

Questioning an animated film

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I teach with film





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by Anne Marie Filho

The screening of an animated film should enable pupils to encounter a work, to question it, to formulate a critical judgement, to express an opinion, an argued point of view, to debate, to compare, to put into perspective, to build links with other works, other arts, other media which have dealt with the same subject. It is thus an opportunity for pupils to acquire knowledge and build skills that they can put to the test at other times.



Rain and fish © Risa Kimpara

Two ordinary modalities but different ways of questioning

When classes are invited to study an object, whatever it may be, offered by nature or produced by the artifice of creation as, for example, a text or a film, two modes of questioning can be adopted.

- A set of questions, often in degrees of complexity, is submitted to the students who answer them.
- The questioning is not decided in advance but is constructed according to the pupils' reflections at the time when they discover the object to be studied and react; the organisation of these reflections and their development will necessarily make it possible to achieve the objectives set for the analysis, for the apprehension of meaning, which remain identical in the two methods; the interest of this second approach is to create the conditions for the gradual acquisition of a method, of an autonomy, including by making the pupils gradually aware of the existence of invariants in their observations. While adapting to their age and level, it is the teacher's responsibility to invite the pupils to reflect on the strategies they use to question, analyse and understand, so that they can criticise them, assimilate them, and be able to appropriate them, reuse them and develop them.

To illustrate the point, we will now imagine that students are invited to discover Risa Kimpara's film, « **Rain and Fish** ».

Keeping the objective of image education

Showing an animated film is always an opportunity to offer students an encounter with a work of art, a work of artistic creation, according to the artistic teaching approach, whatever the objective.

It is worth recalling here the approach to artistic education as formalised in the various publications available on the Eduscol website, in the section devoted to this education.

The study of animated films may usefully be inspired by the proposals contained in these accompanying documents.



From the mobilisation of personal experience to that of knowledge

The children are moved and understand the film in terms of their experience. If the work here is formally different from those with which the pupils are familiar, it refers, in essence, to an experience shared by all, that of the rain, of its noises, that of the umbrella, large or small, with which one wants to have fun, that of the school bus perhaps. It solicits the memory, is easily anchored in personal history and favours the play of perceptive connotations.

Depending on the project, the meeting could be prepared by discussing the theme of "rain" before the screening. Who likes it, who doesn't? Why do they like it? Which memory(s)? What images? We can write, draw, act out our own stories, explore the imaginary vocabulary of rain, before discovering what the director has imagined and told.

Perhaps the work will also resonate with children's culture. There are many books about rain, suitable for all ages. Depending on their age, they have been read books in which the characters are confronted with rain, classics of children's literature such as the album by Agnès Rosenstiehl, "Mimi Cracra, la pluie, elle adore ça !".

They will remember the rhymes in English, "Rain rain go away", in French, "Il pleut, il mouille, c'est la fête à la grenouille"... Will they have had the opportunity to see Gene Kelly singing in the rain? Whatever the case, for many reasons, personal, cultural, social..., the pupils already have the resources to understand the film.

Unconsciously or not, the students will also mobilise their knowledge and experience of the construction of the narratives themselves, which form the basis of their expectations and enable them to anticipate the events to come. In Risa Kimpara's film, the storyline is original in its sobriety. It might upset the aspirations of the young students, those that may have been nourished by their previous experiences, laying the foundations for a first culture of literature and cinema.

This film is both narrative, with a very pure narrative thread, and contemplative. It could be confusing.

Rue de Paris, temps de pluie, Gustave Caillebotte, 1877, Art Institute of Chicago





Exploration

Encountering the work also means meeting its author, and situating the context of its creation and distribution. Students should be trained to be attentive to this information. The meaning of this identification will only become clearer with its repetition, extended to the encounter with other works, whether pictorial, musical or literary... The aim is modestly to teach them respect for an author, for his work and that of his team. Beyond that, they will be able to build step by step the learning of the cultures whose works bear the marks of the eras, to discover, in the long run, the "schools" as we have been saying for a long time for other arts by grouping, if it is relevant, the artists in schools according to their country of origin, according to their century, according to the artistic movement to which they belong.

The animated films offered on the platform are steeped in the culture of their makers, but they are also broadly open to other influences and the composition of the production teams themselves is often multicultural. It should be noted that most of the films have titles in English, which the students will learn to translate according to their age and cycle. Without getting into a controversy, the use of English for films produced in countries where it is not the official language underlines the fact that they are aimed at an international audience whose culture will also influence their reception. Depending on the year's project, traces of this work on the "context" of the works can be kept.

In the case of the film « **Rain and Fish** », the information provided in the film itself is systematically written in two scripts: Japanese and Latin. The information in Japanese is thus translated into English.

Titre	Rain and Fish	The title appears after 43 seconds, in Japanese and English. The names in the English title do not begin with a capital letter, as is conventional, and the Japanese characters mean "goldfish", not "rain and fish". The Japanese characters mean 'goldfish', not 'rain and fish', and they look like little boats on a foggy horizon. 赤しゝ = red. 魚 = fish.
Author	Risa Kimpara	Japanese director
Team and distribution of functions		This information appears at the end of the film.
Script, design, edit and animation	Risa Kimpara	4.22
Animation assistant	Yusuke Kazuta	4.22
Music	Yusaku Masuda	4.28
Sound effects	Takuji Oe	4.28
Audio mixer	Yoshito Morita	4.28
Production	Tokyo University of the Arts	4.28
Directed by	Risa Kimpara	4.34
Production	Tokyo University of the Arts	4.34
Location	Tokyo University of the Arts	Appears on the screen from the beginning.
Production country	Japon	Induit par Tokyo University of the Arts.
Production date	2010	Date at the bottom of the black screen, last image.

Further information can be provided.

Duration of the film	4.47 secondes
Film technique	2-D film
Additional information	Film made by Risa Kimpara ¹ during her first year at the Tokyo University of the Arts.

The way in which all these elements are taken into account depends on the project carried out in the class and the level of the pupils. However, it seems essential that the pupils methodically get used to naming at least the author, without ignoring the fact that making a film involves a team, and to identifying the year and place of production. If the teacher plans to make an animated film with his or her class, he or she can already observe here with the pupils the different functions performed by the members of a team, which can then be distributed.

The difference between the form of this film and that of the Japanese productions they have seen may be apparent to the older ones: here we are closer to the seminal work of the Chinese Te Wei (1915-2010) and his animated washes, or to the singularity of Isao Takahata in "The Tale of the Princess Kaguya" (2013). Elements of Japanese culture are noticeable in the director's choices.



The narrative. Pitch, summary, synopsis

It is interesting to invite the pupils to work, orally and/or in writing, on a presentation of the proposed story.

The term "hook" is preferable to "pitch", which is borrowed from the commercial world and is now commonly used to describe a one- or two-sentence presentation that should arouse interest, generally without revealing the end. In general, this presentation, this "hook":

- sets out the starting situation.
- specifies the characters.
- reports the first event that sets the story in motion and that can change the life of the character(s) by opening up the field of possibilities before them, creating a more or less strong suspense.

The film « **Rain and Fish** » was the subject of several of these brief presentations.

Here are three of them, taken from sites that cite the work, to which is attached a fourth pitch proposed on an English-language site:

"On a rainy day, a little boy waits for the bus and lets his imagination run wild. Images come to mind."

Films pour Enfants

"During a rain shower, a little boy waits for the bus under his umbrella and goes off into his thoughts."

cinemapublic.org

"On a rainy day, a boy waits at a bus stop. Drops of water crackle and wave in a puddle. Suddenly, he is startled. A goldfish in the pond..."

3dvf.com

"One rainy day a boy was waiting sulkily at a bus stop. Pitter-patter, raindrops leap and make waves in a puddle. Watching it, he saw something [jump]. When the boy looked into the puddle, there was a red fish swimming. It is a story of a red fish a boy saw on a rainy day."

Letterboxd, the social network for film lovers

The composition of this catchphrase and the choice it implies is demanding and allows for formative reflection by the students. In the examples presented above, rain is evoked in the first words. It is the driving force behind the action, which increases in intensity and creates puddles, mirrors for the child. When it stops, the film stops too.

One can also work on even shorter forms, a noun phrase or a slogan accompanying the title.

Writing the pitch can be a first or new opportunity to interrogate the chosen title.

Students will observe the difference between the Japanese title which means "goldfish" and the English title which translates as "rain and fish". Why this difference, assumed by the director? What is the point of the first and second titles? What other title would the students imagine? In the manner of La Fontaine, "The child, the rain and the fish", which refers more to the story, without an explicit moral here? Or, very differently, "L'attente", "Rêverie sous la pluie", which reflects the child's situation, his state of mind. Students can come up with many answers.

The class could also compare the title of the film with the titles given by other creators, poets, painters, musicians, etc. to the works they have dedicated to rain, such as those cited at the end of this document.

The summary is longer and tells the whole story. The term "synopsis", which is part of the film lexicon, can be considered a synonym and presented as such to cycle 3 students. The summary of « **Rain and Fish** » will present some difficulties that are easily overcome, partly because of the interweaving of the reverie with real experience, and partly because of the plurality of interpretations of the characters and the links between them. The summary asks the students to identify the place, the characters, the links that unite them and the action in which they are involved.



The place, the setting

The film does not show a precise setting. There are few clues to support the hypotheses:

Visual cues:

- A white barrier (in 0.23).
- The oblong sign (0.48) which is understood to indicate a bus stop.
- A bus or coach.
- Sketched trees and buildings (from 3.29).

Sound cues:

- The sound of cars driving.
- The noise of the bus and its pneumatic doors.

Depending on their personal experience, pupils will recognise a town, a village, a hamlet, a country road, but they will not be able to go further and confirm their hypotheses.

The action could take place in different places, in different countries.

The rain and then the glare caused by the return of the sun hide or crush the elements of the setting. The attention is thus focused on the child, the umbrella, the bus, some essential elements for the story, and, above all, on the rain and then the sun which are essential actors and which feed the child's emotions.

During the first meeting between Satsuki, Mei and Totoro in the film "My Neighbour Totoro" (Hayao Miyazaki, 1988), the rain curtain also hides the grey-coloured setting by fragmenting it. Did the director remember this episode of the film?

Rain and light have dissolving powers. The dissolution of the elements of the décor overvalues the chosen colours, the precise forms disappear and the child evolves in an omnipresent grey colour, then in the clarity of orange-yellow. A few nuances barely distinguish the boy's boots and his slightly bluish clothing, like variations of grey.

The world of rain is as monochrome as Te Wei's washes. The gold fish brings the golden colour which then spreads to the whole sky, just as the expected adult finally arrives. The colours of the décor coincide with the child's feelings and emotions, signifying them as much as they cause them.

Rain and fish © Risa Kimpara





The characters

In this setting of impressions, the main character is identifiable. He is a child. His small size is indicated by :

- The child/umbrella ratio.
- The child/panel proportions of the bus stop.
- The child/adult proportions, in the plunging look on him in the last part, (image showing him next to the adult).

He is probably a little boy, if one interprets in this sense:

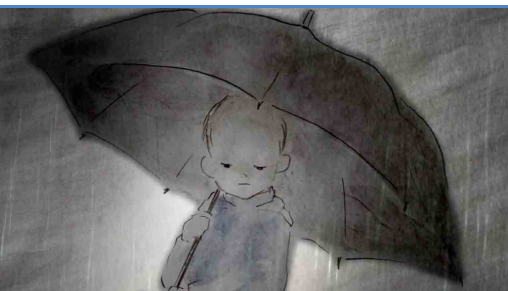
- His clothing, which is that of a child and is more commonly worn by a boy, but the class may wish to discuss this.
- Her short hairstyle, but the students will be able to discuss that too.

The authors of the pitches quoted above unanimously recognise a little boy.

The drawing also provides clues to the child's state of mind.

- His face: the eyes and mouth are expressive.

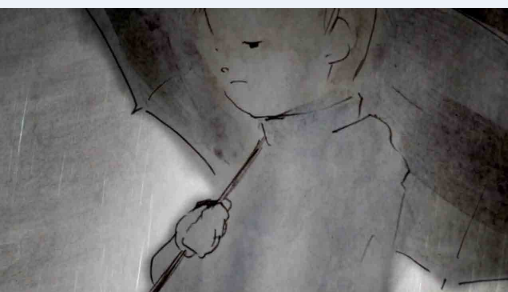
The mouth is drawn, "sketched" with a line that knows how to express sadness, gloom, joy and surprise.



The child goes from sadness to the pleasure of discovering the cat, then to the wonder of reverie before joyfully finding the expected adult. All these feelings are conveyed in one stroke. The way he drags his umbrella accentuates the impression of sadness.

Around the child, the other characters are unclear.

- Animals, real like the dark-coloured cat that meows and flees from the water; real and unreal at the same time, like the goldfish that multiply in the course of the reverie and fly.
- A female figure, such as the metamorphosis of one of these fish, which places a kiss on the child's eyelid. A male figure, who intervenes
- A male figure, who intervenes at the end, strokes the child's hair with an affectionate hand, before going on his way with him.



Adults, in the child's reverie as in reality, are tender and protective. Their presence is associated with pleasure and happiness. The pupils will formulate hypotheses. They will probably want to recognise the man as the father the child is waiting for and will have to justify this interpretation. Will they also judge that the dreamed woman is an image of the mother that the child thinks of? A mother absent in reality but present in the boy's imagination.

The female figure seems to be born from the metamorphosis of the goldfish. She, whose golden hair unfolds like the veiled fins of the fish, quickly disappears.

The metamorphosis of animals into human beings and vice versa is a universal theme and appears in many legends, both in Japan and in other countries.

A reader of Ovid and open to Western culture, Hayao Myazaki exploited this imagination by composing "Ponyo on the Cliff" (2008), the story of a little girl goldfish, not without being inspired by Andersen.



Rain and fish © Risa Kimpara



The action

It is raining. A child, dragging an umbrella behind him, walks towards a bus stop.

From 0.15 to 0.39 the child crosses the field from left to right, looking sad, dragging an umbrella. The movement is emphasised by the alternating shots, showing the child in close-up and then in medium shot. Each change of shot places the child on the left side of the image and again gives impetus to the movement from left to right.

The 0.30/0.31 plane superimposes the two planes.

From 0.31 to 0.39, the child crosses the field and disappears, exiting the frame on the right, leaving the empty space for the title characters to appear and disappear.

In 0.47 and up to 0.54, the film shows the child standing at the bus stop.



The child is standing at the bus stop. A bus comes along, stops and then leaves.

From 0.55 to 1.07, the bus enters the field from the left, crosses and then stops, before leaving the frame from the right. The soundtrack provides information on the pneumatic doors that open and close without being seen in the image.

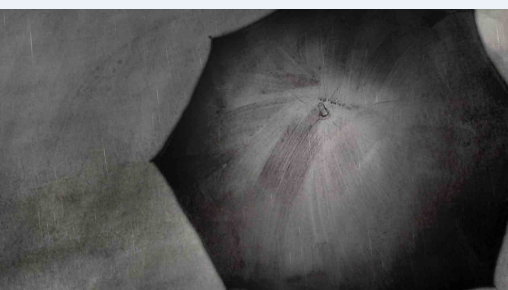


The child did not get on the bus. He stayed, waiting in the persistent rain.

In 1.08, the disappearing bus reveals the child, still standing at the bus stop. One may have thought that he would get on the bus and be surprised to see him.

The downpour increases. The child opens his umbrella and it rings.

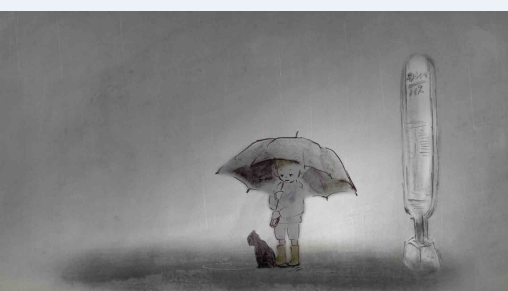
From 1.09 to 1.16, the child is busy opening his umbrella; in 1.17, the umbrella covers almost the entire field, then the child is seen in a close-up (1.18) and a medium shot (1.19), with the two images superimposed in 1.19



A cat joins him and takes refuge under the umbrella.

The child waits and a few seconds are spent showing him like this, motionless, idle. He then gets the idea (1.31, superimposed images) of playing with his umbrella (1.31 to 1.42). While the shot is always close up, the child is gradually seen in a slight dive, as if the viewpoint on him were gaining height, in a travelling shot that is both backwards and vertical. From 1.42 to 2.05, the child's attention is absorbed by the meowing of a cat which remains out of frame. The child is now in the centre of the image and in 2.00 a new vertical movement reveals the cat.

2.05 reveals the child at the bus stop, as before (cf. 1.19), but under his umbrella the cat has taken refuge. The child is no longer alone.



Rain and filsh © Risa Kimpara



The child and the cat watch their reflection in a puddle. The child discovers a goldfish flying around him, accompanied by a flock of other fish. A female figure appears and kisses the child's face before disappearing.

The following image (2.20/2.11) is surprising. It looks like a low angle shot, but it is the reflection that explains this effect. The characters are split in the reflection of a puddle (2.12-2.20), two worlds coexist and, in the water, an unusual universe unfolds.

The goldfish appears in 2.25 as if born from the drop of water that occupies the image from 2.21 to 2.25. It seems to die in 2.38 and is reborn from two hands that take it, shelter it and then let it escape as one does with a bird (2.39-2.45). These two hands do not seem to be those of the child who becomes the amazed spectator of the flight of the fish, and then of all the fish around him. The image places him in the centre, in a close-up, in a close-up, also in a medium shot to discover the ballet of the many fish around him (2.55-3.03, superposition). In 3.10, the close-up allows us to capture the kiss that the light-haired woman places on his eyelid, before disappearing (3.13, several images superimposed to signify the speed of the movement). The child remains alone and then disappears.

The empty field, swept with increasingly yellow and pink colours, is crossed by a red fish from bottom to top and from right to left (3.20). The fish disappears into the depth of the field (3.21).

The sun has returned. The fish have disappeared but the sky, once again sunny, is their colour. The cat leaves. An adult, who probably got off the bus, is now with the child. He strokes his head tenderly. The adult and the child leave together.

A sun-gilded sky fills the entire field from 3.22 to 3.28. The orange shapes in the sky recall the shape of the goldfish, the roundness of its body, the elongated triangularity of its tail. The silhouettes of the child and the cat, with their backs to the sky and the set, reappear, split in their reflection on the ground, while the viewer's gaze moves backwards, as if in a travelling shot. The closed umbrella confirms that the rain has stopped. The cat leaves the child (3.36). In 3.55, the images are superimposed and the child is seen in a bird's eye view, his head down in the centre and his face as it appears in the puddle which the child, still fascinated, continues to look at. A shadow behind him appears in the reflection (4.05). The child's eyes widen. He turns around and faces the newcomer (4.08) whose gaze the film adopts and who remains out of frame. The child is thus seen from above, surprised, without smiling. A large, wide hand enters the field from the top of the frame and rests on his head (4.12), covering it. The child closes his eyes and opens them again, now smiling (4.14), even blushing more and more (4.15). His happy face is superimposed on the bus (4.16) which leaves the field through the frame on the right, revealing the child and the adult now holding the umbrella. The adult holds out his hand to the child (4.18) and the two silhouettes, which merge in profile (4.20), now move to the left and fade away. The field is empty (4.20/4.22) until the credits appear. The adult and child reappear in the centre, behind the team members' names. They are from behind and appear to be moving towards the depths of the field.

The off-screen is the space of the story that does not appear in the frame. The field is the space visible inside the frame. The author uses the off-screen to hide for a moment from the viewer what the child sees: the cat, the adult.

Extensions:

Based on the clues found in the film, the pupils could be invited to imagine what happened before, to give the child a name, to invent his story, the one that leads him to live the moments recounted by the film.



The theme

The definition of the theme can be discussed in the class.

The theme of waiting seems to be at the heart of the narrative here. However, it can be interesting to qualify it: idle, lonely...

The theme of rain is also prominent. The title, which contains the word 'rain' in English, attests to this.

The theme of childhood is also dealt with: the capacity to dream, to imagine, the ability to leave reality for its reflection, to deploy around oneself a universe discovered in oneself and/or in legends, tales... but also the relationship to adults with these female and male figures. The father figure is recognisable, the mother figure is dreamt of. Is the mother absent, ill as in Miyasaki's *My Neighbour Totoro* where the two little girls, Satsuki and Mei, live alone with their father?

Koinobori in Japan, Dmitri Popov



Hiroshige, 1895. Brooklyn Museum



The flying fish motif

Flying fish play an important role in Japanese culture. They are represented in Koi Nobori, literally "carp streamers", which are windsocks in the shape of Koi carp, made for the "Tango no sekku," the boys' festival (sekku).

The sturdy carp swim upstream with a courage that earns them this tribute. This motif of the "flying fish", the importance of which is underlined by the Japanese title, "goldfish", places the reverie, the inner life of the little boy at the heart of the film, revealed for a moment by the appearance of the fish.



The soundtrack

The film's soundtrack is completely devoid of dialogue. It does more than accompany, it supports and guides the visual perception. It underlines the composition, the movement, defines the moments, supports, underpins the meaning, helps to understand. It can reduce the polysemy of images.

Listening without seeing

If the project is to draw the students' attention to the importance of this soundtrack, it is possible to suggest that they listen to it before seeing the film, for itself, and then let the students formulate hypotheses based on this listening.

- In the first one, we hear that it is raining, someone is walking, cars are driving, a 'car' stops and starts, but children may recognise the sound of a bus's pneumatic door, a bell precedes a meowing.

Will their personal experience also enable them to pay attention to the pounding of rain on an umbrella?

- In the second, music like a xylophone covers the sound field, punctuated by the sound of rain, first slow, then very fast, then changes again.

- In the third, the rain is no longer audible. Cars drive with the sound that their movement produces on wet ground, a vehicle stops, someone walks, birds scream, vehicles drive again, several steps, then the last sound, that of a drop of water.

This soundtrack is composed of noises familiar to young students who will be able to formulate hypotheses that the film will confirm or refute.

The second part of the film can be perplexing and no sound cues, apart from the persistent rain, point to reality with any certainty. The disappearance of these sound elements raises questions, if it means the disappearance of a real and familiar world.

Listening and identifying the origin of sounds in the picture

When screening with students, it is interesting to get used to distinguishing :

- Sounds that belong to the reality represented.

(Ex: the rain I see in the pictures).

Are they exactly the same as what we normally hear? Is there a difference between the children's ordinary experience of these sounds and their rendition in the film? Here the sounds are realistic but it is their discrimination that attracts attention, the emphasis on the falling water for example.

- Sounds whose origin is not in the reality represented.

(e.g. music that no one plays in the reality represented).

So the director added this music. It is interesting to ask why, especially as in this film it only appears at a specific moment, changes from slow to fast and then decelerates again. The students will probably see that it accompanies the dance of the flying fish, that the sound of the instruments is very similar to that of raindrops.

The music coincides with the reverie, with the movement of the imagination which is born, arises from the childish experience of the rain, exacerbated by the solitude of an idle wait. It underlines the metamorphosis of a reality that nevertheless remains the starting point of the reverie: the very real sound of the rain, associated for a moment with the cat's bell, becomes a crystalline music.

The water becomes the instrument of a music and the falling drops resound like the blades of a xylophone.

Watch the film without sound

This is an often practised exercise, which allows students to propose one or more soundtracks and to analyse how they influence the reception of the film.

The students are always attentive to the variations in meaning and emotions perceived according to the sound choices made.

The students will also distinguish between music and sound effects.



References

Children's literature

There is a wealth of literature on the experience of rain.
Why not choose works that offer a positive view of rain?
Poems about rain...

"Il pleut", Les Ziaux, Raymond Queneau (1943), a poem full of gaiety that students can imitate as young Oulipians.

"Pluie", À la lisière du temps (1984) and "Le loup vexé", Enfantasques (1974), Claude Roy, poetic and amusing texts.

"Pluie", Les Stances, Jean Moréas (1899), eight melancholic lines that may echo the child's reverie.

"La pluie", Le parti pris des choses, Francis Ponge (1942), an unusual evocation attached to sounds and forms, in a progression similar to that of the film.

"Il pleure dans mon coeur", Romances sans paroles, Paul Verlaine (1874). **"Barbara"**, Paroles, Jacques Prévert (1946).

Animated film

"My Neighbour Totoro", Hayaho Miyazaki (1988). **"Ponyo"**, Hayaho Miyazaki (2008).

Painting

"Rain, steam and speed », William Turner, 1844, National Gallery, Londres.

"Rain on the city », Takeushi Seiho, entre 1864 et 1942, musée d'Orsay, Paris.

"Seascape Study with Rain Cloud", John Constable, 1828, Royal Academy of Arts, Londres.

Comparison between the works of the Japanese painter Hiroshige and the works inspired by him, the "japoneries" of Vincent van Gogh:

"Sudden shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake", 1857, Hiroshige, Bibliothèque du Congrès des États-Unis et la version de Vincent van Gogh **"Bridge in the rain, d'après Hiroshige"**, 1887, Museum, Amsterdam.

"Wheat field in the rain", 1889, Vincent van Gogh, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Out of the rain, Hanabusa Itchō, 1709. Metropolitan Museum of Art



Music

"La goutte d'eau" (Prélude opus 28 N°15), 1838, Frédéric Chopin.

"Jardins sous la pluie" (Estampes), 1903, Claude Debussy.

Claude Debussy declared that he had contemplated Turner's paintings in London before composing these Estampes.

"Rain Tree, pour deux marimbas et un vibraphone", 1981, Toru Takemitsu.

This Japanese composer devoted several works to rain, particularly in the 1980s. This one, played with percussion instruments, is "imitative" and can awaken the imagination of students.