

TEXT	A BUNDLE OF LETTERS (1879)
AUTHOR	Henry James
THEMES	City life (unit 6), travel (unit 8), feelings and moods (unit 13), the written word (unit 19)
VOCABULARY	Describing feelings about places and travelling
WRITING	Students write an email home.
SPEAKING	Students discuss the best city to visit.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Henry James (1843–1916) was one of the most important novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His subtle and often complex exploration of character and social roles was enormously influential on the writers who came after him. He was an American who made Europe his home and his stories often explore the contrasting sensibilities and attitudes of the old and new worlds. The bright young woman who disregards society's strict rules is one of his favourite characters – as in his famous short story *Daisy Miller*. The writer of this letter from *A Bundle of Letters* – Miranda Hope – is another such character – a young, independent single woman visiting Europe. Given that the story is set in the 1870s, it is perhaps surprising to learn that such a thing was not uncommon at the time. As well as exploring the role of women, the satirical story is curiously prescient, anticipating the decline of the British aristocratic class and the First World War. The story uses an epistolary structure. You might want to mention to students that this kind of narrative – one conducted by two or more people writing letters – is a very popular format for short stories, as it allows a number of different voices to tell us their stories and interpretations of things that happen.

### WARMER

Find three or four pictures of people travelling alone and in groups. Ask students to describe the pictures and say what differences there are between travelling with others and travelling alone and which they would prefer to do.

### ABOUT YOU

Students talk about their ideas and preferences. For the second question, ask for suggestions and possible definitions. Elicit the idea that people often 'travel' to have experiences and explore different cultures, whereas a 'holiday' usually means a rest or break from our usual routines.

Go through the introduction and clarify the situation. You could point out that at this time (the 1870s), writing letters was the way people communicated. Although the telegraph existed (a system for transmitting messages from a distance along a wire), it was only used for emergencies. Telephones were first used in the USA in 1877 and were not available in France until a few years after this story takes place.

- 1 After students have read the text, ask for suggestions as to who William Platt is. Is he a friend, a boyfriend (if so, have they broken up?) or someone she wants to know?

## 2

### Answers

- 1 Show them to the family, not to William Platt, although she can show him the bit about handsome men.
- 2 It's lovely, the handsome men, the way people speak
- 3 She thinks that their position in France is better than in England but neither country is as good as the USA.
- 4 It's interesting, the climate is cheerful and sunny and the position of women is better than in England.

## VOCABULARY

## 3

### Answers

- 1 Farewell 2 greatly 3 impressions 4 conclusion

## 4

### Answers

- 1 C The standard of education in the country was really very high.
- 2 D He is remarkably healthy considering he is 100 years old!
- 3 B Your French pronunciation is considerably better than mine.
- 4 A The food in the hotel wasn't great but it was satisfactory.

## WRITING

- 5 Students use the prompts to write their email. With the whole class, get students to brainstorm what kinds of things they think people notice when they go to another country and build up a list on the board. Suggestions will probably include food, clothes, buildings, weather, language, etc. but elicit less obvious examples, especially if students have been or studied abroad – the times of day people eat, TV programmes, how loud people are, what time people go to bed, etc. Tell students they can use the ideas on the board in their email if they wish.

## SPEAKING

- 6 Make groups of about six students. Tell half the group to focus on London and the other half Paris. Ideally, give them time to research things to do and see in the cities as preparation for their discussion. When they talk about the cities, tell them to try and reach a unanimous decision.

### MIXED ABILITY

In any group speaking activity, stronger students can be assigned the role of note-taker, with the task of summarising the discussion and conclusion of the group for the whole class after the activity.