

MEMBERSHIP

HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES



About this activity

Would you hang this painting on your wall?

- ▶ **Language level:** B1
- ▶ **Main tasks:** Teacher-led picture-telling; storybuilding
- ▶ **Topics:** Art; doppelgänger
- ▶ **Language focus:** Reflexive pronouns; *each other*

For this activity, you will need the following:

- **An art image** (see below)
- **The picture-telling text** on page 3



Note: For all materials and discussion, go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/how-they-met-themselves/>

The art image

How they met themselves is an 1860 painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It is a very dark composition that depicts the moment that a young Medieval couple comes across their doppelgänger in a dark forest. It is a terrifying encounter. The man who sees his double has drawn his sword in defence. His female companion has fainted with shock. In fiction and mythology, the doppelgänger is often portrayed as a ghostly or paranormal phenomenon and usually seen as a bringer of bad luck or death.

Activity outline

1. Write the title of the painting on the board and find out if it means anything to anyone:

How they met themselves

2. If no one knows what it is, tell students that it is the title of a painting from 1860. Tell students that they are going to see the painting. But before they do so, ask them to guess the following:


- How many people are in the picture?
- Where are they?
- What are they doing? What is happening in the picture?

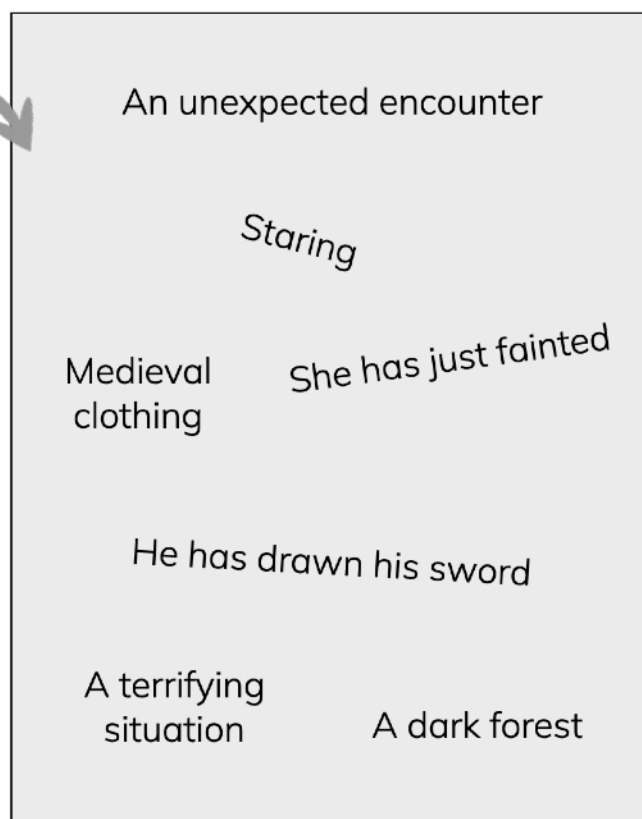
Notes:

- The title of the painting is quite unusual and abstract. It can be difficult to visualise a situation in which people are meeting themselves. It is possible that students will misinterpret the title as “How they met each other”. In this case, they might guess that there are two strangers talking to each other in a park, on a train, in a cafe, etc.
- Don't worry if students have little to say. The objective is to get them to think about the title rather than get them talking. Whatever they guess, accept all answers without offering corrections or feedback. That will come later.

3. Clean the board so that the title is no longer in view. Now draw a picture frame with phrases inside it like this one here

Tell students that before they see the painting, you are going to tell them about it. And when you do so, they will hear all of these phrases. Make sure that students are familiar with the language before you start.

- **An encounter:** an experience when you meet someone or something
- **To stare:** to look at something or someone for a while without looking away or blinking (You can demonstrate this.)
- **To faint:** to suddenly lose consciousness (You can gesture or pretend to do this.)
- **Medieval:** Relating to the Middle Ages
- **To draw your sword:** to take out your  (You can also draw *a conclusion, the short straw, the curtains, a picture and attention.*)
- **Terrifying:** Very scary



4. Now it's time for the picture-telling – see the picture-telling text below.

About picture-telling

For this, you should stand at the front of the class with the image in hand. The image can be displayed on a mobile device or you can make a print copy. It is important that your students cannot see the image but know that it is there. You then have to communicate the narrative of the image as a storyteller would.

The secret to picture-telling success is to prepare the text beforehand. During the picture-telling, you can cheat by placing the text or notes over the image (see example below). Your students need never know!

Picture-telling text

In a little while, I'm going to show you the painting
But first, I'm going to describe it to you
I'm looking at it right now

It's a very dark picture
The colours are dark and the mood is dark
It's a picture of an unexpected encounter
between two couples

How many people do you expect to see in the picture?

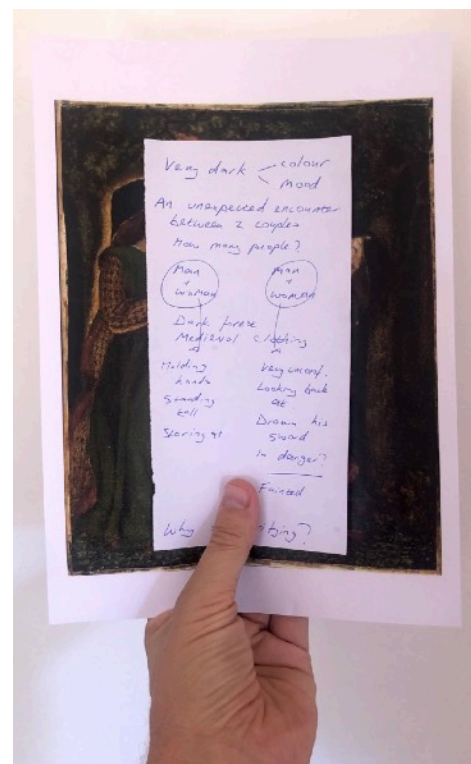
There are four people in the picture – two couples:
A man and a woman on the left
And a man and a woman on the right

They are in a dark forest
They are dressed in Medieval clothing
And something very strange is happening
Let me try to explain

The man and the woman on the left are holding hands
They are standing tall and they are staring at the man and woman on the right

The man on the right looks very uncomfortable about this situation
He is looking back at the other man
And he has drawn his sword
Perhaps he feels that he is in danger

As for the woman, she has just fainted
The question is: *What is so terrifying about this situation for the couple on the right?*



5. You may have to repeat the picture-telling a second time. Then ask students to guess what is so terrifying about this situation for the couple on the right. You can also invite students to ask you closed questions.

Some possible questions from students

Q: Is there a dragon or a witch in the painting?

A: No, there are no other people or animals.

Q: Are the man and woman on the left smiling?

A: No, but they do seem to be confident and comfortable.

Q: Is the woman dead?

A: Well it looks like she has just fainted, But I suppose it is possible that she has died.

Q: Has she fainted because she got a fright?

A: Yes – a terrifying fright.

6. If students are unable to guess the answer, you can give them a clue. Ask them to recall the title of the painting which is:

How they met themselves

7. Once students have worked out the answer or given up trying, show them the image and ask the following questions:

- Can you make sense of the picture? What is going on?
- What do you think of the painting? Would you hang it on your wall?
- Are there any details that you can comment on – for example, anything that you find particularly scary or freaky?

How they met themselves

By Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Painted in 1860 – 1864

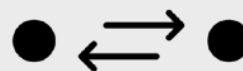
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Grammar point



themselves



each other

You can ask students to reflect on the answers they gave to step 2 of this lesson plan. You provided the title of the painting (*How they met themselves*) and asked students to guess what is happening in it.

Use this as an opportunity to clarify the difference in meaning between the following:

Reflexive pronouns: *myself, yourself, himself, herself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves*

- They looked at **themselves** in the mirror.
- A selfie: when you take a photograph of **yourself**.
- The most useless machine (see YouTube): when you turn it on, it turns **itself** off.

Each other

- A staring contest: a game in which two people stare into **each other's** eyes and attempt to keep eye contact for longer than their opponent. The game ends when one participant looks away or blinks.
- We have known **each other** since we were children.
- They were made for **each other**.



8. From here, you can give students a choice of task:

TASK ONE: The story in the painting

Ask students to write a short story which answers the following questions:

- Who are the couple in the painting?
- What were they doing in the forest so late at night?
- How did they come to meet themselves?
- What happened next and how does the story end?

TASK TWO: Doppelgängers poster

Ask students to investigate doppelgängers and create posters for the classroom wall. Encourage them to explore the following:

- What are doppelgängers?
- Examples of doppelgängers in fiction, mythology and folklore

TASK THREE: The artist and the sitter

The man in the painting is the artist himself – Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He was a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The woman is Elizabeth Siddal – perhaps the most significant of all the female models who posed for the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Ask students to explore the fascinating story of their relationship.