

Looking and Exploring:

Creative writing
for local history

Learning
resource for
Key Stage 2

How to use this resource

This learning pack is designed for Key Stage 2 teachers, supporting a local history study of a significant place or site in the school's locality. While the resources are relevant across the UK, the examples are drawn from Dragon Hall — a medieval trading hall in Norfolk, now home to the National Centre for Writing.

Through observation and investigation, students will explore a meaningful site in their area, sparking their curiosity about the past. The activities serve as an excellent introduction to studying significant events and people associated with a place.

The pack also includes prompts for creative writing activities, encouraging students to use real-life visits as inspiration for creating settings and atmosphere.

Recommended for KS2 (History, English)

Local history study, English writing composition, creative writing.

Learning objectives

- Identify key features of a historical place in the school's locality, using observation to explore similarity and difference, significance and change.
- To develop vocabulary through describing students' immediate world.
- To explore significant historical places in students' own locality.

Curriculum links

English:

- Use discussion to elaborate and explain clearly students' understanding and ideas.
- Develop description of settings through discussing and recording ideas.
- Select appropriate vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning.

History:

- To explore similarity, difference, significance and change through a local history study of a significant place in the school's locality.
- Discuss the significance of historical buildings.
- To develop understanding of connections between local, regional, national and international history by considering the age and use of the site and placing this in the context of other buildings around it.
- Develop appropriate use of historical terms.

Time to complete

40–60 minutes.

Materials and set-up

- Paper and pencils
- Worksheet
- Clipboards (optional)



Gargoyle above the outer door at Dragon Hall

Exercise 1: Exploring and engaging with the space (visual)

Upon arrival at your destination, have everyone spread out and observe the building in front of them. Encourage them to sketch the building's outline and main features, paying close attention to how it is divided into different shapes. Ask them to consider whether the building's sections appear to be from different time periods—can they spot areas that seem older or more recent?

With Dragon Hall it's clear to see which parts of the site were built at different times because they are different colours and materials. The 15th century trading hall is a wood structure, recognisable through its hefty beams and fading plaster; the older Hall House which predates it by a century is white and smooth with plaster, the 21st century parts shine with orange brick and glass reflecting the sunshine.

After the initial drawing, invite anyone who'd like to share to describe their sketch and explain their thought process. How did they decide that certain parts of the building might be older or newer? How did they represent these observations in their drawings?

Emphasise that this doesn't have to be a detailed sketch. Rather, it's an exercise in examining and interpreting the building's structure. Simple shapes like triangles and rectangles can effectively signify different components, helping everyone focus on the building's overall shape and substance.

This exercise could be used to develop appropriate use of historical terms and to demonstrate chronological awareness. By examining and comparing other buildings around the site, students can discuss which structures are older and which are newer, using relevant historical terms. This setting provides an opportunity to introduce vocabulary related to the historical periods during which the building was constructed and used, enriching their understanding of the era's architectural styles and features.



The last surviving dragon of Dragon Hall

At Dragon Hall, the Great Hall itself dates back to the medieval period, but you can clearly see where newer extensions have been added over time. This includes an Edwardian cottage and 21st-century extensions to the building.

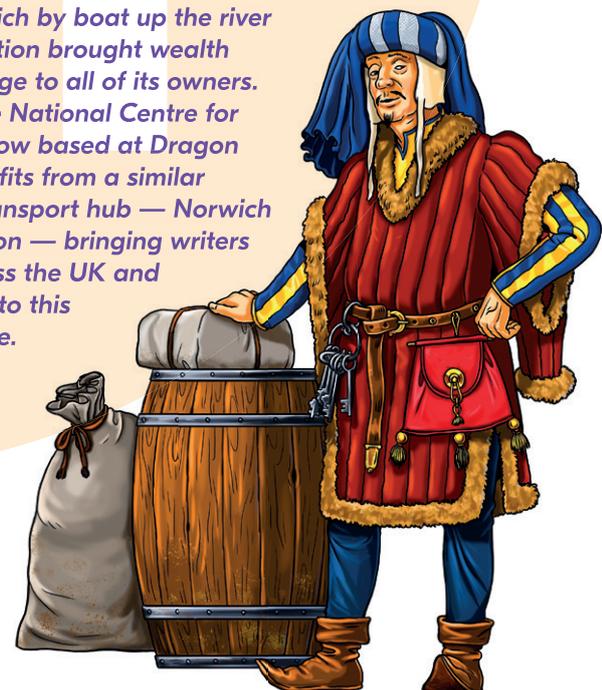
In situ

Take a moment to observe and write down what you can see around the site. Where is it located? Why might it have been built there? For example, if it's a mill, it might be located by a river to harness water power. A church or cathedral might be situated at a central point in the village or city, serving as a focal point for the community.

Dragon Hall is next to the river because its purpose was to sell goods brought into Norwich by boat up the river — its position brought wealth and prestige to all of its owners. Today, the National Centre for Writing, now based at Dragon Hall, benefits from a similar nearby transport hub — Norwich train station — bringing writers from across the UK and the world to this historic site.



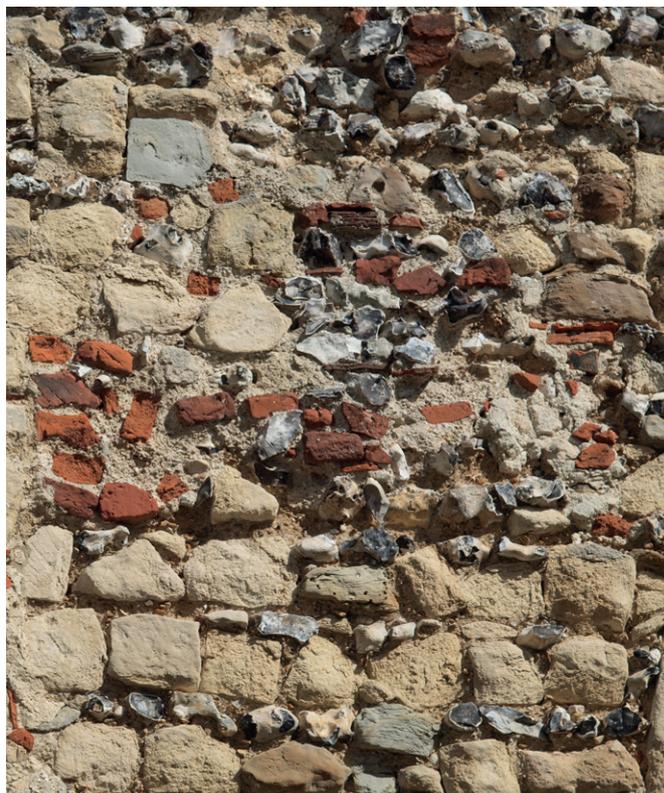
The Great Hall in 1450



Medieval merchants like this one traded at Dragon Hall



Roof beams in the Great Hall



Dragon Hall's walls are old and uneven

Exercise 2: Building description

Now that you've had a chance to closely observe the building, take a moment to think about how you would describe it. Write down five words (or phrases) that you might use to describe this place.

Old, new, falling-down, crumbling, modern, clean, dirty.

What do you see?

A spire? A tower? Crumbling plaster, bricks, stones, wood, glass, grass, trees, windows, river, pond, ruins, door.

How does it feel?

Rough, smooth, cold, warm, sharp, uneven.

What can you hear?

Birds, cars, cows, voices, shouting, trains, buses, wind.

Now write a sentence using some of these words. Try to use both adjectives (describing words) and nouns (names of things) to give a sense of the place. You might say:

*Birds screech over high spires.
Crumbling walls and wailing sirens.
Grass grows near the wooden door.
Buses pass on the busy street
near the crumbling ruins.*

Collect in the worksheets if you used them.

Exercise 3: Back at school

Let's create a class poem by combining everyone's lines! Pupils can write up to two lines each.

Does your class have budding artists who could carry on their drawings and perhaps provide some illustrations of some of the things they can see or hear to go with the poem?

This could create a nice wall display for the classroom.



Does your class have budding artists?

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Lower Key Stage 2

1. What do you see? Draw your location using simple shapes, like squares, triangles and circles.



2. Could parts of the building be old while others are new? How might you be able to tell?



On your drawing:

- *Shade in what you think are the oldest parts*
- *Label which parts you think are newer*

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Lower Key Stage 2

3. What can you see in the landscape around you? (Circle the words)

RIVER SEA HILLS GRASS TREES PATHS

PAVEMENT ROAD RAILWAY TREES VALLEY SKY

ROCK HOUSES PEOPLE

List anything else you can see here:

.....

4. How would you describe this building? (Circle the words)

OLD NEW WONKY MODERN CRUMBLING RED

GREY STONE GLASS SPIRE WOOD

Add any more words of your own:

.....

5. What can you hear? (Circle the words)

BIRDS CARS TRAINS WATER VOICES WIND ANIMALS

Add any more words of your own:

.....

.....

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Lower Key Stage 2

6. Write down five more words that describe different parts of the building and its surroundings.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

7. Write a sentence describing where you are to someone who has never seen it before.

You might write about what was here before and what stands here now, how it makes you feel, or simply how it looks, sounds, or smells.

Eg. Birds screech over high spires.

Grass grows near the wooden door.

Buses pass by the crumbling walls.

.....

.....

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Upper Key Stage 2

1. What do you see? Draw your location using simple shapes, like squares, triangles and circles.



2. Is the building all the same age, or are some parts older while others are newer?
How could you tell?

Hint: think about what building materials you can see and the condition of the building.

.....

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Upper Key Stage 2

On your drawing:

- Shade in what you think are the oldest parts of the building
- Draw and label which parts you think are newer

3. What can you see in the landscape around you?

Eg. A river, the sea, houses or other buildings, pavements and paths.

List what you see here:

.....

4. How would you describe the building? (Circle the words)

OLD NEW WONKY MODERN CRUMBLING RED
GREY STONE GLASS WOOD

Add any more words of your own:

.....

5. What can you hear? (Circle the words)

BIRDS CARS TRAINS WATER VOICES WIND ANIMALS

Add any more words of your own:

.....

.....

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) Upper Key Stage 2

6. Write down five phrases that describe different parts of the building and its surroundings. Try to use adjectives for each part.

Eg. crumbling brick walls, wonky wooden beams, hard stone walls

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

7. Write a sentence describing where you are to someone who has never seen it before.

You might write about what was here once and what is here now, or about how it makes you feel or simply about how it looks, sounds or smells.

Eg. Birds screech over high spires.
Grass grows near the wooden door.
Buses pass by the crumbling walls.

.....

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for Writing

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) SEN/EAL

1. What do you see? Draw your location using simple shapes, like squares, triangles and circles.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw their location using simple shapes like squares, triangles, and circles.

2. What is the building made from? (Circle the words)

WOOD

STONE

BRICK

GLASS

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) SEN/EAL

3. Is the building all the same age or have some parts been added and changed over time? Tick which answer you think is correct.

- The building looks like it was all built at the same time
- The building has had different parts added or parts have changed

On your drawing colour which parts of the building you think are the oldest. 

4. What can you see in the landscape around you? (Circle the words)

RIVER	SEA	HILLS	GRASS	TREES	PATHS
PAVEMENT	ROAD	RAILWAY	TREES	VALLEY	SKY
ROCK	HOUSES	PEOPLE			

Write anything else you can see here:

.....

5. What can you hear? (Circle the words)

BIRDS	CARS	TRAINS	WATER	VOICES	WIND	ANIMALS
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Can you hear anything else?

.....

6. How would you describe the building? (Circle the words)

OLD	NEW	WONKY	MODERN	CRUMBLING	RED
GREY	STONE	GLASS	SPIRE	WOOD	

Looking and Exploring (In Situ) SEN/EAL

7. Write down five more words that describe what you can see of the building and its surroundings.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

8. Write a sentence describing where you are to someone who has never seen it before.

E.g. I can see high stone walls

I can see:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



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Detail of exterior doorway at Dragon Hall

More resources for schools & educators

NCW works with many schools and hundreds of pupils each year to foster a love of books, words and ideas. For further resources and information on how to get involved, visit nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/schools.

Keep in touch

Sign up for our e-newsletter at nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk to be the first to hear about exciting new opportunities for writers, readers, and curious minds!

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DRAGON HALL

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