

Finding the story inside the painting

Project of the lesson based on TedxTalks episode



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Preliminary tasks (10-15 min)

Task 1. (2-3 min)

Look at the title of the Talk. What do you think it might be about? Discuss your ideas with your partners.

Task 2. (1 min to read the words, 4 min to complete the task)

Fill in the gaps with the following words according to their context:

To pinpoint, momentarily, affliction, to compartmentalize, curation, sumptuous, fatigue, to be wired.

Malnutrition is one of the common _____ of the poor.

The doctor said he was suffering from _____ and work-related stress.

Emergency workers at the site are still unable to _____ the cause of the explosion.

The committee was concerned also about the state of _____ in other non-grant-in-aid museums in the country.

I was totally _____ before the interview.

His life was carefully _____, with his work in one city and his social life in another.

The celebrity guests turned up dressed in _____ evening gowns.

She was _____ confused by the foreign road signs.

Task 3. Connect the following words with their meanings (1 min to read, 4-5 min to fill in)

1)Nuptial 2)bodice 3)duvet 4)resolution 5)claret 6)seductive.

- a) a piece of women's underwear that fits tightly to the body above the waist, worn in the past
- b) making you want to do, have, or believe something, because of seeming attractive
- c) an official decision that is made after a group or organization has voted

- d) belonging or relating to a marriage or to the state of being married
- e) a large, soft, flat bag filled with feathers or artificial material used as a covering on a bed
- f) red wine made in the region near Bordeaux in France

Listening

https://www.ted.com/talks/tracy_chevalier_finding_the_story_inside_the_painting

Task 1. 4 min Watch the first part of the TED Talk (00.04-03.50). Complete the sentences with necessary words and phrases:

- 1) Now, sometimes you might last longer than 20 minutes, or even shorter, but I think we all suffer from it. And do you have the _____ (2 words)?
- 2) When I go into a gallery, first of all, I go quite fast, and I look at everything, and I pinpoint the ones that make me _____ (2 words) for some reason or other.
- 3) We tell stories all the time about everything, and I think we do it because the world is kind of a crazy, _____ place (1 word), and sometimes stories, we're trying to make sense of the world a little bit, trying to bring some order to it.
- 4) There are three paintings I'm going to show you now that are paintings that made me _____ (4 words) and want to tell stories about them.
- 5) But I think what's kept me still coming back year after year is another thing, and that is the look on her face, the _____ (1 word) look on her face.

2. Now watch the second part of the TED Talk (03:20 - 09:50)

Task 2. Answer the following questions:

1. What does the speaker find fascinating about the “Girl with a Pearl Earring”?
2. Who is the girl depicted in the painting?
3. What is unusual about the girl’s appearance?

4. Why does the speaker find especially attractive only one of the 4 existing pictures?
5. Who could be looking at the boy according to the speaker's story?
6. Why do we often tend to come back to a particular painting that we once liked?

3. Now watch the third part of the TED Talk (09:50-14:21).

Task 3.

Translate the following sentences from English into Russian and vice versa. Try to guess the meaning of the words that you might not know:

1. This painting made me stop in my tracks for several reasons, one of them being the strong disconnection between his mouth that's smiling and his eyes that are wistful. _____

2. His gorgeous silk doublet with beautiful buttons made me think of a puffy duvet spread over a bed. _____

3. Он был крайне озабочен передачей своего состояния и выбором будущего наследника. _____

4. Мои щеки пылали: я краснел по малейшему поводу, будь то переизбыток физической нагрузки, бокал вина или же шквал накрывших меня эмоций. _____

5. My new white brocade doublet has a plain high collar, detachable sleeves and intricate buttons of twisted silk thread, set close together so that the fit is snug. _____

6. Он всегда поддерживал меня и находил добрые слова. _____

7. -Что ты думаешь о моём камзоле? - Мне кажется, его воротник душит тебя. _____

8. Поздравляю тебя с предстоящей свадьбой, Джеймс, уверен, вы будете счастливы вместе. _____

Task 4.

a. Match the picture with the artist:

a) Girl with a Pearl Earring

1. Chardin

b) Boy Building a House of Cards

2. anonymous author

c) Anonymous

3. Johannes Vermeer

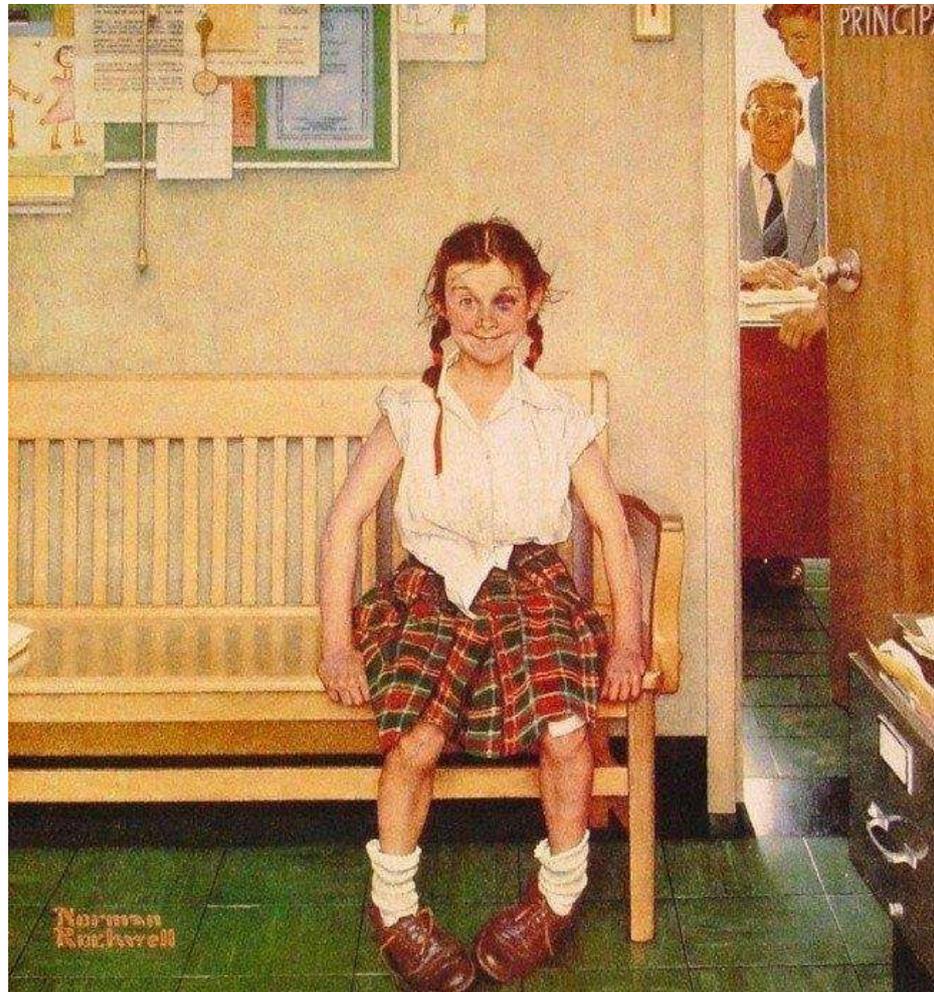
b. Fill in the table with the suitable information from the video and task above:

	Name	Painter	Century	Who/what is depicted	Elements attracting the speaker
Painting 1					
Painting 2					

Painting 3					
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Home assignment. Guess the story beside the painting

Task 5. Look at this picture and write down a possible story behind the painting



(4-5 sentences):

Discussion

Task 6. Discuss the following questions:

1. What is your favourite picture or Who is your favourite artist? Why?
2. Do you go to art galleries? When was the last time you've been there?
3. Does your usual visit to an art gallery look the same way as described at the beginning of the video?
4. Do you think you will follow any piece of advice from the video next time you go to an art gallery?
5. In what ways do paintings influence our creativity?
6. If you met a famous painter, which question would you ask him/her?

Script

I'm going to tell you about an affliction I suffer from. And I have a funny feeling that quite a few of you suffer from it as well. When I'm walking around an art gallery, rooms and rooms full of paintings, after about 15 or 20 minutes, I realize I'm not thinking about the paintings. I'm not connecting to them. Instead, I'm thinking about that cup of coffee I desperately need to wake me up. I'm suffering from gallery fatigue.

How many of you out there suffer from -- yes. Ha ha, ha ha! Now, sometimes you might last longer than 20 minutes, or even shorter, but I think we all suffer from it. And do you have the accompanying guilt? For me, I look at the paintings on the wall and I think, somebody has decided to put them there, thinks they're good enough to be on that wall, but I don't always see it. In fact, most of the time I don't see it.

And I leave feeling actually unhappy. I feel guilty and unhappy with myself, rather than thinking there's something wrong with the painting, I think there's something wrong with me. And that's not a good experience, to leave a gallery like that.

The thing is, I think we should give ourselves a break. If you think about going into a restaurant, when you look at the menu, are you expected to order every single thing on the menu? No! You select. If you go into a department store to buy a shirt, are you going to try on every single shirt and want every single shirt? Of course not, you can be selective. It's expected. How come, then, it's not so expected to be selective when we go to an art gallery? Why are we supposed to have a connection with every single painting?

Well I'm trying to take a different approach. And there's two things I do: When I go into a gallery, first of all, I go quite fast, and I look at everything, and I pinpoint the ones that make me slow down for some reason or other. I don't even know why they make me slow down, but something pulls me like a magnet and then I ignore all the others, and I just go to that painting. So it's the first thing I do is, I do my own curation. I choose a painting. It might just be one painting in 50. And then the second thing I do is I stand in front of that painting, and I tell myself a story about it.

Why a story? Well, I think that we are wired, our DNA tells us to tell stories. We tell stories all the time about everything, and I think we do it because the world is kind of a crazy, chaotic place, and sometimes stories, we're trying to make sense of the world a little bit, trying to bring some order to it. Why not apply that to our looking at paintings? So I now have this sort of restaurant menu visiting of art galleries.

There are three paintings I'm going to show you now that are paintings that made me stop in my tracks and want to tell stories about them. The first one needs little introduction -- "Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Johannes Vermeer, 17th-century Dutch painter. This is the most glorious painting. I first saw it when I was 19, and I immediately went out and got a poster of it, and in fact I still have that poster. 30 years later it's hanging in my house. It's accompanied me everywhere I've gone, I never tire of looking at her.

What made me stop in my tracks about her to begin with was just the gorgeous colors he uses and the light falling on her face. But I think what's kept me still coming back year after year is another thing, and that is the look on her face, the conflicted look on her face. I can't tell if she's happy or sad, and I change my mind all the time. So that keeps me coming back.

One day, 16 years after I had this poster on my wall, I lay in bed and looked at her, and I suddenly thought, I wonder what the painter did to her to make her look like that. And it was the first time I'd ever thought that the expression on her face is actually reflecting how she feels about him. Always before I'd thought of it as a portrait of a girl. Now I began to think of it as a portrait of a relationship. And I thought, well, what is that relationship?

So I went to find out. I did some research and discovered, we have no idea who she is. In fact, we don't know who any of the models in any of Vermeer's paintings are, and we know very little about Vermeer himself. Which made me go, "Yippee!" I can do whatever I want, I can come up with whatever story I want to. So here's how I came up with the story. First of all, I thought, I've got to get her into the house. How does Vermeer know her? Well, there've been suggestions that she is his 12-year-old daughter. The daughter at the time was 12 when he painted the painting. And I thought, no, it's a very intimate look, but it's not a look a daughter gives her father. For one thing, in Dutch painting of the time, if a woman's mouth was open, it was indicating sexual availability. It would have been inappropriate for Vermeer to paint his daughter like that.

So it's not his daughter, but it's somebody close to him, physically close to him. Well, who else would be in the house? A servant, a lovely servant. So, she's in the house. How do we get her into the studio? We don't know very much about Vermeer, but the little bits that we do know, one thing we know is that he married a Catholic woman, they lived with her mother in a house where he had his own room where he -- his studio. He also had 11 children. It would have been a chaotic, noisy household. And if you've seen Vermeer's paintings before, you know that they're incredibly calm and quiet.

How does a painter paint such calm, quiet paintings with 11 kids around? Well, he compartmentalizes his life. He gets to his studio, and he says, "Nobody comes in here. Not the wife, not the kids. Okay, the maid can come in and clean." She's in the studio. He's got her in the studio, they're together. And he decides to paint her.

He has her wear very plain clothes. Now, all of the women, or most of the women in Vermeer's other paintings wore velvet, silk, fur, very sumptuous materials. This is very plain; the only thing that isn't plain is her pearl earring. Now, if she's a servant, there is no way she could afford a pair of pearl earrings. So those are not her pearl earrings. Whose are they? We happen to know, there's a list of Catharina, the wife's clothes. Amongst them a yellow coat with white fur, a yellow and black bodice, and you see these clothes on lots of other paintings, different women in the paintings, Vermeer's paintings. So clearly, her clothes were lent to various different women. It's not such a leap of faith to take that that pearl earring actually belongs to his wife.

So we've got all the elements for our story. She's in the studio with him for a long time. These paintings took a long time to make. They would have spent the time alone, all that time. She's wearing his wife's pearl earring. She's gorgeous. She obviously loves him. She's conflicted. And does the wife know? Maybe not. And if she doesn't, well -- that's the story.

The next painting I'm going to talk about is called "Boy Building a House of Cards" by Chardin. He's an 18th-century French painter best known for his still lifes, but he did occasionally paint people. And in fact, he painted four versions of this painting, different boys building houses of cards, all concentrated. I like this version the best, because some of the boys are older and some are younger, and to me, this one, like Goldilocks's porridge, is just right.

He's not quite a child, and he's not quite a man. He's absolutely balanced between innocence and experience, and that made me stop in my tracks in front of this painting. And I looked at his face. It's like a Vermeer painting a bit. The light

comes in from the left, his face is bathed in this glowing light. It's right in the center of the painting, and you look at it, and I found that when I was looking at it, I was standing there going, "Look at me. Please look at me." And he didn't look at me. He was still looking at his cards, and that's one of the seductive elements of this painting is, he's so focused on what he's doing that he doesn't look at us. And that is, to me, the sign of a masterpiece, of a painting when there's a lack of resolution. He's never going to look at me.

So I was thinking of a story where, if I'm in this position, who could be there looking at him? Not the painter, I don't want to think about the painter. I'm thinking of an older version of himself. He's a man, a servant, an older servant looking at this younger servant, saying, "Look at me. I want to warn you about what you're about to go through. Please look at me." And he never does.

And that lack of resolution, the lack of resolution in "Girl with a Pearl Earring" - we don't know if she's happy or sad. I've written an entire novel about her, and I still don't know if she's happy or sad. Again and again, back to the painting, looking for the answer, looking for the story to fill in that gap. And we may make a story, and it satisfies us momentarily, but not really, and we come back again and again.

The last painting I'm going to talk about is called "Anonymous" by anonymous.

This is a Tudor portrait bought by the National Portrait Gallery. They thought it was a man named Sir Thomas Overbury, and then they discovered that it wasn't him, and they have no idea who it is.

Now, in the National Portrait Gallery, if you don't know the biography of the painting, it's kind of useless to you. They can't hang it on the wall, because they don't know who he is. So unfortunately, this orphan spends most of his time in storage, along with quite a number of other orphans, some of them some beautiful paintings.

This painting made me stop in my tracks for three reasons: One is the disconnection between his mouth that's smiling and his eyes that are wistful. He's not happy, and why isn't he happy? The second thing that really attracted me were his bright red cheeks. He is blushing. He's blushing for his portrait being made! This must be a guy who blushes all the time. What is he thinking about that's making him blush? The third thing that made me stop in my tracks is his absolutely gorgeous doublet. Silk, gray, those beautiful buttons. And you know what it makes me think of, is it's sort of snug and puffy; it's like a duvet spread over a bed.

I kept thinking of beds and red cheeks, and of course I kept thinking of sex when I looked at him, and I thought, is that what he's thinking about? And I thought, if I'm going to make a story, what's the last thing I'm going to put in there? Well, what would a Tudor gentleman be preoccupied with? And I thought, well, Henry VIII, okay. He'd be preoccupied with his inheritance, with his heir. Who is going to inherit his name and his fortune? You put all those together, and you've got your story to fill in that gap that makes you keep coming back. Now, here's the story. It's short.

"Rosy"

I am still wearing the white brocade doublet Caroline gave me. It has a plain high collar, detachable sleeves and intricate buttons of twisted silk thread, set close together so that the fit is snug. The doublet makes me think of a coverlet on the vast bed. Perhaps that was the intention. I first wore it at an elaborate dinner her parents held in our honor. I knew even before I stood up to speak that my cheeks were inflamed. I have always flushed easily, from physical exertion, from wine, from high emotion.

As a boy, I was teased by my sisters and by schoolboys, but not by George. Only George could call me Rosy. I would not allow anyone else. He managed to make the word tender. When I made the announcement, George did not turn rosy, but went pale as my doublet. He should not have been surprised. It has been a common assumption that I would one day marry his cousin. But it is difficult to hear the words aloud. I know, I could barely utter them.

Afterwards, I found George on the terrace overlooking the kitchen garden. Despite drinking steadily all afternoon, he was still pale. We stood together and watched the maids cut lettuces. "What do you think of my doublet?" I asked.

He glanced at me. "That collar looks to be strangling you."

"We will still see each other," I insisted. "We can still hunt and play cards and attend court. Nothing need change." George did not speak. "I am 23 years old. It is time for me to marry and produce an heir. It is expected of me."

George drained another glass of claret and turned to me. "Congratulations on your upcoming nuptials, James. I'm sure you'll be content together." He never used my nickname again.

Thank you.

Keys and comments

Preliminary tasks

Task two

Keys: affliction, fatigue, to pinpoint, curation, to be wired, to compartmentalize, sumptuous, momentarily.

Some comments:

Affliction- something that makes you suffer.

Fatigue-/fə'ti:g/- extreme weakness

To pinpoint- to discover or establish something exactly

Curation-the selection and care of objects to be shown in a museum or to form part of a collection of art, an exhibition,, etc.

Wired(to be wired)- nervous or excited, for example because of a future event.

Compartmentalize-to separate something into parts and not allow those parts to mix together.

Sumptuous- impressive in a way that seems expensive.

Momentarily- for a very short time.

Task 3. Keys: 1)d 2)a 3)e 4)c 5)f 6)b

Listening

Task 1.

Keys: Accompanying guilt, slow down, chaotic, stop in my tracks, conflicted.

Task 2.

Possible answers:

1. The look on the girls' face: she can't tell for sure whether the girl is happy or sad;
2. No research has proven who she is: we don't know it;
3. She wears plain clothes but has got pearl earrings;
4. The boy in the painting is not quite a child, and he's not quite a man and this balance between balance and experience attracts the speaker;
5. An older version of himself (when he becomes an older servant);
6. The lack of resolution about the painting: the story that we make up satisfies us momentarily but not really;

Task 3.

Keys:

1. Эта картина заставила меня остановиться по нескольким причинам, одной из которых была огромная пропасть (разница) между его улыбкой и задумчивым взглядом.
2. Его великолепный шелковый камзол с красивыми пуговицами ассоциировался у меня с мягким пухлым одеялом, расстеленным на кровати.
3. He was extremely preoccupied with his inheritance and his future heir.
4. My cheeks were inflamed, I have always flushed easily, from physical exertion, from wine, from high emotion.

5. Мой новый белый парчовый камзол имеет высокий прямой ворот, съемные рукава и необычные пуговицы из скрученного шелка, расположенные настолько близко друг к другу, что камзол сидит в точности по фигуре.

6. He always supported me and managed to make the word tender.

7. -What do you think of my doublet? - That collar looks to be strangling you.

8. Congratulations on your upcoming nuptials, James, I'm sure you'll be content together

Task 4.

a. Keys: a) 3 b) 1 c) 2

b. Keys:

	Name	Painter	Century	Who/what is depicted	Elements attracting the author
Painting 1	Girl with a Pearl Earring	Johannes Vermeer	17	We don't know for sure/ Vermeer's mistress	Facial expression Girl's background
Painting 2	Boy building a house of cards	Chardin	18	A young servant/ A boy	Boy's age; balance between experience

					and innocence
Painting 3	Anonymo us	Anonymo us	-	We don't know, but according to an earlier supposition - a Tudor age nobleman, Sir Thomas Overbury	a) The disconnection in his face: he is smiling but his eyes are wistful b) Blushing c) A gorgeous doublet