

HOW TO MAKE TEACHING ABOUT IT **ATTRACTIVE**



This publication tries and provoke educators into thinking of ways to teach Waterloo in a new, fresher way which is still relevant for students today – while still being fun. It is a real challenge.

3.1 MULTIPLE NARRATIVES AND PERSPECTIVES



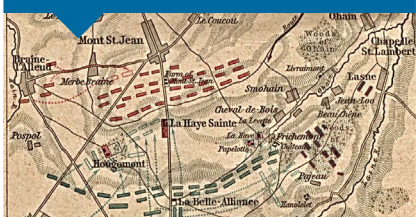
3.2 ARTS AS A KEY TO WATERLOO (AND VICE VERSA)



3.3 ONSITE LEARNING



3.4 LEARNING WITH MAPS



3.5 A LAST SUGGESTION: QUESTIONS



MULTIPLE NARRATIVES - AND - PERSPECTIVES

Beyond the national narrative

The battle of Waterloo, as previously noted, was much more than a confrontation between Napoleon, Wellington, and Blücher. It was also more than a battle between German, French, British, Dutch, and Belgian troops. We are used to learning about Waterloo with a focus on our national narrative; so that French students learn about the glorious defeat, British learn about the definitive victory, Germans about the beginning of their process of unification, Dutch about the participation in the battle of the future King William II, and so on.

Trying to surpass the national focus is indeed hard - but it may be worth it, if only because a constrained regard upon the battle would prevent a clear understanding of its proportions. Thus, one alternative narrative would entail a different approach to the main characters of the battle of Waterloo, the troops engaged in the fight.

The panorama is much more European than the usual narrative tells us: of the 73,200 Allied troops, only thirty-six per cent of the troops in Wellington's army were British (that is English, Irish, Welsh or Scottish); 10 per cent were part of the British King's German Legion, 10 per cent were Nassauers, 8 per cent were Brunswickers, 17 per cent were Hanoverians, 13 per cent were Dutch and 6 per cent 'Belgian'¹⁸. And even among the 'French' soldier, French language was not always their mothertongue. Napoleon himself has been quoted as saying, while referring to his Alsatian troops: *"Let them speak German as long as they wield their swords in French"*¹⁹.

Upon looking on these figures, D-Day veteran and former British chief of the defence staff Field Marshal Lord Bramall's definition of Waterloo as 'the first NATO operation'²⁰ is more than understandable - and helps putting into perspective the way military cooperation is understood still today.

A narrative which places Waterloo in a truly European perspective effectively makes it a shared heritage; which entails a shared responsibility - and sheds new light on the evolving nature of European conflict and cooperation dynamics.

But a European perspective on the Battle of Waterloo is by no means the only alternative to the classic national narratives; what about teaching Waterloo as a failure of the peace, rather than a victory or a glorious defeat? After all, the First Treaty of Paris (1814) had seemingly pacified Europe and exiled Napoleon to the Island of Elba; yet, when Napoleon escaped in February 1815 the French population and his former troops rapidly switched alliances back to their Emperor. Is that not a sign of a detachment between the elites negotiating in Vienna and the commoners? Unresolved issues of injured pride and resentment to the Bourbon monarchy exacted their toll through the Hundred Days campaign. This line of thought can be very promising when brought in the classroom: it may lead to a discussion about change and continuity in peace negotiations in the past and today; or it could lead to reflections on the fact that this time the French population pushed for a return of the Emperor (and thus, war), while the elites were actually settling a peace.

Multiple perspectives

When it comes to views on the Battle, Waterloo's great men have so far monopolised the stage. Their accounts have been read, studied, assessed, taught. As we mentioned earlier, a recent trend has now placed quite some importance to ego-documents produced by commoners, too. Letters, account of their lives, diaries, memoirs, can be very powerful and honest in their descriptions.

Ego-documents can nowadays be collected on the internet; a good starting base is the Waterloo200's website (nam.ac.uk/waterloo200), for ego-documents like many other sources.

Cartoons and press also play a pivotal role in accounting for multiple perspectives.

Civilians' perspectives come handy for a teacher, as further focus on the role of civilian men and women would further enrich students. The teacher could engage students in learning activities that would let them enter in the shoes of the commoners during Waterloo's times and even in Waterloo's surroundings. They could be led to compare images of common life in the 1810s and today; or they could be engaged to think about what kinds of jobs people had at the time, and how they could be affected by the Napoleonic Wars.

The direct impact of the battle to the civilians living in or near the battlefield is also a way of making the subject alive for students.

The excerpt from a Guardian article may serve as a good introduction for a discussion on the issue²¹.

A last remark: not all civilians were victims.

Some of them actually profited from the Napoleonic Wars. It is important that students are enabled to grasp the complexity of history, as they simply mirror the complexity of humanity itself. Such a discussion would easily lead students to compare the situation of war profiteers to modern times.



Scène de la campagne– Horace Vernet 1814

WATERLOO: THE AFTERMATH BY PAUL O'KEEFFE

excerpt from *The Guardian*, 27/11/2014

The impact of this world war on civilians was less than that of the next; how much less we don't know, since it remains unmeasured. The three battles of June 1815 – Quatre-Bras, Ligny and Waterloo – were fought on agricultural land. The peasants whose livelihood it was feature in the accounts – insofar as they feature at all – only as looters who pillaged the dead. Tim Clayton's synoptic Waterloo, and Bernard Simms's The Longest Afternoon, a micro study of the action at the farm of La Haie Sainte, which held up the French while Wellington consolidated his position on Mont Saint-Jean and Blücher moved west to support him, give glimpses of devastation: burnt-out ruins of villages; fields trampled and harvests destroyed; houses occupied and barricaded; doors, shutters and furniture used as firewood; outbuildings gutted; livestock slaughtered; farm machinery wrecked; fugitives "driving their cattle before them, others bearing bundles, women carrying or pulling their children after them ... moaning and weeping". Anecdotal evidence – but enough to explain why, as Paul O'Keeffe tells us in Waterloo: the Aftermath, looting was to an extent tolerated. There was no compensation beyond what was had by plunder.

– J. PEMBLE

The following list is ashamedly incomplete, but it serves its purpose: literature can be taught through Waterloo, and viceversa.

All these works are copyright free, and an educator just needs a quick internet search to uncover the texts.

ART AS A KEY TO - WATERLOO - AND VICEVERSA

The arts have been focusing on the battle of Waterloo for two hundreds years now, and are not likely to stop any time soon.

The famous fictional history writer Bernard Cornwell has very recently published his first nonfiction book, and it is titled *Waterloo: The History of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles*.

Still in the literary field but well back in time, immortal authors have felt the need to measure themselves with the iconic value of the battle of Waterloo: generations of French students have been learning about it during literature class, by studying Victor Hugo's verses in *L'Expiation* (1853)²²:



VICTOR HUGO

**“Waterloo ! Waterloo ! Waterloo ! morne plaine !
Comme une onde qui bout dans une urne trop pleine,
Dans ton cirque de bois, de coteaux, de vallons,
La pâle mort mêlait les sombres bataillons.
D'un côté c'est l'Europe et de l'autre la France.
Choc sanglant ! des héros Dieu trompait l'espérance ;
Tu désertais, victoire, et le sort était las.
O Waterloo ! je pleure et je m'arrête, hélas !
Car ces derniers soldats de la dernière guerre
Furent grands ; ils avaient vaincu toute la terre,
Chassé vingt rois, passé les Alpes et le Rhin,
Et leur âme chantait dans les clairons d'airain !”**

To switch language, James Joyce did visit the battlefield in 1926, and the Wellington Museum, incidentally the same visited by Hugo, and mentioned the battle in his *Finnegan's Wake*, although mysteriously (such is the character of the novel), as being between 'Willingdon' and 'Lipoleum'.

Sir Walter Scott visited the battlefield in 1815, after the Battle, publishing his reportage in 1816 as a set of fictional letters. He also wrote a poem, like Hugo, but, unlike the French writer, Scott's triumphalist *The Field of Waterloo* was received very poorly, and actually derided. Despite our great affection to the great writer of *Ivanhoe* and *Waverley*, it may be interesting and entertaining alike to quote a popular squib mocking Sir Scott:



SIR WALTER SCOTT

**“On Waterloo's ensanguined plain
Lie tens of thousands of the slain;
But none, by sabre or by shot,
Fell half so flat as Walter Scott.”**

Even great authors sometimes fall flat.

Honoré de Balzac, in the *Medecin de Campagne* (1833), described Waterloo in violent terms, as much as Napoleon's old enemy, François-René de Chateaubriand, did in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849).

Stendhal, in *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839), provides us with one of the most human views on the battle:

“Red uniforms! Red uniforms!” the escorting hussards cried joyously, and initially Fabrice could not make anything of it; eventually, he noticed that actually almost all the corpses wore red clothes.

A particular circumstance had him shiver with horror; he noticed that many of those unfortunate red clothes were still alive, were ostensibly crying out for help, and no-one was responding to their begging. Our hero, a very humane fellow, tried very hard for his horse not to stamp upon any red cloth. The escort stopped; Fabrice, who was not paying enough attention to his soldier's duties, kept galloping, while observing a wounded wretch.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, instead, sketched a more humorous, but not less intense, portrait of the battle. Sherlock Holmes' dad also fathered Brigadier Gérard, a pompous and dull, but also brave and good-hearted, French soldier, a die-hard supporter of Napoleon. The amused sarcasm employed by Conan Doyle lightens up the tragedy of war, and his unusual mockery of patriotism make the Brigadier's short stories particularly interesting for the classroom²³.

Of all the great battles in which I had the honour of drawing my sword for the Emperor and for France there was not one which was lost. At Waterloo, although, in a sense, I was present, I was unable to fight, and the enemy was victorious. It is not for me to say that there is a connection between these two things. (...) Wellington had with him sixty-seven thousand men, but many of them were known to be Dutch and Belgian, who had no great desire to fight against us. Of good troops he had not fifty thousand. Finding himself in the presence of the Emperor in person with eighty thousand men, this Englishman was so paralysed with fear that he could neither move himself nor his army. You have seen the rabbit when the snake approaches. So stood the English upon the ridge of Waterloo.

William Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* (1847) found space for Waterloo and for a praise to Wellington:

Everybody had such a perfect feeling of confidence in the leader (for the resolute faith which the Duke of Wellington had inspired in the whole English nation was as intense, as that more frantic enthusiasm with which at one time the French regarded Napoleon), the country seemed in so perfect a state of orderly defence, and the help at hand in case of need so near and overwhelming, that alarm was unknown."

The same Thackeray, few lines afterwards, gave a very piercing reading of the political situation Napoleon found himself entangled in upon returning to France:

Those who like to lay down the History-book, and to speculate upon what might have happened in the world, but for the fatal occurrence of what actually did take place (a most puzzling, amusing, ingenious, and profitable kind of meditation) have no doubt often thought to themselves what a specially bad time Napoleon took to come back from Elba (...). The august jobbers assembled at Vienna, and carving out the kingdoms of Europe according to their wisdom, had such causes of quarrel among, themselves as might have set the armies which had overcome Napoleon to fight against each other, but for the return of the object of unanimous hatred and fear. (...) Each was protesting against the rapacity of the other; and could the Corsican but have waited in his prison until all these parties were by the ears, he might have returned and reigned unmolested.



STENDHAL



**SIR ARTHUR
CONAN DOYLE**



WILLIAM THACKERAY



The Napoleonic Wars have also attracted many among the greatest painters of the time, such as Ingres, or David. Paintings can be used for exercising students' critical thinking: they can identify propaganda, extract information, look for the message the painter wanted to pass through, analyse the which side of the story the painter had decided to portray. Under the same vein, satirical pictures can be a good exercise.

There are many of them about Napoleon and the Napoleonic Era. There are some about Waterloo too: they are usually under copyright, but can be used in the classroom.

The Battle was famously depicted by J.M.W. Turner, with sombre strokes of colour which suggested the horrors of war.

Other painters measured themselves with Waterloo, with a more or less open political agenda such as Dumaresq's *Cambronne à Waterloo* (commissioned by Napoleon III), or Pieneman's *De Slag bij Waterloo* (financed by the Dutch monarchy), and Northern's *Attack on Placenoit* during the battle of Waterloo.

From painting to cinema, images have repeatedly proven their learning value. They catch students' attention and ease them into the story that is being told. Waterloo has been a long-time hit for the cinema industry. The first obvious examples are Charles Weston's *The Battle of Waterloo* (1913), and Karl Grune's *Waterloo* (1929), although one may want to refrain from feeding students with a 1910s and a 1920s early cinema essays. Besides, Weston's movie is now almost entirely lost, due to the natural and irreversible nitrate decomposition.

A safer choice is the Soviet-Italian production *Waterloo* (1970). The movie boast old stars such as Christopher Plummer and Rod Steiger, beside a cameo appearance by Orson Welles. It could be a good choice, because it is a truly international production (an East-



From top to bottom:

1. *Cambronne à Waterloo* – Armand Dumaresq 1867
2. *The field of Waterloo* – J.M.W. Turner 1818 (CC via Tate.org.uk)
3. *De Slag bij Waterloo* – Jan Willem Pieneman 1824

West collaboration right during the Cold War) which diversify the average cinema culture of students (and educators!). The movie is generally considered rather faithful and, while it focuses much on Waterloo itself, it does cover the Hundred Days.

A wonderful French production dates from 2002: *Napoléon*, a rendition for television of Max Gallo's bestsellers books. The series is very intense and extremely well played by actors who are among the best of the French and international scene: Christian Clavier, Gerard Depardieu, John Malkovich. Its fourth and last episode is centred on Waterloo.

In 2014 the documentary *Waterloo, l'ultime bataille* has been released. The film, directed by Serge Lanneau, has been promoted as a documentary which does not try and romance the battle, and it is based on the notes of French, Belgian, and British soldiers.

From image to sound. Napoleon has prompted many musical masterworks, such as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's beautiful *1812 Overture* (inspired by the Russian campaign) and Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony N. 3* or the *Heroic Symphony* (which dedication he famously scrapped upon Napoleon's coronation) and *Wellingtons Sieg oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria* (dedicated to Wellington's victory in Vitoria, during the Iberian Campaign, 1813).

This would be a good way to introduce students to classical music and the Napoleonic Wars at the same time!

And finally, a half-joking remark: let's not forget about ABBA's *Waterloo*, proud winner of the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest!



Waterloo movie – 1970 (CC via Waterloo 200)



Napoléon mini-series – 2002

ONSITE - LEARNING -

Educators know that direct experience of the place of history can have a more effective impact on students than words. Visiting the battlefield is common practice - an old one, in fact; Waterloo has been, in a way, a touristic destination since the battle itself²⁴:



THE TIMES
UK newspaper, 1934

Waterloo involved the presence of significant numbers of tourists before, during, and, particularly, after the battle. In a conversation reported by his private secretary, Wellington observed : “I hope the next battle I fight will be further from home. Waterloo was too near: too many visitors, tourists, amateurs, all of whom wrote accounts of the battle”.



An introduction to the battle through what is called *thanatourism* can leave a very vivid impression to the students, thanks to its anecdotal potential combined to the many accounts that ‘tourists’ wrote and that, although they displeased Wellington, can be extremely useful to add multiple perspectives on the battle from external eyes. These accounts, their evolution over time, and the evolution of the reasons behind thanatourism are in addition essential to a clearer understanding of the process of memorialisation over the years.

The process of memorialisation and the evolution of the way Waterloo has been remembered - or not - over the years has been mentioned earlier in this publication. It is a central subject to tackle with learners, as it leads them beyond the mere study of the event, to an understanding of how public opinion shapes, and is shaped by, politics and history. Understanding this process provides students with the necessary tools to grasp the multiple shades of the world they live in; it provides them with special ‘reading glasses’ to decipher the traps of public memory and enables them to be ready to take into account competing perspectives on historical and contemporary events. In a word, it helps open their minds (ours, actually) and increases the chances of having them engaging in cross-border exchanges.



Memorials and monuments are thus an excellent tool for addressing public remembrance of events such as Waterloo: let us take Waterloo's Lion's Mould.

**STUDENTS SHOULD BE CONFRONTED
WITH QUESTIONS SUCH AS
'WHY IS THIS MONUMENT PORTRAYING A
LION?', OR 'WHY IS IN THAT SPOT?',
AND SIMILAR QUESTIONS.**

By highlighting the reasons behind monuments, which can range from pure propaganda ('the King of the Netherlands has been wounded on that spot, for the glory and freedom of humanity!') to a shared memory, which still betrays a certain perspective on a historical event (such as what has been left on purpose of the Berlin Wall)²⁵.

Pictures are perfect tools for learning activities and allow for very easy comparison exercises. Field trips are also good, when possible, for a more complete and deeper understanding of the function and rationale of a memorial.



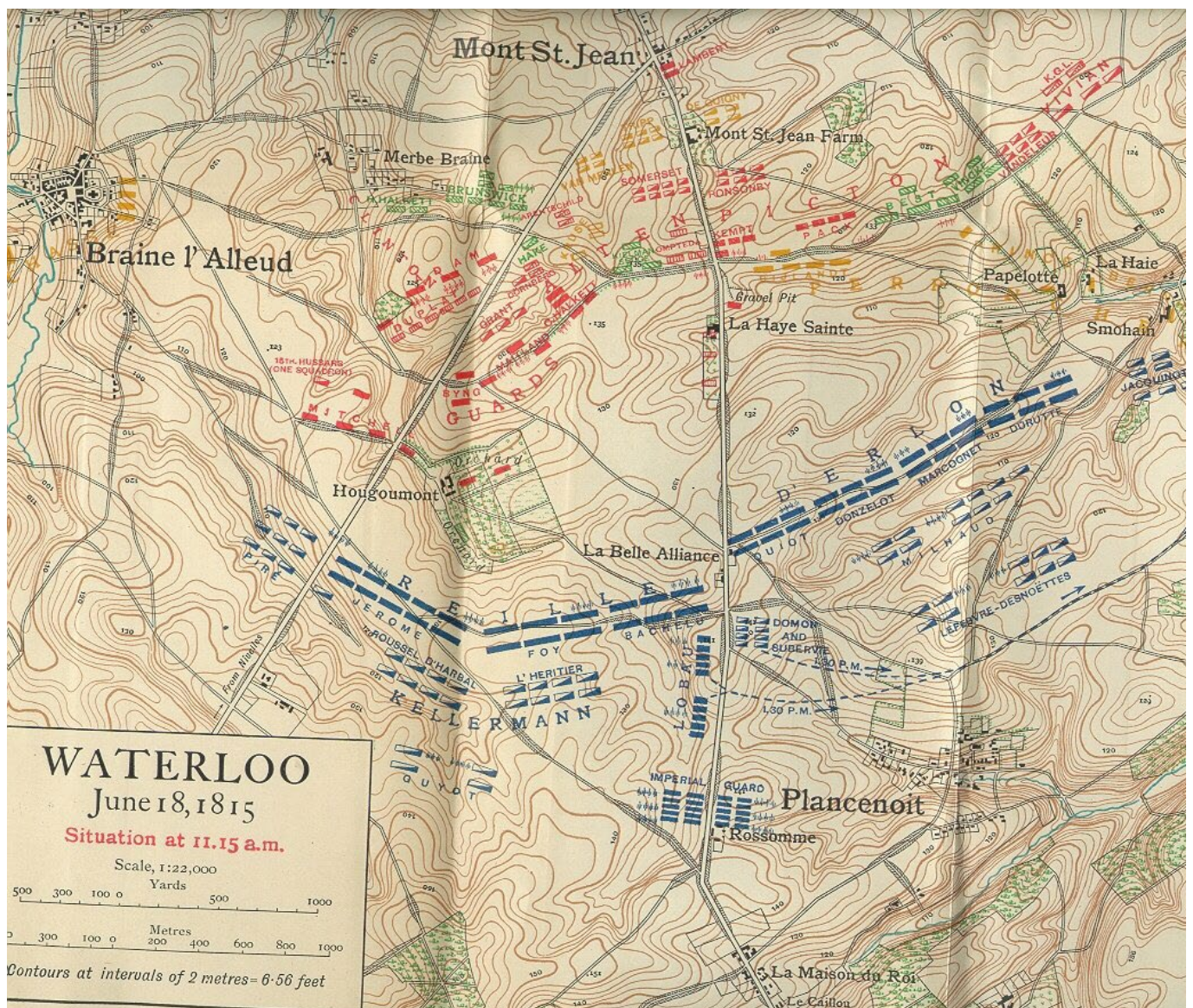
LEARNING - WITH - MAPS

Maps are excellent learning tools. Maps can tell stories - in this case the story of a battle. It can be used as a tool for describing the battle from a military point of view - but there are other possible uses to it. An enlarged map of Southern Belgium could show the cities and villages affected by the battles of Waterloo and Quatre-Bras, for example.

Students could be challenged to

find out the number of inhabitants, and try to describe the way the battle influenced their lives.

Sources such as maps can be very simple and yet generate quite an amount of work for students. They can stimulate students to apply their historical knowledge, their sense of chronology, their historical awareness, and hopefully develop their sense of a co-existence of contrasting perspectives on history.



A LAST SUGGESTION: QUESTIONS

Just a glimpse through the subjects and fields we have tackled in this booklet would prove the impressive potential of Waterloo. Like looking through a kaleidoscope, through Waterloo educators can unleash a wide array of themes, while the richness of the sources allow for multiple and flexible ways to teach the battle in a way that not only teaches about facts, but also foster critical and historical thinking.

In conclusion, we would like to leave you with some reflections on the bulk of a history class: the set of questions that would make a lesson start. How to find new, fresher questions that would appeal students and that they would feel compelled to find their own answers to?

The solution can perhaps be found by detaching ourselves from the subject, and looking at it from the distance. Questions thus framed will benefit from an increased awareness of the bigger picture: if one looks at Waterloo as more than a battle, but as a converging movement of troops, one could then ask:

WHY WAS NAPOLEON GOING IN THAT DIRECTION, TOWARDS BRUSSELS?

thus opening up discussion on strategy and diplomacy.

If one instead regards Waterloo as the final stage of Napoleon's attempt to regain power, one could ask:

WAS WATERLOO SO IMPORTANT AFTER ALL? WOULD NAPOLEON HAVE BEEN ABLE TO STAY IN POWER AFTER A VICTORY IN WATERLOO?

This would lead to interesting debates about politics, but also about the situation of civilian populations:

HOW LONG WOULD HAVE FRENCH COMMONERS ENDURED A PROLONGED STATE OF WAR?

And if Waterloo marked the end of Napoleon's power, what about his allies?

WHAT HAPPENED TO THOSE PRINCES (HIS BROTHERS, BUT ALSO THE GERMAN PRINCES, AND THEN MARÉCHAL MURAT, AND THE THEN SWEDISH PRINCE BERNADOTTE) AND POLICY MAKERS THAT HAD BENEFITED FROM HIS RULE?





Students could be instructed to choose a character and make their own research; besides, entire social classes lost or won from Napoleon's defeat, in different grades according to the European region they lived in.

One could then use Waterloo as a mere springboard and ask further questions:

IS IT POSSIBLE TO SAY THAT WATERLOO PUT AN END TO THE FIRST PHASE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD?

And even further: to what extent do you think that Waterloo was a French defeat, since many French actually had fought against Napoleon? Was it a victory for monarchists and republicans alike, and a defeat only to the Napoleonic faction? And what about the other nationalities involved? What did Waterloo mean for the Polish legion? And for the Polish peasants? Such a question would indeed underline the pan-European, transnational, cross-border scope of the subject.

There is indeed space for some historiographical reflection, too:

WHAT DID NAPOLEON'S LEGACY CONSIST OF?

or,

WHEN DID IT START GOING WRONG FOR NAPOLEON? WHEN DID HE START LOSING HIS POWER?

Students could also be confronted with the way we look at history: we judge events with a post-factum knowledge of history that may distort our judgement. In order to make it clear to learners, a questions such as

HOW FAR IS OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO INFLUENCED BY WHAT HAPPENED LATER?

can indeed be an useful tool.