

Exercise – Analyse an Impressionist landscape

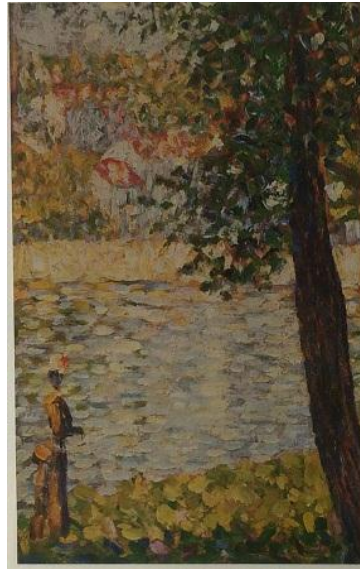


Figure 1 *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, 1885, by Georges Seurat.

Annotate one of the following:

- One of Whistler's Nocturne series of paintings.
- An Impressionist landscape painting which uses a well-documented technique, for example one of Monet's many paintings of water lilies or a Pointillist painting by Seurat or Cross.

Annotate your chosen image, concentrating particularly on technique and the use of scientific colour principles. Whichever option you choose, work your annotation up into a short (400-500 word) report analysing your chosen painting.

I have selected *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, 1885, by Georges Seurat for further study as it is a fine example of the pointillist technique and contemporary trends in colour theory and light studies.

A brief description of *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, 1885, by Georges Seurat (in the form of three spider diagrams)

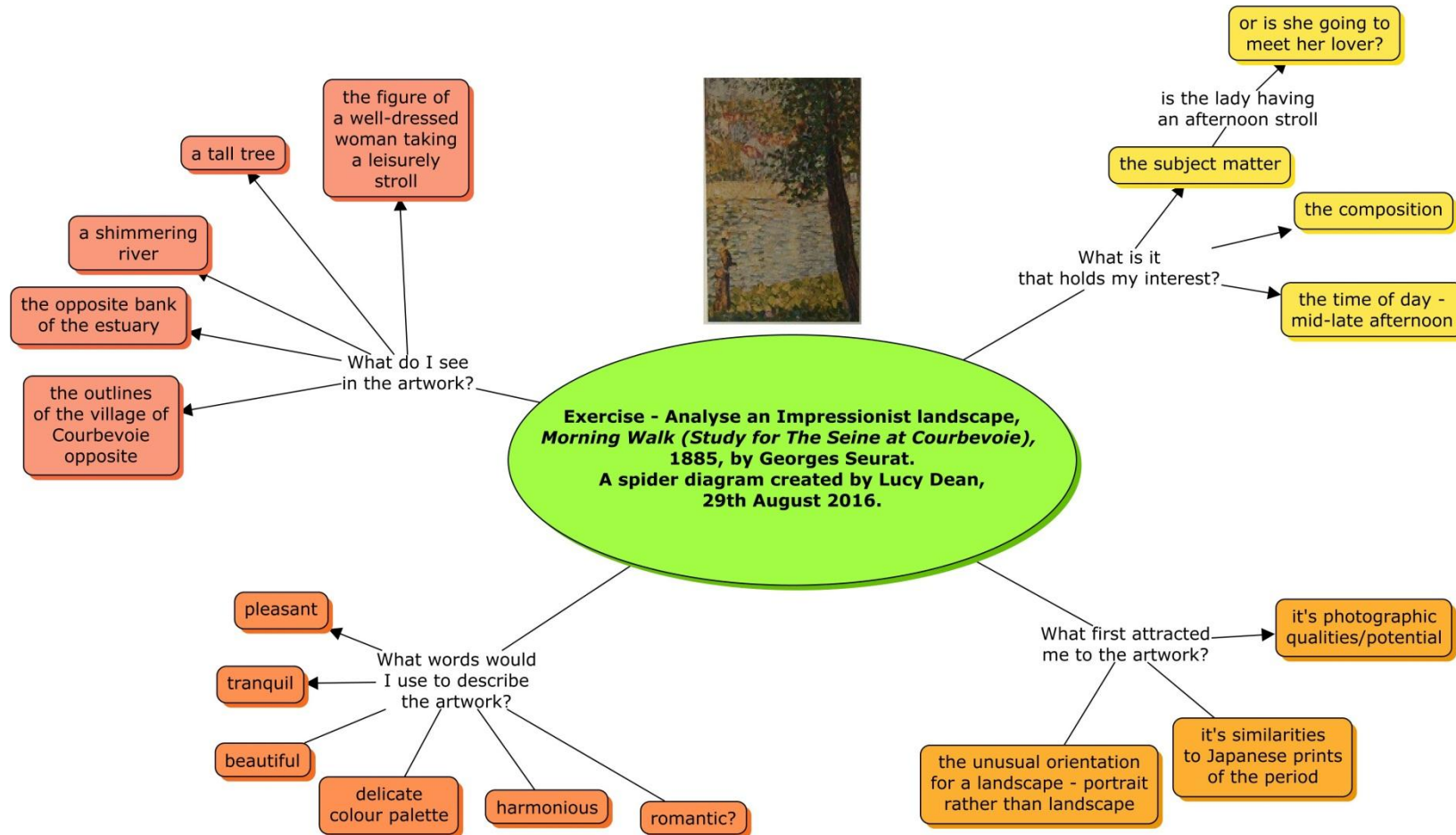


Figure 2 Spider diagram 1 of 3.

Describing and relating *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, by Georges Seurat (spider diagram 2 of 3)

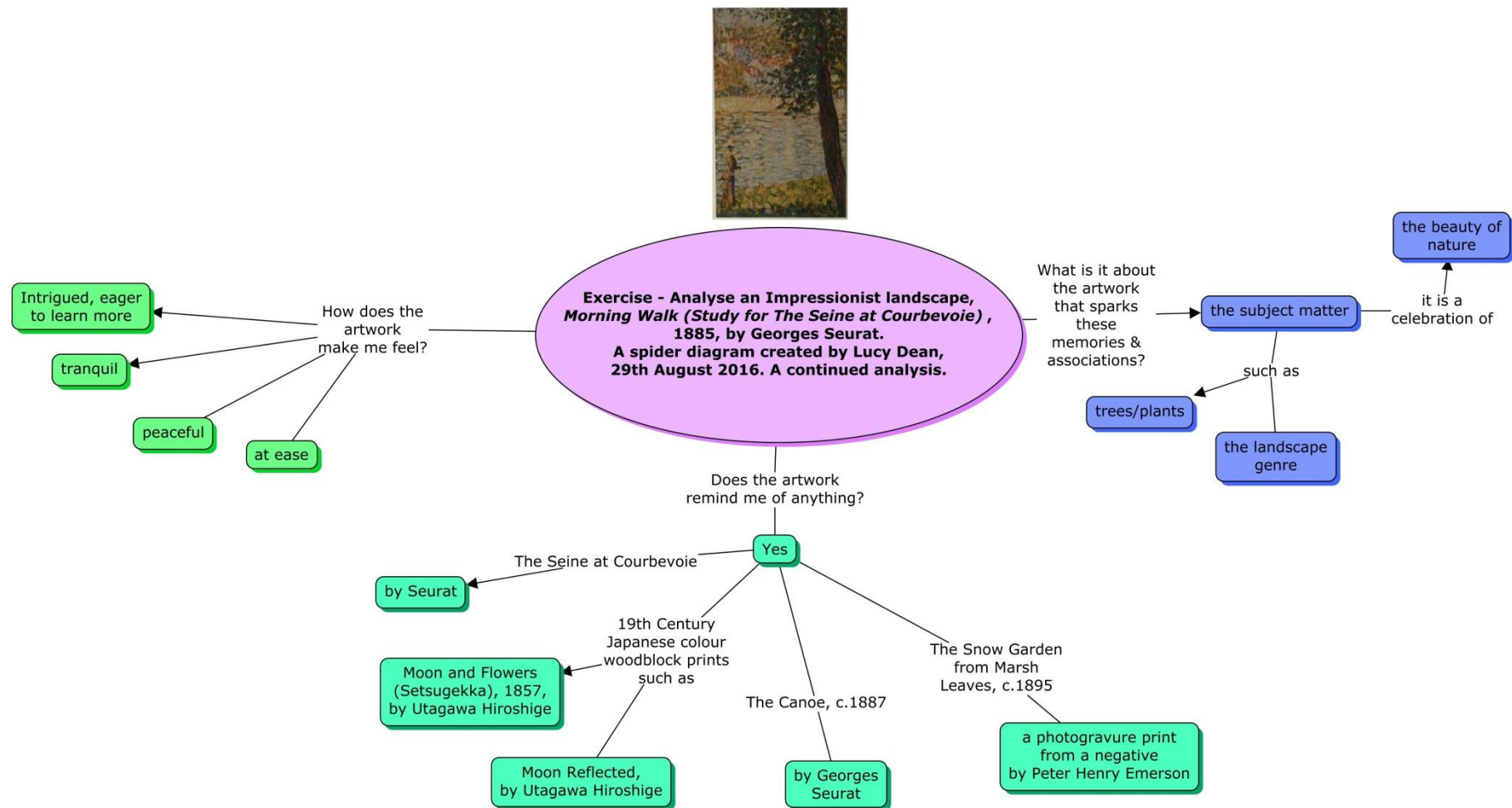


Figure 3 Spider diagram 2 of 3.

Describing and relating *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, by Georges Seurat (spider diagram 3 of 3)



Figure 4 Spider diagram 3 of 3.

Describing the processes and techniques of *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*

- *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)* is a landscape painting in the Pointillist style. It was created by applying daubs of pure pigments directly onto the surface of the canvas in a “divisionist” manner (Sproccati, 1992).
- Seurat based his work on the research of chemists such as Michel Chevreul who studied the effects of light and colour and how these two things are resolved by the human eye.
- Thus Seurat implemented Chevreul’s systems of “simultaneous contrast” (Sproccati, 1992), by applying two colours side by side which were direct opposites on the colour wheel. He also furthered the techniques devised by the Impressionists of solving issues with light, by applying pure colour with divided brush strokes. Thus his paintings make far more sense when viewed from a distance as the human eye fills in the remaining information. Part of Seurat’s skill was that he was able to apply tiny amounts of various pigments which were just enough to allow the spectator to stand back and admire his canvases. Up close the surface of his works are multi-layered with dashes and daubs of pigment all over the place; but from afar the picture emerges. Such is the power of “simultaneous contrast” (Sproccati, 1992) and visual perception.
- Pointillism in painting is known as “the systematic use of optical mixes” (Lucie-Smith, 2003).

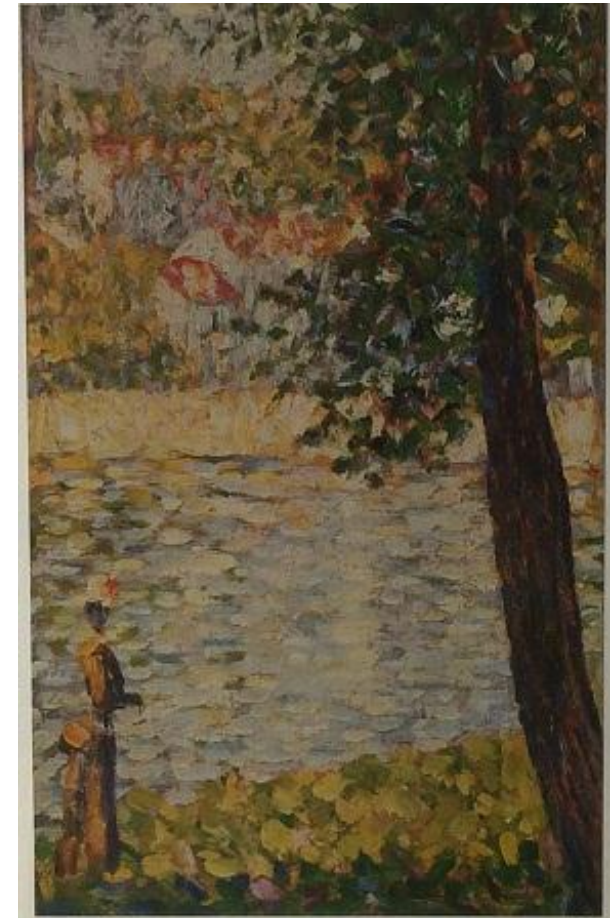


Figure 5 *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*, 1885, by Georges Seurat.

Interpreting *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)*

- In this artwork it is clear to me that Seurat is exploring the effects of simultaneous contrast to challenge the viewer's ideas of Pointillist art.
- The artwork was created in France during a period of great discoveries. It was an exciting time as photography had been invented and was being utilised by artists to produce better and more exciting work. Chevreul was publishing his treatises on the properties of light and colour and Japan had just re-opened its borders for the first time in over three hundred years.
- The artwork is certainly influenced by all of these developments. For example, the extreme cropping and portrait orientation of *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)* suggests an influence of Hiroshige's Japanese woodcuts. Whilst the particular use of colour and the style utilised; reference Seurat's interests in colour theory and visual perception.
- Pointillism represents both a rejection and an embrace of some of the Impressionist ideas in regards to light and colour.
- The work as the title suggests was intended to be a study for a larger work. Hence it's highly experimental appearance.
- *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)* in comparison to his other works is far more impressionistic and a lot less refined than some of his later works, although it has its own distinct charm.

Evaluation

To briefly summarise, *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)* is a highly experimental study in both colour and texture. It depicts a view of the river and the town of Courbevoie on a warm and sunny afternoon.

The scene pictured is highly impressionistic, and without the title the environs are less immediately obvious. For instance, were it not for the title, the viewer could be forgiven for thinking that this was a charming river scene in any provincial town of this period.

The painting depicts an elegant lady contemplating the river on a sunny afternoon. The foliage and trees are awash with colour and the overall scene is very tranquil. Another example of a similar scene by Seurat is: *La Seine at La Grande Jatte in the Spring*, c.1887. Again the scenery is sleepy and peaceful and a figure is seen canoeing near some sailboats.

The artwork is about the power of colour and light to transform a painting in our eyes. Pointillism proved that a painting could have areas of canvas showing through without destroying the overall effect of the image. In fact the addition of the white canvas showing

through provided a greater luminosity. Therefore, I believe *Morning Walk (Study for The Seine at Courbevoie)* would be completely transformed if the canvas was plain as the white pigment is responsible for the vibrancy of the pigments. Without this white base, the earth-toned colours would simply disappear. The cool colours would look passable but the warm hues would blend into the background. In fact, the overall effect would be flattened considerably. Seurat's techniques and observations rely on a melange of both warm and cool colours; on a white base to transform his images into stunning works full of vibrant visual effects.

Bibliography

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