



Walter Scott 1771-1832

Melrose: Walter Scott and Place Activity Pack



A teaching resource for upper-primary and lower-secondary pupils, containing:

- Discussion of place
- Introduction to Walter Scott, one of Scotland's most influential writers
- Analysis of a nineteenth-century poem
- Follow-on work



This activity uses the introduction to Melrose from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* to encourage pupils to think about their own experiences of place and to engage with unfamiliar language.

The lesson has the following links to the curriculum for excellence:

LIT 2-13a	I can select and use a range of strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to make meaning clear and give reasons for my selection.
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.
LIT 2-02a	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.
ENG 2-27a	I am learning to use language and style in a way which engages and/or influences my reader.
LIT 2-28a	I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or combine ideas in different ways.

Steps:

1. Starter activity
2. Introduction to Walter Scott
3. Language task
4. Reading
5. Concept checking question
6. In-depth questions
7. Further work

Description of activities:

1. Starter activity

The starter activity gives the pupils an opportunity to discuss different environments.

- i) If using the PowerPoint, pupils (individually or in groups) can either pick an image to describe or be assigned one by the teacher.



If using print outs of the pictures in [Appendix 1](#), you can either give them to the pupils to discuss them in groups, or you can attach them to the wall and ask the pupils to walk around and look at them.

- ii) Ask the pupil/s to describe the picture and suggest what sort of person might live there.
- iii) Once they have described the picture, click on it. It will fade away. Behind it, a picture of Walter Scott's house, Abbotsford, will be revealed. If the pupils live near Abbotsford, you can ask them what has been revealed. You can then ask pupils what person might have lived in Abbotsford.

2. Introduction to Walter Scott

The third slide of the PowerPoint includes a basic introduction to Walter Scott. There are five facts about his life, which are individually animated. As each one comes onto the screen, you can ask the pupils the following questions:

- i. How many years ago did Scott live? What do you think life was like then?
- ii. How do you think Scott's disability affected him? What challenges do you think he faced?
- iii. Do you know any traditional stories or songs? What are they?
- iv. What poems have you read? Do you think there are any famous poets today? Explain your answer.
- v. What do you think makes a great novel?

3. Pre-reading

Later, pupils will read a short passage from Scott's poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The language will be unfamiliar for most pupils. You might want to prepare them for it by asking them if they know of any old words, any words that have changed meaning, or any way in which a piece of writing from 200 years ago might be tricky for us.

4. Reading

The next few slides contain a short passage from Scott's poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. It is about the abbey in the town of Melrose. You may find it helpful to read it out loud to the pupils before they begin the language task. Alternatively, they can do the language task first and then return to the poem.

5. Language task



Split the pupils into groups. Give them a copy of the passage with the tricky words highlighted ([Appendix 2](#)). The pupils' next task is to find out the meaning of the words. They can either look up the words in a dictionary/online, or they can do a running dictation.

For the running dictation:

- i) Before class, cut up the definitions in [Appendix 3](#) and put them around the room.
- ii) Get the pupils into pairs. Make them choose one runner and one writer.
- iii) Explain the rules: the runner has to find each definition, read it, and return to the writer who then writes down the definition. The runner cannot actually run – they must walk. The runners cannot push each other out of the way. The runners cannot shout the definitions across the room. The writer has to write down the definitions exactly as they appear on the paper.
- iv) Play the game. The pair that finishes first wins.

Once the pupils have finished the running dictation, elicit the answers from the pairs so that everybody knows all the definitions. Then, go through the poem with the pupils, asking them what they think it is about. As it may be easier for the pupils to understand the poem in sections, it is split across multiple slides. Alternatively, the modernisation in [Appendix 4](#) may also be used.

6. Concept checking questions

Slide 5 has three pictures. Ask the pupils to say which one best represents the image described in the poem (it is the bottom left picture).

Slide 6 has a fill-the-gap, which you can go through as a class, or ask pupils to work on alone/in groups.

You should go and visit _Melrose_ at _night-time_. If you go at that time, you will see:

Dark _arches_

Moonlight on the ruins

Some black _buttresses_ and some white _buttresses_.

Silver _light_ on the edges of scrolls and statues.

It is better to go by yourself/~~with others~~.

7. In-depth questions



Hopefully, the pupils now understand what the poem means. You can then move onto the in-depth questions in [Appendix 5](#) and PowerPoint slide 7.

8. Further work

This passage can be used as a launching pad for pupils' own work. [Appendix 6](#) is a suggested follow-on activity.



¹ Photo by Aleksandar Pasaric: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/street-under-cloudy-sky-1344537/>



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² Photo by Aysegul Alp : <https://www.pexels.com/photo/an-empty-hallway-9112891/>



3

³ Photo by Baran Haznedaroğlu: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-swimming-under-the-sea-and-holding-onto-a-chain-13097421/>



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⁴ Photo by Daria Shevtsova: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/house-near-green-and-brown-mountain-2823132/>



5

⁵ Photo by David McBee: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/high-angle-shot-of-suburban-neighborhood-1546168/>





7



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⁸ Photo by Pixabay: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/adventure-beautiful-boardwalk-bridge-235734/>



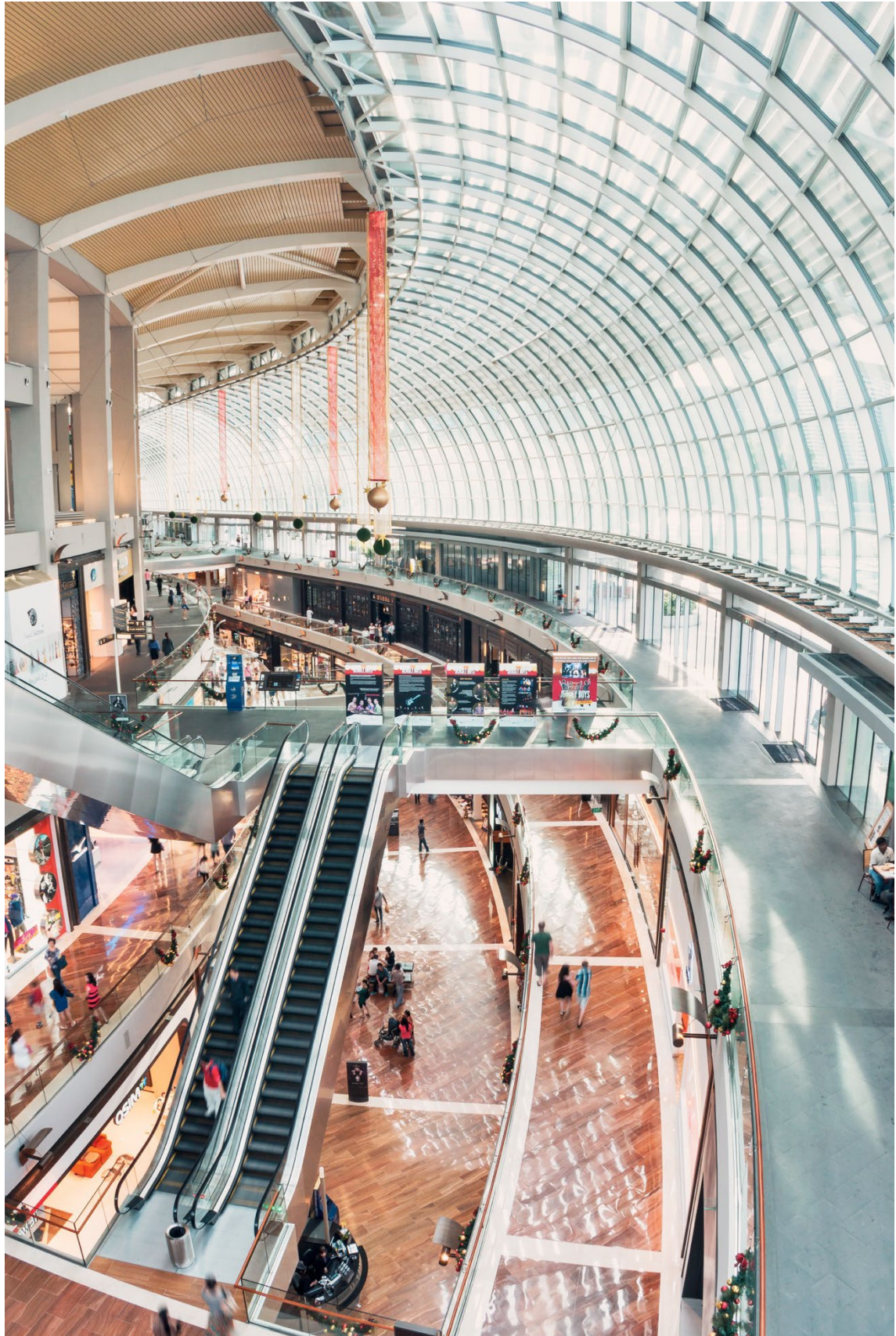
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⁹ Photo by Sebastian Voortman: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/farm-against-sky-253625/>



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¹⁰ Photo by Yogendra Singh: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/aerial-view-of-brown-concrete-houses-12912712/>



If **thou** would'st view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moon-light;
For the **gay** beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to **flout**, the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night.
And each **shafted oriel** glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When **buttress** and buttress, alternately.
Seem framed of **ebon and ivory**;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach **thee** to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to **rave**.
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave;
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St David's ruined pile;
And, home returning, **soothly swear**.
Was never scene so sad and fair!



If **thou** would'st view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moon-light;
For the **gay** beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to **flout**, the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each **shafted oriel** glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When **buttress** and buttress, alternately,
Seem framed of **ebon and ivory**;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach **thee** to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to **rave**,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St David's ruined pile;
And, home returning, **soothly swear**,
Was never scene so sad and fair!

Thou = you

Gay = happy/cheerful

Gild = cover (in gold)

Flout = to ignore or disobey

Shafted oriel = long window

Buttress = a wall's support

Ebon and ivory = black and white

Thee = you

Rave = unclear talk

Soothly swear = promise truly

If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,	If you want to see Melrose the right way
Go visit it by the pale moon-light;	Then visit it during the night-time;
For the gay beams of lightsome day	Because the happy rays of sunshine
Gild , but to flout , the ruins gray.	Are not right for the grey ruins, even though they decorate them.
When the broken arches are black in night,	When the broken arches are black because it is dark
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;	And the long windows shine white [from the moonlight];
When the cold light's uncertain shower	[and] When the faint light of night-time
Streams on the ruined central tower;	Bathes the ruined building
When buttress and buttress, alternately,	[and] When the buttresses are alternatively
Seem framed of ebon and ivory ;	Black and white;
When silver edges the imagery,	[and] when the moonlight makes the edges of the carvings
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;	and the scrolls look silver;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave ,	[and] when you can hear the Tweed River
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,	And the owl hooting above the churchyard
Then go—but go alone the while—	Then go – but go by yourself
Then view St David's ruined pile;	And visit the ruins.
And, home returning, soothly swear ,	And return home say truly
Was never scene so sad and fair!	That it was the most sad and beautiful place you've ever seen.

Melrose Abbey

If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moon-light;
For the gay beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to flout, the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When buttress and buttress, alternately,
Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
Then view St David's ruined pile;
And, home returning, soothly swear,
Was never scene so sad and fair!

- In your own words, explain why the speaker thinks it is better to visit Melrose by night.
- Find one example of effective word choice. Explain what effect it has.
- Why do you think the poet said 'ebon and ivory' instead of black and white?
- How does the sentence structure support the main idea of the passage?
- Why are the final two lines an effective ending for this passage?

Questions and answers:

All of the questions have multiple possible answers. Some are suggested below:

- In your own words, explain why the speaker thinks it is better to visit Melrose by night.

The poet thinks that you cannot get a good impression of the atmosphere of Melrose Abbey in daylight. In the night-time, every part of the ruined abbey looks beautiful and mysterious.

- Find one example of effective word choice. Explain what effect it has.

'glimmers,' 'framed,' 'silver,' are all positive words which are used to describe beautiful and expensive things. They make the moonlight appear beautiful and valuable.

'pale,' 'glimmers,' 'uncertain,' 'streams,' 'seem,' are all tentative/gentle words. They create a mysterious atmosphere.

- Why do you think the poet said 'ebon and ivory' instead of black and white?

These words are more mysterious and connote exotic travel/trade. They strengthen the mysterious tone of the passage.

- How does the sentence structure support the main idea of the passage?

Most of the passage is one very long sentence. It gives the impression that the wonder the speaker feels is ongoing/overwhelming. The parenthetical dashes emphasise the importance of visiting alone.

- Why are the final two lines an effective ending for this passage?

They sum up the main point of the passage – the ruins are beautiful. They also complete the idea started in the first line with if (we are told what will happen if you go to the ruins).

If you would visit...

1. Think about a place that you like. Imagine it in daylight and in the night. What can you see and hear? Write or draw your descriptions below.

Day

Night

2. Imagine you are writing to a friend who lives a long way away. What advice would you give them if they wanted to visit this place? Write three points.

1.

2.

3.

3. Think of a character from a book that you like. Imagine that they found themselves in this place in the night. Write a paragraph describing what they would do.