

Title: Interpreting Key Words of Russian Culture through Art
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I teach an advanced (Third Year) conversational Russian class that seeks to develop students' "symbolic competence" (Kramsch C. 2011:201) by engaging with original art objects (prints, paintings, photographs) from Oberlin's Allen Museum of Art. My presentation will lay out the pedagogical goals and strategies implicit in this course.

The immediate, tactile contact with art that students experience in a museum, combined with the act of actively 'translating' the visual into the verbal, works to deepen, complicate, and personalize students' understanding of certain important (but inherently amorphous) cultural concepts such as *sud'ba* (fate), *dusha* (soul), *smirenie* (patience), and *toska* (sadness), and allows them to "unravel a whole tangled 'ball' of attitudes, values, and expectations, embodied not only in words" (Vierzbicka, 1997:17). The museum sessions also mirror the experience of being in an unfamiliar cultural setting, and encourage students not to simply 'translate' language, but also to consciously position themselves in a 'foreign' cultural system.

In my presentation I will outline the design and objectives of the course, present samples of the pedagogical material that I developed over the last three years in close collaboration with the Allen Museum of Art, and then analyze in greater detail the reflective responses to works from the museum that my students wrote after engaging in vocabulary-building activities around the key concepts mentioned above. My analysis of my students' efforts to "read" and reflect in Russian upon visual texts shows that by the end of the course, in addition to expanding and refining their linguistics skills, they have developed a much more layered understanding of these key concepts of Russian culture. The students increase their willingness to "reframe ways of seeing familiar events (...) and find an appropriate subject position 'between languages'" (Kramsch, 2011, 201).

Kramsch, C. *The Multilingual Subject*, 2011.

Vierzbicka, A. *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words*, 1997.