

The Great Wave – Katsushika Hokusai (c.1829-33; British Museum)

https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objeclid=787334&partId=1&searchText=hokusai&page=4



- This is one of the most famous works of art ever created. We see it all the time in posters, t-shirts and adverts. That sometimes means we need to look even more closely than usual as we think we know what we are looking at. Where do you think it was made? How do you know? **Japan. The writing looks Japanese, even if we cannot read it. Some people might even recognise the volcano, Mount Fuji, in the distance.**
- What is about to happen? **A huge wave is about to land on top of three boats.**
- Does this look a normal wave? **It is a bit like a cartoon or comic. The ends of it are like a monster's claws or fingers.**
- How has the artist shown us how big the wave is? **It reaches up to the top of the picture. The volcano looks tiny next to it.**



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- What is going to happen to the people on the boats? How would they be feeling right now? **A chance for some good vocabulary, e.g. scared, terrified, petrified, anxious etc.**
- After “three” freeze in your most panicked, frightened pose showing how you feel with your whole body and face. Stay in that pose and then after another “three” make the sounds your character would be making.
- Have another look at the artwork. Are the people on the boats screaming and panicking? **They are actually curled into a ball in the “brace” position. They know that if they hold on tight they will survive! They will get wet of course but they will come out the other side.** Practise getting into the brace position. Instead of being a scary image that we thought at first this one is actually showing us how to stay safe and calm in the face of danger.

Follow on ideas

- This artwork is not a painting but a print, made by scratching a design into a block of wood and then putting ink on it and pressing down onto a sheet of paper. You can make a very simple print by halving a potato and dipping it into paint before pressing it carefully onto paper. You could get more imaginative by cutting shapes into the potato or using different sized potatoes.
- Imagine you are one of the people on the boat. Imagine you have just got home after your tough journey. Describe what you experienced and how it made you feel.
- Life in Lockdown discussion: What techniques could you use if you want to stay calm during difficult times?

Topic links

- Geography: Japan
- Water/The Ocean
- Monsters
- Volcanoes
- Transport Journeys