

# From a Railway Carriage

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh in 1850. When he wrote this poem in the 1880s, steam trains were a very popular form of transport. They enabled people to travel long distances at much greater speeds than ever before. This poem describes a journey on a steam train.

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,  
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;  
And charging along like troops in a battle,  
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:

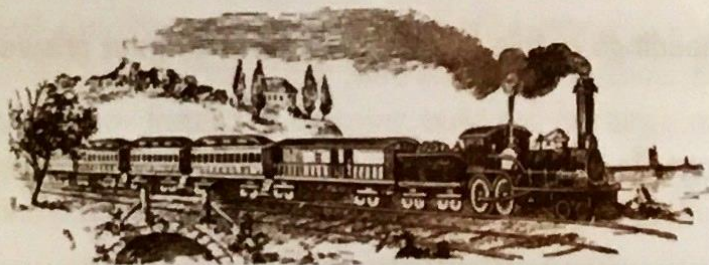
- 5 All of the sights of the hill and the plain  
Fly as thick as driving rain;  
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,  
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clambers and scrambles,

- 10 All by himself and gathering brambles;  
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;  
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!  
Here is a cart run away in the road  
Lumping along with man and load;

- 15 And here is a mill, and there is a river:  
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!

Robert Louis Stevenson



1 Why do you think the poet compares the speed of the train to magical creatures like "fairies" and "witches" (line 1)?

.....  
.....

1 mark

2 What does the poet compare to "troops in a battle" (line 3)?

.....

1 mark

3 "Fly as thick as driving rain" (line 6). This is an example of (circle one):

- a. a metaphor
- b. a simile
- c. onomatopoeia
- d. personification

1 mark

4 What is the poet describing in lines 9-15?

.....

1 mark

5 Why are the things described in the poem "gone for ever" (line 16)?

.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

6 What effect does the rhythm of the poem have on the reader?

.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

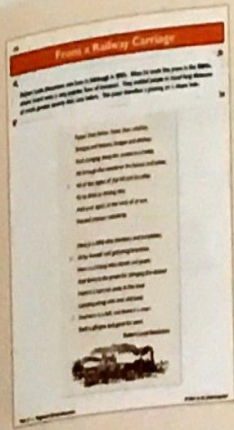
7 Do you think this is an effective description of train travel? Explain your answer.

.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

Total  
out of 10

# From a Railway Carriage



## Question Book:

Year 5, pages 16-17

## Author / Source:

Robert Louis Stevenson

## Genre:

Classic poetry

## Cross-curricular links:

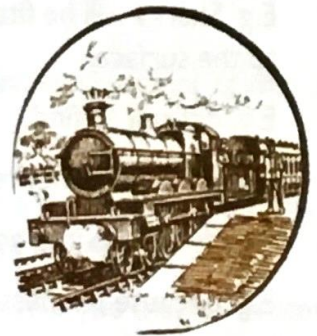
- History (Victorian railways)
- Maths (timetables)

## 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.