

Language through Art: An ESL Enrichment Curriculum (Beginning) Information for Teaching

A Storm on a Mediterranean Coast

Claude-Joseph Vernet (French, 1714–89)
1767
Oil on canvas
44 1/2 x 57 3/8 in.
2002.9.1



Background Information

Claude-Joseph Vernet depicted a storm's aftermath in this painting: dark clouds above an angry sea, a shipwrecked boat and its anxious survivors, and listing ships in the distance. As the sea furiously beats against the shoreline, waves explode beyond the rocks in a froth of white. The motion of the waves, the distant rain shaft, the battered ship, and even the bodies of the fleeing castaways fill the scene with strong, opposing diagonal lines. The lighthouse standing solidly upright at the painting's center counters all of this activity.

The strong colors of the shipwrecked survivors' clothing stand out against the palette of greens, grays, and browns in the turbulent sea. Clearing skies cast the survivors in an eerie glow; dark tones at the left and lower edges and in the waves themselves draw further attention to the bright figures.

The scene as a whole suggests the powerful force of nature over man. Vernet's companion piece for this painting, *A Calm at a Mediterranean Port*, presents a sharply contrasting scene of a harbor in more placid weather.

About the Artist

Claude-Joseph Vernet (French, 1714–89)

A coach painter's son, Vernet first studied with his father, then with a painter in Aix-en-Provence in France. Supported by some of the region's art patrons, the young artist went to Rome in 1734. From 1746 until his death, he regularly sent pictures to the Salon, where they were enthusiastically received. Returning to France in 1753, Vernet became a full member of the Académie Royale. His fame was assured when Louis XV commissioned him to paint a series of ports of France. Assisted by Pierre-Jacques Voltaire, Vernet traveled around France for nine years. After 1762 he settled in Paris and painted highly successful storm scenes, shipwrecks, and moonlit night pieces.