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Talking pictures

Exploring Jan Steen's *The Merry Family* online in the EFL class - Teacher's Manual

FOR LEARNERS IN YEAR 9/10

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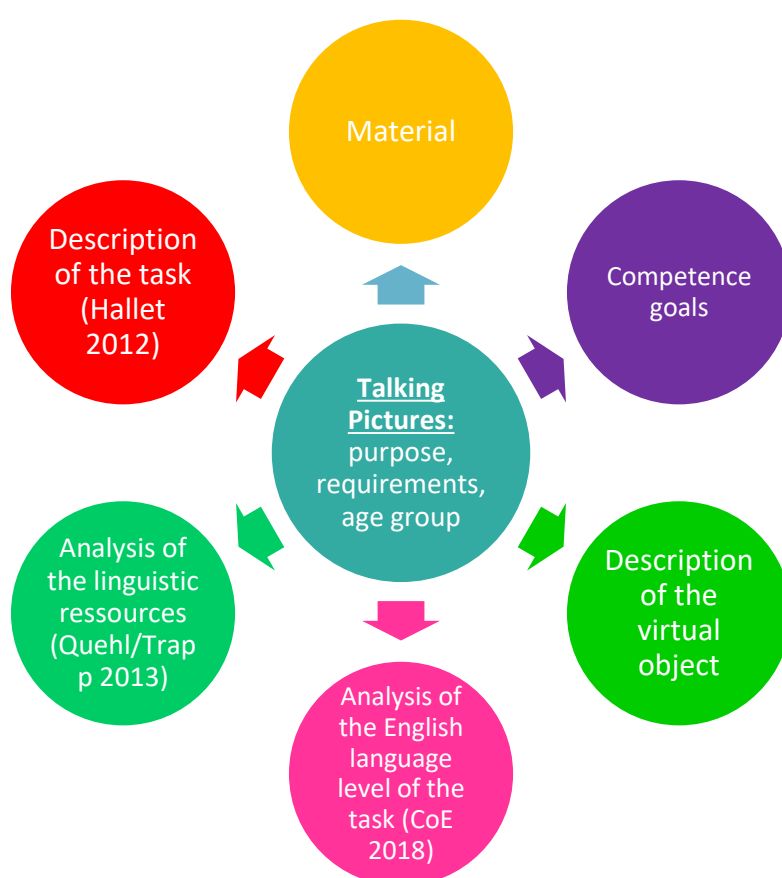


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The Purpose behind this Teaching Material

These days teachers, learners, and parents alike are struggling to come to terms with distance learning and home schooling. The internet abounds in educational material, virtual tours, and digital activities. Famous museums and galleries for instance have opened their archives and show rooms and invited the public to explore paintings, sculptures, sketches, textiles, jewelry and many more artefacts. But learners need more than just a link to click on to benefit from educational offers. Teachers, too, need more than just great materials.

Creating innovative teaching ideas is a great challenge. This teacher's manual suggests how to put one such idea into practice with the help of online material designed for a competence-oriented approach. It can be used for distance learning as well as for blended learning to support learners in

- making use of the internet for foreign language learning
- enjoying online material provided by a first-class museum
- developing an interest in great paintings
- increase their language competence in English.

Requirements

To be able to do the creative core task in this package, access to the internet is required to watch the curator's talk about a famous painting from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Learners should be able to use a laptop or computer with loudspeakers, and should be able to do the writing task on their computer.

In addition, the tasks and handouts for learners are provided via the Prezi presentation 'Exploring a Jan Steen household online' that can be accessed online and free of charge (<https://prezi.com/p/qezv6ytok-msh/?present=1>).

The entire exploration including the creative core task at the end requires approximately two double lessons or 180 minutes.



The Age Group

Paintings can be used with learners of all ages. Steen's *Het vrolijke huisgezin* (English title: *The Merry Family*) could even be used in primary school. However, we assume that the audio-visual text and the task we have designed are appropriate for 15-to-16-year-old learners in year 9 or year 10. They will already have encountered phrases to describe a picture, but still need to practice working with paintings with the help of language support.

The analysis of the language level of the input shows that there is a mix of phrases that belong to the levels of B1 and B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2018). At the end of year 9 EFL learners are expected to have acquired a B1 level (cf. Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2019: 8), hence the language of the input is appropriate and challenging at the same time.

The task, to create a short story based on the painting, should be manageable for learners in year 9 with the scaffolding provided in the Prezi presentation, yet it is challenging and therefore still suitable for a year 10 class.

Competence Goals

The task presented here aims to foster motivation in using art online to develop language competences as well as text and media competences. It also includes the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the title and proverb in different languages. Doing the activities and tasks, learners will be able to

- follow a spoken explanation in English of the painting *The Merry Family*
- explain that the expression “a Jan Steen household” is used to describe paintings showing a happy family of adults and children in a messy and untidy room or house



- relate the Dutch title *Het vrolijke huisgezin* to the proverb in the top right-hand corner, a German equivalent, and a potential English translation
- reformulate the moral message of Jan Steen's painting in their own words
- empathize with the characters in the painting by speculating about their thoughts and feelings and
- take notes on their thoughts and emotions
- narrate what is going on in the painting from the perspective of the dog or one of the adults or one of the children
- write a short story using the situation depicted in the painting as their starting point.

Description of the Virtual Object

The virtual object of this teaching idea is the painting *Het vrolijke huisgezin* (English title: *The Merry Family*), created by Jan Steen in 1668. It shows a very happy but messy family in a living room. Paintings like this have led to the coining of the expression of a “Jan Steen household”, a description of a messy and cluttered interior with happy families.

The painting includes a moral message: the behaviour of the children is not supposed to be laughed at but to be seen as mirroring the parents' behaviour, since the children are doing what the adults do. People should be careful when children are around, as the little ones may imitate the adults' behaviour.

Furthermore, there is a YouTube clip by Pieter Roelofs (Head of paintings and sculpture at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam) in which he talks about the painting and why he likes it.



Description of the Task

The task consists of a pre-viewing task before watching the video, a post-viewing task to consolidate the new vocabulary introduced in the video and a productive complex competence task. The analysis of the complex competence task according to Hallet (2012) can be found in the diagram at the end of this section.

Task 1: What is happening here? (Pre-viewing task)

- Have a close look at the painting and think about what is going on during this family's dinner. Would you like to join them?
- Think about a title that fits the painting.
- Additional task: If somebody exclaims 'One big happy family', what do they mean?

Task 2: Getting to know the painting. (While-viewing task)

- Listen to Pieter's explanation of the painting.
- If you need help with this listening task, you can look at the summary of Pieter's main ideas and at the handout 'Language support'.

Task 3: Quiz: What is in the picture? (Post-viewing task)

- Answer the following questions
 1. Where is the boy playing the bagpipes?
 2. "Merry" is another word for: _____
 3. What do you call paintings like this one by Jan Steen?
 4. What are the children smoking?
 5. Who is drinking wine in the foreground of the painting?
 6. The two children smoking are to be found in the _____ right-hand corner of the painting.
 7. What is another word for 'at the moment'?



Task 4: What are they thinking? (Pre-task)

- Try to imagine what these characters in the painting might be feeling and thinking.
- You can use the space at the bottom of the worksheet to collect ideas for your short story.

Task 5: Now it is your turn! (Core-task)

- You have looked at the painting, listened to the curator and exchanged ideas about this Dutch masterpiece. Now it is your turn to become the storyteller! Choose a character (adult, child or dog) from the painting and write a short story from his or her perspective. Create an event that brings a surprise ending to this family's supper.
- For further support on how to write a short story read the next slides.
- After you have finished your story, you may want to send it as a written text or as a podcast to us (teflsupport@uni-wuppertal.de) and your friends and family to encourage them to look at the painting and listen to your story.

Task 6: Follow-up task for language detectives (task for more able learners)

- Look at the title of the painting. The original title in Dutch says 'Het vrolijke huisgezin' and the English translation is 'The Merry Family'. What would be an equivalent title in German or any other language you may know? Does the meaning change?
- Look at the Dutch proverb in the top right-hand corner: "Soo d' oude Songen, Soo Pypen de Jonge." What would that be in German, in English or any other language you may know? Does the meaning change, when another language is used?



| |
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| Competence Aim(s) SWBAT (Students will be able to ...) ... follow a spoken explanation in English of the painting <i>The Merry Family</i> ... explain the expression "Jan Steen household" ... relate the Dutch title to the proverb, the German equivalent and a potential English translation ... reformulate the moral message of Jan Steen's painting in their own words ... empathize with the characters in the painting by speculating about their thoughts and feelings ... narrate what is going on in the painting from the perspective of the dog or one of the adults or one of the children ... write a short story using the situation depicted in the painting as their starting point |
| Topic / Themes <i>Transforming a piece of visual art (the painting "The Merry Family" by Jan Steen) into a piece of literature (short story)</i> |
| Input Video material "The Merry Family" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZloPe3CuhHw&list=PLB_wSMz6npKOaxSuQ5k5sv8plZqg4YQ1D&index=2&t=0s) Transcript of the video to further support the understanding of the video Language support in the form of a summary of the video and visualisations of the vocabulary required Why people like short stories – core characteristics of short stories as a genre |
| Material Access to the internet to watch the video Prezi (https://prezi.com/p/qezv6ytokmsh/?present=1) Computer / Paper to write the story / recording device for audio recording |
| Genre of the original text [Ausgangstext]: Interpretation of a painting by a curator Genre of the target text [Zieltext]: Short story (either in writing or as a podcast) |
| Language Specific vocabulary (household, family), see 2 grids for receptive and productive vocabulary Present Progressive Language structures for narration (adverbs, direct speech, inner monologue,...) |
| Subtasks / Exercises Discussing the sarcasm when using the term 'one big happy family' Listening comprehension based on the video presented by the curator Speculating about the thoughts of the characters in the painting, generating ideas for a simple plot in pair work |
| Scaffolding Summary of Pieter Roelof's main ideas Support: how to write a short story Support: collecting ideas for your short story and the characters' thoughts |
| Instructions You have looked at the painting, listened to the curator and exchanged ideas about this Dutch masterpiece. Now it is your turn to become the story-teller! Choose a character (adult, child or dog) from the painting and write a short story from his or her perspective. Create an event that brings a surprise ending to this family's supper. |

| |
|---|
| Cognitive processes - understanding the description of the picture and the concept of a Jan Steen household - understanding the moral message of the painting - thinking about what the people and the animal depicted in the painting might feel or think - connecting the content of the painting and the perspective of a character in it to the characteristics of a short story |
| Language-discursive processes - using appropriate language for a short story (direct speech, inner monologue, adverbs, exclamations,...) to make it suspenseful or funny or thrilling - combining written language with spoken language (e.g. audio recordings) |
| Interactional processes - speculate about the feelings and perspective of a character from the painting in pair work - agreeing on the plot structure and the mode of the story (written or spoken as an audio recording) |

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|--|
| Outcome / Learner product A short story from the perspective of the dog / an adult / a child in the painting to be given to friends, family, and readers online to spark their interest in art |
|--|



Analysis of the Language Level

The language level of the input, namely the video and the transcript, were analysed according to the Oxford Language Scale (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/text-checker/>) and categorised into the levels of B1 and B2. Important terms were analysed by marking vocabulary which is necessary to understand the input and to create the output required in the tasks.

The transcript of the video is shown in the following. B2 phrases are marked in red, B1 phrases in green and important terms in yellow:

Hello, my name is Peter Roelofs, I'm head of paintings and **sculpture** in the Rijksmuseum and I'm **currently** working from home. I very much would like to **reflect** on a painting by Jan Steen, one of the greatest storytellers in Dutch art history. This painting in the Rijksmuseum gallery was made 350 years ago, it is called "The **Merry Family**" and it is showing **a chaotic state of affairs** that looks quite **familiar** to the **current** situation I am in right now. And you out there having little children, you might recognize this. Where on the one hand side you try to keep up with your work but at the other hand your children try to get your attention.*Boy **screams** "papa"* And this is exactly what Jan Steen is trying to depict here. In Dutch we call this a Jan Steen **household**. A household from Jan Steen showing a chaotic state of affairs. When you look at this painting you see a man and a few women sitting around a table and the man **at the left-hand side** has stopped playing the violin. He is holding a glass of wine, the women are singing, there is a boy playing **bagpipes**. That does not really look like kind of negative behavior but once you start looking at the children you are seeing quite the interesting details. For example, the **boy at the left**, close to the window, **is smoking a pipe**. So are the two others near the **chimney** at the **outer right-hand side of the composition**. The boy and little girl drinking wine, this is not something that you would like your children to do. And this is exactly that Jan Steen wants to tell us.



At the one hand side it is quite amusing but at the other hand it is also **instructive**. He wants, as the piece of paper at **the upper right-hand corner** describes: **“as the old sing, so pipe the young”**. And Jan Steen quite literally depicted this Dutch **proverb** as well, he is actually showing how the grown up are drinking and smoking and singing while they do not have the attention for their children. Where the children are playing the flute, they’re playing the bag pipes, they are smoking pipes as well and this is something that we could learn from this painting as Jan Steen tries to tell us: don’t give the negative example. Well keep up out there! (cf. Oxford Language Scale) (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/text-checker/>)

Analysis of the Linguistic Resources

For the completion of the task, the following linguistic resources are required:

- specific vocabulary to understand the video/transcript
- vocabulary to describe a household
- vocabulary to describe a painting
- vocabulary to understand the interpretation of the picture.

The grid is based on a framework developed by Quehl/Trapp (2013: 35 ff.) and comes in two versions, Table 1 for the viewing comprehension task and Table 2 for the creative writing task.

| Topic | Activities | Language functions | Language structures | Vocabulary |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Transforming a piece of visual art (the painting “A Merry Family” by Jan Steen) into a piece of literature (short story) | Watching the video and listening to the art historian | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding the context of the painting and the interpretation of the art historian• Developing questions | <p>Idiomatic phrases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A chaotic state of affairs• As the old sing, so pipe the young <p>Phrases to describe a picture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On the left-hand side• On the left• On the outer right-hand side of the composition• On the upper right-hand side | <p>Adverbs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Currently <p>Adjectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• merry• instructive <p>Verbs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to reflect• to scream• to smoke <p>Nouns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• household• chimney• bagpipes• proverb |

Table 1



Specific vocabulary to create the output:

- Vocabulary to describe a household
- The present progressive

| Topic | Activities | Language functions | Language structures | Vocabulary |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Writing a short story | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at a picture and understanding the context and its meaning Imagining what the dog / a person in the painting might think and feel in the situation depicted Collecting ideas for a short story Writing a short story on the basis of the painting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speculating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreeing/disagreeing Narrating | Language structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct speech Idiomatic phrases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A chaotic state of affairs As the old sing, so pipe the young Tenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple Past | Adverbs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> at first then suddenly Adjectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> merry instructive Verbs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to reflect to scream to smoke ... Nouns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> household chimney bagpipes proverb ... |

Table 2



Material: The Prezi Presentation for Learners



The presentation for learners, consisting of the input, the tasks and also the scaffolding, can be opened and sent via the following hyperlink:
<https://prezi.com/p/gezv6ytokmsh/?present=1>

Material: Handouts / Worksheets

The handouts for the pupils to note down their ideas and solutions for all tasks are shown on the following pages. To use them as a template for your learners it is possible to detach them from the rest of the PDF and convert them back to a word document.

Exploring A Jan Steen Household Online

Pupil's Worksheet



Task overview

Task 1: What is happening here?

Task 2: Getting to know the painting.

Task 3: Quiz: What is in the picture?

Task 4: What are they thinking?

Task 5: Now it is your turn!

Task 6: Follow-up task for language detectives.

1. What is happening here?

| I would like to join the family's dinner because... | I would not like to join the family's dinner because... |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">--- | <ul style="list-style-type: none">--- |

A fitting title for the painting could be:

Write your ideas in this text box.

Additional task: If somebody exclaims 'One big happy family', what do they mean? Write down some notes:

Write your ideas in this text box.

3. Quiz: What is in the picture?

Answer the following questions:

1. Where is the boy playing the bagpipes?

Answer:

2. "Merry" is another word for:

Answer:

3. What do you call paintings like this one by Jan Steen?

Answer:

4. What are the children smoking?

Answer:

5. Who is drinking wine in the foreground of the painting?

Answer:

6. The two children smoking are to be found in the _____
right-hand corner of the painting.

7. What is another word for 'at the moment'?

Answer:

4. What are they thinking?

Write your answer in this thought bubble.

Write your answer in this speech bubble.

Write your answer in this speech bubble.

Write your answer in this thought bubble.

Ideas for my short story:

Write your ideas in this box.

5. Now it is your turn!

You can use the following pages to type your own short story!

6. Follow-up task for language detectives

“Het vrolijke huisgezin” - What would be an equivalent title in German or any other language you may know? Does the meaning change?

Write your ideas in this box.

“Soo d’ oude Songen, Soo Pypen de Jonge.” - What would that be in German, in English or any other language you may know? Does the meaning change, when another language is used?

Write your ideas in this box.

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