

Module 2

Strength and Power

Rain, Steam and Speed



When Turner painted this picture in 1844, he was nearly 70 years old and was making his observations about something new and powerful that was happening. Before steam and railways people would have walked, travelled on a horse, or been pulled along in a carriage. To some this would have seemed like a quick form of transport but during the Industrial Revolution everything changed. There became a need to transport goods and people. Railways were built across the country and the power of steam was embraced to drive these new 'iron beasts'.

These two videos really explain a great deal more about the picture and also highlight elements that are quite difficult to see.

Besides Turners exploration of the combination of rain and steam together there are contrasts between a farmer working in his fields on the right, a small boat sailing on the left and also an old stone bridge. There are even a group of 'maidens' in the field perhaps waving at the train.

Turner also includes a hare running along the track in front of the train. Is it fleeing the new technology or is it also saying that nature can also speed?

Have you ever been on a train platform and felt the force of a train passing through a station? Perhaps you've been on a steam train and felt the force of the steam as it blows passed you or witnessed the amazing sound and smell. Have you watched how the wheels are turned?

What is our modern day equivalent of having major construction to make travelling faster? Motorways, HS2, new roundabouts. What is destroyed when these are built?

What do we know now about speed – aerodynamics – what would our designs be like if we wanted to build something with power and strength but also speed.

Turner used oils for this painting. Try and work out how he has applied the paint. Very few parts of the painting are in sharp focus – is this to emphasise the mix of rain and steam and the blur of moving quickly. How quickly do you feel this train is coming towards you? Where are you viewing it from? The other side of the bridge? Is it about to go passed you?

These two videos are quite interesting to watch and listen to and help you understand a little more about both the subject of the painting and the way Turner painted. He is one of our most famous English artists and worth finding out about.

<https://youtu.be/pPsqUFuysbU>

<https://youtu.be/N8mf9y6ziXA>

Other artists have used Turner's painting to make an engraving

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-rain-steam-and-speed-engraved-by-r-brandard-t06366>

The building of the railways also meant that the Victorians had to create large railway stations in important towns and cities which became central places from which railway lines spread out.

Many of these are very high buildings – can you imagine several trains arriving and all steaming or getting sufficient power to set off. Do you think they were clean places? What about the noise. Have you ever heard the hiss as steam is let out of an engine?

The 19th century station in Madrid, Spain has now got a rainforest area inside it as well as shops and cafes, in an attempt to adapt and use the space.