

The Ashmolean's paintings provide creative starting points to inspire descriptive writing about settings from different cultures, times and places. Through the collections explore suburban streets, city rooftops, and unusual views of world cities such as Paris, Rome or Venice. Visit Oxford's nineteenth century High Street and see cityscapes, both real and imagined. Experience birds-eye views, vast rural landscapes, pastoral country or waterside scenes and detailed naturalistic landscapes. Use these pictures a launch pad to describe a setting.

Starting questions:

Choose a picture. Use these questions to describe the setting:

- Choose one word to describe the place.
- What is the first thing you notice?
- What is the time of day and time of year?
- Describe the weather in detail.
- Describe what is happening.
- If you could step into the picture what would you see, hear, smell and touch?
- Where would you go in the picture and why?
- Describe the colours. What effects do they create?
- How is light used in the picture? How does this affect the mood?
- Would you like to visit this place? Why?
- Find something no one else might have noticed.
- Does this scene remind you of anything?
- Does it make you think of any situations, feelings or stories?
- Give the picture a new title.



Key Galleries:

Gallery 43: Italian Renaissance

Gallery 44: European Art

Gallery 49: Britain and Italy

Gallery 67: 19th-century Art

Gallery 50-51: Landscape Oil Sketches

Gallery 66: Pre-Raphaelites

Gallery 65: Pissarro

Gallery 63: Sickert and his contemporaries

Gallery 62: Modern Art



Imagining your setting

- Describe the place to someone who cannot see it or to a partner who has chosen a different picture. Point out the smallest details and explain why you chose it. Try using prepositions to start each sentence.
- Annotate a copy of the picture with words to describe sounds, textures, smells, colours and atmosphere. Add your own questions, ideas and comments.
- Imagine something is hidden. What is it and who might find it?



Winter Scene
Jean-Desire-Gustave Courbet WA 1936.48

Starting to write

Write down every idea and thought that comes to you about the setting: words, phrases, sentences, pieces of dialogue, images, a feeling, memory, smell or taste, the name of a character, a description of a person or place.

Share ideas with a partner and ask them questions about their place. Choose your favourite ideas and work with them.

Write a piece of descriptive prose as part of a story. What mood and atmosphere do you want to create? Which aspects of the place will you describe? What is about to happen next?

Write an imaginary travel brochure for your setting to persuade people to visit.

Imagine this picture is an illustration in a book. Write the caption to accompany it.



Vase with winter landscape, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, around 1910 EA 200.47

Further resources

Ashmolean Education Learning Resources:
www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources

Education Department

Ashmolean Museum

Beaumont Street

Oxford OX1 2PH

T. 01865 278015

E. education.service@ashmus.ox.ac.uk

www.ashmolean.org/learn