

The Fighting Temeraire by Joseph Mallord William Turner

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) is one of Britain's best-known landscape painters. During his long career he produced a huge body of work including more than 500 oil paintings, hundreds of watercolours and an incredible 19 000 sketches. Turner was born in 1775 in Covent Garden, London, the son of a barber. His father's shop was a two-minute walk away from the Thames, which was then a busy highway serving one of the world's finest ports. From an early age, ships held a strong fascination for Turner and, combined with a preoccupation with the power of nature, the subject of the sea became of great significance to him.

In 1789, he enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy of Arts, which was then the only art school in England. He soon became a regular exhibitor of watercolours and later oils, showing his first work at the age of 15. Turner became a full member of the Royal Academy in 1802. Aged just 26, he was one of the youngest members ever.

Turner died at the age of 76, following a successful career. He was buried at his own request "among my Brothers in Art" in St Paul's Cathedral, alongside Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Royal Academy. Under the terms of his will he bequeathed all his finished oil paintings still in his possessions to the nation. *The Fighting Temeraire* was included among these.

The painting shows the final journey of the *Temeraire*, a celebrated gunship which had fought valiantly in Lord Nelson's fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Thirty-three years later, decaying and no longer in use, she was towed 55 miles up the Thames from Sheerness to be broken up in a Rotherhithe shipyard. The *Temeraire* was a 98-gun, three-decked battle ship that had been launched in 1798, during the French revolutionary war. Her name means bold or fearless in French.

Turner's painting pays tribute to the *Temeraire's* heroic past. The gunship, painted delicately in light tones, seems to float effortlessly on the calm waters, giving it a ghostly appearance. The glorious sunset behind is a fanfare of colour in her honour. Just as the day is drawing to a close, so too is the life of the *Temeraire*. The nostalgic and melancholy mood of the painting is emphasised by the fact that she can no longer travel by the power of her own sails; they have been furled for the last time and a steamboat tugs her in to shore. Turner paints the two boats in stark contrast to one another: the steamboat moves ahead of the grand gunship, squat, dirty and ugly by comparison.

Complete the definitions with the underlined words.

- 1 _____ to arrange for money or property to be given to somebody after your death
- 2 _____ a man whose job is cutting men's hair
- 3 _____ to (cause something to) become gradually damaged, worse, or less
- 4 _____ pale and transparent
- 5 _____ to fold and roll something such as a flag, sail, or umbrella into a tight tube shape
- 6 _____ an idea or subject that someone thinks about most of the time

7 _____ to pull a car, boat, etc. along, using a rope or a chain tied to another vehicle or boat

8 _____ seeming not to need any effort

9 _____ to stay on the surface of a liquid and not sink

10 _____ not frightened of danger

11 _____ to praise someone or something

12 _____ to pull something quickly and usually with a lot of force

13 _____ empty, simple, or obvious, especially without decoration or anything that is not necessary

14 _____ importance

15 _____ place where ships are built or repaired

Key:

1. bequeath

2. barber

3. decay

4. ghostly

5. furl

6. preoccupation

7. tow

8. effortlessly

9. float

10. bold

11. tribute

12. tug

13. stark

14. significance

15. shipyard

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