Veneziano (1438-1461), *'The Annunciation'* (c. 1445)

Biagio d'Antonio (1446-1516), *'The Siege of Troy, The Death of Hector'* (c. 1490-1495)

Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1638), *'A Village Festival in Honour of St. Hubert and St. Anthony'* (1627)

You might like to use this resource alongside the Narratives video on the Fitzwilliam Museum schools website.

Close encounter

Alfred Elmore, *'On the Brink'*

Take a close look at this painting and think about the **'back story'**. What might have just happened to this young woman? You might think about what is going on in the room behind her, and what the empty purse in her hand and torn gaming card at her feet suggest. Can you find the shadowed figure of a man behind the young woman? Is he inside or outside the room? What is the effect of having him in **shadow**? How is the room behind him lit? What are the colours inside the room and how might these be significant? Contrast this to the colours used to paint the scene outside the window. What do you think is the **source of light** and what might this symbolise?

Summarise your investigations and let's press **'play'** on this painting – take the painting's narrative forward to the **next 10 minutes**. You could write this as a **dialogue** to read with a friend. Now it's crunch time: the young woman has a decision to make. She is already, as the painting's title suggests, 'on the brink' of this... it's your choice. What does she decide? Write down your thoughts and then project this woman's story as a timeline: what happens to her the **next day, week, year**? You are creating her narrative.

Paintings such as *'On the Brink'* were thought of as **'moral'** paintings. Why do you think that is and who might be shown the importance of

making the 'right' decision? If you enjoyed this then you might enjoy investigating the story in other paintings.



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Close encounter



Domenico Veneziano, 'The Annunciation'

Image © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Where do you think a painting like this, showing a scene from the Christian Bible, might have been displayed originally? (It was once part of an altarpiece in a church in Florence, Santa Lucia de' Magnoli.) Why do you think it was important to paint stories from the Bible at this time (15th century)? In the previous painting we took the narrative forward – can you do the same with this story? What happened to this young woman over the following year? You might like to find paintings that illustrate her story.

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Close encounter



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Biagio d'Antonio, 'The Siege of Troy, The Death of Hector'

This painting tells part of the ancient Greek myth of the Trojan War. Research the myth of the Trojan war, and find out which part of the story is shown here. Can you spot the same characters repeated within the image? (Clue: Hector has his name written across his chest.) How does this help with retelling this narrative? The Museum also has a companion painting showing a different scene, 'The Siege of Troy, The Wooden Horse of Troy'. Selected scenes from the story were painted and displayed together to form a visual story, like a giant graphic novel – the viewer could 'read' the pictures and identify the characters.

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Close encounter

Pieter Brueghel the Younger, 'A Village Festival in Honour of St Hubert and St Anthony'

Brueghel the Younger chose not to paint a well-known story; instead, here he explores the daily lives of people living in a Dutch village. The people in the painting have been given the day off for a religious festival in honour of St. Hubert and St. Anthony. Can you spot people taking part in religious activities? And can you spot people making the most of their day off by taking part in other types of activities – what sorts of things are they doing? This story has many layers. At the time this painting was painted, the Netherlands was under Spanish rule. Can you find any details that might refer to this?



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Discuss

Alfred Elmore, *'On the Brink'*

Put yourself in the young woman's dilemma. What are the possible outcomes and what might happen if she follows a certain decision or chain of events? Do you see the pure white lily and the purple passion flower? What different paths do you think they represent?

How would a painting like this help you to reflect before you make life decisions? Do young people face similar decisions today? Explore more with this factsheet: https://fitz-cms-images.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/fs_a_elmore_on_the_brink.pdf.

Domenico Veneziano, *'The Annunciation'*

Find out the story of the Annunciation from the Christian Bible. In this painting, we encounter a very precise moment in the story – what moment is this? How is this represented through symbolism? You might wish to look at the dove, the writing, the lily, and the facial expressions.

Biagio d'Antonio *'The Siege of Troy, The Death of Hector'*

There is something strange about the historic setting of this painting. Has the artist depicted this scene in the historical timeframe of ancient Greece? Think about what ancient

Greece would have looked like: buildings, costumes, weapons. Where has the artist instead decided to place Troy in his painting? Do you think it is a 'real' place? Can you identify any of these buildings and work out which Italian city they are in? In a way, this painting is showcasing the Italy that the artist actually lived in and making it seem even grander, adding to the region's strength and power. Can you do further research to find another depiction of the story of Troy? Where could we find an ancient Greek depiction of this myth?

Now reimagine this story in a contemporary style – how would you change the characters, the city, weapons, and the environment? How would this change the scene?

Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *'A Village Festival in Honour of St Hubert and St Anthony'*

What impression do you think Brueghel wanted to give of these villagers? Do you think he is shocked by some of the more boisterous behaviour on display? Or do you think he is enjoying the antics they are getting up to on a well-deserved day-off? There are layers in this story: look at the scene of the open-air play – what is this play about? (You'll need to look very closely.) Do you think the crowds are enjoying a 'bawdy' play? How does this contrast to the religious procession to the right?



Vessel. Neck-amphora. Achilles and Ajax playing dice, battle scene. Antimenes Painter, vase-painter (c.530-510 BC, Athens). Clay, black-figured, height 0.385 m, width 0.261 m, 520-510 B.C. Field Collection: Vulci, Etruria, Italy. Archaic Period.

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Create

Animation

Can you think of other media you could use to tell a story? With access to a smartphone or tablet, students might want to try creating a simple animation to expand on the narratives told in these paintings. We like to use the free Stikbot app (<https://stikbot.toys/app/>). Why not take a look at this animated version of 'A Village Festival' made by Year 8 students from Soham Village College for inspiration: <https://vimeo.com/410588971>.

Mixed media challenge

Draw or paint the background from one of these paintings – 'The Siege of Troy' would work well. Choose a new narrative you would like to tell for your subject. Cut figures out from magazines or comics to add to your background using collage techniques. Make use of perspective and be sure to choose figures of an appropriate size, depending on whether they're in the foreground (the front of the painting) or the background.

Synoptic narratives

A **synoptic** narrative shows multiple actions in one single scene to try to convey a sequence of events. Sometimes the same figures are depicted multiple times in one scene, just like in the painting 'The Siege of Troy'. Choose a

story you would like to tell – it could be something you've read in a book, a historical event or something from your own life. In creating your own artwork, consider which actions you will need to include and whether you will need to repeat some of the figures to tell the story. When you are finished, challenge another member of your class to work out the story from your artwork. How tricky did they find it?



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Reflect

What different ways do these artists use to tell a narrative? Do they choose one moment to focus on, or do they try to tell multiple parts of the story in one painting? Do they leave us on a cliffhanger, guessing what will happen next?

Are there ways these artists use to tell narratives which inspire you? Think about how you might build on these ideas in your own artwork.

Think about whose narratives artists choose to tell in these paintings: heroes from ancient Greek mythology, figures from the Bible, people going about their everyday lives and characters created to tell a moral tale. Where would you look for inspiration for your own artwork?

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