



## The Landscape Painting Interpretation Based on “Barrier-free” & “Barrier” Visualization Techniques



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*Manuscript submitted: 09 Jan 2020, Manuscript revised: 27 Feb 2020, Accepted for publication: 12 March 2020*

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### Abstract

The process of painting interpretation handling and text writing resulted in insufficient attention to children's live speech; the teacher guided their activities, and individual interpretation of a painting is blocked by "barriers," such as rigid teacher instructions, sample descriptive texts, and the like. The experimental technique was recognized based on establishing open educational communication between the teacher and pupils at the lesson, where primacy and value of the painting worked as a visual image. The research represented the comparative analysis of children's texts. The results were as follows: first, comparison of text drafts and final versions describing the painting; second, third, analysis of pupils' worksheets for comparing two paintings; fourth, analysis of individual memos. The research concluded that the "barrier" technique, where pupils should respond on already prepared text, resulted in less detailed statements with fewer figurative expressions, and also increased the similarity of the texts, that was "leveling up" of perception and vision of the painting by children. "Barrier-free" technique ran effectively because it helped children build educational and personal communication.

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### Keywords

*barrier technique;  
barrier-free technique;  
cooperative activity;  
educational  
communication;  
painting interpretation;*

*International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities © 2020.*

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## 1 Introduction

Working with the painting as a visual image has always been considered in regular schools as an essential component of developing children's speech coherence. Textbooks in the Russian language contain reproductions of paintings such as landscapes, less often like genre painting, even less often like still life paintings. It is a part of academic and methodological complexes for primary schools. The traditional method of developing children's speech (Zinovieva, 2016 & Lvov et al., 2002), "forces" teachers to work on a painting description essay according to the following structure: an *introductory conversation* for example, about an artist or picture, *painting examination*, *painting discussion*, *plan drawing*, and *vocabulary development*, which includes elements of orthography, finally, *text creation*. Such essays are "convenient in terms of organization and psychologically valuable since the artist has already interpreted the phenomena of life depicted in the painting" (Lvov et al., 2002). The main principle of a traditional method focuses on the painting interpretation process, as well as text creation. The teacher guides the process, focusing children's attention on the painting, precisely, on a specific part of it. The teacher advises what words, including symbolic ones, children should use describing the painting, and in what way the description text should be spoken. This process cannot be spontaneous because children do not pay enough attention to the main parts of the painting.

Moreover, the description will be "uncultured" in terms of speech structure like orthography, punctuation, and stylistics. It is also worth noting that the extended speech produced by children during the lesson on speech development is not live, all of the statements are addressed to the teacher. Besides, there is no communication among pupils because children see the same thing and interpret it in the same way. As a result, children write very similar texts, forgetting that this act requires a creative way of writing. In our research, *a new way of creative writing*, an alternative to the traditional one, is suggested: while working with painting, like in terms of a landscape, children are allowed to describe it creatively and share their thoughts and ideas about the picture. In other words, the teacher aims at structuring the lesson, so the painting becomes a source of discussion, reflection, mutual interest, a source of open educational communication between the teacher and the pupils. After all, the painting was initially created for its viewing (admiring and gradual immersion), not for description. Many artists would be surprised if they read the way pupils interpreted essays, while methodologically competent teachers guided them.

The research was based on the idea of Mitchell (2013, 1994, 2005), that there was a struggle for dominance between images and linguistic signs in modern culture and education, where the textual and visual forms were opposed to each other. Birth of visual culture in modern society worsened the opposition between the culture of the printed word and visual image, where the visual image was considered as a "second-rate illustration" of ideas (Mirzoeff, 2002). The experimental method was set as the idea of simultaneous, for example, a one-time and "single-moment," painting perception as a visual image, compared to a successive perception of fictional text with gradual reading, understanding, and the assumption that the result of text perception was visual perception interpretation (Polonnikov et al., 2017). It is essential to point out that the simultaneity of visual image perception assumes the viewer's trust in the first impressions, as there is no right or wrong impression, which according to Mamardashvili (1997), is considered as "events of emotional life," or "reflections of mental work." Using the painting as a source of impressions means that children become diverse; they express lively, real impressions when looking at the painting. Their impressions are interpreted well while communicating with others. In this sense, the situation of a painting viewing is emotional, and communication involvement is a result of an open discussion, which is called cooperative activity. At the same time, physiologists and neuroscientists point out that the "process of observing or viewing something helps to get some clearer understanding of the situation in contrast to other senses, thinking process, or behavior. Approximately half of our brain serves our eyesight." (Changizi, 2015).

The traditional method for pupils' speech development is still based on a progressive approach and insists on differentiating two processes: interpretation of the painting as a work of art by children and preparation for communication about the painting. In the first case, it is crucial to building a conversation competently, in the second one – to prepare children for painting description by drawing up a plan, selecting the lexical means appropriate to the painting specifics, structuring the spelling training to prevent children from mistakes. It is essential to consider all features of the descriptive text because the traditional method uses a standard division of texts according to speech types like narration, description, and argumentation without using other stimuli that cause children to respond in writing (Levinzon, 2014). The stages of a lesson on essay writing, based on

the painting, are as follows: setting the educational task, silent examination of the painting, analyzing the painting content, discussing the essay structure, preparing of lexical and spelling means, and writing the text. Within this method, the painting specifics as a visual image and its educational resources for open educational communication of the teacher with children is lost, as well as the organization of the dialogue between participants in the cooperative activity. "Understanding in the dialogue is carried out through representation of individual vision and its complementation with different viewpoints which, as a result, deepen and enrich this vision" (Prozumentova, 2016). One of the methodological difficulties for a teacher working with a visual image is defined as "confrontation" of the printed text as a word and painting as a visual image (Pozdeeva, 2017); the teacher interprets the landscape painting through the prism of "reference" printed text that children should create to describe this painting. Examples of texts-descriptions of the painting in the methodological manuals and on the Internet, in our opinion, become a barrier in building open communication with children when working with a visual image. Even supporters of the so-called creative writing, an alternative to the Russian concept of "speech development," in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America, emphasize the importance of practical activities when constructing speech content in the process of teaching writing, and also encourage teachers to listen to pupils more attentively and discuss their potential (Graves, 1983; Wright et al., 2006). They associate the success of pupils' written speech development with the choice of topics that are close to children's personal experience and pay less attention to educational and communicative resources of visual images and their application at the lesson.

## 2 Materials and Methods

The purpose of the experimental research is to test the technique of "descriptive essay" writing based on open educational communication between the teacher and pupils, recognizing the primacy and value of a painting as a visual image, compared to the secondary nature of the text describing it. It was essential to understand how much we can trust children in their vision of painting, removing all "barriers" such as rigid teacher instructions, regulated conversation on the painting, prepared plans, observance of rules for text creation, presentation of descriptive text samples, and the like. Within the experiment, we wanted to prove the assumption that "speech actions universalization could result in loss of visual image uniqueness like there was no such painting and would never be, and deprived of the opportunity to use the painting as a means for communicative and personal development of a pupil." (Pozdeeva, 2017).

Objectives of the experimental study:

- a) Develop and teach lessons in the 3rd grade of a primary school where one can compare the "barrier-free" and "barrier" communication techniques; the latter presupposes a prepared text describing the picture as a barrier.
- b) Substantiate and prove techniques of creating open educational communication at the lesson, during frontal, individual and group work.
- c) Analyze children's texts in terms of their speech format and content, first, immediately after the painting interpretation, second, after a group discussion.
- d) Find out how children identify the succession of painting descriptions and what role they attribute to visual actions.

Within the experiment, the following methods were involved: development and conduct of experimental lessons, observation over the teacher and pupils' activity, audio record and lesson transcripts, analysis of the text creation in terms of their speech format and content like the vocabulary, part-of-speech diversity, figures of speech, size of the text and sentences. For the experimental research, two paintings were selected: "Spring — high water" and "March" by I. I. Levitan. Grounds for selection of these paintings are the following: they are a part of classic Russian painting; the pictures are comprehensible for a child's perception, close to their personal experience, and positive in color range. The choice of the third grade as a test basis can be explained by the fact that children have developed oral and written speech skills at this stage, have had experience in writing essays of different kinds, experience in interpreting painting reproductions in the Russian language and literature. Three experimental lessons were developed and conducted by the teacher every two weeks from April to May 2017. The first lesson included work with the painting "Spring — high water," focusing on the "barrier-free"

technique, where the texts were based on the original drafts followed by a group discussion. In the second lesson, the painting "March" was interpreted with the use of the "barrier" technique: children started with a prepared descriptive text and moved on to the painting interpretation; after that, they wrote their descriptions. During the third final lesson, the main task was to compare two paintings and create a memo "How to write an essay about the painting. *The first experimental lesson* had the following structure. A puzzle-accompanied demonstration of the painting in front of the children: a boat depicted in the lower-left corner remained covered, and children tried to guess what was hidden there, for example, "an animal," "a bridge," "a boat," or "a bush." After getting the answer, children tried to predict the painting title, for example, "spring flood," "an early spring," "a conversation of trees," "a wooden lake," then they explained the author's title, mainly, why it consisted of two words. It is worth noting that some children did not realize that it was spring; they decided that fall was depicted in the painting. After that, on the worksheet, which had two columns (Me versus Others), children expressed their impressions and feelings. In the first column, the teacher suggested a set expression like "In the painting, I see ..." Then, some volunteers read their drafts. The other children could write their groupmates' expressions and sentences, which they liked in the second column. Finally, they wrote down a "full" descriptive text of the painting. *The second experimental lesson* was structured differently. At the lesson beginning, the painting description was given; after reading it, children had to predict the picture itself. To do this, the pupils highlighted word-images and word-paints with pencils of different colors while reading the text. As a result, children attributed the following words to words-images: "a snow cap," "will slide with rustling," "hit," "a horse," "an unclosed door," "stretching towards the sun," "reinforces the birdhouse," "it is breathing," "reflecting," "it is gaining strength." Children expressed such epithets like "a sunny day," "a bright blue sky," "a beautiful sunlit," "spring warmth," "light trunks," "dark pines," "warm reddish tones," "blue shades of snow," "a lemon-yellow wall," "golden sunrays," "a clear blue sky." After reading the text, children tried to describe how they saw the picture. After pupils had seen the picture and after its careful examination, children shared their opinions about what coincided and what did not coincide with what they imagined. Only after that, children wrote their texts. *The third experimental lesson* was devoted to comparing the two paintings. During an introductory conversation, children recollected what they were doing in the previous lessons. The pupils guessed an object covered in the painting, predicted what the painting would look like, compared thoughts of the painting with what they already saw, and then described the pictures. After that, the teacher suggested choosing one of the paintings to explain why it caught their attention. Children wrote mini texts. Seven pupils chose the painting "Spring — high water," twelve – the painting "March." They gave the following arguments in favor of the first painting: "the water looks like a mirror, beautiful, beautifully depicted trees that seem to be bathing in the water," "the boat is depicted on the shore, and a fisherman has been there recently," "summer is getting closer, and everything is coming to life." The painting "March" attracted children's attention because it had many descriptions like "a modest plot," "it is clear that this is March," "the scene is brighter," "lively," "cheerful," "some shadows are depicted," "there are animals, for example, a horse." It is interesting to note that one pupil remembered the fact that the artist had painted it quickly. Listening to children, the teacher summarized that Levitan's spring was different in these paintings; then, he gave a group assignment to analyze both paintings using a comparative table with the given criteria and reproductions. When formulating the comparison criteria, we considered the following steps: to start with the painting title, because it briefly conveyed its content, then addressed the objects depicted, specifying the painting content, then turned to signs of spring, since both paintings are "vernal." The next step was to pay attention to the colors used by the artist since it was a piece of art, to analyze the presence of a person in both paintings like explicit or hidden, and finally, to complete the analysis with defining the overall impression of the painting. When all groups presented, the lesson ended with personal writing of the memo "How to write a painting description essay."

### 3 Results and Discussions

The first table presents the analysis of drafts and final versions of the texts (twenty-five descriptive texts) created by the children during the first experimental lesson.

Table 1  
Comparative characteristics of the first text (draft) and the final variant

Criteria	Draft	Final version	Improvement
The average size of the text (number of sentences)	4.0	10.12	2.53
Variation of several sentences	2 - 6	5 - 17	3.0/3.4
The average number of words in the text	22.0	55.48	2.52
Variation of several words	11 - 40	25 - 108	3.64/3.72
Number of figurative means (per one text)	0.44	1.28	2.9
Correlation of speech parts (concerning the total number of words in the text):			
• nouns	42%	42%	0
• verbs (gerund)	23.6%	19.97%	0.85
• adjectives and participles	6.36%	12.18%	1.92
• pronouns	10.54%	10.02%	0.95
• adverbs	9.09%	7.2%	0.79

This table presents the final texts that are two and a half times larger than the first drafts. It is explained by the increase of sentence number, and hence, of words. The variation of sentence number when writing the draft was 3.0, and the final was 3.4. That proves a greater diversity of final texts. This result is also proved by the variation of word number: 3.64 and 3.72, respectively. However, the average number of words in a sentence almost did not change (!): it was 5.5, and it became 5.48. The changes mainly related to the sentence structure. The drafts consisted mainly of unexpanded and straightforward sentences; complex sentences appeared in the final texts, in 88% of the texts. Children used up to four complex sentences in the text. For example, mind that each sentence has been taken from different texts, *"I like spring because it becomes warm."* *"The river is like a mirror where the whole forest is reflected."* *"There are a lot of colorful scenes, for example, a transition from violet to blue."* *"In the distance, you can see a house; apparently, a fisherman lives in it."* *"I imagined that I was floating on a boat along this vast and beautiful river."* *"In the picture, I see trees that seem to be bathing in the water."* *"It appears that white birches are bathing in the water, and the birches are talking to each other."* *"Moreover, the silence is such as if something is about to happen."* *"In the picture, I see spring trees that stand in cold water."* *"Looking at this picture, I feel that I am standing on the shore, and the breeze is blowing in my face from the water."*

The final texts, as can be seen from the table, became more imaginative due to the use of more epithets, personifications, and metaphors. As for the variety of speech parts, the number of nouns did not change, the number of verbs even decreased, the number of adjectives and participles almost doubled (!), which indicated the accuracy, abundance, and imagery of description. In our opinion, this improvement is related to the discussion of initial drafts when another person's vision enriched your vision of the picture. It was confirmed by the analysis of the column "the Others" during the discussion of the first draft; 77% of children filled this column. At the same time, 55% wrote only one sentence, 35% added two sentences, and 15% – four sentences. In 75% of cases, children named objects (water, trees, sky, and houses) or put down short phrases like, *"In the picture, I see trees on the water."* *"Trees and houses have already been flooded."* *"Half of the picture is occupied with the water."* Only in 35% of cases in the column "the Others" children wrote sentences with figurative means, *"Trees seem to be talking to each other."* *"The natural mirror is reflecting the trees."* However, only 15% of children included such sentences in the final version of the text. It is noteworthy that only one child wrote the phrase, *"In the picture, the others saw."* There was no specific difference between the use of adverbs and pronouns, although the final texts also contained demonstrative pronouns, not only personal ones. The second table shows the comparative analysis of texts which were based on the "barrier-free" and "barrier" techniques.

Table 2  
Comparative characteristics of the texts describing two paintings

Criteria	Draft	Final version	Improvement
The average size of the text (number of sentences)	10.6	10.12	1.05
Variation of several sentences	9 - 14	5 - 17	1.56/3.4
The average number of words in the text	50.4	55.48	0.91(-5.44)
The average length of sentence	4.75	5.48	0.87 (-0.73)
Variation of several words	38 - 63	25 - 108	1.66/3.72
Number of figurative means (per one text)	0.18	1.28	0.14 (-1.10)
Correlation of speech parts (concerning the total number of words in the text):			
• nouns	43.9%	42%	
• verbs (gerund)	18.7%	19.97%	
• adjectives and participles	16.95%	12.18%	
• pronouns	4.4%	10.02%	
• adverbs	9.02%	7.2%	

As can be seen from the table, texts of different essays turned out to be approximate of the same size in the number of sentences, but the average sentence length was less by 0.73 units in the following text. There was less variation of sentences and number of words in the texts in the painting "March"; in other words, the texts, in this case, were "obvious." It was manifested in the content: all children listed the main objects in the picture, their mutual arrangement, denoting the main characteristics of these objects like color and size. As for the speech parts, there was no significant difference between these two texts. Nouns and verbs were still leading. Among verbs, the word "stands/is standing" was the most frequent one; in some texts, it was repeated up to three or four times. According to the average number of adjectives, the text "March" was slightly ahead of the text "Spring — high water." It was because, first, the color range of the picture was more intense and bright, and second, apart from the words denoting colors, children used words which name dimensions (small, large), and also participles "not melted, harnessed, gone." In the text, there were fewer pronouns because children did not use personal pronouns like "I" or "me." As a result, the texts could be described as less personal. A small increase in adverbs number was due to the use of adverbs of place (to the right, next to, in the middle of, up). The difference was essential in terms of figurative means: texts on the painting "March" contained seven times fewer tropes (!). Only four pupils used one trope "*the sky is not so cruel: it is clear and bright*," "*it looks as if the snow is going to slide*," "*the house stands like on a cloud in the sky*," "*the forest is alone without a human soul*." One could say that, despite the brightness of colors and the positive mood of the painting, it "*did not catch*" the children emotionally: only two pupils wrote, "*I feel*," three pupils — "*I see*," one — "*I imagine*." It can be assumed that the prepared descriptive text somewhat "*cooled*" the children's emotions and their attitude to the painting; it became a kind of barrier in the painting interpretation. It was noteworthy that when the teacher asked children at the lesson: "*Did the prepared descriptive text help you with the description?*" children unanimously replied, "*Yes, it did. More, it explained what should be described in the picture*." It shows that children tend to exaggerate the meaning of a prepared text, someone else's description, as they created texts. Nevertheless, they did not use the sample text as a source for essays but created their versions.

The third table represents the analysis of five group worksheets. The worksheets were filled in the third lesson, where two paintings were compared.

Table 3  
Content of worksheets

Criteria	Spring - high water	March
Suggested titles for painting	Summer is coming Late spring Flood Late spring Late spring	Beginning of spring Early spring Live spring forest Early spring Early spring
Objects named in the painting	Flooded village Boat, birch, fir, house, water Trees, land, water Trees, boat, shadows of trees Boat, village, trees, river	Private house, birdhouse Horse, sleigh, birch, birds. Trees House, horse, snow, birdhouse Horse with sleigh, birdhouse
Signs of spring	The buds blossom Snow has melted, there is much water Flood Water has melted, there is no snow High water, tree buds	Leaves are shooting Mud and melting snow Melting snow The snow is melting, and a clear sky Melting snow
Presence of a person	Vague Orange, blue, light Dim Yellow, red, brown, green Dark blue, sandy	Light Brown, green, orange Bright Yellow, white, green, brown. Brown, white, green
The mood conveyed by the painting	Gloomy Cheerful and sad at the same time Sadness and fun Sad because of the gloomy sky A bit sad	Cheerful. Merrier Hilarious Cheerful, joyful Reviving

According to the first criterion, in which children drew attention to the time of spring is depicted as late – early; the second criterion included what objects they mentioned; much emphasis was placed on the boat in the first case and on the horse in the second. The boat turned out to be a very “attractive” for children because at the first lesson this object was covered in the painting and children tried to guess what was hidden (the followings lessons children repeatedly recalled this episode as one of the most exciting lesson parts); moreover, the boat is located in the lower-left corner and immediately catches one's eye. The horse attracted children's attention as it is the only living object in the picture (one group also wrote about the birds which could be in the birdhouse). The criterion “Signs of Spring” was not sufficiently manifested; children paid attention to snow, water, and mud, they even made a factual mistake about the blossoming leaves; the main difference in this criterion was the presence or absence of snow. The presence of a person in the first case can be predicted by the boat on the shore and the house at a distance; in the second case, we can see a horse, a house, and an open

door. One group made a fascinating remark about the presence of a person: in the first painting, the presence is remote because the person is far away, while in the second painting, the presence is nearby because the person has entered the house. As for the color range, children mentioned that the painting "Spring" is full of vague and dim colors: blue and yellow; in the second painting, one can see bright colors: green, orange, and brown. It determined the painting mood – sad or mixed (probably, there was slight sadness), in the second – cheerful and reviving.

Comparison of the texts written, using the "barrier-free" and "barrier" technique, points at apparent advantages of the first technique, as children's texts turned out to be more imaginative and, therefore, personal, more detailed, extended and exciting in their content. Movement from the painting perception to the written expression of the first impressions, then the exchange of these impressions and finally writing of the final text turned out to be possible and practical, as in their final texts children used more figurative means, adjectives (although the average length of the sentence did not increase). The "barrier" technique as movement from the prepared text to the painting results in less detailed statements with a smaller number of figurative expressions, and what is the most important – to the similarity of texts that is "leveling" of perception and vision of the painting. The "barrier-free" technique is built on recognizing the picture value as a visual image, trust in children's first impressions of the painting, and building educational and personal communication among children. During such communication, pupils exchange their impressions, thus enriching their vision. This process becomes the method basis for writing texts, which can become diverse and exciting in terms of speech format and content. Implementation of the "barrier-free" technique contributes to the development of the following communicative skills among pupils: the ability to fully immerse in the picture (its color range and mood), express their impressions of what they have seen (both in oral and written forms); ability to see the same things as the others in the picture (pupils and the teacher); ability to choose adequate figurative means for expressing one vision; ability to compare different landscape pictures and understand the uniqueness of each one.

#### 4 Conclusion

Teaching experimental lessons and analysis of children's written texts allow us to draw the following conclusions. First, the "barrier" technique when a child is guided to present his text using the prepared descriptive text of the landscape painting, results in a weak monologue regarding content and speech diversity. It simplifies the children's vision of the painting, which is proved by the similarity of the texts created by different pupils. Second, the "barrier-free" technique, based on recognizing the painting value as a visual image, trust in children's first impressions of the painting and building educational and personal communication among children, is more effective because the texts of children are more diverse, full of figurative means; moreover, they convey the author's position. Third, the emotional and communicative involvement of children in cooperative activity on the painting viewing ensures the establishment of open adult-children and children-children communication where the teacher offers children "not to remember but look; not to listen but peer into; not to enumerate but enjoy the image." (Pozdeeva, 2017). The conducted experiment shows that the method for primary schoolchildren's speech development opens up an opportunity to create a real alternative to a current educational situation where "a visual mediator – image assists (is subordinate) to a verbal mediator (word)" (Polonnikov *et al.*, 2016). The subject of further research can be a search and testing of mechanisms for educational communication building based on other types of visual images in a primary school.

#### Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Russian reviewers and editors for their consideration of the further process of the present paper. Thanks to the editorial board of IJSSH for the valuable support, time as well as advice.

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"March" by I. I. Levitan



"Spring — high water" by I. I. Levitan

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