# Writing the Nation

## Introduction

Representation of places in the arts, including literature and film, is highly influential. Benedict Anderson has shown that people develop collective self-identity through how their regions and countries are portrayed in media. Additionally, people’s ideas of what other places are like are influenced by how those places are represented. Walter Scott is often accredited with creating, or at least deepening, a global understanding of Scotland that became entrenched over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The names of tourist attractions, such as the Loch Katrine steamships (‘The Lady of the Lake,’ ‘The Sir Walter Scott,’ and ‘Rob Roy’) testify to his continual importance in the global imagination (even if people do not know what underpins their expectations of Scotland). Walter Scott, however, did not present Scotland as a stereotype, monolith, or timeless utopia. Rather, he engaged with the relationship between land, people, and time in ways that are still relevant today.

It is important for young people to feel part of the country in which they live, but it is equally important for people to recognise that other countries have as varied and as interesting a history as their own. Through a comparison of extracts from Walter Scott’s *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and ‘On Camera’ from Ye Guangqin’s *Mountain Stories*, pupils will discover how the nations of Scotland and China are presented in high-quality literature. Pupils will be encouraged to:

* recognise how representations of nations and their histories affect the reader.
* discuss how different readers may interpret the same text differently.
* compare Scotland and China.
* think about the difference between national and regional identity.
* think about how humans exist within space and time.
* consider the differences between literature written at different times and places.

## Levels and Warnings

This lesson involves reading two pages of unfamiliar text (a page from a Chinese story which refers to historical events that may be unfamiliar to your pupils, and a page of early nineteenth century poetry). It is therefore advised to use this lesson with high-level and/or mature secondary school pupils.

The speaker in Walter Scott’s poem mentions the death of his son in battle. This may be distressing for pupils who are bereaved or who have been in or known people involved in war.

## Curriculum for Excellence

The resource targets the following curriculum for excellence targets.

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| LIT 3-02a | When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion. | The discussion task encourages pupils to share different points of view. The ‘Having discussions’ sheet provides pupils with helpful sentence starters. |
| ENG 3-12a | Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression. | Both texts in this lesson will likely be unfamiliar to pupils. One is from China and the other is from the nineteenth century. The questions help guide pupils through these texts so that they gain an understanding of them. |
| ENG 3-19a | I can:   * discuss and evaluate the structure, characterisation and/or setting using some supporting evidence * identify the main theme of the text and recognise the relevance this has to my own and others’ experiences * identify and comment on aspects of the writer’s style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence. | The questions on both texts prompt pupils to think about key aspects of them as literature. |
| SOC 3-02a | I can make links between my current and previous studies, and show my understanding of how people and events have contributed to the development of the Scottish nation. | The extract from Scott provides insight into different periods of Scottish history that can illuminate or be linked into pupil’s studies in social science and history. |
| SOC 3-04a | I can explain the similarities and differences between the lifestyles, values and attitudes of people in the past by comparing Scotland with a society in Europe or elsewhere. | There are two passages in this lesson: one set in Scotland in the eighteenth century and one in China in the twentieth. Pupils are able to compare temporal and geographical differences in values and attitudes. |
| SOC 3-13a | By comparing settlement and economic activity in two contrasting landscapes, I can reach conclusions about how landscapes influence human activity. I can explain my findings clearly to others. | The two passages in this lesson look at how people interact with their environment. This lesson can, therefore, can give an additional perspective to their studies on settlement and economic activity in landscapes. |

## Materials required

* If possible, ask the pupils to research China and Scotland before the lesson begins. They should bring in pictures.
* Large paper and pens (see starter below).
* Copies of two texts in either printed or digital formats.

## Plan

### Starter (20 minutes + prep):

Preparation:

Ask pupils to bring in images and information about China and Scotland. You may wish to ask half the class to research China and the other half to research Scotland.

You may also wish to extend the activity by asking the pupils to research countries of their choice. You will need at least one group to work on Scotland and one to work on China.

In class:

Pupils should create mood boards for China and Scotland. They should write key words about the countries and attach/glue any images. Only allow them a very short amount of time to complete the task – the idea is to get their first impressions of the countries instead of doing an in-depth study.

They should then compare their posters with at least one other group.

Keep the posters to return to later in the lesson.

### Reading Task 1

Pupils should read the extract from ‘On Camera.’ During this first reading, they should aim just to understand what happens in this story. We will return to it in more depth later. Advanced pupils can move onto the development and discussion questions.

### Discussion Task 1

This task can be used as the starter for the next lesson, if your lessons are in 50-minute blocks.

* In groups or as a full class, pupils should discuss how the story matched with their mood boards of China. Was the story what they expected from a story from China?
* How was the experience of creating the China mood board different from making the Scottish one? Did your own experience affect your board? Did you think more about local/regional issues or national ones?

### Reading Task 2

Tell the pupils that they will now read an extract, ‘Sweet Teviot,’ from Walter Scott’s poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* This was first published in 1805 but has two different time periods. An elderly minstrel (storyteller/singer) in the eighteenth century tells a story to the Duchess of Buccleuch. The poem keeps on coming back to his point of view. In the passage we shall read, he mentions the death of his son. The story he tells is the main narrative of the poem and is set during a sixteenth century border feud. In the poem, the speaker starts by comparing the flowing of the Teviot river to the flowing of time. The minstrel then talks about the death of his son in his past, and then moves into the action of the narrative (in the sixteenth century).

The pupils should read the poem and answer the comprehension questions. At this stage, they are just working out what the poem is about. We will return to the poem in more depth later.

### Comparison Task

To find the similarities between the two texts, pupils should complete the comparison activity. There are 8 statements. They should underline the statements that pertain to ‘On Camera,’ draw a squiggly line next to the statements that pertain to ‘Sweet Teviot’ from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel,* and circle the statements that pertain to both. They will find that even though the two texts are very different (different genres, time periods and countries), they have a lot in common.

### Three Time Periods

In the comparison task, pupils should have discovered that each passage has at least three different time periods. Now it is time to look at these. Allocate half the pupils to work on ‘On Camera’ and half to work on ‘Sweet Teviot’ from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* They should summarise each time period in one sentence, and then write down at least one sentence on how the earlier time period/s affect the later period/s.

You may wish to use the three time period sheets. Pupils can write or draw in the boxes.

The answers are:

#### ‘On Camera’

1. In the seventeenth century (1606-45), Li Zicheng used the village as his base, riding from there to the Imperial Palace.
2. Some time in the 1960s or 1970s, Upright Li, who is now a film director, was rusticated in the village (sent to live there). However, he only lasted a few months.
3. In the present (unspecified time), a film crew wants to film in the village. The narrator is talking to the village head about this.

Both earlier time periods establish the idea that the people are quarrelsome. This means that the narrator, in the present, has the difficult job of getting difficult people to work together.

#### ‘Sweet Teviot’ from The Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Please note that the time periods go from most recent to oldest as you read through the passage.

1. In the past, (mid 1500s, but no dates are given in the passage itself), the area is being attacked by raiders. The local people have fled from their homes and are sheltering in Branksome Tower. The watchman sees smoke in the distance and tells people to prepare to fight.
2. The minstrel’s son died in battle ‘by the side of the great Dundee.’ (Dundee refers to John Graham, First Viscount of Dundee, a Jacobite leader).
3. In the present, the minstrel is telling his story.

Without the raids, the minstrel would not have a story to tell. More advanced pupils may also notice that the minstrel is preoccupied with the grief caused by the collective history (the attack described in the earliest time period) and his personal history (the death of his son).

### Discussion

This is the point where the pupils should be encouraged to think about deeper issues relating to the texts.

The following questions can be given to the pupils in small groups or discussed as a class. Try to encourage them to share different opinions politely. You may wish to use the “ways to agree and disagree” sheet to help them in their discussion.

* How do the two passages relate to the mood boards you created earlier? What similarities and differences are there between your mood boards and the representation of China and Scotland in the passages?
* Do you think writing about regions (Qinling Mountains – the real-life location of ‘On Camera’ – and the Teviot River) help us understand more about a specific country?
* What problems might there be in trying to understand a country from a passage about just one place?
* What do you think of each passage?

### Research

Tell the pupils to pick a place that is near to either where they live now or where they have lived in the past.

* Find one thing about the place from its past.
* Write down one memory of the place from your own past.
* Write one sentence about the place now, which incorporates elements of its past.

See the example from ‘Sweet Teviot’ from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

### Creation

Pupils should turn their three moments into a description about the place, bringing in the three different time periods.

They can either tell or write their descriptions.