

Academic English ^{UK}



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Describing Paintings

How to describe works of art using a range of English phrases

EXAMPLE

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Teacher's Notes

Aim: To give students practice describing paintings using phrases for general description, style and technique, colours and mood, and interpretation.

Time: 60–90 minutes

Introduction

- In pairs/groups, students briefly discuss a famous painting they like.

Task 1: Artistic Styles

- Read about different artistic styles and take notes.

Task 2: Definition Matching

- Match definitions with styles.
- Feedback: share/distribute **ANSWERS**.

Task 3: Language Phrases

- Read through language phrases, check unknown words.

Task 4: Describing Paintings

- Study five paintings and use phrases to describe them.
- Feedback: share/distribute **ANSWERS (includes expert analysis of the paintings)**.

Differentiation

- Students work on one painting at a time with **ANSWERS** given after.
- Or each student studies one of the five paintings, then shares their description in groups.
- Or in groups study one painting and share findings with another group.

Task 5: Describe a Famous Painting

- Students select a famous painting of their choice and describe it using the phrases.

Describing Paintings

EXAMPLE

Introduction: A Famous Painting

Think of a famous painting that you like. Describe and explain the painting to another student in terms of a general description, its style, use of colours and your interpretation of meaning.

Make some notes here first:

Task 1: Different Painting Styles

What do you know about these different styles? Add some notes to the description column.

	Style	Description
1	Renaissance	
2		
3	Rococo	
4		
5	Romanticism	
6		
7	Impressionism	
8		
9	Expressionism	
10	Cubism	
11		
12	Abstract Art	
13		
14		

Task 2: Different Styles in Painting: Definition Matching **EXAMPLE**

Match the different styles to their correction definitions. The first one has been done for you.

	Style		Description
1	Renaissance	A	Light, [redacted] colours [redacted]
2	[redacted]	B	Built on Impressionism but added bold colours, shapes and emotional depth.
3	Rococo	C	[redacted], imaginative images.
4	[redacted]	D	Reduced [redacted] for clarity and purity.
5	Romanticism	E	[redacted] to reflect human beauty and proportion.
6	[redacted]	F	Highlighted emotion, imagination, and nature's power over reason.
7	Impressionism	G	[redacted] subjects.
8	[redacted]	H	Used distorted [redacted] inner feelings.
9	Expressionism	I	Dramatic, emotional, and full of movement with strong contrasts of light and shadow.
10	Cubism	J	Inspired [redacted] [redacted] moral themes.
11	[redacted]	K	Aimed to depict everyday life and people with truthful accuracy.
12	Abstract Art	L	Used bright [redacted] and advertising.
13	[redacted]	M	Broke [redacted] multiple perspectives at once.
14	[redacted]	N	Captured [redacted] [redacted] effects.

1	E	2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12		13		14	
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Task 3: Language Phrases for Describing Artwork

EXAMPLE

When describing art, we usually focus on four areas: general description, style and technique, colours and mood, and personal interpretation. Below are useful English phrases for each section.

1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the [Renaissance / Impressionist / Cubist / etc...] style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)... and is called...

The artist uses _____ / earthy / colours.

The brushstrokes are bold / delicate / expressive / loose / full of movement / precise...

The _____ symmetrical / fragmented with...

It is painted in oil / watercolour / fresco / acrylic on canvas.

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The use of light _____ / unsettling / stark / effect.

The colours give the painting a warm / cold / vibrant / monumental / formal / serious atmosphere.

The mood of the _____ / reflective / tense / austere / serene.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It could _____ about...

It makes me feel...

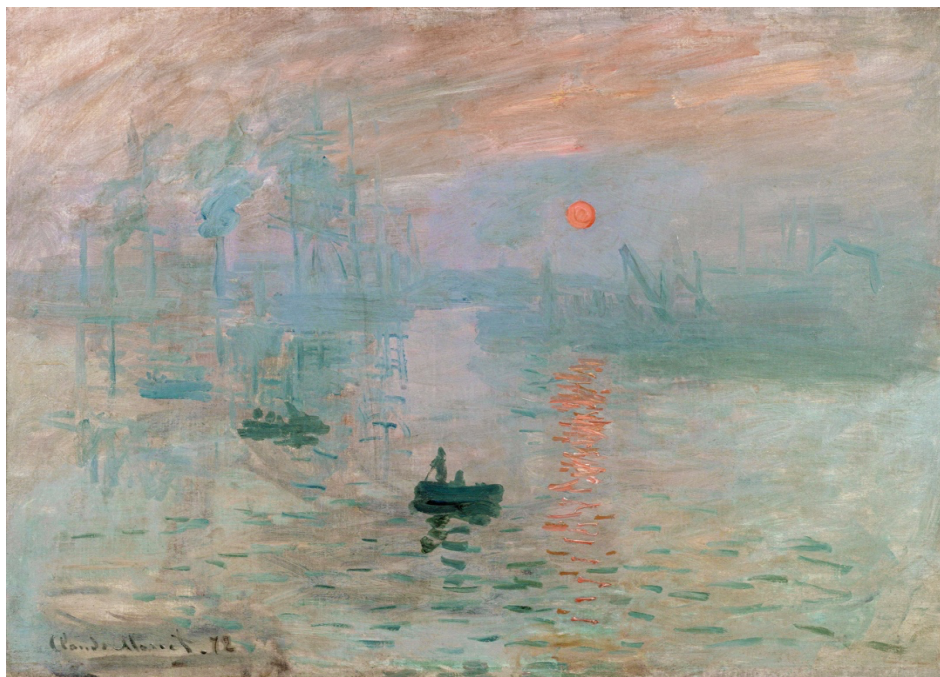
I _____ because...

This reminds me of...

Task 4: Describing Paintings EXAMPLE

Study the five paintings and complete the phrases from the box to form your description.

Painting 1



1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

Painting 2 **EXAMPLE**



1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

Painting 3 **EXAMPLE**



1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

Painting 4 **EXAMPLE**



1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

Painting 5 **EXAMPLE**



1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

Task 5: Describe a Famous Painting EXAMPLE

Select a famous painting of your choice and describe it using the phrases.

1. General Description

This painting shows / depicts / portrays...

It is a portrait of... / It is a landscape of...

It appears to be...

2. Talking about Style & Technique

It was painted in the style.

I think it was painted by (artist's name)...and is called...

The brushstrokes are....

It is painted in....

3. Colours & Mood

The dominant colours are...

The colours give the painting a ... atmosphere.

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

The painting might symbolise...

It makes me feel...

This reminds me of...

ANSWERS EXAMPLE

	Style		Description
1	Renaissance	E	<i>Focused on realism, perspective, and harmony to reflect human beauty and proportion.</i>
2		I	<i>Dramatic, emotional, and full of movement with strong contrasts of light and shadow.</i>
3	Rococo	A	<i>Light, decorative, and playful, often using pastel colours and elegant details.</i>
4		J	<i>Inspired by ancient Greece and Rome, emphasising order, simplicity, and moral themes.</i>
5	Romanticism	F	<i>Highlighted emotion, imagination, and nature's power over reason.</i>
6		K	<i>Aimed to depict everyday life and people with truthful accuracy.</i>
7	Impressionism	N	<i>Captured fleeting moments with quick brushstrokes and vibrant light effects.</i>

1	E	2	I	3	A	4	J	5	F	6	K	7	N	8	B	9	H	10	M	11	C	12	G	13	L	14	D
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---	----	---

ALL ANSWERS INCLUDED IN PAID VERSION...

Painting 1: Impression, Sunrise (1872) by Claude Monet **SUGGESTED ANSWERS**

1. General Description

- This painting shows *the port of Le Havre at sunrise*.
- [REDACTED]
- It is a landscape of *the sea with mist and morning light*.
- [REDACTED]
- It appears to be *both realistic and atmospheric*.

2. Style & Technique

- It was painted in *the Impressionist style*.
- I think it was painted by *Claude Monet and is called 'Impression, Sunrise'*.
- [REDACTED]
- The brushstrokes *are loose and expressive*.
- [REDACTED]
- It is painted in *oil on canvas*.

3. Colours & Mood

- The dominant colours are *blue, grey, and orange*.
- [REDACTED]
- The colours give the painting *a cool atmosphere with touches of warmth*.
- [REDACTED]

4. Interpretation & Personal Response

- The painting might symbolise *the beginning of a new day or era*.
- [REDACTED]
- It makes me feel *peaceful and thoughtful*.
- [REDACTED]
- This reminds me of *early mornings by the sea*.

Expert Analysis

Subject & Context

Impression, Sunrise shows the port of Le Havre at dawn, Monet's hometown. Instead of detail, it captures atmosphere [REDACTED]

Technique & Style

Monet used loose [REDACTED] The orange sun glows against hazy blues, breaking with academic tradition. Its title gave "Impressionism" [REDACTED]

Psychological Effect

The misty scene feels calm yet alive. [REDACTED]
immediacy and showing perception rather than reality.

Reception & Legacy

First mocked as [REDACTED] Critics recognise it as the manifesto of Impressionism and a foundation of modern art.

General Overview

Experts agree that *Impression, Sunrise* is less about the port itself and more about capturing an [REDACTED] turning point in art history, where the focus shifted to subjective perception and modern life. Its revolutionary [REDACTED]

ALL SUGGESTED ANSWERS INCLUDED IN PAID VERSION...