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# DEVELOPING PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH PROBLEM-BASED TASKS IN NATIVE LANGUAGE LESSONS

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**Abstract**

This article examines how problem-based tasks can support the development of critical thinking among primary school students in native language lessons in Uzbekistan. It proposes a teaching sequence in which students identify a language problem, compare possible solutions, justify their choices, and revise their answers after discussion. Examples involving word choice, punctuation, and text interpretation illustrate how familiar language exercises can prompt students to explain their reasoning. When interpreting a short story, for instance, students compare two explanations for a character's action and identify the details that support each explanation. The article describes how teachers can use guiding questions, peer discussion, and formative feedback to help students connect their answers to evidence from the text or an appropriate language rule. It also proposes criteria for assessing the relevance of the evidence, the clarity of the explanation, and the student's ability to revise an answer in light of a stronger argument. The examples are intended for use in primary classrooms and in the methodological preparation of future primary school teachers.

**Keywords**: Critical thinking, primary education, native language lessons, problem-based tasks, text interpretation, argumentation, formative assessment.

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## Introduction

# РАЗВИТИЕ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО МЫШЛЕНИЯ МЛАДШИХ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ НА УРОКАХ РОДНОГО ЯЗЫКА ПОСРЕДСТВОМ ПРОБЛЕМНЫХ ЗАДАНИЙ

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**Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается, как проблемные задания могут способствовать развитию критического мышления младших школьников на уроках родного языка в Узбекистане. Предлагается последовательность работы, в ходе которой ученики выявляют языковую проблему, сопоставляют возможные решения, обосновывают свой выбор и пересматривают ответы после обсуждения. На примерах заданий по выбору слова, постановке знаков препинания и интерпретации текста показано, как привычные языковые упражнения могут побуждать школьников объяснять ход своих рассуждений. Например, при чтении небольшого рассказа ученики сравнивают два объяснения поступка героя и находят в тексте детали, подтверждающие каждое из них. В статье описано, как с помощью направляющих вопросов, обсуждения со сверстниками и формирующей обратной связи учитель может помочь ученикам обосновывать ответы с опорой на текст или соответствующее языковое правило. Предлагаются критерии оценки уместности приведённых доводов, ясности объяснения и способности ученика пересмотреть ответ при появлении более убедительного аргумента. Примеры предназначены для применения на уроках в начальной школе и в методической подготовке будущих учителей начальных классов.

**Ключевые слова:** критическое мышление, начальное образование, уроки родного языка, проблемные задания, интерпретация текста, аргументация, формирующее оценивание.

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## Introduction

Native language lessons in primary school give children opportunities to explain how they reach a judgment about a word, sentence, or text. For example, when two headings seem suitable for a short story, pupils can compare them by identifying the main event and pointing to details that support their choice. Explaining why one heading fits better requires pupils to distinguish a central idea from a memorable detail. In this article, critical thinking refers to examining alternatives, supporting a judgment with relevant evidence, and reconsidering that judgment when a peer offers a stronger explanation.

A problem-based task begins with a question that pupils can investigate using age-appropriate language material. In primary schools in Uzbekistan, teachers can design such tasks around familiar stories, classroom dialogues, and short written messages. A task might ask pupils to decide which of two words best conveys a character's feelings. The teacher can prompt them to connect each proposed word with what the character says or does. Comparing classmates' interpretations then gives pupils a reason to return to the text and clarify their reasoning.

The purpose of this article is to describe how primary school teachers can design problem-based native language tasks and assess the reasoning pupils express in their responses. For future teachers, the examples connect lesson planning with the practical work of guiding discussion and giving formative feedback.

## Methods

The article uses a methodological analysis of classroom tasks to describe how critical thinking can be developed in primary native language lessons. The analysis focuses on three types of tasks involving word choice, punctuation, and interpretation of short texts. Examples are built around familiar classroom situations and everyday language to suit primary school pupils in Uzbekistan. Each task is designed to prompt pupils to consider at least two possible answers and explain their choice using a textual detail, a language rule, or the intended meaning of a sentence.

The proposed lesson sequence begins with individual work, during which pupils record an initial answer and a brief reason. In pairs, they compare their answers and identify the evidence behind each response. During the class discussion, the teacher asks pupils to explain how changing a word or punctuation mark affects

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meaning. Pupils then revisit their initial answers and explain what led them to keep or revise them.

Pupil responses are assessed using three criteria: the relevance of the evidence, the clarity of the link between the evidence and the answer, and the ability to consider an alternative. To practise applying these criteria, future primary teachers can compare two sample answers, identify the reasoning each pupil has expressed, and formulate a follow-up question that helps the pupil develop a clearer justification for the chosen answer.

## Results

The task analysis identified three ways pupils can justify answers in native language lessons. In word choice tasks, pupils connect a word with a detail in the text. Given a story in which a character rereads a note and asks what it means, pupils might choose between "curious" and "worried." An explanation for either choice needs to connect the character's actions or words with the feeling selected. In punctuation tasks, pupils explain how a mark changes the way a sentence is read. A pair of sentences containing the same words can end with a full stop or a question mark. Pupils read both versions aloud, decide which one fits the dialogue, and explain how the surrounding lines helped them choose. In interpretation tasks, pupils compare evidence for competing readings. When choosing a heading for a story, they can distinguish a detail that appears in one scene from an idea that connects several events.

Across the three task types, a pupil's explanation provides a basis for formative feedback. When a pupil cites a relevant detail, the teacher can ask how it supports the answer. When two choices remain plausible, the teacher can ask which choice accounts for more of the text. Future primary teachers can use these examples to practise identifying the reasoning in a response and choosing an appropriate follow-up question.

## Discussion

The value of a problem-based task depends on what pupils have to explain. A question such as "Which word describes the character?" can be answered by naming a feeling. Asking pupils to choose between two plausible words and identify the detail that supports each choice gives them a reason to examine the text more closely. The teacher can then ask which detail best distinguishes the two

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feelings. In a native language lesson, this approach brings vocabulary and reasoning together because pupils consider the meaning of a word in relation to what a character says, does, or notices.

The teacher's questions help pupils move from citing a detail to explaining its significance. A pupil who says that a character is worried because she reads a note twice has identified a relevant action. The same action could also suggest curiosity. The teacher can ask what happens next and whether it changes the interpretation. If the character hides the note when someone enters, pupils can discuss how that action affects their judgment. This exchange makes the connection between evidence and interpretation visible and shows how a new detail can strengthen, weaken, or complicate an initial answer.

Punctuation tasks call for a different kind of justification. In a short dialogue, pupils can read the same sentence with a full stop and a question mark, then compare how each reading fits the next speaker's reply. The teacher can invite pupils to rewrite the reply so that it fits the other version. This gives them a practical way to examine how punctuation signals what a speaker is doing, such as asking for information or making a statement. For younger pupils, reading aloud and acting out the dialogue can prepare them to explain their choice in writing.

Classroom discussion offers a way to adapt these tasks to pupils' reading and language abilities. A teacher can read a passage aloud, display two possible answers, and give pupils time to point to a relevant phrase before asking for a full explanation. Pair work gives each pupil an opportunity to rehearse an answer and hear another interpretation before speaking to the class. In primary schools in Uzbekistan, teachers can select texts familiar to their pupils and vary their length and vocabulary. A short, accessible passage leaves more time for comparing interpretations and discussing the reasons behind them.

For future primary teachers, reviewing sample responses can clarify what to assess during such a lesson. Two pupils may select the same heading for a story while offering explanations of different quality. One may refer to a single event, while the other explains how the heading connects the opening, the central problem, and the ending. The teacher can respond to the first pupil by asking which other event supports the heading and invite the second to consider whether the alternative heading captures an important part of the story. In a teaching methods seminar, trainees can practise writing these follow-up questions and

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discuss when to ask them. Feedback can also recognise a well-supported decision to retain an initial answer. The focus is on how pupils respond to evidence, whether they keep their answer or revise it.

## Conclusion

Problem-based tasks give primary school pupils a way to practise critical thinking while working with vocabulary, punctuation, and short texts. A teacher can build a task around two plausible answers and ask pupils to explain which one fits the context. The explanation connects the pupil's choice with a word, a detail from the text, or a language rule. When pupils hear another interpretation, they can return to the material and decide whether to keep or revise their answer.

In primary classrooms in Uzbekistan, teachers can incorporate this sequence into work with familiar stories, dialogues, and everyday written messages. Younger pupils can begin by pointing to a phrase or reading a sentence aloud before explaining their choice. As pupils gain experience, they can compare several details and explain why one carries more weight. Formative feedback can focus on the relevance of the evidence, the clarity of the explanation, and how the pupil considers an alternative.

In teacher education, future primary school teachers can practise turning a routine exercise into a problem-based task, anticipating possible responses, and preparing questions that help pupils develop their reasoning. Reviewing sample answers can help them decide when to ask for another detail or invite a pupil to explain how a detail supports the answer. This approach makes reasoning part of the ordinary work of a native language lesson.

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