Simply Charlotte Mason presents

Constable



SAMPLE

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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John Constable
(1776–1837)

by Emily Kiser

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Constable
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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 John Constable

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

There were many artists working in England, the story of whose lives would fill a book by themselves. But as there is not room for all, they must stand aside to make room for Constable, the man who worked such wonders in the art of landscape painting, not only in England, but in Europe.

This John Constable was born in 1776 at East Bergholt, in a substantial red-brick house built by his father, who was a prosperous miller, and who owned several mills in the neighbourhood.

At first it seemed as if he was going to be one of those children whose epitaph runs, "Came in, looked about, didn't like it, went out," for he was so nearly going out that it was necessary to have him hurriedly christened on the day of his birth.

But instead of giving up the battle of life, little John struggled on and became a strong, healthy child, and a very handsome one too. Indeed, when he grew up, and was helping his father in the mill, he was known in the country round about as the "Handsome Miller."

In a way John was somewhat of a disappointment to his kindly, genial father and clever, sensible mother. They had set their hearts, to begin with, on their son going into the Church; and when John decided that he did not want to become a clergyman, they had to content themselves with the prospect of making him a miller, like his father. That was the first disappointment, and presently another followed. John did not want to be a miller either. He had set his heart on learning to be a painter. And every one knew what a poor trade that was!

It was while John was still at school that his thoughts had turned in this direction. He had made friends then with a plumber and glazier called John Dunthorne, who had

fired his ambition. This man had the soul of an artist, and spent all his leisure time in painting landscapes from nature, and encouraged John to do the same.

John's father did not object to the friendship, but he strongly objected to John becoming a painter.

"It is an unprofitable calling," said his father.

"You will never make a living out of it," said his sensible mother, adding something about it being scarcely a respectable trade either.

So John tried to stifle his desires, and made up his mind to make himself as good a miller as possible, seeing that a miller he must be. But all the time when he was at work in the mill he was learning other things as well, things which helped him to paint his famous pictures later on.

Then came a red-letter day in the life of John Constable. He was introduced to Sir George Beaumont, and saw for the first time a picture by Claude Lorrain. Sir George was a Royal Academician, and had a remarkably fine collection of pictures, and was in the habit of carrying about this painting by Claude Lorrain wherever he went.

Think, then, of the joy of the young miller when he saw such a picture for the first time. Indeed, the beauty of it dazzled his eyes and filled him with wonder and awe. Then, too, Sir George showed him some water-colour sketches by young Girtin, Turner's friend, which fascinated John, and awoke again all his longings to be a painter himself.

Clearly the one thing to be done now was for John to go up to London to try and find out if his painting was likely to be a success. Luckily he had letters of introduction to artists there, and he also made the acquaintance of an old engraver, called "Antiquity Smith," who gave him much good advice. John was strongly advised to leave the mill and take to painting. There was something about his sketches, even in those early days, that made experts feel sure that he would succeed in making his mark.

Constable worked hard and copied other men's pictures diligently for some time, and then gave up in despair. He was not sure enough of himself. Very sorrowfully he decided to return to the mill. Time was going on. John was no longer a boy, but a man of twenty-three, when again the longing to paint possessed him and sent him out to seek his fortune once more in London. And this time there was no turning back.

Little by little, after close study of other men's work, his favourite Claude Lorrain and Girtin, as well as Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Ruisdael, he slowly but surely took

For Further Reading

If you are interested in reading more about John Constable, check your library for the following resource:

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

This is a treasure, if you have access to it. Chapter 24 in the "Painting" section covers Constable.

Constable 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!





Weymouth Bay

c. 1816, oil on canvas, 20.9" x 29.5"
The National Gallery, London

Present this picture as described on pages 9 and 10.

Leading Thoughts

As a painter from the Romantic school of art, Constable admired nature's raw beauty. The fleeting aspects of the landscape filled him with awe and reverence: clouds, water, and leaves blowing in the wind. How difficult do you imagine it is to paint those things that are in constant motion?

An often quoted saying of Constable's is, "Painting is but another word for feeling." What feelings do you have when looking at this scene? Can you almost feel the wind on your face or hear the waves sweeping the shore?