

Take One...

Coastal Scene (la nuit)

ASHMOLEAN

MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

'Coastal Scene (la nuit)' c. 1750-53
by Claude Joseph Vernet (1714-79)

oil on canvas, 97 x 123 cm

A zoomable image of this painting is available on our website to use in the classroom with an interactive whiteboard or projector.

www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources



Starting questions

The following questions may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class:

- What is the first thing you notice?
- Where is the light in the painting coming from? How many light sources can you see?
- What time of day do you think it is? How do you know?
- What are the different groups of people in the picture doing?
- What animals can you find in the painting?
- What buildings can you see in the background?
- If you could step into this painting what would we be able to see/hear/feel and smell?
- Imagine where the large boat is going and where it has been?
- How does light affect the mood of the painting?
- If it was daylight would the painting feel different?



Background information

The painting

This Ashmolean painting, Coastal Scene (la nuit/the night) is a variation of one of a set of four oval paintings commissioned by a wealthy Irish peer and politician, showing The Times of Day. These sets were very popular depicting different effects of light and atmosphere. 'Morning' was a tempestuous shipwreck, 'Midday' a sandy bay, 'Evening' a busy harbour and 'Night' in calm and tranquil mood.

'La nuit' is a striking composition. The moon rises over a harbour bathing the grey, rippling water and lighting up the sky with a magical silvery light. Vernet told a student he had spent his life studying the sky and learned a new lesson every day

Scenes from everyday life create a busy atmosphere. Fishermen on a small boat bring in their nets and a circle of local figures, reddened by the glow from their fire, cook supper and share gossip or songs. In the distance, under a rocky arch, tiny horses and riders speed away. Perhaps they carry cargo unloaded from the stately galleon on the right of the composition?



The historical context

Vernet specialised in imaginary views of the Italian coast. His paintings were popular as souvenirs of a journey taken from Rome to the Bay of Naples by rich tourists as part of the 'Grand Tour.' They travelled through France and Italy in search of art and culture. Wealthy British 'Grand Tourists' made up about half of his patrons in Italy. The imaginary scenes he created in his studio from detailed drawings of landmarks, ships and nature were highly saleable

The artist

Vernet, the son of a decorative painter, was born in Avignon in the south of France. He moved to Rome in 1734, where he established an international reputation as a painter of harbours and coastal views before returning to France in 1753.



Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 & 2 curriculum

Understanding the arts

- Look at colour, light and mood.
- Explore colour mixing and silhouettes.
- Take a detail from the painting, enlarge and recreate it using digital or mixed media.
- Create a soundscape. Think about the sounds you would hear if you were drawn into the painting. Practice and perform your soundscape using musical instruments as an extension.
- Create sailors dances. (Links could also be made here to PE – rope climbing etc.)
- Use animation software and model to bring parts of the painting to life.

Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing

- Who would have worked on the galleon? What jobs would they have done?
- Life onboard ship. What would they eat and drink? How healthy was this diet? What diseases might they suffer?
- Discuss water safety and design water safety posters.
- PE sessions could also tie in with drama and music activities as outlined above.

Understanding English, communication and languages

- Working in pairs or groups, choose characters from the painting and create dialogues.
- Use the painting to inspire creative writing, e.g. the captain's log, pirates, smugglers or travellers tales.
- Create poems based on the sounds you would hear in the painting.
- Use the painting as a focus to research vocabulary in French or Italian. Starting with times of day: 'la nuit' – the night.

Scientific and technological understanding

- Make model boats and carry out simple airflow experiments to see what works most effectively to power the boats.
- Carry out investigations of floating and sinking to discover what kind of boat designs are more stable.
- In this painting the moon is full. Create moon phase diaries observing the changes over a period of weeks.
- Use the painting to support work on shadows, reflections and light sources.

Historical, geographical and social understanding

- Discuss the groups of people in the painting. Do the people round the fire and in the fishing boat look rich or poor? What sort of people might travel on the galleon?
- Use clues from the painting to decide on the historical setting. How would the painting look if we changed the historical time period? How would the buildings/transport and clothing differ?
- Compare and contrast this coastal habitat with your locality. Investigate landscape, contours, coasts and cliff erosion. How does water affect landscapes and people?



Sketching from Coastal Scene in the galleries

Tips for introducing paintings to a class

- Reveal the painting section by section over a number of days. Each time a new detail is revealed the children can make predictions about what might be in the rest of the picture by looking at the details.
- Display the painting in the classroom for a number of days with a tape recorder or 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the painting. Once the pupils' comments and questions have been gathered a class discussion could follow on.
- Introduce the painting to the whole class in a question and answer session designed to take the pupils into the painting as outlined on page one.
- Show the painting to the class for a minute or so and then cover it up or taken away. Ask the children to remember what they could see.
- Show the painting to one or two willing volunteers. They should then describe what they have seen to the rest of the class. Pupils could then draw what they have heard described to them and then see how well the versions match up.

Take One Picture inspires...

Take One Picture encourages teachers to use a painting imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Many curriculum areas can be delivered using a single image as a starting point.

The challenge is for each school to use the painting as a focus to develop culturally enriching, engaging, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.

“ Incredibly inspiring! Take One Picture allowed us to broaden the curriculum and create amazing links across subjects. ”

Art Coordinator and Year 2 teacher

Please contact us or visit our website for more information about our programmes

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