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Draft 4: Interpretation plan for Writers of Influence

Context

The purpose of the programme, *People, Places and Portraits*, is to broaden access to the National Portrait Gallery's collection through specific projects at local level. The project is funded through Strategic Commissioning, the DCMS/DCSF funded National/Regional Museum Education programme.

Introduction

This interpretation plan aims to draw together all thinking and ideas in order to inform interpretative planning, approach and resource development by all the partners. As a collaborative project, the purpose of this plan is to capture all partner ideas and aspirations and support the development of the exhibition. It offers a framework for possible areas of exploration in the exhibition. It identifies and offers a framework for possible approaches that could be taken and sets out target audiences, approaches and timeframe.

It is a working document to record all developments to ensure all partners are fully aware of project development. Please feed in all developments and ideas to Helen at the NPG who will update this document and ensure all partners are kept in the loop.

Key Target Audience

The target audience for *People, Places and Portraits* for 2009 -2011 has been identified and agreed by all partners as:

Young people (11-19) in formal and informal education

This project – exhibition, interpretation and programme of activity will look at ways to participate, involve and inform this shared priority audience. It aims to establish capacity and sustain relationships with this target group.

The project will also appeal to other audiences however the priority focus of our work will be to engage young people.

The Exhibition

Sandy Nairne, Director of the NPG suggested the Shakespeare portrait for consideration to tour to partner venues. Possible concept for an exhibition could be writers, poets and playwrights. This exhibition concept was initially proposed at the Strategic Commissioning meeting on 3 June 2009 at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens and agreed by all partners. Museums Sheffield is the lead partner for the development of this exhibition.

Possible Exhibition Titles

- **Influence: from writers to lyricists**
- **Words + Pictures**
- **Just Words**
- **Only Connect**

Audience Participation

Considering the target audience, all partners discussed ways of involving young people in the project at the partner meeting on 3 June. It was agreed all partners will consult with their youth forum/schools/young people working on projects to get a sense of writers and poets they like or have studied at school to help inform the long list of images. All partners agreed to also discover which authors, poets and playwrights are on local school syllabuses for 11-19 year olds.

All partners agreed having an initial input of young people's ideas at the long list stage was important to ensure it reflected/included relevant names. It was agreed that young people

should then select the short-list – being given a curatorial/interpretive role to choose and interpret a selection of images.

Possible Interpretive Themes

Writers influenced by each other

Salman Rushdie & James Joyce
Wilfred Owen & John Keats
Benjamin Zephaniah & Percy Bysshe Shelley
Monica Ali & Iris Murdoch
Zadie Smith & E M Forster & Jane Austin

Writers who cite Shakespeare as an influence

Julian Barnes, Dylan Thomas, Aldous Huxley, Malorie Blackman

Writers/Lyricists

John Lennon & Lewis Carroll
John Cale & Dylan Thomas

All partners agreed to explore the literary theme and the idea of using influences as a way to group portraits and connect to a range of audiences. Questions were raised over the problem of emphasising one influence over another, and assuming influences without fully explaining the pairings. e.g. How were the writers influenced and in what way? What is the writer known for in their own right? By bringing together influences and pairs, will gaps be created?

At the Strategic Commissioning partner meeting on 29 October the image selection was discussed. A number of issues were raised for consideration by Sheffield's Youth Forum when they next meet on 12 November. It was felt that having the youth forum consider these points would give them a richer experience and open up the complexities and considerations around exhibition image selection. Points to discuss include:

- Shakespeare is the only dramatist on the list. Is this fine? Do we need a contemporary dramatist as a counterpoint? GCSE English curriculum compares and contrasts Shakespeare with a contemporary dramatist. Do you consider Shakespeare to be a dramatist or a writer?
- There are no WWI poets included. As they're included on the curriculum so are we missing a trick?
- There are English, Irish and Welsh writers but no Scottish writers. Is that ok? Robert Louis Stephenson – Treasure Island/Kidnapped/Jekyll and Hyde or Robbie Burns?
- Does the selection include a regional representation of partner locations?
- The selection includes 11 women but all contemporary musicians are men.
- Does the selection reflect Britain's culturally diversity?

Interpretation in the exhibition should engage our priority audience – young people. Thinking of interpretation approaches, we should consider what the exhibition is trying to say. What are the key messages/new perspective the exhibition is considering? What narrative/approach makes it different from other exhibitions about literary figures? As well as influences what other interpretive routes could be considered? Ideas include

- Biographical informational of the writer
- Written word – extracts of writing, poetry, music...
- Literary styles – language, form, style, genre
- The Canon – exploration of their significance. Why are these writers considered significant? Why do we still read them today? What do they say about the world?
- Social context – the cultural, social, political context in which they lived eg. industrial revolution, role of women etc....
- Global context – why is English Literature/English theatre considered highly around the world? Our best export? ...historic – Empire, language etc...
- Reader response – relevance and resonance of books on the reader. Which books have had a significant influence on us? The curriculum stresses importance of reader

response.

What format could these approaches take?

From Comedians, we have a listening post that could be re-purposed to record young people reciting poems, extracts from books or reciting their own response to works.

A visual mind map in the Gallery space showing the connections could appeal to young people and would create a very visual looking exhibition. Reference was given to Simon Patterson's *The Great Bear* – a re-working of the Underground map making connections between people. What is interesting about this is that sometimes the connections are easy to spot, others are very oblique.

Following on from Paul Merton's introduction to Comedians, it was suggested a social historian could give a contextual introduction. This may help shape the exhibition as it may be difficult to contextualise many of the writers and form connections without having a good overview.

Interpretive Programming

Young people in Sunderland and Plymouth will be consulted for programming ideas. As this interpretation plan develops, partners to discuss collaborative, integrated programming ideas and provide the NPG with project plans of their interpretive programme.

Bibliography/Links to help inform interpretation research

World Shakespeare Festival

<http://www.london2012.com/get-involved/cultural-olympiad/projects/world-shakespeare-festival.php>

BBC Big Read – Top 100 books

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100.shtml>

TS Eliot – Nation's Favourite Poet

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/oct/08/ts-eliot-nations-favourite-poet>

Appendix 1 – Suggested writers by young people

1. Museums Sheffield

For the exhibition content and interpretation, Sheffield has recommended that they work with their Youth Forum. For the exhibition programme they will work with a wider group including partnership work with Young Writers and Young Ambassadors at the Crucible Theatre.

Books/writers that have been studied at school

Alice In Wonderland – Lewis Carroll

Flat Stanley – Jeff Brown

Lord of the Flies – William Golding

Educating Rita – Willy Russell

the Sherlock Holmes stories – Arthur Conan Doyle

Goodnight Mr Tom - Michelle Magorian

Skellig – David Almond

Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

Shakespeare

Dickens

Arthur Miller

Chaucer

Bronte

Jean Rhys

Seamus Heaney

William Golding
Simon Armitage
Carol Ann Duffy

Writers they would like to see in the exhibition

Patricia Cornwell
Nicci French
Lewis Carroll
Lemony Snicket
Conor Oberst
Leonard Cohen
Joni Mitchell
Brand New
Eminem
Steve Turner
Carol Ann Duffy
Simon Armitage
Gemma Malley
Val Rutt
Stephenie Meyer
Malorie Blackman
Sophie Mckenzie
Julia Green
Sarah Dessen
Jenny Valentine
Allen Ginsberg
T.S. Eliot
Dan Brown
John Boyle

Other authors they have particularly enjoyed

JK Rowling
Phillip Pullman
Linzi Glass
Francesca Simon

2. Sunderland

These suggestions are from a group of young people from Southmoor Community School, along with the views of some young people quizzed in the City Library and Arts Centre. Both groups have been working with Stephen Dodd, the Children's Librarian for Sunderland City Council.

Suggestions of younger to teenage writers:

Roald Dahl
JK Rowling
Anthony Horowitz
Eoin Colfer
Darren Shan
Kevin Brooks
Patrick Ness
Keith Grey
Frank Cottrell Boyce
David Almond
Stephanie Meyer (Twilight, can't get away from this at the moment)
Jacqueline Wilson
Philip Pullman
Andy Stanton
Malorie Blackman
Alan Gibbons
Chris Ryan

Terry Pratchett
Cathy Cassidy
Louise Rennison
Lewis Carroll
Marcus Sedgwick

Suggestions of adult authors picked by 17 year olds

Sophie Kinsella
Stephen King
James Herbert
Nora Roberts
Ann Rice
Hunter S Thompson

Younger Books:

As one of 10 judges for this year's Carnegie Greenaway Children's Book Award, Stephen Dodd has been working with a group of keen Y7 readers from Southmoor Secondary School and the school librarian Lynn Henderson. They have been involved in shadowing the award and reading the titles from this year's Carnegie Medal shortlist. The list of favourite authors was suggested by members of this group and other readers visiting the Southmoor School 'Reading Suite', a purpose built area within school to encourage reading for pleasure.

Older titles:

Stephen Dodd is currently in the process of establishing a Book Group for young adults at the City Library. The young people who have signed up to take part so far are Y11 pupils from St Anthony's Catholic Girls School. The authors they suggested are some of their favourite writers and the Book Group will be reading selected titles by these authors over the coming months. The Book Group is due to meet for the first time on the 22 July 09.

3. Plymouth

Plymouth consulted with their youth forum group – The Core - about possible writers, poets and musicians that could be included in the exhibition.

Musicians:

- Alex Turner from Arctic Monkeys – from Sheffield, quotes Shakespeare characters in one song – **not in collection**
- Jarvis Cocker – from Sheffield
- Morrissey
- Ian Curtis
- John Lennon
- David Bowie
- Thom Yorke – **not in collection**
- Dizzie Rascal – **not in collection**
- Roots Manuva
- John Lydon
- Fish from 'Marillion' – suggested by 'The Core'

Poets

- Dylan Thomas
- James Joyce
- Benjamin Zephaniah
- Ted Hughes & Sylvia Plath – there is a pen drawing by Plath of Hughes in the collection
- (W.S) Sydney Graham – based in St Ives area
- John Donne

Authors

- Virginia Woolf – St Ives link *To The Lighthouse*
- John Le Carre – Cornwall based
- Agatha Christie –lived in Devon

- JK Rowling
- Olaudah Equiano – Plymouth link / slavery link
- Madonna – wrote children’s books
- Rudyard Kipling – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Jane Austen – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Tolkien – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Beatrix Potter – suggested by ‘The Core’
- AA Milne – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Kenneth Grahame – suggested by ‘The Core’
- David Gemmell – suggested by ‘The Core’

Comedians

- Mighty Boosh – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Victoria Wood – suggested by ‘The Core’
- Alan Carr / Justin Leigh Collins – suggested by ‘The Core’

Update 3 November

Updated exhibition selection list

1. From National Portrait Gallery National Programmes for the exhibition *Literary Theme* (title TBC) at the Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield from 17 April to August 2010; Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery from 16 October 2010 to December/ January 2011 and Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens from January to March 2011 (dates TBC).

1	William Shakespeare	John Taylor	1a
315	Charles Dickens	Ary Scheffer	3
532	Geoffrey Chaucer	Unknown artist	1a
686	John Keats	Benjamin Robert Haydon	2
1235	Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley	Richard Rothwell	2
1405	George Eliot	François D’Albert Durade	3
1605	John Keats	Joseph Severn	2
1809	William Blake	James Deville	2
1863	Rudyard Kipling	Philip Burne-Jones	3
2929	Thomas Hardy	William Strang	3
3181	Jane Austen	Unknown Artist	2
3635	Beatrix Potter	Delmar Banner	4
3668	Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	Sir (John) Bernard Partridge	4
4222	John Milton	Unknown Artist	1b
4467	T.S. Eliot	Patrick Heron	4
5883	James Joyce	Renée Mendel	4
5933	Virginia Woolf	Vanessa Bell	4
6324	H.G. Wells	Feliks Topolski	4
6352	Sir Salman Rushdie	Bhupen Khakhar	5
6703	Seamus Heaney	Ta-Shan Schierenberg	5
6723	J.K. Rowling	Stuart Pearson	5
D275	Kenneth Grahame	Anthony Wysard	Archive

D7608	George Gordon Byron	William Finden	
D7811	George Gordon Byron	Nicholas Eustache Maurin	
D19942	Samuel Taylor Coleridge	William Say	
D25490	John Donne	William Marshall	
L213	Dylan Thomas	Augustus Edwin John	4
P237	Lewis Carroll	Unknown Artist	3
P359	Aldous Huxley	Man Ray	4
P583	John le Carré	Barry Ryan	5
P637	Angela Carter	Sally Soames	4
P726	Ted Hughes	Henri Cartier-Bresson	4
P843	J. R. R. Tolkien	Lord Snowdon	4
P865	George Orwell	Felix H. Man	4
P949(2)	Malorie Blackman	Maud Sulter	5
P949(3)	Michael Bond	Maud Sulter	5
P949(6)	Dame Jacqueline Wilson	Maud Sulter	5
P957	Douglas Adams	Brian Griffin	4
P958	Philip Pullman	Eamonn McGabe	5
X17368	A.A. Milne	Madame Yevonde	Photo Coll
X19837	C.S. Lewis	Arthur Strong	
X22468	Jean Rhys	Bill Brandt	
X26062	Johnny Rotten	Steve Pyke	
X29578	Dame Catherine Ann Cookson	Chris Hay	
X82203	Oscar Wilde	Elliott & Fry	
X88050	Morrissey	Eric Watson	
X88055	Ian Curtis	Kevin Cummins	
X88093	Simon Armitage	Roderick Field	
X88212	Sir William Gerald Golding	Mark Gerson	
X88746	Benjamin Zephaniah	Donald MacLellan	
X125022	Roald Dahl	Jan Baldwin	
X125140	Jarvis Cocker	Barry Marsden	
X125180	Ian Lancaster Fleming	Lewis Morley	
X125842	John Lennon	Harry Goodwin	
X126130	David Bowie	Terry O'Neill	
X126334	Roots Manuva (Rodney Smith)	Jennie Baptiste	
X126501	Dame Agatha Christie	John Gay	
X128164	Terry Pratchett	Harry Borden	

X128508 **Enid Blyton**

John Gay

X132388 **Carol Ann Duffy**

Sue Adler

Please note that the request is for **either** D7608 **or** D7811 (Byron) and **either** 686 **or** 1695 (Keats).

Appendix 2 – Youth Engagement Strategy

This strategy details ideas, approaches and outcomes around youth engagement in the project. Each partner will have a different experience and approach to working with and engaging young people. This strategy aims to outline what each partner will contribute to the project individually and how this will shape the overall direction of the project.

Objectives

- Establish a good working practice for the partnership around youth engagement work
- Co-ordinate and share engagement activity with each other
- Involve young people in our practice and make our thinking visible
- Ensure youth engagement gives young people the opportunity to influence and shape the project within set guidelines
- Ensure youth engagement is realistic and expectations are not raised unnecessarily
- Be clear and honest about what we hope to achieve
- Have processes in place if unable to deliver on expectations
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and what the outcomes are

Youth engagement

Each partner is in consultation with young people regarding the possible content of the exhibition. Suggestions of writers, poets and musicians by young people have been requested and are detailed above in Appendix 1. Sheffield and Plymouth have consulted with their Youth Forums and Sunderland has consulted with Southmoor Community School and young people in the City Library and Arts Centre. London will consult with their Youth Forum.

Museums Sheffield has suggested they will have a consultation day with their Youth Forum to explore possible exhibition themes, writers and works. From this a small group of young people will form a project team to help develop the content and interpretation of the exhibition in a more focussed way developing their involvement with the Museum and being introduced to various departments and being involved in the decision-making process. They will be exploring working with a different group of young people during the exhibition.

Levels of youth engagement will vary across the partnership. This strategy aims to reflect the different levels and experiences of youth-led practice across the partnership.

Levels of engagement

1. Information – keeping young people who are involved in the project informed about project developments
2. Consultation – engaging young people with aspects of the exhibition and getting them to make decisions within a structured framework
3. Decision Making – Young people selecting the images, curating the exhibition and writing the exhibition text.
4. Action – engaging young people in the production of the exhibition including space design, installation, build and hang. Engaging young people with marketing and press campaigns. Engaging young people with the development of programme activity.
5. Capture – ensuring all processes are captured digitally for the website.

Youth Consultation

As lead partner, Sheffield's youth engagement work will focus on confirming the image selection, curating and writing the exhibition interpretation. Sunderland, Plymouth and Southampton will focus on interpretation ideas and programming ideas.