



Letter Writing with Walter Scott

Introduction

This activity takes inspiration from a letter written by Walter Scott to his friend. The letter in question was written to Lady Abercorn, on 13th March 1808. Scott had just finished writing a long poem called *Marmion*, which he would have written completely by hand before it was printed. He writes to Lady Abercorn to say he needs to take a break from writing poetry in his next writing project!

In this lesson, pupils will:

- Create a crest to represent themselves
- Write a letter about their favourite poem
- Learn to fold and seal their letter in an early nineteenth century style
- Read an extract from one of Walter Scott's letters.
- Answer understanding questions based on this extract.

You can choose to do the letter-writing part of the lesson by itself, or as part of a lesson on personal identity, early nineteenth-century history, or literature. Additionally this activity can be completed after the pupils have completed one of the poetry activities included in this resource suits, such as the Short Poems activity, where one of these excerpts could be used as a 'favourite' poem. The PowerPoint also includes extracts from four short poems, which pupils can use as their favourite poem should they choose to.

Before the lesson you should:

- Ask the pupils to choose their favourite poem and bring it to class. Alternatively, there are short snippets of poems on slide 5, which the pupils can use.
- Provide one piece of A4 paper per pupil.
- Find some scrap paper for the pupils to draw their crest. Alternatively, if you have access to mailer/blank stickers, the pupils can draw directly onto them.
- Provide scissors and glue.



Curriculum for Excellence

LIT 2-02	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking.
LIT 2-10a	I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting, and I can explain why I prefer certain texts and authors.
ENG 2-17a	To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own.

Lesson Plan

Step 1 (slide 2)

Show the students Walter Scott's crest. Tell them that a crest is an image that represents a person, family, or group. The pictures on a crest usually tell us something about the person/people that it represents. What do you see on Walter Scott's crest? What sort of person do you think he was?

Step 2 (slide 3)

Introduce Walter Scott. You can see if any of the pupils' predictions about Scott were true.

Step 3 (slide 4)

Ask the students what they would put on their own crest. The pupils can discuss this with their partners/groups.

Ask the pupils to draw a circle or give them a small circle and ask them to draw their crest in the circle.

They will cut these out and glue them on their letters later. As their crests will probably get ripped later, you may wish to ask them to draw two so that they have a copy to keep.



Step 4 (slide 5)

This slide has four snippets of poems from Walter Scott. If your pupils have brought their own favourite poems, you can skip this step. If they have not, you can read these snippets together, discuss what they mean, and encourage the pupils to pick a favourite.

Step 5 (slide 6)

Tell the students that in the nineteenth century, there were no phones or computers. People wrote long letters to each other. Because paper and posting were expensive, they would write their letters on a piece of paper, fold it up, and seal it with their crest. They should cut out their crest and be ready to use it as a seal.

1. Write a letter to a friend about the poem that you have chosen. Answer these questions:
 - a. What is the poem about?
 - b. Why do you like the poem?
 - c. What would you ask the poet if you could?

Make sure you sign your name at the end.

Step 6 (slide 7)

Tell the pupils to use the instructions to fold up their letter. (Alternatively, you can challenge the pupils to find their own way to fold the letter.)

Glue your crest to the letter to seal it.

Step 7 (slide 8)

Put the pupils in pairs and get them to switch letters (you can use this as an opportunity to get them to walk around by making them close their eyes as you switch their letters with someone else then getting them to find their partner). First, the pupils should see if it is possible to open the letter without breaking the seal. You can tell them that Scott would have used a wax seal that could not be peeled off. The pupils can then open the letters, find their partners and read the letters. Once they have read the letters, they should ask their partner to read them their poem. They should then discuss the questions on the slide.



Step 8 (slides 9-12)

Read the letter out loud to the pupils. This is just a short bit from one of Scott's letters. He wrote it when he had finished writing a very long poem called *Marmion* (1808). He is thinking about taking a break from poetry and writing a non-fiction book about another writer called Jonathan Swift.

Step 9 (slide 13)

Pupils can answer the questions as a class or in small groups. The answers are:

1. He compares himself to a spider. A spider has to rest before spinning a new web, and Scott has to rest before writing a new poem.
2. No, Scott says that he writes faster than anyone else, which is probably a bad thing. (However, if the pupils have other ideas/answers, that's fine too).
3. He does not have enough new ideas to write a new poem.
4. In husbandry, it is important to switch between different crops so that the soil does not get tired. Scott wants to similarly switch between tasks. You can use this to start a discussion with the pupils about whether they find switching between tasks useful.
5. Pupils' own answers.