

## USING THE PICTURE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM TAKE ONE PICTURE

The National Gallery promotes the use of a single image as a rich and accessible springboard for cross-curricular learning in primary schools through the Take One Picture scheme. Further information on the scheme can be found at [www.takeonepicture.org.uk](http://www.takeonepicture.org.uk).

### RESOURCES

A digital image of the painting and a zoom facility is available at [www.takeonepicture.org.uk](http://www.takeonepicture.org.uk). A printed reproduction of the painting and a Take One Picture DVD can be purchased from National Gallery shops, by mail order at [mailorder@nationalgallery.co.uk](mailto:mailorder@nationalgallery.co.uk) or by telephone on 020 7747 5958. Details of Continuing Professional Development courses, and availability, can be found at [www.takeonepicture.org/cpd/schedule.html](http://www.takeonepicture.org/cpd/schedule.html) or by telephoning 020 7747 2844.

### STARTING POINTS

#### Strategies to support looking

- Describe the painting to someone who cannot see it.
- Draw the painting without taking the pencil off the paper/looking at the paper.
- Jump into the painting. What can you see around you/behind you? What can you see/hear/smell/touch?

#### Open questions to initiate dialogue, develop imagination and facilitate higher-order thinking

- Strike the pose of someone in the painting. Tell me something about that character. How do you know? What else?
- Divide the figures in the painting into groups. How are they similar/different? Who stands out? What might this tell us?
- What new questions do you have about the painting? The class/group choose a question they want to answer. Pupils explore a variety of responses to the chosen question.
- What word or object would you choose to sum up this painting? Explain your choice. Can anyone add to that idea?
- Does this scene remind you of anything? Situations/feelings/stories.

### LINES OF ENQUIRY

Lines of enquiry begin with themes in the painting and extend to make meaningful connections with broad learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Projects that enrich learning will emerge as you explore the different contexts and possibilities that the painting creates for you and your pupils. A potentially fragmented curriculum is thus transformed into learning with depth, coherence and ownership.

### SOME EXAMPLES

#### *Tracing our origins*

How the ancient empires of Persia and Greece influenced language, mathematics, science, astronomy, citizenship, democracy, sport, warfare, law, theatre, religion, philosophy, art and fashion. Modern fusions and shared origins. The expression of cultural diversity around the world – past and present.

#### *Societies, leaders, heroes and heroines*

Venetian society recognised the need to protect the state from invaders. They would have also held onto the Classical idea of the powerful hero who is both noble and fair. What do you

think makes a good society and leader? Democracy or domination? Values and priorities. Peacemakers, conquerors, lifesavers and freedom fighters. Research, compare, contrast and create your own.

#### *Symbols of power and feeling*

Demonstrating hierarchy and emotions through clothing, jewellery, materials, stature, architecture, colour and composition.

#### *Narrative themes*

Exploring mistaken identities, reversal of status and mercy towards the vulnerable in other situations and stories. Condensing a narrative to a single image or scene.

#### *Colour, texture and location*

Venetian art was dominated by bright pigments, luxurious textiles, the effects of the water and the changing light of Venice's lagoon. How is a style influenced by access to materials and a geographical location?

### WEB LINKS

Use the National Gallery website to research related themes in paintings: e.g. leaders, battles, Venice and symbols. [www.nationalgallery.org.uk](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk)

Macedonian and Persian empires  
[www.historyofmacedonia.org/](http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/)  
<http://persianempire.info>

Alexander the Great  
[www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/alexander\\_the\\_great.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/alexander_the_great.shtml)  
[www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/gr/m/portrait\\_alexander\\_the\\_great.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/m/portrait_alexander_the_great.aspx)

Aristotle and philosophy  
<http://homepage.mac.com/mseffie/handouts/mean.html>  
[www.philosophy4children.co.uk](http://www.philosophy4children.co.uk)

History of language  
[www.ielanguages.com](http://www.ielanguages.com)

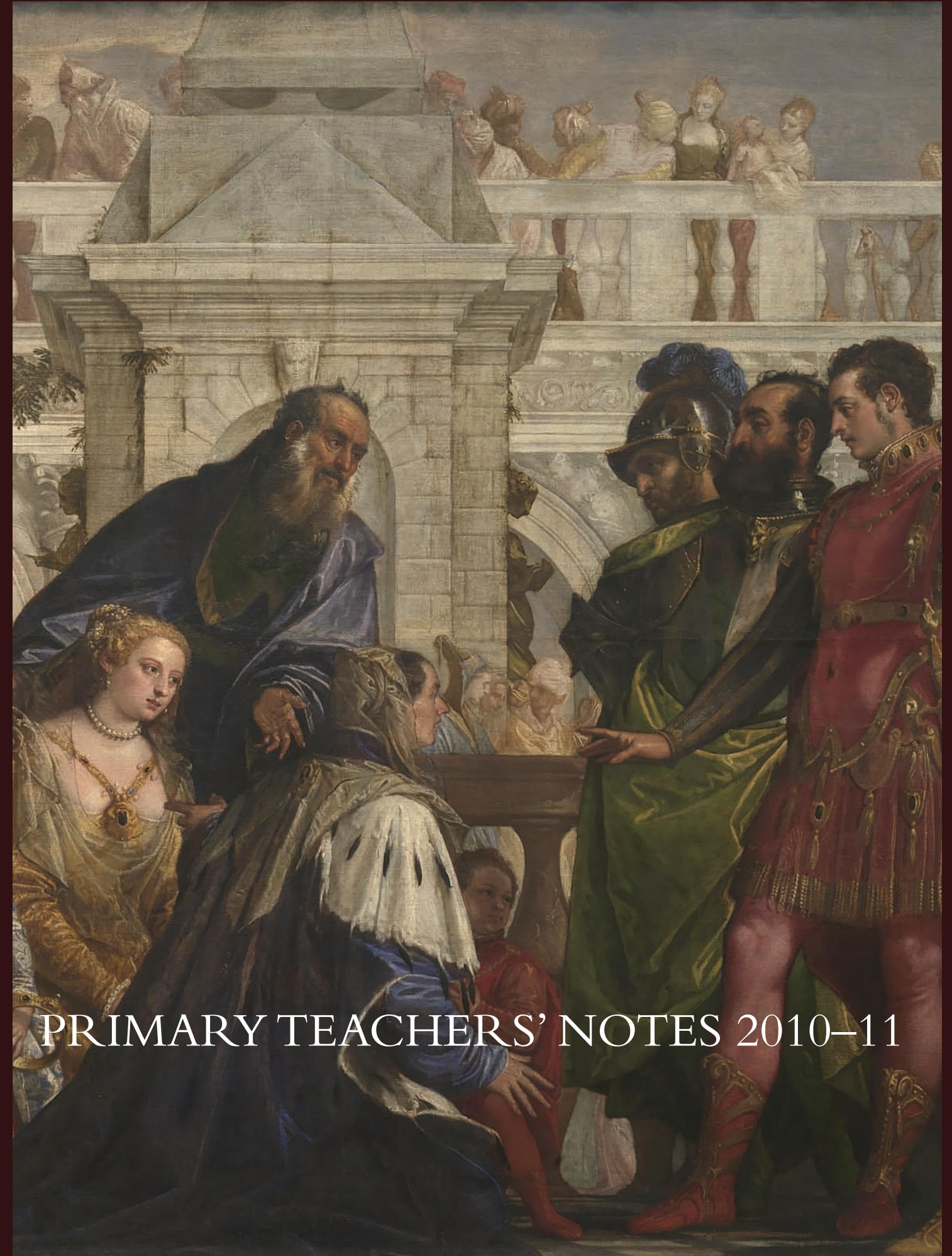
Ancient maps and battles  
[www.earth-history.com](http://www.earth-history.com)

Textiles and jewellery  
[www.vam.ac.uk/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/index.html)

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PRIMARY TEACHERS' NOTES 2010–11

THE  
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# THE FAMILY OF DARIUS BEFORE ALEXANDER, 1565–7

BY PAOLO VERONESE  
OIL ON CANVAS, 236.2 X 474.9 CM



© The National Gallery, London

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Veronese was born in Verona in 1528 but moved to Venice in the early 1550s, where he became one of the leading painters of the 16th century. His real name was Paolo Caliari, but he often signed his name 'Paolo Veronese', affirming his origin.

He was trained in Verona by the local painter Antonio Badile, whose daughter, Elena, he married in 1566. In Venice, Veronese was influenced by the colouring of Titian (Tiziano), and also by Jacopo Tintoretto. However, Veronese went on to develop his own more decorative style. His works included allegories and history paintings for civic buildings, altarpieces for churches, large-scale religious paintings and secular works for private villas.

Veronese ran a large family workshop, assisted by his brother Benedetto and his sons Carlo and Gabriel. They carried on his studio after his death, using their father's drawings.

## SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Venice, along with Florence and Rome, became one of the most important centres of art in Europe, and numerous wealthy Venetians became patrons of the arts. Venice at the time was a rich and prosperous maritime republic, which controlled a vast sea and trade empire. Due to its geographical position, Venice had access to the best pigments, silks and spices arriving from the East by boat.

Venetian painting in the 16th century was dominated by Titian and by the family workshops of Veronese, Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano. Veronese was renowned for his harmonious and decorative colour and brilliant illusionistic

effects. His paintings won Titian's praise and he attracted many commissions from the Venetian state, including paintings for the Doge's Palace. The doge was the elected head of the Venetian state.

This huge painting was probably made for Francesco Pisani, who owned the Villa Pisani, outside Venice, which he had commissioned from the architect Andrea Palladio. Some art historians believe that *The Family of Darius* contains portraits of the Pisani family, Veronese's patrons. It may be that the family identified with the theme of magnanimity and chivalry demonstrated by Alexander's mercy towards Darius's defeated family, and wished to set an example for future generations. The painting may have been commissioned to celebrate a family wedding, for which the theme of love would have been appropriate. Others believe that Veronese has not painted particular people but has used a general 'type' of person, who can be found in his other paintings.

## ABOUT THE PAINTING

### WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

Rich colours have been used in the foreground of this large-scale painting. Several groups of figures and animals are painted in detail. On the right, a group of men stand with weapons, dogs and horses. Facing them, and in the centre of the picture, four richly dressed women and girls kneel. A man in blue in the centre of the painting appears to be presenting them in some way to the men in armour. On the left are several other figures, including a dwarf and a monkey. The scene is set outside, in what is perhaps the courtyard of a grand palace or large house. It is likely that Veronese intended

the painting to be hung above head-height, as the vanishing point of the architecture within the picture is just below the lower edge. From a balcony in the background, spectators look down onto the scene being played out in front of us.

### MISTAKEN IDENTITY

The story comes from Classical legend. Art historians continue to debate which ancient text Veronese referred to in his telling of the story – possibilities include Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, the Historical Library of Diodorus Siculus and the *History of Alexander the Great* by Quintus Curtius Rufus. Veronese has chosen to paint a particular moment in time – just after Alexander's victory over Darius III, King of Persia, at the Battle of Issus in 330 BC.

Following Darius's exile, here we see his family asking for mercy from Alexander and his invading army from the west. The captured queen mother, accompanied by Darius's wife, the queen (Stateira), and two princesses kneel at Alexander's feet. In the fluster of the moment of encounter, Sisygambis, Darius's mother, mistakenly addresses their appeal for mercy to Alexander's closest friend, Hephæstion, perhaps misled by his height and splendid attire. Hephæstion recoils, and an attendant corrects her, but Alexander magnanimously forgives her, graciously explaining that the error is understandable, for 'Hephæstion is another Alexander'.

But which man in the painting is Alexander? Is he the figure in imperial crimson depicted simultaneously calming the agitated queen mother and pointing to his esteemed friend Hephæstion, who is literally taken aback? Or is Alexander the man in orange, so that it is Hephæstion in red, who gestures to the woman to stop, and indicates Alexander to his left? If this is the case, Alexander, with the laurel leaves of victory adorning his armour, points to himself to confirm his own identity.

Art historians tend to believe that the man in crimson is Alexander, because he is more central to the composition, and is the more conspicuously dressed of the two, but we cannot be sure. The possibility of confusion is necessary if we are to understand the queen mother's mistake. Veronese has left us with a mystery, and after nearly 500 years, we are still not sure of the answer.

### WHO WAS ALEXANDER THE GREAT?

Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great, was born in the northern Greek kingdom of Macedonia in July 356 BC. His parents were Philip II of Macedon and his wife Olympias. Alexander was educated by the philosopher Aristotle. By the time Philip was assassinated in 336 BC, the empire had expanded to include other city-states and had become the largest power of the western world. Alexander inherited this mighty empire, which he increased by conquering the competing empires to the east. He led his army to victories across the Persian territories of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt without suffering a single defeat.

Alexander founded over 70 cities, including Alexandria in Egypt, and created an empire that stretched across three continents and covered around two million square miles.

He died of a fever in June 323 BC.

### DRESSING UP

Veronese has presented us with a mixture of contemporary dress and exotic fancy costume. An Eastern setting is suggested by the onlookers' turbans. The plate armour worn by the figure in orange and by the soldier with the green cloak is an accurate representation of Italian armour of about 1560–90. The armour of the figure in red, on the other hand, is based on antique sculpture. The cuirass, made of leather, is moulded in the form of the torso, with the navel very evident; the girdle at the waist and the pleated skirt below are all derived from Roman armour. However, modern features are also evident in this costume – under the cuirass you can see a mail shirt with a striped pattern in the sleeves made of brass and steel rings. All three of the soldiers at the front of the group wear cloaks, possibly inspired by those of Roman generals. The red cloak is being held up by a page, whereas the other figures hoist up their own cloaks. Some of the soldiers hold weapons called halberds, the figure in red has a sword at his waist, and a young page leans on a shield depicting a mermaid-like creature.

The family of Darius wear Venetian dress of the 1560s. The queen mother wears the ermine fur associated with rulers. The clothes in the painting depict a wonderful richness of colour and detail, and the fur and brocade worn by the women give an air of luxury. Veronese seems to have paid particular attention to the lustre of the pearls around the princesses' necks and hair. Pearls are a traditional symbol of beauty and love, associated with the goddess Venus.

Darius's elder daughter holds a crown, which may perhaps allude to her marriage to Alexander a few years later. Alternatively, it could be that the crown actually belongs to the queen mother, Sisygambis, and is being carried by her elder daughter, as this would hardly be the right moment to wear it.

### ANIMALS

Veronese has taken great care in his representation of the monkey and may have actually portrayed a particular animal, possibly owned by one of his patrons – it may have been a diplomatic gift from the East and was certainly symbolic of the family's wealth. From the Middle Ages, apes or monkeys were a symbol of the art of painting and sculpture because the artist's skill was regarded as imitative and monkeys were known for their love of copying. We do not know if Veronese intended to convey a message through the depiction of the monkey, but given its prominence in the painting, it is possible.

The horses on the left of the painting, as well as some of the architecture and figures on the balustrade, have become translucent over time. The pigments that used to reflect the light now absorb it, so enabling the viewer to see the layers of paint behind the horses. It is thought that the large horse on the far right was intended to represent Alexander's famous charger, Bucephalus.

Horses, as well as dogs, have long been considered the animal most faithful to men. In art, dogs are often used to symbolise marital fidelity, so perhaps Veronese was making a comment by including them in his painting.