**“Living Canvases” (English, grade 9)**

**Text Appendix**

**Fight for the Banner. The Feat of Horse Guards Gavrilov and Omelchenko at Austerlitz**

Viktor Vikentievich Mazurovskii (1859–1944)

Despite the fact that the Battle of Austerlitz between the Russian-Austrian and French armies on November 20 (December 2), 1805, was lost by the allies, Russian battle painters often turned to it in their works.

The battle was full of vivid examples of the courage and fortitude of the Russian army, which impressed Emperor Napoleon. The Guard of Alexander I especially distinguished itself. After the French broke through the center of the allied troops, it made several brilliant attacks slowing the enemy's advance.

During one of the attacks, the Life Guards Cavalry Regiment defeated the French detachments. Privates Gavrilov, Omelchenko, Ushakov, and Glazunov captured the “eagle” (banner) of a battalion, which became “the only trophy of the allies in the Battle of Austerlitz”. In a report to Alexander I, M. I. Kutuzov wrote, “In general, the entire guard acted in this attack with such bravery as is characteristic of a corps that has the good fortune to protect the person of Your Imperial Majesty”.

**The Battle for Smolensk**

Alexander Iurievich Averianov (b. 1950)

Smolensk is the only large Russian city that Napoleon had to take by force in 1812.

The battle began on August 16, when the defense was held by the 7th Infantry Corps of General Raevskii. On August 17, it was replaced by the 6th Infantry Corps of Infantry General Dmitrii Sergeievich Dokhturov. At this time, the Russian armies had already begun to retreat from Smolensk to Moscow. Convinced that the Russians were again avoiding a decisive battle, Napoleon ordered a general assault. About 45 thousand people were thrown into the battle, supported by numerous artillery.

The painting depicts the battle near the Molokhovskii Gate, around 5 p.m. The city is already burning. Eyewitnesses recalled how “clouds of bombs, grenades and repaired cannonballs flew at houses, towers, shops, churches. And houses, churches and towers were embraced by flames — and everything that could burn — went up in flames!” We see the five-domed Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary surrounded by clouds of smoke.

Near the Molokhovskii Gate is the commander of the 6th Infantry Corps, General Dokhturov. Sitting on a horse, he examines the battlefield through a telescope.

Among the columns going into the attack is the division commander, Lieutenant General Petr Petrovich Konovnitsyn. He is wounded in the left arm, but does not leave the battlefield. Next to him is the divisional adjutant, Staff Captain Dmitrii Ivanovich Akhsharumov (in the future — a historian of the Patriotic War of 1812). On horseback, with a sword in his hand, Major General Prince Eugen of Württemberg leads the rangers of his 4th Infantry Division into battle. He is accompanied by his adjutant, Staff Captain Otto Ivanovich Wachten.

The column of rangers is led by an officer with a naked sword. This is Major Karl Iegorovich Heydeken.

In the foreground of the painting, the French infantry is retreating under the onslaught of the Konovnitsyn and Württemberg regiments.

Around 11 o’clock in the evening, the artillery cannonade died down. Napoleon’s troops were unable to break into the city. But at one o’clock in the morning, Dokhturov, on the orders of the commander-in-chief of the 1st Army, Barclay de Tolly, left Smolensk.

On the morning of August 18, Napoleon’s troops entered Smolensk. As historians wrote, he “occupied the city, but did not take it”.

**Attack of the Lithuanians**

Nikolai Semenovich Samokish (1860–1944)

During the Battle of Borodino, the French attacked the Life Guards Lithuanian and Izmailovskii Regiments defending the village of Semenovskoie. During the battle, a rare case in military history occurred when infantry not only repelled an attack by enemy cavalry, but also went on the attack themselves, “The commander of the Lithuanian Regiment, Udom, fired a battle fire and shouted “hurrah!” He went for the bayonets and drove the enemy to the nearest heights.”

From the report of the commander of the Life Guards Lithuanian Regiment Colonel I. F. Udom to Lieutenant General N. I. Lavrov, “The enemy showered us with cannonballs and grapeshot, and sent cavalry to attack the regiment. All three battalions were built by me in squares opposite the cavalry, and, having let them approach the distance, having fired battle fire first, having shouted “hurray”, they disorganized and drove away the enemy…”

**The Feat of Raevskii's Soldiers at Saltanovka**

Nikolai Semenovich Samokish (1860–1944)

In July 1812, the 2nd Western Army of Infantry General Petr Ivanovich Bagration was moving to join the 1st Army of Infantry General Mikhail Bogdanovich Barclay de Tolly. The city of Mogilev, which had already been occupied by the enemy, lay on the path of the 2nd Army. To find out the enemy’s strength, Bagration sent the 7th Infantry Corps of Lieutenant General Nikolai Nikolaievich Raevskii forward.

Near the village of Saltanovka, Raevskii’s 17,000-strong corps clashed with the troops of the 1st Army Corps of the Grand Army of Marshal Davout, numbering more than 20,000 people.

The painting depicts the legendary episode of the Battle of Saltanovka on July 23, 1812: Corps Commander Raevskii leads the Smolensk Infantry Regiment into attack. Following the general into the attack are his sons — 16-year-old Alexander and 11-year-old Nikolai.

After the battle at Saltanovka, N. N. Raevskii proudly wrote to his wife about the bravery of his sons, “Alexander became known to the entire army, he received a promotion... I was only shell-shocked in the chest, but lightly... Nikolai, who was in the thickest fire, was only joking”.

But the significance of the battle at Saltanovka is not limited to this heroic episode. Marshal Davout repelled the attacks of Raevsky’s corps and retreated to Mogilev, where he prepared for battle with all the forces of the Russian army. But Bagration did not go to the city, but ferried his troops across the Dnieper. After that, he reached Smolensk, where the 1st and 2nd Russian armies finally met.

General Iermolov ironically remarked, “Thanks to you, the famous Davout, who has served Russia so well!”

**Pursuit of French Mounted Rangers by Horse Guards near Polotsk
on August 6, 1812**

Filipp Antonovich Chirka (Chirko) (1859–1928)

The painting depicts a real episode that occurred during the battle near Polotsk between the 1st Separate Infantry Corps of Lieutenant General P. Kh. Wittgenstein and Napoleon’s troops.

On August 17, General Wittgenstein’s 1st Infantry Corps, which also had the 9th Cavalry Division under its command, attacked the positions of Napoleon’s troops near Polotsk. The battle lasted two days.

On the evening of August 6 (18), 1812, when the enemy was pressing the Russian troops, the cavalry made a brilliant attack. The Horse Guards wore a common uniform: a white tunic (jacket) and a leather helmet with a forehead protector and a horsehair plume.

The attack put the French to flight. Their brigade included two regiments of mounted rangers. The painting depicts an elite company of one of the mounted ranger regiments retreating along the road to Polotsk. The mounted rangers wore dark green uniforms. They were armed with a light cavalry sabre and a musketoon (literally “small gun”). Red epaulettes served as a distinctive feature of the soldiers of the elite company.

**The Feat of Colonel Nikitin's Battery in the Battle near Krasnoie, 1812**

Mikhail Osipovich Mikeshin (1835–1896)

The painting depicts an episode of the battle near the town of Krasnii in the Smolensk region, which lasted from November 15 to 18.

Kutuzov, true to his careful tactics, tried to beat the enemy in parts, attacking individual detachments. Denis Davydov called this battle “a search for hungry, half-naked Frenchmen. Whole crowds of Frenchmen, at our appearance on the highway, hastily threw down their weapons”. In such a situation, many commanders took risks, confident of success.

On November 17, 1812, the company of horse artillery No. 7 of Colonel Alexei Petrovich Nikitin, finding itself in the face of the enemy without the support of cavalry and infantry, successfully attacked the enemy in horse formation. An extremely rare case in military history. The task of horse artillery is to provide fire support for the actions of infantry and cavalry. But now the company commander, Colonel Nikitin, on horseback, raising his sword, leads his artillerymen, who are also mounted, into battle. All of them are experienced riders. Nikitin's artillerymen attack the enemy infantry, which is retreating in close formation to the city of Krasnii. The attack of Nikitin's company was a complete success: the French infantry was overthrown, up to 300 prisoners and two guns were taken. Alexei Petrovich himself laconically noted in his memoirs, “This attack cleared the city”.

**The French Army Crossing the Berezina**

Unknown artist

A copy of the work by the Bavarian artist Peter von Hess.

Peter von Hess painted pictures dedicated to the main battles of 1812, commissioned by Emperor Nicholas I. In this work, the artist managed to convey the unique feature of the Battle of Berezina: during the crossing of the river (November, 26–29), Napoleon won a victory on one bank and suffered a terrible defeat on the other. To show this, the author had to depict the events of different days on one canvas.

The foreground shows what happened on November 29, 1812. On the eastern bank of the Berezina, there are still wounded, exhausted, incapacitated and separated soldiers of the Napoleon's Grand Army. On the right, they are attacked by the advancing troops of General P. Kh. Wittgenstein. The general himself is depicted on horseback, in a gray overcoat and an officer’s cap with a red band. Next to him is General Diebitsch.

The enemy is rushing in panic to the two bridges across the river, where a real tragedy is unfolding. The bridges were built on November 26. One of them was intended for infantry and cavalry, the other for artillery and supply trains. Hastily built with improvised materials, they turned out to be weak. We see how the bridge for artillery and supply trains is collapsing. The other bridge is burning. Napoleon himself gave the order to burn it, having made sure that the combat-ready units had crossed to the western bank. He was no longer concerned about the fate of the sick and the slow...

In the background, on the western bank of the Berezina, the artist depicted the events that took place the day before. On November 28, Napoleon successfully repelled the attempts of Russian troops under the command of Admiral P. I. Chichagov to prevent the crossing. We see the enemy cavalry division begin its attack. It was this success that allowed Napoleon’s combat-ready army units to cross the Berezina and avoid encirclement.

**Napoleon’s Return from the Campaign against Russia**

Adolf Northen (1828–1876)

The tragedy of the retreat of Napoleon’s army has been described many times in memoirs and in literary works. The famous and once the most widely read author of historical novels in Russia, Aleksander Danilevskii, wrote, “Napoleon passed Vilna on Catherine’s Day, November 24, and the Russian border — on November 26, on St. George’s Day... Napoleon recalled with annoyance the words he had said several months earlier, upon entering Russia, unknown to him at that time... “Forward! Let us show the strength of France, cross the Neman, bring weapons into the borders of Russia; throw this new wild horde back to its former fatherland, to Asia”.

Now Napoleon, recalling these expressions, only twitched his shoulders and silently frowned. The image of burnt Moscow and his forced, shameful exit from its ruins did not leave his thoughts...

“From the glorious to the ridiculous is only one step!” Napoleon said with a bitter smile...”