



Johannes Vermeer's *Geographer*

# Picture Study

## Teaching children to love great art

"...children should learn pictures by reading not books but the pictures themselves."

Charlotte Mason, *A Philosophy of Education*

**Includes:**

Article: "Enjoying Picture Study"

Two reproductions for study:

*Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci

*Snap the Whip* by Winslow Homer



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*The Gleaners* by Jean-Francois Millet

## Enjoying Picture Study

By Sheila Carroll  
Living Books Curriculum

The study of great works of art is an important component of a Charlotte Mason education. Many educators think children should learn first to “do art”, that is, learn free-hand drawing and other art techniques. Then, later, usually much later, the child is introduced to great works of art. Charlotte Mason believed this was putting the cart before the horse. Teaching a child early to look closely at line, color and design of great works establishes in their minds what beauty is and should be

Ms. Mason wrote, “There must be knowledge...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 (about art) but the pictures themselves.” (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 214)

### How to Prepare Your Picture for Study

First, purchase a simple, wooden picture frame and easel. These can be found at any discount store.

Next, print out the reproduction in color on an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper. If you do not have a color printer, you have two options: 1) have a copy center print it for you. The cost is usually less than a dollar; or, 2) study the work on your computer screen. This is less desirable, since your child must be in front of the monitor to see it, instead of having the art work displayed in your home.

Last, put the picture to be studied in a location where your child sees it frequently.

### How to Study a Picture

To begin the study of a new picture first introduce the artist with a few interesting details of his life. An excellent book to aid you in this is *Art in Story* by Marianne Saccardi.

Leave the picture up for one week. Throughout the week refer to the picture in passing. Several times ask your child to find two new things in the picture, but make the request more of game than an “assignment”.

At the end of the week, put the picture away and ask your child to narrate all he recalls of the picture, then ask him to narrate what he knows about the artist

Ms. Mason describes the process this way: “a few sympathetic words about his trees or his skies, his river-paths or his figures, the pictures are studied one at a time; that is, children learn, not merely to see a picture but to look at it taking in every detail. Then the picture is turned over and the children tell what they have seen (i.e. narrate)” (p. 214).

## **Preparing an Art Portfolio to Store Pictures**

Developing an art portfolio to hold all the reproductions is a good practice. You will need a three-ring binder and sheet protectors. Any office supply store sells these. The sheet protector is three-hole punched, so you then print the work of art as described and store it in a three-ring binder until you need it. To the back of the picture or on a separate sheet, add the title, artist, date of production, and any other helpful information then place in plastic sheet protector.

## **Sources for inexpensive (or free) picture study**

Learning to enjoy and understand a work of art is a sweet pleasure that lasts a lifetime. However, a finding affordable reproduction, especially for homeschooling families on one income, is a challenge. Charlotte Mason noted that she acquired her reproductions, postcard-sized black and white engravings, from a commercial source. “A friendly picture dealer supplies us with half a dozen beautiful reproductions of the work of some single artist by term.” (p. 215).

### **Internet**

Many museums have digital copies of their works online. It is permissible to download one copy for study purposes. The drawback is that a good print requires using your colored ink cartridge a good bit. The plus side is that you get a fairly good reproduction that you can print in 8-1/2 x 11 format, which permits you to see more detail. Use any search engine to find the works of the artist you want to study. A really good searchable database is Artcyclopedia <[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)>, which has online art for over 8,000 famous painters, sculptors and photographers, at art museum sites and image archives worldwide.

### **Dover Books**

Dover Books <[www.doverdirect.com](http://www.doverdirect.com)> has many quality reproductions in the form of “art cards”. These are small or large format prints that sell for \$1.50 and \$5.95, respectively. Each book contains 12-24 prints of either one artist or art period, such as Impressionism.

### **Remaindered Books**

The book seller Barnes and Noble <[www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)> regularly sells remaindered books in its “Sales Annex” online and has a special table in most stores. Remaindered books are publishers’ overstocks that have been dramatically reduced, often more than 80% off the list price. Bargain books are not used or damaged, but some titles are marked to indicate that they are publishers’ overstocks.

This article previously appeared in *Parent's Journal*, the e-newsletter of Living Books Curriculum.

# ABOUT THE PAINTINGS

## ***Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci**

Mona Lisa (also known as La Gioconda) is a 16th century portrait painted in oil on a poplar panel by Leonardo Da Vinci during the Italian Renaissance. The work is owned by the French government and hangs in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, France with the title Portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo.

The painting is a half-length portrait and depicts a woman whose expression is often described as enigmatic. The ambiguity of the sitter's expression, the monumentality of the half-figure composition, and the subtle modeling of forms and atmospheric illusionism were novel qualities that have contributed to the painting's continuing fascination. Few other works of art have been subject to as much scrutiny, study, mythologizing and parody.

Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona\\_Lisa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa)

## ***Snap the Whip* by Winslow Homer**

Winslow Homer (February 24, 1836 – September 29, 1910) was an American landscape painter and printmaker. He is considered one of the foremost painters in 19th century America and a preeminent figure in American art. His painting *Snap the Whip* is his most famous and shows his use of dramatic diagonals and pleasure of everyday subjects, such as children playing.

Adapted from Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winslow\\_Homer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winslow_Homer)



