Simply Charlotte Mason presents

Gainsborough

Picture Study Portfolios

by Emily Kiser

Breathe a sigh of relief—you, the teacher, don't have to know about art in order to teach picture study!

With Picture Study Portfolios you have everything you need to help your family enjoy and appreciate beautiful art. Just 15 minutes once a week and the simple guidance in this book will influence and enrich your children more than you can imagine.

In this book you will find

- A living biography to help your child form a relation with the artist
- Step-by-step instructions for doing picture study with the pictures in this portfolio
- Helpful Leading Thoughts that will add to your understanding of each picture
- Extra recommended books for learning more about the artist

"We cannot measure the influence that one or another artist has upon the child's sense of beauty, upon his power of seeing, as in a picture, the common sight of life; he is enriched more than we know in having really looked at even a single picture."—Charlotte Mason

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Thomas Gainsborough
(1727–1788)

by Emily Kiser

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Picture Study

Why do we do Picture Study?

A Charlotte Mason education is full of variety. Parents spread a feast before their children, giving them endless opportunity to taste, savor, enjoy, discover, and appreciate many different kinds of intellectual food, otherwise known as ideas. Nature study, music, and art are just as important in this balanced feast as math, reading, and science. Picture study doesn't take much time, just fifteen minutes or so each week, but its benefits are far reaching: "We cannot measure the influence that one or another artist has upon the child's sense of beauty, upon his power of seeing, as in a picture, the common sights of life; he is enriched more than we know in having really looked at even a single picture" (*Home Education*, p. 309).

Charlotte Mason says that it rests with parents and no others to provide an *intellectual culture* by which she means, "not so much the getting of knowledge, nor even getting the power to learn, but the cultivation of the power *to appreciate, to enjoy, whatever is just, true, and beautiful in thought and expression*" (*Formation of Character*, p. 212, emphasis mine).

Through conscientious study of the great masters of art, children take delight in the "just, true, and beautiful" expression that these artists have given us. Charlotte Mason went so far as to tell us that God "whispers in the ear" of the great artists and we owe it to Him to study their works and read their messages rightly (*Ourselves*, Part 2, p. 102). This ability to appreciate and read a painting rightly is a skill to be developed over time, one that develops naturally as we, the teachers, expose our children to great works of art. "As in a worthy book we leave the author to tell his own tale, so do we trust a picture to tell its tale through the medium the artist gave it" (*Towards A Philosophy of Education*, p. 216).

How do we do Picture Study?

"But the reader will say, 'A young child cannot appreciate art; it is only the colour and sentiment of a picture that reach him. . . .' But, as a matter of fact, the minds of children and of their elders alike accommodate themselves to what is put in their way; and if children appreciate the vulgar and sentimental in art, it is because that is the manner of art to which they become habituated" (*Home Education*, pp. 307, 308).

Art appreciation is an integral part of the abundant feast that parents should spread before their children. Just as we weed the "twaddle" out of our bookshelves, and replace it with high quality literature, we should be feeding our children's intellects with high quality art, not "vulgar, sentimental" illustrations that are common in children's books. Our children are born persons who appreciate *real* art, from a very young age.

"We recognise that the power of appreciating art and of producing to some extent an interpretation of what one sees is as universal as intelligence, imagination, nay, speech, the power of producing words. But there must be knowledge and, in the first place, *not the technical knowledge of how to produce*, but some reverent knowledge of what has been produced; that is, ***children should learn pictures, line by line, group by group, by reading, not books, but pictures themselves***" (*Towards a Philosophy of Education*, p. 214, emphasis mine).

The first step in doing picture study is supplying your children with good art. Charlotte Mason believed that art appreciation, in the form of picture study, should be included in a student's lessons from the age of six onwards. Each term the student studies six or so works by a single artist. It is not important to study artists in chronological order, and we do not give young children teaching on art history periods; rather, they will assimilate this information as their history reading progresses, and their knowledge of art increases. Breathe a sigh of relief—you, the teacher, don't have to know about art in order to teach picture study! "[T]he first and most important thing is to know the pictures themselves" (*Towards a Philosophy of Education*, p. 216). It can be helpful to choose artists to study who painted during, or pictured scenes from, the history period you are studying, although this is not necessary. More important, make sure that the styles of the artists studied during the year are different from one another to avoid confusion for your children.

When we begin to study a new artist Charlotte Mason suggested that we read a short story of that artist's life. Then we let the children study one picture, silently taking

it all in, noticing every detail until they know it and see it in their mind's eye. This type of study will furnish them with a portable gallery hung in their mind that they will carry with them throughout their lives. They will have made connections with hundreds of great works of art over the course of their school studies, and will know these works intimately.

After studying the picture, the reproduction is turned over or hidden from sight, and a six- to nine-year-old then describes what he saw with all the details he took in, maybe drawing a few lines to show where various objects were located—all from memory. An older child adds to this narration a description of the lines of composition, light and shade, and the style of this artist, as he is able. (All of this knowledge comes through the simple study of pictures in this manner, week after week, short after short lesson.) High school students may render in mono-chrome (all one color), and from memory, as many details of the picture as they can remember. Don't have your children attempt to reproduce the picture exactly; Charlotte Mason said this lessens a child's reverence for the artwork (*Towards a Philosophy of Education*, p. 216).

When the narrations, oral or drawn, are complete, a discussion about the picture may occur. Teachers should keep in mind that they are not the dispensers of knowledge, but should tell the name of the piece and ask the child's response to it. Did you like this painting? What did this picture make you think of? Did it remind you of anything you've read about? These simple questions further a child's interaction with the piece, helping him connect the new painting to his previous knowledge. Many works of art have subjects from literature, mythology, the Bible; your children will recall the stories that they have read or will remember the picture when they do read about the subjects portrayed.

All of these things occur in one short lesson each week. Fifteen or twenty minutes once a week is not hard to fit in, even though your school schedule may seem full. The change in type of lesson, the enjoyment afforded by looking at great art, and the relations your students will make are just some of the rewards you will discover by including picture study in your home school.

How to use a Picture Study Portfolio

1. Read the story.

At the start of the term, read the story of the artist included in this portfolio. It may take one or two lessons to complete the reading, but keep the lessons short—fifteen to twenty minutes maximum. Make sure students narrate the reading, either orally or in written form according to their ability.

2. Select a picture

After this introduction to the new artist for the term, select one picture to study per lesson. Charlotte Mason recommended six different pictures. This allows students to become familiar with the style of the artist, after even just six pictures they will recognize paintings they have not seen before as the work of an artist they have studied. We have included more than six pictures so that you may choose which you would like to study. There is no particular order to the pictures; it isn't necessary to study some over others. The choice is yours; select pictures that appeal to you and your children. Spread the individual works out over the term, or introduce one painting each week for six weeks and then allow the students quiet time over the remaining weeks to look over the pictures at their leisure.

3. Do a picture study.

During the picture study lesson follow these steps:

- Ask the children to tell you about the picture you looked at last time. If this is the first picture study of the term, ask them to tell you a little about the artist's life, where he was from, or something else they remember about him.

- Before they look at the picture, you may want to tell them how large the actual work is, comparing it to some object they are familiar with. Do not tell them the title yet.
- Have the children look at the picture silently for 3–5 minutes, looking closely at all the details in the painting until they can see it in their mind's eye. Have them check to make sure they can see the whole picture with their eyes closed.
- Next, ask the student(s) to narrate the picture, telling as much as they can about the painting. If you are doing picture study with more than one child, start with one and stop him after he has narrated some of the picture, then have the next child add to his sibling's narration. Older students may do a drawing of the piece from memory if they are able.

4. Have a Picture Talk.

Last, have a "Picture Talk." Now tell the children the title of the work. Does this shed any light on what they thought was happening in the picture? What do they think of this picture? Do they like it? How does it make them feel? Can they tell what time of day it is? This is not a time to quiz the student(s) on what they may have missed; it is a time for them to engage and contemplate the picture further. Charlotte Mason tells us that questions about what they think never bore the students, but quizzing them does! If there is a story behind the picture, you may want to look that up and read it if there is time. But keep the lesson short!

5. Display the picture in your home.

Put the picture of the week on display somewhere in your home where everyone can see it.

That's all there is to it. Enjoy this course of your educational feast. Your family will be blessed by having "a couple of hundred pictures by great masters hanging permanently in the halls of [your] imagination" (*Towards a Philosophy of Education*, p. 43).

The Story of Thomas Gainsborough

from *The Stories of the Painters* by Amy Steedman, edited by Emily Kiser

In the year 1727 there was a child born at Sudbury in Suffolk, who was to grow up to be a great painter.

Thomas Gainsborough was the name of this child, and he came to a very ordinary home, without any flourish of trumpets, and no signs at all of having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father, John Gainsborough, was a kindly, well-to-do tradesman, fond of his children and rather proud of his ladylike wife, who had a genteel talent for painting flowers.

Not that there was much time for painting in that busy household. There were eight children in the nursery before little Thomas was born, and children are always careful comforts.

Whether it was from their business-like father or their gentle ladylike mother that the children inherited their cleverness, we cannot tell, but certainly the cleverness was there, and genius as well.

To begin with, Jack, one of the elder boys, had a passion for machinery and was never tired of trying to invent machines. "Scheming Jack" they called him, and one of the things he contrived was a pair of wings, with which he actually learned to fly, though they did land him in a ditch. He also made a cradle that could rock itself (perhaps to save himself trouble, there being so many babies to rock in the family), and a cuckoo that could sing. Then Humphrey, another brother, made a little working model of a steam engine, before steam engines had been thought of. This engine he showed to a man who was a friend of Watt the engineer, and so perhaps helped towards the great discovery.

Thomas, the youngest of the family, seemed from the very first to take after his mother. As soon as he could hold a pencil firmly in his hand he began to draw. Give him a sheet of

paper and a pencil and he was as happy as a king and as good as gold. He was not fond of lessons, and when he was sent to the grammar school, where his uncle was master, he did not shine at all as a clever boy. The things he wanted to know he learned easily enough, but those things were not to be found in a schoolroom or inside the covers of books. It was out in the woods and fields that the really interesting lessons were to be learned. He wanted to know the way that trees grew, how the flowers unfolded, how lights and shadows came and went, and all the different shapes of the clouds that went sailing by. There was scarcely a tree in the woods that he did not know, not a field or stream whose picture was not printed in his memory. Horses, dogs, sheep—all were eagerly studied, as well as the shepherds and country people that came his way.

It was a decided temptation to play truant and spend the sunny summer days in the woods instead of being cooped up in a dull schoolroom, and it was no wonder that Thomas did his work badly when his eyes always wandered to the window and his heart was out in the green world.

And one day, when the longing was more than he could bear, he begged his father to write a letter to the schoolmaster asking for a holiday.

"Holiday, indeed! Certainly not," said his father. He was a good tradesman and did not believe in unnecessary holidays.

But the heart of Thomas was set upon that holiday, and he meant to have it by hook or by crook. A brilliant thought struck him: he would write the letter himself! So with the greatest care he copied his father's handwriting, and did it so well that the schoolmaster was entirely deceived, and the holiday was granted.

Then away to the woods went Thomas with his paints and his canvas, as happy as a king. Of course he knew that his sin would soon find him out, but what cared he as long as he had this whole happy day to himself?

"Tom will come to be hanged," cried his angry father when he heard about the forged letter. "What mischief were you up to that you stole a holiday?"

"I spent the whole day sketching in the woods," declared Tom. And to show that he was speaking the truth he brought out his sketches and showed them.

Looking at each sketch carefully the father forgot his anger and was greatly astonished. "Why, the boy will be a genius," he said, and the sinful letter was forgiven.

Often in mischief, bright and quick at everything except lessons, Tom became a prime favourite at school. Even the schoolmaster could not help smiling when the boy's clever

For Further Reading

If you are interested in reading more about Gainsborough, check your library for the following resources:

A Child's History of Art, V. M. Hillyer (Appleton-Century, 1936)

This is a treasure, if you have access to it. Chapter 23 in the "Painting" section covers Gainsborough.

Thomas Gainsborough: Artist of England, Sally Glendinning (Garrard, 1969)

Recommended for upper-elementary readers.

Gainsborough, Elizabeth Ripley (J. B. Lippincott, 1964)

A very good series of biographies of the artists, much recommended if you can locate these out-of-print gems! For middle school on up.

Gainsborough Picture Study

Choose **six** of the following pictures to study with your students; select those you like best, or that your students will enjoy the most. There is **no order to the following pages**, though the first few pictures are generally the artist's best known works; the extra pictures are included to give you options when choosing pieces to study.

In each lesson, use the "Leading Thoughts" to lead your students in a Picture Talk *after* they have studied the piece and given their narrations. You may choose to talk about or ask any, all, or none of the questions and comments. These are included to provide any helpful information that you and your students may not be familiar with, and to draw your attention to significant points of the work of art. Remember not to lecture your students; ask them what *they* think of the painting. After even a short time you will be amazed at the number, and quality, of relations your students will have formed with great artists and their works!

The Blue Boy
(Portrait of Jonathan Buttall)

c. 1770, oil on canvas, 70" x 44.1"
Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Present this picture as described on pages 9 and 10.

Leading Thoughts

This is perhaps Gainsborough's most famous painting. It is rumored that Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great artist and contemporary of Gainsborough, declared that no good painting could be predominately blue. Our artist took the declaration as a challenge and produced this piece, which has been beloved by its viewers ever since. When Henry Huntington, an American railway magnate and art collector, bought *The Blue Boy,* there was public outcry that the piece would leave England. At the time of its sale, this painting sold for the most amount of money that had ever been paid for a single work of art. It is still a part of Huntington's collection and can be seen outside of Los Angeles, California.

The clothes the boy wears in this painting were antiques during Gainsborough's day, from the 17th century instead of the 18th. Perhaps the artist was tipping his hat to Van Dyck, the painter he most admired, who had painted the young Charles II in similar attire.