

The National Portrait Gallery

Visit <https://www.npg.org.uk/visit/360-gallery-views/> and spend at least 30 minutes exploring.

Find a portrait in the exhibition that catches your eye, for any reason. Study your portrait and make some notes- be as vividly detailed as you can.

Now take over from the painter and make this character yours. Here are some exercises to help you: choose whichever one you like to help you get into your scene, or feel free to go straight into a draft if you feel inspired!

- Imagine your portrait as a still taken from a story you are going to write. Write the scene immediately *before* this moment. What has caused the character's expression? Where are they? How are they feeling?
- A good exercise to bring in **conflict**: choose a "prop" from the painting (something the portrait is holding or wearing.) This has great significance for your character. How did they acquire the object? Who did it originally belong to? What does it signify to them? Write the character's explanation to him/herself as to why this has taken on personal meaning. This can be logical or irrational. Then write a scene in which an acquaintance asks your character about the object, and your character *lies about it*. (Why? What's at stake?)
- A good exercise for understanding **point of view**: study the facial expression of your portrait. Is it resigned, frustrated, bored? Now, write a scene showing this picture being painted. Your character is in the exact position and pose you see in the painting, but they are feeling a *completely different* emotion to the one they have chosen to show to the artist. If they look happy, they are miserable. If they look bored, they are utterly beside themselves with excitement. What are they really feeling and why? Why are they concealing it? How can you show the reader both the true emotion and the false one in the most effective way?
- Find a facial feature on your portrait that could be a "defining" one. (A crooked nose, ruddy cheeks, crooked teeth, a mole?) Imagine how your character feels about it. Do they remember the first time someone commented on it? Is a family trait, does it make them look like someone? Has it given them a nickname, affectionate or cruel? Have their feelings about it changed over time? Write a scene from the character's life in which this facial feature is a part of the narrative.
- Write a scene set in the room you are in now, with your portrait covered in red velvet, about to be unveiled. Perhaps there is a party with champagne, or your character has snuck in after hours to take a look. Describe the unveiling of your portrait for the first time. What is your character's reaction?