



Rob Roy

A Victorian railway accident

This resource was produced using documents from the collections of The National Archives. It can be freely modified and reproduced for use in the classroom only.

Introduction

This photograph was taken in 1868. It shows a Great Western engine, the Rob Roy surrounded by onlookers and workmen (navvies).

They are trying to rescue the engine after an accident. The chief engineer, Mr W. G. Owen, is wearing a top hat and standing in front of the smokestack.

Telegraph wires and salvage equipment can also be seen in the photograph.

Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. Look at the photograph and answer the questions below:
 - a) Describe what you can see in the photograph.
 - b) What do you think happened before the photograph was taken?
 - c) How might you be able to work out when this photograph was taken?
2. Pick a person in the photograph. Describe the situation from their point of view. What can you hear, see and smell? How are you feeling? What thoughts are going through your mind?
3. Use this photograph to write an opening scene for a story. There are different ways starting a story. Use one of the following ways to start:
 - a) Description
 - b) Action
 - c) Dialogue

Background

Britain's first steam railway lines opened in the 1820s. In just a few decades they had grown to cover most of the country, employing thousands of people and covering thousands of miles of countryside with track and signalling. The coming of the railways in Victorian England meant that for the first time people could travel by train to different parts of the country. People were able to travel outside of their village or town. Day trips and seaside holidays started to become popular. Also many Victorians started to travel to football and cricket matches. It was now possible to transport newspapers and books more easily to different parts of the country. Fresh milk, and butter from the countryside and fish from the coast could be delivered to the towns.

Although Victorian railways were generally safe and reliable there were a number of very serious accidents in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1868, the same year as Rob Roy's accident, there was an even worse rail disaster at Abergele in Wales. Three years

earlier in 1865 a train to London full of passengers including the author Charles Dickens came off the tracks in Kent. Ten people were killed and many more hurt.

Teachers Notes

This lesson can be used with pupils at key stage 2 to support the teaching of Literacy in Year 5. It focuses on a photograph of a railway accident in 1868, and supports the following text level objectives from the National Literacy Strategy:

3 - to change point of view, e.g. describe a situation from the point of view of a another character or perspective

7 - to write from another character's point of view

11 - to experiment with alternative ways of opening a story, e.g. description, action, dialogue

More activities

Pupils could 'freeze-frame' sections of the photograph, and 'hotseat' each other on their chosen person.

Pupils could work in groups to discuss the photograph, and draft a story outline as preparation for a short piece of oral storytelling.

Pupils could use the photograph to write and perform their own play script

Source 1 : Rob Roy (RAIL 1005/132)

