

Describe the painting. Focus on the image, the story told by the painting, and the artist's message.

useful words and expressions:

to portray to depict N.B. to represent - only for symbols or when speaking of political representatives in Parliament!	on the left/right (side of the picture) in the centre at the top/bottom (of the picture) in the foreground/background
composed of (figures/shapes/lines/etc.) horizontal/vertical/diagonal lines square, circular/round, triangular shapes	portrait/landscape/seascape/abstract scene
figure(s) = people, animals, objects	artist/sculptor/painter - N.B. author is used for written works; composer for musical compositions

N.B. - In English, we never say -

"The artist wants to" unless the artist has actually said what his intentions were.

"The painting wants to ...". Only living beings can have desires and therefore "want".

12-15 lines, presuming an average of 10 handwritten words per line, equals 120-150 words.

Description of "A Life Well Spent" (1862) by Charles West Cope

Long version (288 words - too long for your test answer)

This painting depicts a scene of peaceful domestic life, a mother surrounded by her children. The woman is sewing, perhaps mending socks, while speaking to the two younger children. The oldest child, a girl in a white dress, is sitting on the floor and reading a book while she rocks an infant in a cradle. The two or three furnishings visible suggest the sitting room of a wealthy family. However, the background is dark and so directs the viewer's attention to the woman and children, who are dressed elegantly but soberly in nineteenth century fashion. Probably this is a middle-class family.

The painting is built on a series of triangles. The most obvious is formed by the oldest girl and her white dress in the foreground. Another includes her mother and her brother and sister. The diagonal from the upper left-hand corner to the lower right-hand corner divides the younger children from the older girl and her mother. Structurally, the connection between the girl and her mother is reinforced by the horizontal line centring the mother's and daughter's bodies.

The subject of the painting is clearly an idealised vision of the female figure. The oldest daughter is growing toward womanhood and is sitting quietly at her mother's feet. While she is reading she is also attentive to the infant beside her; she is preparing for her future role as mother. The mother, too, has a book on her lap, even while she is mending. As a good mother, she is concerned with both the education of her children and their physical well-being. This woman is intelligent and thrifty, mindful of her duties as mother, and in consequence she is blessed with obedient children and a tidy, comfortable home.

Shorter version (174 words)

This painting depicts a scene of domestic life, a mother surrounded by her children. The woman is sewing while speaking to the younger children. The oldest child, a girl in a white dress, is sitting on the floor next to an infant in a cradle and reading a book. The dark background directs the viewer's attention to the family. The painting is built on two triangles. One is formed by the oldest girl in the foreground. Another includes her mother and her brother and sister. The diagonal divides the younger children from the older girl and their mother. The subject of the painting is a woman's role. The oldest daughter is at her mother's feet and is preparing for her future as a mother by reading and minding a small child. The mother has a book on her lap, even while she is mending. She is concerned with both the mind and body of her children. This woman is a dutiful mother, and consequently she is blessed with obedient children and a comfortable home.