

## Rain, Steam and Speed – J.M.W. Turner (1844; National Gallery)

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-mallord-william-turner-rain-steam-and-speed-the-great-western-railway>



- Sometimes artists paint in such a way that makes it hard to work out what the painting is of at first. Is there anything you recognise here? **A train, two bridges, a boat.**
- What kind of train is it? One we have now or an old fashioned one? **It is a steam train, one of the first trains ever made.**
- What is the weather like? **Rainy, windy, cloudy. It looks as if a passing shower has just come across a blue summer sky.**
- How has the artist shown the weather in paint? **He has painted the sky in a very messy, blurry way. This suits the messiness of the steam train.**



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- Why can we see what looks like fire at the front of the train? **The artist removed the front of the train to allow us to see inside the engine – it is almost as if we have x-ray vision. The fire heats the water which makes steam, like the steam that comes out the top of the kettle, which makes the train move.**
- Imagine the train further back on the bridge in the distance. Make the sound of a very quiet steam train, shushing slowly across the bridge. As it gets closer and closer to the front of the painting it gets louder and louder. Perhaps when it is at its loudest a whistle blows!
- When trains like this were first built no one had seen modern forms of transport before. How do you think the artist felt when he saw and heard it for the first time? Choose a word to describe the feeling. **E.g. Surprised, scared, astonished, amazed, happy, delighted, angry, curious etc.**
- How did people get around before trains were invented? Can we see examples of this in the painting (you need to look really closely!)? **A boat on the river. On the far right of the painting toward the bottom a farmer is walking behind two horses.**

### *Follow on ideas*

- Imagine you are looking at this painting way back when it was first painted in 1844. Describe to someone who has never seen a train before what you saw. Think about the sounds, sights and even smells.
- Make a messy weather painting like Turner did. He might have even used his hands to show how blurry everything was when the weather was like this.
- What would you call this painting? Turner chose three words for its title, can you guess what they are? **Rain, Steam and Speed.** Speed is the key one as, apart from on galloping horses, people had never really experienced speed before. Turner told people he had gone on a train and stuck his head out of the window on a rainy day to experience speed. He held on to that sensation when it came to making the painting.
- Life in Lockdown discussion: If people are leaving the house at the moment it is mainly to walk to the shops. Where and how would you travel if you were able to go further?

### *Topic links*

- Transport/Journeys
- Weather
- London/The River Thames
- Science: Steam/Forces



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- Maths: Diagonal/horizontal lines
- History: The Victorians