

Life in the Country

Welcome to this audio guide for looking at paintings. This guidance is for looking at any painting from our Life in the Country gallery.

The guide will escort you around with the aim of helping you to notice the features and happenings in the picture you've chosen.

Let's start by taking a look at the style of the painting. Is the style realistic and detailed, or loose and unfocused? Try zooming into the painting to look at the brushstrokes if you can. What are these like? Smooth or rough, expressive or careful?

What about the painting's feel – colour and light will very much affect what we think about the feel of an image, so how would you describe the colour scheme – muted perhaps, or bright? What about the light – is it dark, overcast, misty, pearly, sunlit or something else? How does *this* affect your impression of the picture?

Now let's look at the subject of the painting, and consider what type of countryside is shown here. Imagining you're on the phone to a friend and standing looking out at this scene, how would you describe the landscape to your friend?

Try to evoke the type of terrain you can see – is it open land or not, coastal, wooded, hilly or flat, can you see far into the distance? What interesting features can you see – people, animals, trees, rocks, houses, clouds....

Now what about the ambiance of the landscape, what would you say to your friend to describe this – perhaps pleasant and tranquil, awe inspiring, forbidding, dramatic, pretty, or something else?

Whereabouts do you think this place might be? Perhaps the painting title tells you, or perhaps you have to take a guess. Do you know anything about this place, from the painting, perhaps that it's humble or affluent, wild or tamed?

Try to describe the weather to your friend as well. What's that like?

And what do you think the weather outlook could be for the people in the painting, for the next couple of hours?

Bringing your attention now to the person or people in the painting; notice, is it the case that these figures keep drawing your eye back? Maybe the people are the main subject of the painting? Often images of people, when placed in a picture, form a focal point. They interest us as viewers and we keep coming back to them as we look at the whole canvas, even if the figures are rather small.

Painters will put a person into a picture for a number of reasons – for interest, to give a sense of scale, to add an attraction for the audience, or to tell a story. Why do you think people have been put into *this* particular image?

What difference do you think the presence of people makes to this Countryside image? Do the people give a sense of scale? If they weren't there, what effect would that have on our perception of the scale?

And if the people weren't there, how would this affect the mood of the painting? If it's possible to do this, use your fingers or your whole hand, to try to block out the person or people now, and see what you think of the image without people in it. What happens? Does the image lose its sense of scale at all? Does the mood of it change? If so how? Try uncovering and covering the people a few times to compare.

What story is the painter telling us by putting this person or these people into the landscape? What information do they add? Perhaps they tell us something about the landscape and how it's used, who lives there, or who visits there?

Choosing one person now, think about what he or she is doing. Does it look pleasurable, or not? What would you judge the temperature of the air to be, and how does that feel for the person in the picture? How old would you think the person is? Judging from the body language, could you guess how this person is feeling?

Would *you* like to be here with this person? Do you like the look of where they are, of what they're doing? Or not? Why do you feel this way?

We've come to the end of this audio guide now, although you're welcome to spend more time looking at the painting on your own.

Next, you might like reflecting on what you most enjoyed about this brief activity so scroll down to **Wrap up your painting** to have a go at this.