

E/.F  
Edinburgh  
Art  
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“a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time”  
– Patrick Geddes, pioneering environmentalist and city planner

## Learning Resource

# A Drama in Time – a visual poetry resource by poet and performer Courtney Stoddart



Graham Fagen: *A Drama in Time* (2016), credit: Ross Fraser McLean / StudioRoRo

## **A Drama in Time – a visual poetry resource by poet and performer Courtney Stoddart**

**Courtney Stoddart has created a series of creative writing activities to help you to explore the lesser discussed parts of renowned poet Robert Burns’ life and to use your understanding of Edinburgh and thoughts on your identity to imagine the future, by creating a visual poem.**

The activities have been inspired by Graham Fagen’s artwork *A Drama in Time*, and the quote the artwork takes its title from, by Edinburgh city planner Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) – “a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time”. The artwork and its title invite us to think of the people, sites and events which create the city’s sense of place: past, present, and future.

Through Activities 1-3 you will research and reflect, helping you to identify the visual elements important to your poem.

A brief glossary is included at the end to help you understand any words you might not know.

**If you would like your work featured on Edinburgh Art Festival’s blog or social media, please ask your teacher to email [learning@edinburghartfestival.com](mailto:learning@edinburghartfestival.com) or tag @EdArtFest on social media**

**Courtney Stoddart** is a Scottish-Caribbean poet and performer, born and raised in Edinburgh. Her work focuses on racism, imperialism and growing up in Scotland. She writes with the intention to challenge the dominant power structures of our times and intertwines social, political, and historical discussion into rhythm and rhyme.



Credit: Kat Gollock

Courtney Stoddart website: [amapoetica.wordpress.com](http://amapoetica.wordpress.com)

Instagram: @amapoetica

Facebook: Courtney Stoddart Poetry

## Activity 1 – Graham Fagen's *A Drama in Time* (video interview) 10mins

Watch artist Graham Fagen's video interview about his artwork *A Drama in Time*. Write down the important themes of this art work.

Link to Graham Fagen video, 5mins and 24secs:  
[vimeo.com/667343891](https://vimeo.com/667343891)



Stills from *Graham Fagen's 'A Drama in Time'* – Edinburgh Art Festival interview.  
Videographer: Rachel McBrinn

## **Activity 2 – Influential people in Scotland's history**

### **10mins**

Using the images provided on page 5 create a mind-map responding to the following questions and prompts.

- 1. Who was Robert Burns (1759-1796)? What is he famous for?**
- 2. Who was Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) and what links did he have to Edinburgh?**

Using the internet, find out as much as you can about who these two men were, what they stood for, and any controversy surrounding them. Think about advantages and disadvantages they experienced based on their identity, background, status and the culture and laws of the time.

It is interesting to think of how they were both writers who have greatly influenced the world with their thinking yet have very different pasts.

Compare and contrast, but also find overlap between them.

Both these men lived during the Transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. How were they connected and affected by it?

Scotland has a complex history. Research has unearthed the ways in which chattel slavery and Scotland's involvement in the British empire and colonialism have shaped modern Scotland, leaving legacies which still affect society today. Knowing more about these legacies, expands our knowledge about Scotland's relationship to the rest of the world, and can help us to envision a fairer future Scotland.



## Activity 2



**Left:** *Poet 1787* by Alexander Nasmyth (portrait of Robert Burns, 1759-1796)

**Right:** *Frederick Douglass* by Samuel J. Miller, The Art Institute of Chicago Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowment

### Activity 3 – Poetry steps – warm-up exercise

20mins

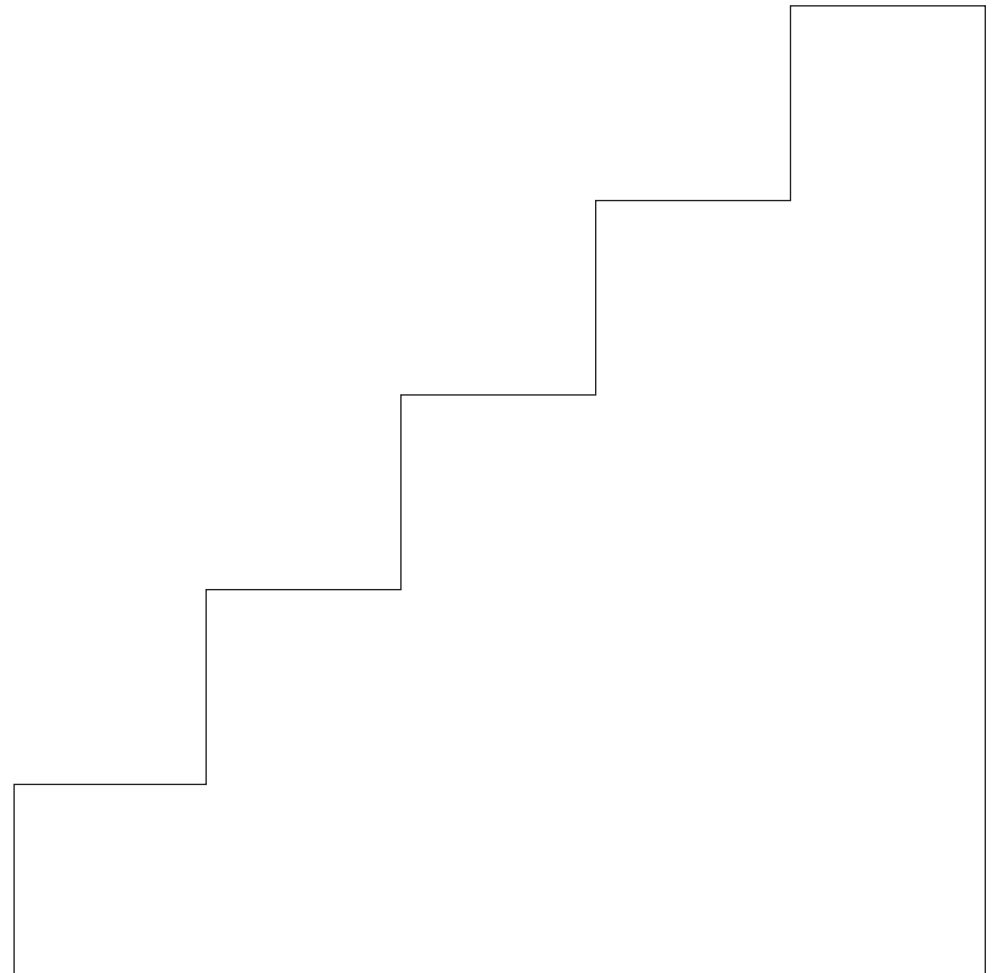
Graham Fagen’s artwork ‘A Drama in Time’ is located at the foot of Jacob’s Ladder, a steep pedestrian pathway and steps, carved into the volcanic rock of Calton Hill. There are a number of steep pathways known as ‘Jacob’s Ladder’ in countries throughout the world, including in Australia, New Zealand, England and the island of St Helena. The name relates to a passage in the Bible in which Jacob dreams of a steep ladder extending between earth and heaven.

Imagine yourself climbing from Earth to your own personal idea of ‘heaven’. What would be different? What would you transform? How would you make the world a safer, fairer place?

Write down your ideas. Then consider these poetry writing tips, identifying interesting, key words which relate to your ideas, and that you might want to use in your final poem. On each of the five steps write down a key word that you might want to use in your final poem.

#### Tips for writing a poem:

1. Poetry does not have to be complicated. It is simply a way to express how you feel.
2. Think about techniques e.g. rhyme, alliteration, repetition, rhythm, onomatopoeia. Your poem could include all these techniques, or none of them at all – it would still be considered a poem.
3. Poets have long been associated with rebellion and calling out the status-quo, don’t be afraid to be controversial.
4. Break the mould! Don’t do what everyone else is doing, be yourself and let the words flow.
5. The most successful poets always have something unique about them and their style, think about what makes you unique.



## Activity 4 – Create a visual poem

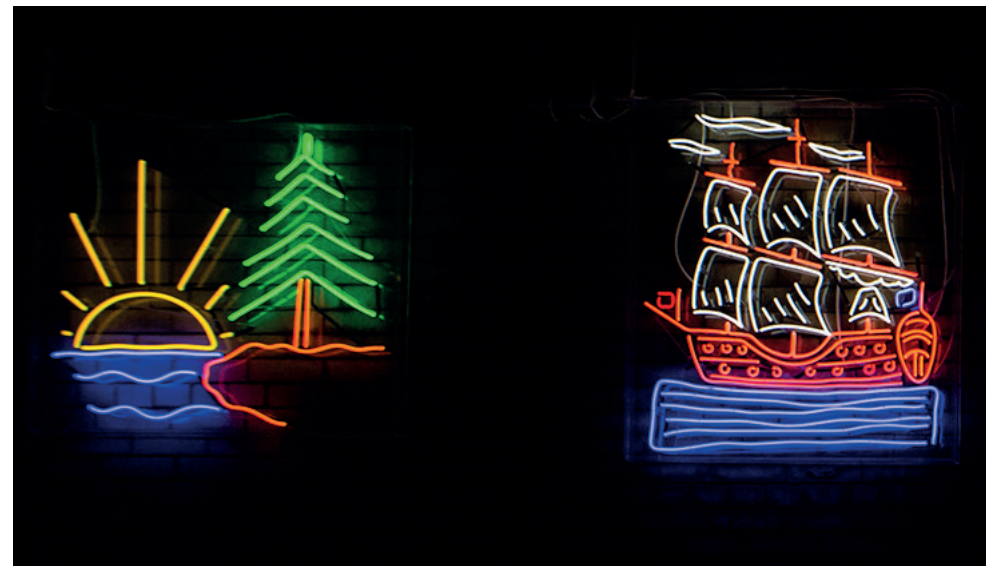
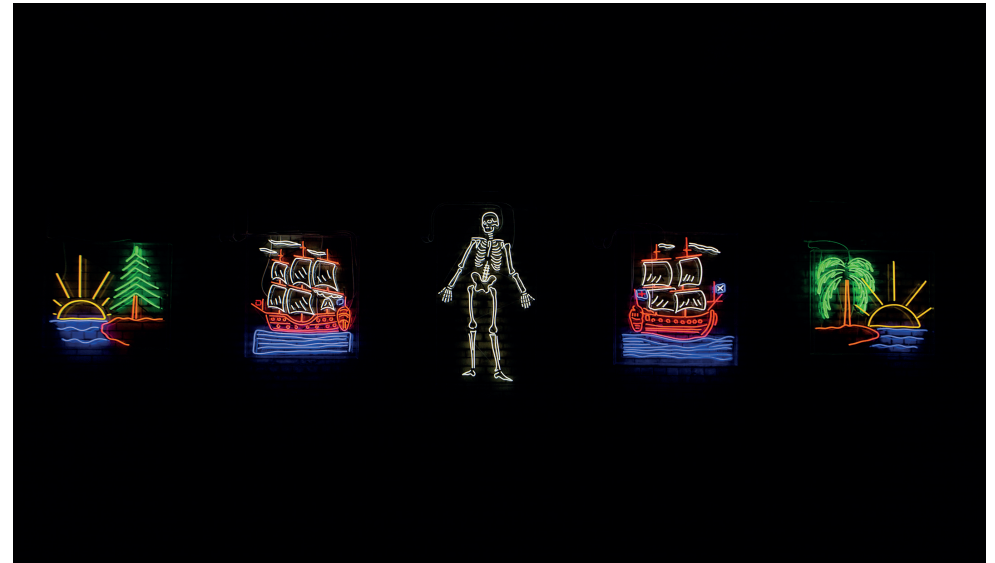
### 30-40mins

In this activity you will formulate a poem about Edinburgh or Scotland, focussing on the important visual aspects of your poem. Consider the past, present and looking to the future, and incorporate aspects of your identity as a person living in Edinburgh. What visually can represent these ideas?

Using the 5 boxes provided on pages 8 and 9, create simple line drawings similar to Graham Fagen's artwork. Your boxes, which will help you visualise the important elements of your poem, must include at least one of each of the following:

- An aspect of history that you are critical of and one you appreciate.
- One thing about Edinburgh today that you enjoy and something you feel could be improved. This could be something very simple, or something wider about the political climate – whatever you choose, make it something unique and important to you. What does a fairer Scotland look like to you?
- Personalise the poem – include something you think of when you think of Edinburgh, what does it remind you of, smells, tastes, textures, e.g. the colour of the sky?
- Incorporate the use of colloquialisms (for example, 'dinnae', 'aye', 'bampot' etc.), slang and dialect specific to Edinburgh and/or your background or culture as a person living in Edinburgh.
- Incorporate an important word or phrase in some or each of the boxes.

On the next page you can use the boxes to draw images which evoke your visual ideas. Then on the lines beneath you can write your poem, using your drawings as inspiration.



Graham Fagen: *A Drama in Time* (2016), credit: Ross Fraser McLean / StudioRoRo

**Activity 4**



## Activity 4

[illegible][illegible]

## How to artistically develop your work further

- **Option 1:** Use colour chalk on black paper or white paper painted with black poster or acrylic paint. Paper size A3 ideally, cut to desired size/format (for example square).
- **Option 2:** Cut card or cardboard (cardboard creates a more textured quality) to desired size/format, paint the card/cardboard with black poster or acrylic paint, and use colour liquid chalk pens or fluorescent poster paint to create a more 'neon' quality.

## Glossary

### British Empire

The British Empire at its height was the largest empire in history, officially lasting from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century. Its territories once covered approximately a quarter of the land on earth, including Afghanistan, Africa, America, Canada, Egypt, India, Iraq, Jamaica, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palestine to name but a few.

### Chattel slavery

Chattel slavery means that one person has total ownership of another. A 'chattel slave' was legally considered to be the property of the slave owner, as were the children of the enslaved.

### Colloquialism

Colloquialism is a word or phrase that is not formal or literary and is used in ordinary or familiar conversation.

### Colonialism

Colonialism is when a country takes control over another region or country, its people and resources.

Over 60 territories gained independence from the United Kingdom between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.

Today there are 14 overseas territories, known as the British Overseas Territories, which form the remnants of the British Empire. However, the legacy of empire extends beyond these 14 locations. Aspects of the British language, culture and legal system can still be found across the world today. Racism, discrimination and other negative consequences can be attributed to the impacts of the British Empire worldwide.

### Dialect

Dialect is a form of a language that people speak in a particular part of a country, containing some different words and grammar.

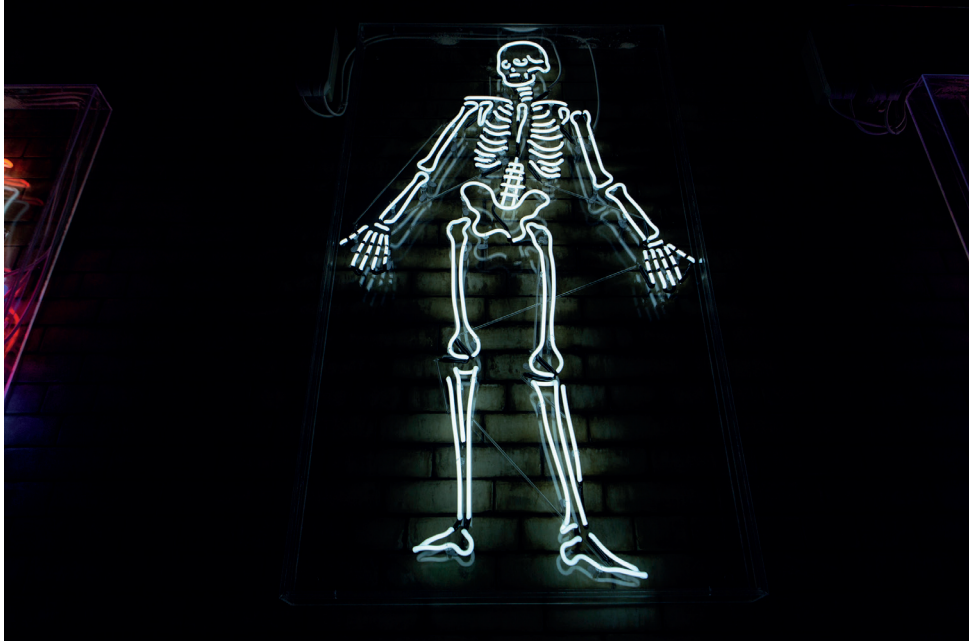
### Imperialism

Imperialism is a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonisation, use of military force, or other means.

### Transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans

The transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans was a hugely profitable British business involving three stages, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

1. Ships carrying slavers and manufactured goods, such as guns and cloth, sailed from Britain to West Africa.
2. The slavers sold their goods in exchange for men, women and children who had been forcibly taken from their villages. These people were transported across the Atlantic, in atrocious conditions, with many dying onboard. They were taken to various locations in the Americas, many to the Caribbean and Brazil, where they were forced to work on sugar and cotton plantations, as well as in other enslaved roles. Numbers are unconfirmed but approximately 12-15 million Africans were enslaved and a similar number died during capture or transportation.
3. The third stage was the transportation of goods produced by the enslaved, such as sugar and cotton, back to Britain.



Graham Fagen: *A Drama in Time* (2016), detail,  
credit: Ross Fraser McLean / StudioRoRo

**Edinburgh Art Festival**, founded in 2004, is the platform for the visual arts at the heart of Edinburgh's August festivals, bringing together the capital's leading galleries, museums, production facilities and artist-run spaces in a city-wide celebration of the very best in visual art. The festival features leading international and UK artists alongside the best emerging talent, major survey exhibitions of historic figures, and a special programme of newly commissioned artworks that respond to public and historic sites in the city. The vast majority of the festival is free to attend.

**Edinburgh Art Festival Community Engagement** runs a year-round programme of learning and engagement activities building long-term relationships with partner organisations, community groups and schools. Through our bespoke tours, workshops and projects we introduce and inspire people to get creative, removing barriers and broadening access to visual art and our festival programme.

**[edinburghartfestival.com](http://edinburghartfestival.com)**

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