

Yeats pre-visit information

Below are a number of suggested activities for you to try with your classes before your visit to the exhibition. We request and strongly recommend that classes visiting the exhibition are at least familiar with Yeats' basic biography and have looked at some of his poems in class.

1) Talk about the National Library with the class. Have any of them visited before? What do they expect would be kept in a National Library? A brief history of the Library is attached and more detailed information is available on our website (www.nli.ie).

2) Look at some of Yeats' poems in class. Some suitable poems for primary level are:

The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

The Song of Wandering Aengus

The Wild Swans at Coole

An Irish Airman Forsees his Death

He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven

The Stolen Child

When You are Old

You can listen to Yeats reciting 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' on the Yeats exhibition website www.nli.ie/yeats.

3) Introduce the class to Yeats' basic biography and discuss with them what they think they will see in the exhibition. There is some information about Yeats below or perhaps the class would benefit from a 'virtual' visit! See our online exhibition at www.nli.ie/yeats.

A brief history of the National Library:

- The NLI is on Kildare St beside the Dail and the National Museum and was built between 1877 and 1890. It is a beautiful building and features stained glass windows and mosaic floors. The class may recognise some of the figures depicted in the stained glass.
- The NLI holds the biggest collection of Irish material in the world with over **eight million** items. People come from all over the world to look at the books and documents held here.
- The National Library is a reference library, not a 'lending' library. All the books are kept at the Library and at its stores so that anyone who comes to look at a book will be able to do so.
- As well as books, the Library also collects photographs, drawings, manuscripts and newspapers. The Library gets a copy of every newspaper printed in Ireland – even the 'freesheets' that are delivered to homes and given out at train stations!
- One of the biggest collections of manuscripts at the Library is the Yeats collection. This collection is made up of over 2,000 items which are stored in 100 archival boxes on 26 metres of shelving in the Library. (About the width of a football pitch.)

Basic biographical information about Yeats:

- WBY was born in Dublin in 1865 and grew up between Dublin, London and Sligo.
- Yeats' mother (Susan Pollexfen) was from Sligo and as a boy he spent many summer holidays there. One of his most famous poems is called 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' about an island in Lough Gill (Sligo).
- Yeats had many interests, including painting, the theatre, philosophy, learning about other cultures and religions, history and politics. He was also very interested in Irish folklore and mythology, particularly in the legend of Cuchulain.
- The great love of Yeats' early life was Maud Gonne. She was considered to be the most beautiful woman in Ireland at the time and was over six feet tall. Yeats fell in love with Maud and often asked her to marry him, but his love was not returned.
- Yeats was very interested in the theatre and set up the Abbey Theatre in Dublin with a number of friends. One of these friends was Lady Augusta Gregory, who lived at Coole Park, in Co. Galway.
- When he was 52 Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees. They had two children: Anne and Michael. They had a house in Dublin but spent their summer holidays in an old tower house in Galway, called Thoor Ballylee.
- In 1923 WBY won the Nobel prize for literature. You will see a facsimile of the gold medal he won on display in the exhibition.
- Yeats died in January 1939 in France. He is buried in Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo.

