



We Will Sing: Letters to the Future

Learning Resource



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UK City of Culture

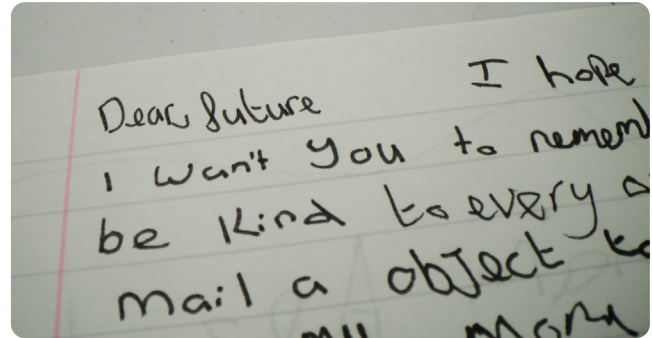


We Will Sing: Letters to the Future

What does the future need to know?
Write your Letter to the Future and be part of a new artwork by Ann Hamilton.

[We Will Sing](#) is a new artwork inspired by Salts Mill and Bradford's textile heritage. Created by artist Ann Hamilton for Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture, We Will Sing opens in May 2025 – and you can be a part of the work.

Hamilton is inviting us all to write a Letter to the Future, connecting our memories of the past and what we love about the present to tomorrow's world and the people who'll live in it. What do you think the future needs to know? What would you share with it, and what could you teach it? What stories would you tell the future – and what do you hope the future never forgets?



[Click here](#) to watch Hamilton's invitation and then scroll down for guidance and inspiration on writing and sending your Letter to the Future. A selection of the letters we receive will be featured in the We Will Sing newspaper (available exclusively in the installation at Salts Mill), read aloud during the installation and/or reproduced on the [Letters to the Future](#) website.

Below are some activity ideas that you could use to help link your letter writing into your group's wider learning, but you can write your letters in any way that works for your group!

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More information about the project, along with further letter writing prompts, are also enclosed.

Learning Prompt 1

We Will Sing - Art & Creative Writing

(KS3-KS4 / 11-16-year-olds)

You will need:

- The enclosed Invitation from artist Ann Hamilton/video linked above
 - Materials for creative responses, including:
 - Different types of paper (different colours, textures, sizes etc.)
 - Different materials for writing/mark making (pens, pencils, chalks etc.)
 - Anything else you'd like to add!
-

Activity

1. READ & REFLECT

Together or individually, read the enclosed Invitation from artist Ann Hamilton and/or watch the video. Think about the questions she asks – what resonates most with you?

2. DISCUSS

In pairs or in small groups, discuss which questions were most interesting to you. You might share:

- What the question made you think of?
- How you would answer the questions?
- How it feels to think about the future as something you can reach out to?
- Have you ever received a letter? If so, talk about that experience – who was it from? How did it feel?

3. CREATE

Respond to one or more of the questions using the materials provided.

You can respond in any way that works for you, but you might think about:

- What kind of paper you want to use? What size? Do you want to combine some different types of paper together? How does it relate to your ideas?
- How you want to make your mark on the paper and with what? What feels right to you?
- How do you want to present your response? You can use any form that you want.

Some suggestions include:

- i. Automatic Writing – put pen to paper and let the words flow without thinking
- ii. Poetry – Turn your ideas into a poem
- iii. Creative Writing – use your response to tell a story or describe a picture, feeling or experience
- iv. Colour & Artistic Flair – is there anything else about how you want to express yourself?

You might think about how you want your writing to look, for example:

- Do you want to use print or cursive?
- Emphasise certain words by making them bold, underlining them, or using different colours?
- Are all the words the same size?
- How does your letter sit on the page? It could be a list that just runs down one side of the paper, or written in a circle, or using cross writing

4. SHARE & DISCUSS

Look at all of the responses together as a group. What do you think the Future would think about your group if it could read your responses? What things do the letters have in common? What are the differences?

Learning Prompt 2

Letter Writing & Writing for Purpose (KS3-KS4 / 11–16-year-olds)

You will need:

- Different Types of Letters, which could include:
 - Love Letters
 - Letters of Complaint
 - Open Letters (i.e. in a Newspaper)
 - Letters with Instructions
 - Pen Pal Letters
-

Activity

1. DISCUSS

Begin the session by discussing what letters are. You might think about:

- What they might look like
- What they might be for/what kind of messages they convey
- How letters might be structured
- Why might you want to write a letter (rather than sending a text or digital message)?
(e.g. from www.results.org.uk : “MPs and their researchers have confirmed on numerous occasions that an original letter sent by one committed, passionate constituent is far more powerful than a pile of identical letters or postcards. Mass email actions and template letters have less impact because the MP knows that they only take a few seconds to complete and are not necessarily representative of the priorities of their constituents. The fact that you have taken the time to craft a personalised and well-informed letter demonstrates to the MP that there are people in their constituency that care deeply about an issue. In turn, your opinions are likely to be taken more seriously as a result.”)

2. DISCUSS

Look at a selection of different types of letters with different purposes (either together or in small groups). Discuss:

- What do the letters have in common?
- What are the differences?
- Look at the different word choices and structures. How do they contribute to our understanding of the letter?

Learning Prompt 2

(continued)

3. THINK

Imagine you can write a Letter to the Future. What would you like that letter to do? Some examples:

- To persuade the future that something that matters to you is important, and shouldn't be forgotten
- To inform the future about something that happened to you or someone you know that you think should be remembered
- To describe an object that is precious to you, using all five senses
- To instruct the future in a skill, game, or activity that you think should be passed on
- To tell a story that you want the future to know

4. WRITE

Write a letter to the future based on one of your ideas. You might also think about:

- Why it's important that you pass this on to the Future
- What you want the Future to know from your letter
- How you might choose your words, metaphors, or structures to help you achieve your intended purpose

5. REFLECT & DISCUSS

In pairs, read each other's letters. Can you identify what their purpose was? How does the language, style, and tone of the letter help convey their purpose?

6. EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Imagine a world in which Climate Change has left us with fewer resources, and we don't have access to the things that are most precious.

Discuss with a partner or in a small group the things that you miss the most – these could be objects, people, or experiences.

Write a new Letter to the Future based on your discussion, this time telling them about the things you would miss and why. Compare this letter to your previous one.

- Are they about the same things, or different ones?
- What do you notice about the style and tone of the two letters, and how might that change how you feel about the things being described?
- Which letter better conveys your emotions?

Learning Prompt 3

Letters & Storytelling

(KS1-KS4 / 5-16 year olds)

You will need:

- Examples of stories that use letters, e.g.:
 - *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley (KS3+)
 - *Dracula*, Bram Stoker (KS3+)
 - *Write to Me: Letters from Japanese American Children to the Librarian They Left Behind*, Cynthia Grady (KS2+)
 - *I Love You*, Michael Collins, Lauren Baratz-Logsted (KS2+)
 - *Dying to Meet You*, Kate Klise (KS2+)
 - *The Night Monster*, Sushree Mishra (EYFS/KS1)
 - *The Jolly Postman*, Janet and Allan Ahlberg (EYFS/KS1)
 - *Dear Greenpeace*, Simon James (EYFS/KS1)
 - *Paddington's Post*, Michael Bond (EYFS/KS1)
- The enclosed Letter to the Past from the Future

Activity

1. READ

Either as a class or in small groups, read some extracts from an epistolary story

2. DISCUSS

Think about how the letters function as narrative devices. You might consider:

- How do they move the story on?
- What do they tell us about what's happening?
- What do we learn about the characters writing the letters? Or who they're writing about?

3. THINK & SHARE

Think of a story you'd like to be remembered – this could be a story you were told by a family member, a story from your heritage, or something that really happened to you or someone you know. Tell it to a partner.

4. WRITE

Write a letter addressed to the future, telling your story. As well as the story you share, you might also include:

- Where the story comes from
- Why the story is important
- What you want the future to remember about the story

5. READ

Either as a class or in small groups, read the enclosed Letter to the Past from the Future.

6. WRITE

Write a letter in reply to the Future – you can respond to as many of the questions in the Future's letter as you wish, just focus on those that inspire you. Are there any questions you would like to ask the future?

7. READ, REFLECT & DISCUSS

Read your letters and the letter from the Future side by side – what story do they tell all together?

Learning Prompt 4

Letters & History

(KS3-KS4 / 11-16 year olds)

You will need:

- Examples of historical letters, either in facsimile or transcript, sources include:
 - *Written in History*, Simon Sebag Montefiore
 - Letters of Note: [Letters of Note – Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience](#)
 - The National Archives: [Education and Outreach - The National Archives](#)

The letters could be from any time period, depending on your area of study, but could include:

- [Wartime letters](#)
 - Letters from historical figures, e.g.:
 - [Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn](#)
 - [Emmeline Pankhurst to Women's Social and Political Union](#)
 - [Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera](#)
 - [Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)
 - [Ghandi to Hitler](#)
-

Activity

1. READ

Either as a class or in small groups, read one or more historical letters from your chosen time period or subject area.

2. DISCUSS

Think about the letters as historical artefacts. You might consider:

- What do they tell us about the historical figures who wrote the letters?
- Why was the letter written? What was the writer trying to achieve? Does that change how we think about what it tells us?
- What does the letter tell us about what was happening in this moment in time?
- What story does the letter tell? How does that fit into what you know about this person/ time period/subject?

3. THINK & SHARE

What events have you witnessed in your lifetime? These could be big moments in history (e.g. the COVID pandemic, SpaceX, Brexit, the King's Coronation, Black Lives Matter, Palestinian conflict) or smaller, more personal events that mean something to you (e.g. starting school, a birthday, time spent with family or friends). Share your ideas with a partner.

Learning Prompt 4

(continued)

4. WRITE

Write a letter to the future sharing your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about your memory. You might include:

- What happened
- Why it was important to you, and how you felt about it
- What you want the future to know about your experience

5. DISCUSS

Compare your letter to the historical letters you read at the beginning of the session. What do you think the Future would learn about your life today from what you have written?

6. DISCUSS

Read the enclosed Letter to the Past from the Future. How do you think the historical figure(s) in the letters you read from the past would respond?

7. WRITE

Write a letter in reply to the Future – you can respond to as many of the questions in the Future's letter as you wish, just focus on those that inspire you

8. EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Think about other types of historical artefacts. What objects are special to you? What would you send to the future if you could? Can you incorporate that into one of your letters?

Learning Prompt 5

Class Writing (EYFS, Groups & SEND)

You will need:

- Picture books with examples of letter writing, e.g.:
 - *The Night Monster*, Sushree Mishra
 - *The Jolly Postman*, Janet and Allan Ahlberg
 - *Dear Greenpeace*, Simon James
 - *Paddington's Post*, Michael Bond
 - The enclosed Letter to the Future Writing Frame
-

Activity

1. READ

Read your chosen book together as a group.

2. DISCUSS

Talk about the story together, thinking about:

- What are letters for?
- Who wrote the letters in the story?
- Who were the letters for?
- What did we learn from the letters?

3. THINK

Imagine you could write a Letter to the Future. What would you want to tell the future about?
You might think about:

- Something exciting that happened to you
- Your favourite things – a toy, a book, your favourite food
- Someone special to you – a friend or family member
- Your favourite thing to do – a game (and how to play it!), a recipe you like to cook, or something you're really good at

Learning Prompt 5

(continued)

4. WRITE

Using a board or a large sheet of paper, write a letter as a group. The learners can call out/share their ideas as the educator or group leader writes them up into a letter.

5. WRITE

Create a Writing Frame for a Letter to the Future for your learners and allow them to fill in the blanks. You can build a bespoke one in response to your learners' ideas in the discussion, their interests, or your current topics of interest. You could also use some of the prompts below:

Dear Future,

I would like you to remember some things about me.

My favourite thing to do is _____

When I'm happy, it feels like _____

If I could send you an object, it would be _____

My favourite thing to cook and eat is _____

A person who is special to me is _____

From _____

Writing and submitting your letter

We'd love to receive as many handwritten letters as possible, but you can also type your letter if you'd prefer. Please keep your letter anonymous, free from any personal details that might identify you or anyone else. And when you've written your letter, you can send it to us in one of three ways:

Online

Submit your letter online using the [form on our website](#)

By email

Email your letters to:
learn@bradford2025.co.uk

By post

Please send your letters to:
The Future
c/o Bradford 2025
1A Aldermanbury
Bradford BD1 1SD

In person (from 3 May 2025)

Drop off your letter in person when you visit the installation at Salts Mill.

Please note that by writing and submitting your Letter to the Future, you're agreeing to it being displayed and/or read aloud in We Will Sing, featured on [the project's website](#), reproduced in news media, and physically/digitally archived for the future. Letters that contain personal information and/or offensive language may be edited or not used. Read more in [our privacy policy](#).

Letters to the Future

An introduction from Ann Hamilton



A wish, a poem, a song, a memory, an essay, a story, a sense, a description, a history, a list, a book, offered to the future.

Digital technology has amplified the speed and distance of our reach, but a letter – words set to paper in pencil or ink, written in silence – is still a hand-carried thing. Folded, placed in a stamped envelope, the letter might travel across time zones to land some days or weeks later at your door: a material connection between you, the reader, and the writer. The weight and smell of the paper, and the image on the stamp, communicate as surely as whatever the letter might contain – news, congratulations or condolences, ideas or feelings.

History is full of correspondence that has crossed oceans and endured over decades of friendship. Bundled in string, stored in trunks, saved in attics – each letter is a form of touch, a looking-back and a looking-forward. Every letter stitches the near-at-hand to the faraway from a particular place in time.

What might you write in a letter addressed to the future, to a not-yet time and place? What does the future need to remember? What stories need repeating? What knowledge needs passing on? Perhaps these questions will help you write your own Letter to the Future.

Ann Hamilton

January 2025

CONSIDER...

- What does the future need to know?
- What skills will the future need?
- What do you love and want the future to keep hold of?
- If you think of the future as a coat, with what would you fill its pockets?
- And there's more: Ann Hamilton has written some prompts, questions and inspirations for your Letter to the Future. You can [read or download them at the We Will Sing website](#).

Thanks in advance for writing a Letter to the Future. See you at Salts Mill from May 2025 for [We Will Sing](#).

Letter to the Past from the Future

By Ann Hamilton



Dear Past,

I may be your next breath, your next birthday, a year or a millennium from the moment you are in reading this letter. We may be separated by just a sliver of hours or a whole ocean of decades but near or far, what I am is inherited from you, is an accretion of what previous times have passed along.

Like you, I am awash with information, areas of knowledge and fields of research expand algorithmically. We know more of the many intelligences - plant - animal - machine - that occupy and make our world. How am I to sift through all of this. How am I to know what thread to pull forward?

There are songs hummed, and stories heard or told, but not recorded. There are hopes held only in the heart of your thoughts. There are physical skills - like skipping rope and tying knots that I shouldn't forget. How deep do I plant a seed, how much do I water the soil needed for the healthy husbandry of land and animals. Can you describe in words what your hands know - you may be able to spin wool into yarn, weave yarn into cloth, cut and sew cloth to make the coat that now keeps you warm.

What can you tell me about the smell of the air, the taste of cold water, the feeling of being wrapped in a wooly blanket, the qualities of life that you love, the qualities we don't want to lose, the qualities we need to remember and carry forward. For time sediments things - you see it in the stone of the buildings that house you, in the collections of your libraries and archives, you see it even in the drawers of your own kitchen cabinets. Not everything survives. What do I, the future, need to know that you can share.

Perhaps your letter can be like a whistle formed by your lips to call across our distance? I will be forever grateful for your offerings - I will put them in my pocket, I will care for them, I will carry them forward into the possibility of a future.

Thank you,

A Future

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