

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

***A Calm at a Mediterranean Port***

Claude-Joseph Vernet (French, 1714–89)  
1770  
Oil on canvas  
44 1/2 x 57 3/8 in.  
2002.9.2



**Background Information**

*He has stolen Nature's secret; whatever she produces, Vernet can re-create.*  
—Denis Diderot, reviewing the Salon of 1763

In brilliant detail, Claude-Joseph Vernet captured in this painting the gorgeous weather and leisurely activities of a day by the sea. Fishermen clean the day's catch on a stone pier while several people chat nearby, one of them pointing toward the large ship in the bay. Meanwhile, a man sits and smokes his pipe, the tobacco glowing a bright red. A cumulus cloud, perhaps the remnant of a distant storm, towers to the left of the setting sun. Warm tones of red, orange, and yellow predominate, suggesting a hazy sunset after a bright day.

In *A Calm*, Vernet portrayed a completely peaceful scene in striking contrast to its pendant, *A Storm on a Mediterranean Coast*. Taken together, the two works show, on the one hand, nature's benevolence, and, on the other, nature's fury.

**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.