

ANTARCTIC VIEWS

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& PONTING

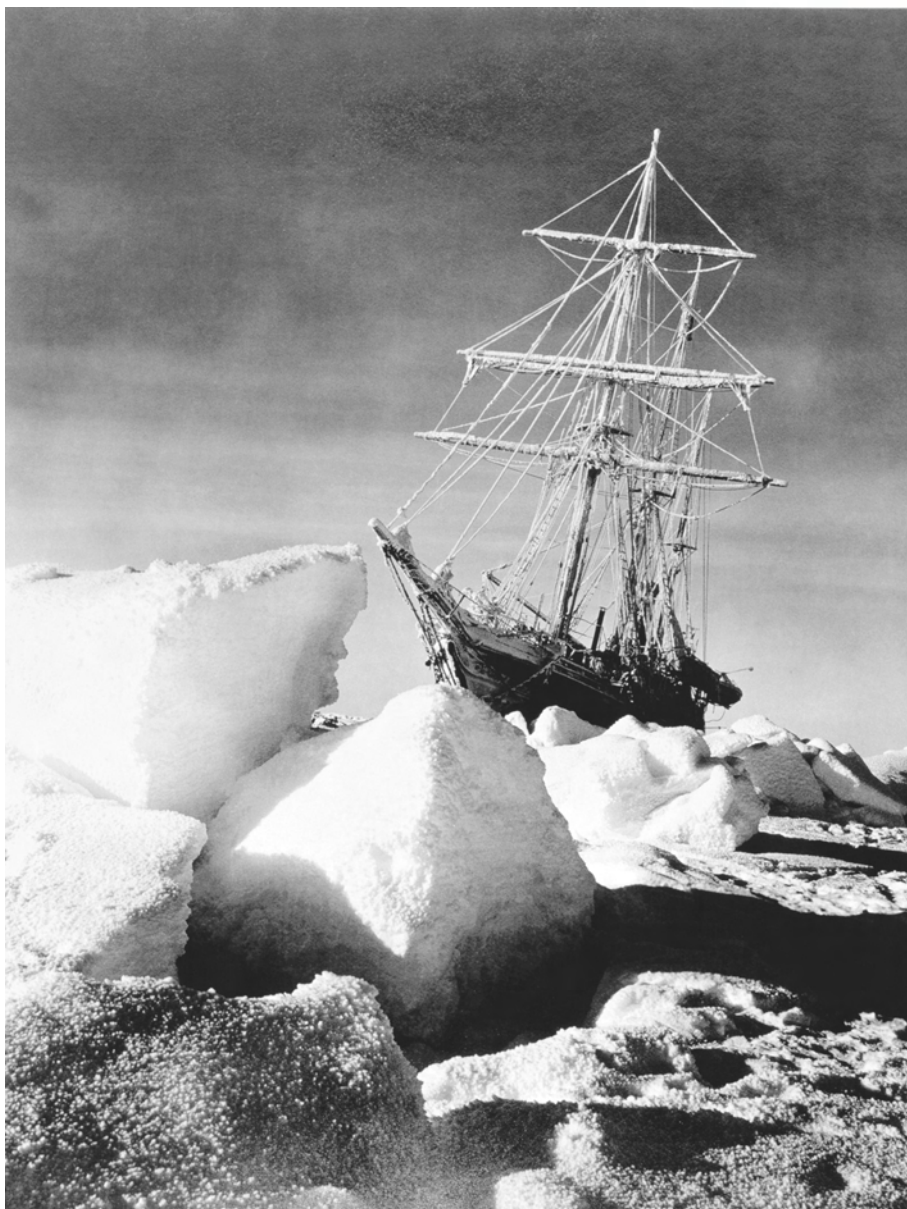


Image: Daylight returns Frank Hurley 1915 ANMM Collection

Teacher Resource Material
Physical Journeys –
the Antarctic experience

Introduction

It is mandatory that every student sitting for the NSW HSC study some form of English. 2 unit Standard and Advanced students together study what is known as the Area of Study. Under the current English syllabus, the area of study is Physical Journeys. Within this area of study students can focus on one of three angles –

- the physical journey
- the imaginative journey
- the inner journey

Texts

The Board prescribes the texts set for study in these focus areas and also produces a booklet made up of a variety of texts to which the students are to refer in their examination of the idea of journey.

As well as the texts set for study and the Board booklet of texts, students are expected to generate their own portfolio of texts, personal to them and their exploration of the journey area. These texts are known as supplementary texts.

What are supplementary texts?

A supplementary text can be any kind of body of work that, for the purposes of current students, explores some aspect of journeying.

Commonly chosen texts are:

- Novels
- Novellas
- Articles from the print media
- Poetry
- Song lyrics
- Plays
- TV shows
- Films
- Documentaries
- Computer games
- Web sites
- Paintings
- Sculptures
- Photography
- Pieces of music
- Museum exhibitions

Why choose a museum exhibit as a supplementary text?

Museums tell stories and attempt to get across ideas to their visitors and they largely rely on visual material to do this – objects, graphics, and hands-on displays.

Museums know that most people who visit are ‘browsers’. It is the visual material they are largely interested in. If a visitor can be drawn to a narrative by the way it is visually displayed, they might then take the time to examine the exhibit more closely and read the story label that goes with it.

Because of their low level reliance on literary material, museums make choosing supplementary texts a little easier for students who do not want to read copious literary documents.

When used as a supplementary text:

- the museum and / or its individual exhibits becomes “the composer”
- the visitor becomes “the responder”.

About this exhibition

The narrative behind this exhibition follows the usual framework – who did what, when, where, why and how. This framework is covered in the words of the exhibition’s major theme label.

It is the WAY in which the story is told that makes the difference. This is an exhibition of photographs taken by Frank Hurley and Herbert Ponting. These photographs tell the story of the physical journey to and in Antarctica undertaken by Scott and Shackleton.

The photographs are mesmerizing – the composer draws the responder into

- the harsh realities of the physical journey
- the privacy of the inner journey
- the authenticity of the imaginary journey

Using the photographs as supplementary text

Choose the photograph that most appeals to you.

You are the responder. The way you react to the photograph is your response to the way the composer (in this case, the photographer) has chosen to tell their story.

Ask yourself these questions:

What is the story or aspect of the story the image is attempting to tell? If the photograph has a title, this might help you.

How does the photograph achieve this?

- Look at the subject matter of the image: is it a landscape, a portrait, a group of people, animals, a still life?
- Placement of objects / composition of the photograph: to one side, centred? What was the photographer's focus? What draws the responder's eye?
- Is it a long shot / close up / middle shot? What is the effect of this for the responder?
- Are people in the photograph? Notice their clothing, hairstyles, the activities they are up to, the size of the space they are living and working in.
- What is happening in the photo? Was it staged or spontaneous?
- Look at colour: consider the effect of black and white. Does the lack of colour matter, considering the subject matter of many of the shots? Think about the surreal quality of black and white photography and how this might complement the notion of imaginative and inner journeying.
- Notice shadowing – what do the shadows highlight? What kind of response do you think the composer was expecting?

An example taken from the image of the *Endurance* wedged in the ice titled *Daylight returns*

Students need to remember that they cannot write a great deal about their pieces of supplementary material.

There is no time to be giving long, detailed descriptions of the narrative. The focus of student's writing must be

- the narrative (briefly)
- the various ways by which the composer tells the story
- the response to the story from the responder

Here is an example paragraph regarding the Frank Hurley photograph of the *Endurance* stuck in Antarctic ice. This ice would grip it so tightly that it would eventually sink.

Frank Hurley's photograph of the ship Endurance embedded in Antarctic pack ice is one of the most famous images to come from early European exploration of the Antarctic. It is a long shot, with the entire sailing ship filling the central frame of the photograph. The way in which the light settles on the ship's slight tilt gives the responder a more realistic idea of the great size of the ship and therefore the enormity of the problems that it is causing for all the expeditioners.

In this one image the extraordinary difficulties of the journey are told. The starkness of the black and white photography complements the colourlessness of the environment. The light almost has the effect of creating a ghost-like ship in appearance. There is eeriness and a quietness that comes from the composer's image. There is a stillness too. These features combine to draw the responder into the mesmeric nature of the scene.

Is it part of the real world or part of the imaginary world? This relates to the mesmeric hold the Antarctic had on its early 20th century adventurers. They wanted to explore but couldn't explain what it was that drew them. The story this photo tells is of a physical journey that has taken its explorers beyond the known boundaries of the real, known world. The isolation of the ship suggests the isolation of its travellers. The privacy of isolation gives the adventurers an opportunity to examine the inner journey that is part of the physical journey.

There are a number of other comments that could be made about this photograph. For example, there are no people in the shot and this would clearly have an impact on how the responder reacts to the image.

Summary

What needs to be remembered is that the museum as text is supplementary material. It will form only a small part of all that the student wants to be able to say about their study of the (physical or imaginative or inner) journey.