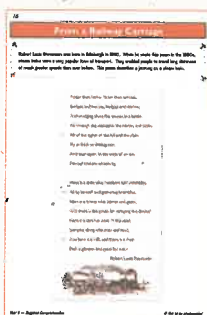


From a Railway Carriage



Question Book:

Year 5, pages 16-17

Author / Source:

Robert Louis Stevenson

Genre:

Classic poetry

Cross-curricular links:

- History (Victorian railways)
- Maths (timetables)

Introduction

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was a Scottish writer and poet. This poem, which describes a journey on a steam train, was published in 1885. The first fully steam-powered railway in the world, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, had opened in 1830, and by the 1880s, Britain had several thousand miles of railway lines. The rise of the railways transformed long-distance travel in the UK, and this poem reflects the Victorians' fascination with train travel. Read the poem out loud with the class, focusing on the effect created by its rhythm.

Answers

1. E.g. Because comparing the speed of the train to these creatures makes the train seem magical too.
OR E.g. Because fairies and witches can fly and the train is going so fast that it feels like it's flying too.
2. "horses and cattle"
3. b. a simile
4. E.g. The things he can see through the train window.
5. E.g. Because you just see these things quickly through the train window, and then they disappear from sight, so you'll probably never see them again.
6. E.g. The rhythm of the poem is like the rhythm of the train, so it helps the reader to imagine what it's like to travel on the train.
7. Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because it describes lots of different things, one after the other. This helps you imagine the way different views flash past the window when you're on a train.



Extra Activities

- Explore how Stevenson creates the train-like rhythm of the poem. As a class, annotate the poem, underlining the stressed syllables in each line, then read the poem aloud again, with everyone tapping out the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables on their tables.
- Suggest some other modes of transport that have a distinctive rhythm (e.g. marching, horse riding) and discuss the pattern of syllables that would mirror their rhythm. Get pupils to write some rhyming couplets for each mode of transport, focusing on using stressed and unstressed syllables to recreate their rhythms.
- Get pupils to write a poem describing a memorable journey that they have undertaken.
- Ask pupils to find out about how people and goods were transported before the invention of the railways (e.g. canals, horses). What were the disadvantages of these modes of transport? How did the introduction of rail travel change things? Pupils should use their research to create a promotional leaflet for a Victorian railway company, explaining the advantages of rail travel over other forms of transport.
- Get pupils to find train timetables for the station nearest to school. Challenge pupils to use the timetables to plan a journey that will take them as far as possible from the starting station within four hours.