

*Simply Charlotte Mason presents*

# *Dürer*



*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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*Albrecht Dürer*  
(1471–1528)

by Emily Kiser

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

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Dürer  
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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 Albrecht Dürer*

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

Germany, too, was touched by the wand of the Renaissance, that will o' the wisp that came with its magic of awakening Art. It was at Nuremberg that the star of German Art shone out in fullest brilliancy in the work of Albrecht Dürer (pronounce the *u* as in the word *pure*—D“u”-rer), as you shall hear.

There were gay doings in the picturesque old city of Nuremberg one summer day in the year 1455. A grand wedding was being celebrated, and all the town was out holiday-making. At the castle there was dancing under the broad lime tree in the courtyard, entertainments were provided for every one, and gaily dressed crowds thronged the streets.

In the midst of all this merry-making a poor travel-stained man stood apart, looking on, too tired and dusty to join in the rollicking fun, but gazing with interested eyes on the splendidly dressed people and at the precious jewels they wore.

The name of this tired-looking man was Albrecht Dürer, and it was little wonder that he was weary and footsore, for he had pilgrimaged from far-off Hungary through many countries, and had at last come to Nuremberg, where he hoped to settle and carry on his trade of goldsmith.

“This is a good omen for me,” he said to himself as he gazed on the richly dressed people crowding up to the castle; “surely a man of my calling will find plenty of work here.”

Then turning to one who stood next him he asked, “Whose wedding do they celebrate with so much pomp and show?”

“Thou art a stranger surely,” was the answer, “or thou wouldst have known that it is

the wedding of Philipp Pirkheimer, one of the foremost of our citizens.”

The name meant nothing to Dürer, and this dust-stained traveller was quite unknown to the rich and honoured bridegroom, yet if any one could have peered into the future he would have seen a son of Pirkheimer and a son of Dürer joined in an enduring friendship, both honoured citizens of Nuremberg. And the son of the poor traveller was to be the one to bring the greatest fame and glory to the ancient city.

It was by no means difficult for this stranger to find work and to make a home for himself in Nuremberg. He was a skilled craftsman, and, as he had foreseen, there were many rich citizens there ready to employ a good goldsmith in the fashioning of gold and silver ornaments and the setting of jewels. Fortune smiled on Dürer, and he found at once a good master, whom he served faithfully for some years, and whose daughter Barbara he married at the end of that time, when he set up business for himself.

Now, although the young goldsmith had as much work as he could do, and was well paid for it, there was not a great deal of money to spare, for as time went on there were many mouths to feed. Almost each year brought a new baby to the Dürer's house, and the storks of Nuremberg were kept very busy.

The third child brought by those busy birds was a boy, who was called Albrecht after his father. Of course there was nothing to show at first that he was a special baby different from all the rest, and if his mother thought him wonderful, it was just what all mothers are apt to think, whether the baby turns out to be a wonder or not. Besides, there was really not much time to consider one child more than another when they trod so swiftly on each other's heels, till in the end there were eighteen brothers and sisters in the crowded home.

The children were most carefully and well brought up in that German family. The father was a simple, good man, upright and God-fearing, intent on making his children learn to love God and their neighbours. Day by day he saw to it that they were well trained, and as he taught them he could not help noticing how quick and intelligent little Albrecht was, and to feel a particular pride and delight in him.

The boy was so keen to learn and so clever with his hands. True there was not much money to spare, but it was surely worth while to let him go to school that he might learn to read and write. So to school Albrecht went, and, learning his lessons quickly, he was ready, when twelve years old, to leave school and go into his father's shop to learn to become a goldsmith.

## ***For Further Reading***

If you are interested in reading more about Dürer, 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 18 in the "Painting" section covers Dürer.

*Albrecht Dürer (Art for Children)*, Ernest Raboff (Doubleday, 1988)

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.

*Famous Old Masters of Painting*, Roland McKinney (Dodd, Mead, 1951)

This out-of-print book has a chapter on Albrecht Dürer.

*Story-Lives of Master Artists*, Anna Curtis Chandler (J. B. Lippincott, 1953)

As well as including a biographical narrative of Dürer, the author describes the setting in which he lived. Interesting reading if you can find this old book!

## *Dürer 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!





1500  
AD

Albrechtus Durerus Natus  
ipsum ut proprius se tunc.  
geba in coloribus quibus.  
anno M. L. V. V.



## *Self-Portrait in Fur-Collared Robe*

1500, oil on panel, 26.4" x 19.2"  
Alte Pinakothek, Munich

Present this picture as described on pages 9 and 10.

### *Leading Thoughts*

This is a highly unusual self-portrait. Dürer painted three self-portraits; this is his last. The first two were done in the fashionable mode of the times, showing his face turned slightly away from the picture plane. In this self-portrait, the artist painted himself in a pose that was reserved for icons of Christ. An icon is a special type of religious art created to aid the viewer in worship. There has been much speculation about Dürer's character and what arrogance he must have had to align himself with the Savior of the World in such an overt way. What do you think about this?

Notice the symmetrical composition, unified with the classic triangular shape. The artist's signature initials and an inscription that is translated "I, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg portrayed myself in everlasting colors aged twenty-eight years" balance the head against the deep black background.

What textures can you identify in the painting? Dürer's skill as a painter is quite apparent in the way he depicted the different materials in this piece.