

Paul Cézanne
(1839–1906)

by Emily Kiser

To be used with the Picture Study Portfolio: Cézanne
published by Simply Charlotte Mason

Cézanne
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ISBN 978-1-61634-707-9 printed
ISBN 978-1-61634-708-6 electronic download

Published by
Simply Charlotte Mason, LLC
930 New Hope Road #11-892
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30045
simplycharlottesmason.com

Printed in the U.S.A.

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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" (*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***” (*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” (*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 (*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—15 to 20 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” (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 43).

The Story of Paul Cézanne

by Kristin Keller

Have you ever heard of the Continental Divide? Scientists can draw a long, squiggly line down through the continents of North and South America, from Alaska all the way down to the tip of Chile. To put it simply, a drop of water that falls to the west of the divide will end up in the Pacific Ocean, while watershed to the east of the divide will work its way to the Atlantic Ocean. It is a clear boundary. In a similar way, many art experts look at the work of Paul Cézanne (pronounced say-ZAHN) as being the boundary between old world European art and Modern art. If you visit the National Gallery in London, you will find his art hung beside Impressionists and other painters of the 19th century, representing the end of the pre-modern art story. However, if you visit the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, you will find Cézanne's work displayed as examples of the very beginning of the modern movement. Cézanne is where art divides; his paintings straddle the divide between old and new styles.

Let's get to know this revolutionary, era-defining painter. Paul was born in 1839 in the sunny countryside of Aix-en-Provence in the south of France. His parents, Louis-Auguste and Anne-Élisabeth, sold women's hats. Their business was so successful that Louis-Auguste was able to open a bank, and Paul and his two younger sisters grew up in wealth and comfort. At 13, Paul was sent to boarding school where he met two friends: Jean Baptiste Baille and future writer Émile Zola. They enjoyed spending afternoons in the country, walking, swimming, fishing, writing poetry, reading the classics, and discussing art. They became such a unit that their classmates called them *Les Trois Inséparables*—The Three Inseparables. Later in life, when Paul was a grown man, he told about a time when he saved his friend Émile from a gang of bullies and was rewarded:

Cézanne 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 Basket of Apples

1887-1900, oil on canvas, 25.4" × 31.5"

The Art Institute of Chicago

Present this picture as described on pages 9 and 10.

Leading Thoughts

Cézanne, as a Post-Impressionist, was inspired by his Impressionist predecessors, but took their ideas in his own direction. In this still life we see the loose brushwork and vibrant colors of Impressionism, but there is something new in Cézanne's use of perspective. If the viewer traces the lines of the table top, he quickly sees that this table is portrayed in multiple planes at the same time. The table top is strangely tilted, and no right angles exist. The items on the table appear to interrupt the continuity of the table's edges, breaking them into disparate planes. This style may seem strange to Western viewers accustomed, since the Renaissance, to expect three dimensions portrayed on two-dimensional surfaces with a single vantage point. Cézanne was committed to painting the truth, and each time he returned to work on the still life, he saw from a slightly different perspective and proceeded to paint from there. In his opinion, this is far more true of how humans view and interact with the world around them—from a dynamic, ever-changing perspective. Each of these views are recorded in his painting, and what is remarkable is how the artist is able to make a cohesive, harmonious picture, even while the angles undermine our traditional notions of three-dimensional space. The bottle lists to the left, while the stack of lady finger cookies aligns with the edges of the canvas, emphasizing the different perspectives used to create this painting.

After viewing this piece and retelling what you saw from memory, lay the edge of a pencil or a straightedge along each line of the table's edges. How many different angles do you find? Do you agree or disagree with Cézanne that these different perspectives are more true to life? Why or why not?