The Lay of the Last Minstrel

Introduction

This resource uses the opening of the poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), as a springboard for the pupils' own creativity. It includes a simple reading comprehension of the poem and suggested activities for the pupils to create their own stories.

In the opening section of Scott's poem, a sad, elderly minstrel wanders along the way, feeling mournful about the life that he has lost. He is 'the last' minstrel, as his way of life- telling stories and poems- is passing out of fashion. It was popular to write about 'minstrels' and 'bards' during this time. People were interested in how stories were told; how history and special events were remembered. In the days before cameras, films, technology and so forth, stories and words were important not only for entertainment, but also for remembering brave deeds and events, people and times.

This activity combines English and drama skills. After a starter activity, pupils should read the poem and use the description of the minstrel to draw a picture of him. The third activity is an interview task, in which pupils take turns to pretend to be the minstrel. Eight pictures of unusual characters are included in the activity pack, which the pupils can then use to create a short skit. Full instructions are given within the pack. Finally, some analysis questions are included as an advanced or follow-on activity. If you are using a screen reader, you may find that the pdf version is better.

Curriculum for Excellence

LIT 2-10a	I am developing confidence when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning. I can communicate in a clear, expressive way and I am learning to select and organise resources independently.	The group discussions and the improvisation will help pupils develop their confidence and communication skills.
Eng 2-12a	Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar, and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression.	The poem will probably be unfamiliar to all pupils. With just a few key words defined, they should be able to work out the meaning.

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Lit 2-26a	By considering the type of text I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience.	When the pupils create their own story, skit or storyboard, they will have to use suitable vocabulary and organise their ideas in an appropriate way.
Eng 2-31a	Having explored the elements which writers use in different genres, I can use what I learnt to create stories, poems and plays with an interesting and appropriate structure, interesting characters and/or settings which come to life.	The pupils should use what they have learnt from Scott's poem to develop their own creative outputs.
Advanced level task		
Eng 3-17a	To show my understanding, I can comment, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, and respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other types of close reading tasks.	The analysis questions will help pupils develop their ability to understand unfamiliar texts.

Steps

1. Starter activity (discussion): What does it mean if something is the last of something? Can you think of any lasts in your own life (last day of school, last day of the holidays etc.)? Can you think of any lasts in stories that you know/like?
    a. This can be gamified by playing it as a run-to-the-board. Split the board into as many teams as you want by drawing vertical lines. Give each team a different coloured pen and ask them to stand in a line in front of the board. Tell the pupils they will have 2 minutes to write as many words as they can that can follow the word "last" and still make sense. Once you've said "go," the first student in each line will write a word, hand the pen to the next person, and then go to the end of the line. The team that writes the most words in the time allowed wins.
2. The pupils should read the extract from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.
3. The pupils should draw a picture of the minstrel. They should think about how old he is (elderly), what he is carrying (a harp), his hair (long and grey), and his emotions (sad, which could be portrayed by having him bent over).
4. Put the pupils into pairs. One should be an interviewer and the other the minstrel. The interviewer should ask him as many questions that they can think of:
    a. Where are you coming from?

b. Where are you going?
c. Why are you sad?
d. What do you like doing?
e. Who is the boy who is with you?
f. What is your favourite song?

5. In groups, pupils should pick a character that they think the minstrel might meet. They can use the sample character prompts provided or create their own. They should create a fact sheet about the character.
6. As a class, or in groups, pupils can do an improvisation acting activity.
    - The simplest way to do this is to ask the children to act out what happens when the minstrel and the orphan boy meet the other character.
    - Alternatively, a more complex improvisation game can be done. Each pupil is given a character – the minstrel, the orphan boy, or one of the characters from the previous activity. The class stands round in a circle as the minstrel and the orphan boy act according to a prompt (see below). Then one of the other pupils should shout "freeze," and the actors should freeze in place. The new pupil should replace one of the frozen actors, taking the exact position the pupil had been in, and then shout "unfreeze." At this point, the newcomer should change what is happening and the others must play along. Keep on going until all the pupils have had at least one go at acting.
        i. As the minstrel, boy and character are walking along, a bird swoops down and says "stop!"
        ii. A young person tries to sell lemonade to the others.
        iii. A highwayman rides up to the others and demands that they give up all their money.
        iv. The boy sees a mysterious person in the bushes and challenges them. This can be the character or the character can be a bystander.
        v. The minstrel and the boy sing a song and the other character wants to learn more about it.
        vi. The minstrel, boy, and other character are on the road when they are attacked by wolves.
7. Either alone or in groups, pupils should write or draw a short story, skit or storyboard based on one of the improvisation activities.
8. A close reading activity is included for advanced students.

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The Lay of the Last Minstrel

by Walter Scott

The way was long, the wind was cold
The Minstrel was infirm and old;
His withered cheek, and tresses gray
Seemed to have known a better day;
The harp, his sole remaining joy
Was carried by an orphan boy.
The last of all the Bards was he
Who sung of Border chivalry;
For, well-a-day! their date was fled
His tuneful brethren all were dead;
And he, neglected and oppressed
Wished to be with them, and at rest.
No more, on prancing palfrey borne
He carolled, light as lark at morn;
No longer, courted and caressed
High placed in hall, a welcome guest
He poured, to lord and lady gay,
The unpremeditated lay;
Old times were changed, old manners gone,
A stranger filled the Stuarts' throne;
The bigots of the iron time
Had called his harmless art a crime.
A wandering harper, scorned and poor
He begged his bread from door to door;
And tuned, to please a peasant's ear
The harp, a King had loved to hear.

If a person is infirm, they are physically or mentally weak. Did you know, hospitals can be called infirmaries?

Minstrel and bard are words used describe someone who tells stories and sings songs. In the olden days, they would walk from place to place.

Brethren means brothers. In this case, it means the other minstrels even though they weren't related to the minstrel.

A lay is a type of song that tells a story. Unpremeditated means he could make it up on the spot.

A bigot is a person who is prejudiced against others. The people at the minstrel's time made his job illegal.

Tresses is another word for long hair. The minstrel's hair is grey. What colour is your hair?

Chivalry refers to the adventures of knights. The word comes from a word for horse, so you can imagine the knights galloping off on adventures. The Border refers to the Scottish-English border.

A palfrey is a type of horse. Prancing suggests fun, carefree movement.

A stranger refers to a foreign relative of the old king.

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alien

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archer

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fairy

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knight

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robot

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shoemaker

Photo by Juliano Astc: https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-holding-a-fire-torch-10556588/

torchbearer

Photo by cottonbro from Pexels: https://www.pexels.com/photo/topless-man-with-green-plants-on-his-chest-standing-beside-brown-tree-while-seriously-looking-at-the-camera-6056162/

tree-man

Draw a picture here

Write the character's name here

Age: _____

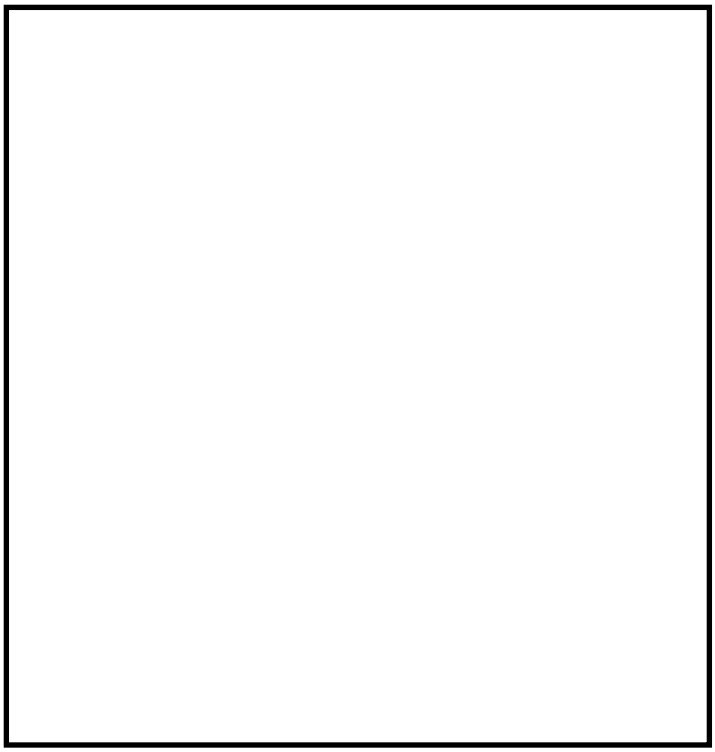
Job: _____

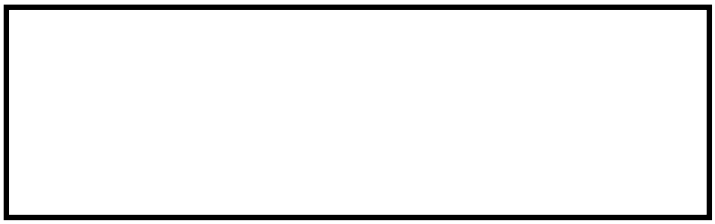
Favourite food: _____

Best friend: _____

Home: _____

Write where the character is and how they got there. Remember, they are about to meet the minstrel.





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Questions

1. Find an example of **alliteration** (repeated sounds at the beginning of words).
2. Find an example of **contrast.**
3. What effect is created by the use of contrast?
4. How does Walter Scott use word choice to make the reader feel sorry for the minstrel?
5. Do you think the speaker is happy about the changes that have

Suggested answers:

1. Find an example of **alliteration** (repeated sounds at the beginning of words).

Possibilities include: way, wind; courted, caressed;

2. Find an example of **contrast.**

Anything that shows the difference between the state of the minstrel now and the past, when he was a welcomed guest.

3. What effect is created by the use of contrast?

Pupils could write about how contrast creates sympathy for the minstrel and/or highlights his miserable life.

4. How does Walter Scott use word choice to make the reader feel sorry for the minstrel?

Pupils should pick a word and show how it shows that the minstrel is suffering. Possibilities include: infirm, old, withered, neglected, oppressed, scorned, poor, begged.

5. Do you think the speaker is happy about the changes that have happened in society? Explain your answer.

No, the speaker calls the people currently in control "bigots." The sympathy he expresses for the minstrel also shows that he thinks things have changed for the worse.

6. Do you think this is an effective opening of a poem? Explain your answer.

Pupils may answer that the opening is effective because:

A) it creates sympathy for the minstrel.

B) as the minstrel is on a journey, the reader is interested to know where he is going and what will happen there.

Some pupils might think the poem is over-the-top and therefore funny.