

# TURNER AND CONSTABLE, PAINTERS OF NATURE

## LEAD IN

**1** Read these two quotes by the famous English Romantic painter William Turner and John Constable. Then answer the following questions.



↑ *Self-portrait* by William Turner (ca. 1799), oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London.

“

My job is to paint what I see, not what I know. ”

“

Painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then, may not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments? ”



↑ *John Constable* by Ramsay Richard Reinagle (ca. 1799), National Portrait Gallery, London.

1. What does ‘painting’ mean for them? Match the definition with the artist:
  - a. Painting means making what he sees ‘visible’.
  - b. It is more of a scientific inquiry into the natural world.
2. How do you think the two artists differ in their conception of art?
3. Which of the two do you think is more interested in expressing emotions and sensory experiences? Which do you think has a more ‘scientific’ approach?

Share your ideas with the rest of the class.

### Who was William Turner? (1775-1851)

**William Turner** is a British painter whose works are strongly pervaded by a fascination with outstanding natural elements, such as mountain scenery, avalanches and storms. His interest in progress also leads him to work on the impact on landscapes of the industrial revolution. Thanks especially to his later works, he is considered one of the precursors of Impressionism, where forms are dissolved in coloured atmospheres. His revolutionary explorations of light through painting have impacted later generations of artists and painters. His major works include *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839) and *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844).



↑ *The Fighting Temeraire* by William Turner (1839), oil on canvas, National Gallery, London.

**FIRST** Listening | Part 2

**2** **084** You will hear an art critic talking about Turner's painting *The Fighting Temeraire*. For questions 1-8 complete the sentences with a word or short phrase.

*The Fighting Temeraire* was first exhibited at the National Gallery in 1839.

The full title of the painting *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*, 1838, tells us that the work describes a **1** .....

The warship had taken part in the **2** ..... in 1805. The blood-red sunset reflected on the Thames represents a potent mix of **3** ..... The contrast between **4** ..... for the warship and black for the steamship also suggests the end of the age of sail and the advent of the new age of **5** .....

The black buoy in the right-hand side of the foreground has been interpreted as a symbol of **6** ..... The sky in the background offers further contrast between the cool, **7** ..... light on the left and the hot, red colours of the setting sun on the right. Its merits lie not only in its emotive, historic and patriotic impact but also on the artist's innovative and challenging use of **8** .....

### Who was John Constable? (1776-1837)

**John Constable** gives voice to the 'bucolic' side of English Romantic painting. Born in Suffolk, he never left his mother country and chose to represent its rural and pastoral scenes, which he painted with meticulous attention to detail, celebrating the beauty of uncontaminated nature. His major works include *The Hay Wain* (1821) and *The Vale of Dedham* (1828). Just like Turner, Constable was also fascinated by light and its effects on nature. To capture its power and beauty fully, Constable often chose to paint in the open air.

→ *The Hay Wain* by John Constable (1821), oil on canvas, National Gallery, London.



### DO IT YOURSELF

**4** Look at the painting entitled *The Hay Wain* (1821) by Constable. Then answer the following questions.

1. What is the focal point of the painting?
2. What colour does the painter use to catch our attention?
3. What natural element gives the idea of calm and peacefulness?
4. What natural elements give the idea that nature's life is blossoming?
5. What elements in the background inundate the painting with light?

### VOCABULARY Lab STEAM

**3** Find the English equivalent of the following phrases (1-8) in the two painters' biographies.

1. elementi naturali
2. paesaggi
3. Impressionismo
4. atmosfere colorate
5. scene pastorali
6. attenzione al dettaglio
7. natura incontaminata
8. all'aria aperta

### TAKE ACTION

**5** Use the Internet to find these two paintings:

- *Flatford Mill (Scene on a navigable river)* by John Constable
- *Newcastle-on-Tyne* by William Turner.

Write a short text (max. 200 words) comparing the two works. Focus on the choice of landscapes and the impression that the paintings create.