

PRIMARY TEACHERS' NOTES

THE GRAHAM CHILDREN
WILLIAM HOGARTH

'THE GRAHAM CHILDREN' BY WILLIAM HOGARTH (1697–1764)



The actual size of the picture is 160.5 x 181 cm. It was painted in oils on canvas in 1742.

This leaflet, together with a large poster of Hogarth's 'The Graham Children', will be given to primary school teachers attending a one-day course **Learning by Art** at the National Gallery in 1999 – 2000. Cross-curricular work produced in schools as a result of these courses will be shown in an exhibition called **Take One Picture** at the National Gallery in the year 2001. The project is supported by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

About the painting

Hogarth is particularly famous for his paintings and engravings of Modern Moral Subjects (a category of art he invented himself: consisting of stand-alone or sequential images depicting, often humorously, a moral dilemma). He also had considerable success as a portrait painter and this picture belongs to the phase in his career when he had moved from small to large scale portraits. His sitters usually came from the wealthy professional middle and merchant classes rather than the aristocracy.

This delightful life-size group portrait shows the children of a Dr and Mrs Daniel Graham who lived in Pall Mall in central London. Daniel Graham was Apothecary (someone who prepares medicines) to the King – George II, and also had recently been appointed apothecary to Chelsea Hospital. These were significant appointments and the family was very prosperous. The painting is signed and dated 1742.

In order of age the four children are Henrietta Catherine in the blue dress, born 8 November 1733, here aged nine, Richard Robert born 8 January 1735, here aged seven, Anna Maria born 7 July 1738, here aged about five, and Thomas born 18 August 1740. Ironically although each child seems happy, vivacious and full of life, the baby Thomas died before the painting was completed.

Richard on the right is turning the handle of a 'bird-organ' – a device which imitated birdsong. The bird-organ is decorated with a scene showing Orpheus playing his lyre surrounded by a miscellaneous group of animals. The organ's sound presumably has inspired the caged bullfinch to sing, which in turn has provoked the predatory cat to leap hopefully up the back of the boy's chair. The two girls seem unaware of this small drama, while baby Thomas, rusk in hand, has eyes only for the cherries held out by his elder sister. Thomas is seated in a go-cart: an elaborate little armchair on wheels with a long towing handle attached to the axle. It has been suggested that the carved gilded dove on the front may have had a mechanism to make its wings flap as the go-cart was pulled along. There is no evidence that the

Graham family owned such a cart (or indeed bird or bird-organ) but the chances are that they did. The silver basket of fruit by the infant, and the two carnations, their stems crossed, lying on the floor at his feet act as kind of tributes to the dead child, while in the shadows behind him on top of the large clock (itself a symbol of time) is a winged cherub with hourglass and scythe, objects which are normally associated with death.

The children's clothes are very fine. Notice in particular that the baby boy is dressed in skirts. This was normal for the first two years or so of a baby's life – presumably until he was toilet-trained. The other children wear miniature versions of adult clothing – long skirts for the girls with a bodice which would have been laced at the back, and an apron in front which could be removed for washing. Anna Maria's dress is particularly pretty, the cherries on it echoing the cherries in her sister's hand. Robert wears knee breeches as his father also would have done.

The children pose almost like figures on a stage and the room behind them is very dark – it is hard to make out anything. The curtain draped behind Robert's chair is little more than a device to emphasise his position as the heir and to complete the composition on that side of the painting. Close examination reveals a couple of paintings on the back wall, one of which shows a dark shore with a tower.

William Hogarth spent his entire life in London (apart from the occasional trip abroad), making paintings and engravings. For years he was closely associated with the Foundling Hospital (an orphanage) sited at the edge of London (Coram's Fields just north of Holborn) and here he arranged for prominent painters of the day to donate pictures for the public to see, because in those days there was no public art gallery in London.

He was a highly original and gifted painter who was largely self-taught and although he was not as successful in his lifetime as he felt he should have been, nowadays he is often considered to be the first really great English artist.

Introducing the picture to children

There are many different ways of doing this: here are four ideas to start you off.

- Put the picture up in the classroom and let the children live with it for, say, a week before discussing it.
- Use the picture to play 'I Spy' or invent a memory game. Allow the children to look at it for say one minute and then ask them to remember what they saw.
- Cover the picture with a card in which you have cut windows –rather like an advent calendar. Open one each day to reveal an interesting detail. Only reveal the entire picture after a week.
- Allow one or two children to see the picture. Get them to describe it in as much detail as they can to the rest of the class. Then each class member does a picture from the description only. Show the picture when everyone has finished.

Discussion leads

- Start by discussing the obvious – what you can see. You might begin by asking what the children noticed first, or by asking which of the Graham children is the oldest/youngest and guessing how old they are.
- The difference between a painting and a picture, and a painting and a reproduction or print. Introduce the concept of 'the real thing' as opposed to a reproduction. Introduce the word 'unique'.
- Why such a picture would have been made? What is the modern equivalent? (Today nearly everyone has their photo taken at some time or another but long ago only the rich could afford to be recorded in this way.)
- The death of the baby (if appropriate). Life expectancy in the 18th century (25% of 1-9 year olds died). Mortality in general.
- Incorporate these terms into your discussion: portrait, group portrait, pose/posing, sitter, full length, half length etc. Full face, three quarter view, profile etc. Foreground, background.

Curriculum Links

English - Literacy Hour

- Play 'I Spy'.
- Sort out nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Make up sentences using these.
- What is each child thinking/going to say next? Create a tableau with each child saying his/her piece. Photocopy the image and stick on speech or 'thinks' bubbles.

Drama

- Work out what everyone might be saying. Work in groups of four and write a mini-play. Perform the scene.

Maths

- Calculate how long ago this was painted.
- Give the years of each child's birth and get the class to work out approximately how old each one was when the picture was painted.
- Clocks and calculation of time. Calendars.

Science

- Forces: pulling.
- Living things – life processes (humans, fruit, predators).
- Birth and death.
- Hygiene and medicine.

History

- What was life like in England in 1742?
- Where do you live? What was there in 1742 (eg green fields, earlier buildings). How did local people make their money?
- Visit local museum/house/church/cemetery etc.
- Look at clothes, food, toys, books, furniture, sanitation, medicine.
- Tracing your own ancestors – how to do it using public records such as parish registers – your local museum might be willing to help you with this.

Geography

- Look at an 18th-century map of London. Find Pall Mall (where the Graham Family lived) and Leicester Fields (where Hogarth lived – now called Leicester Square). You will not be able to find either Trafalgar Square – laid out after the battle of Trafalgar – or the National Gallery which did not then exist. Find Buckingham house (now Buckingham Palace), Saint James's Park (where you could buy milk straight from the cow). Compare with map of London now.

Art

- Create modern group portraits of class members or families based on the Hogarth. Do them life size or use photography or video.
- Let each child choose one figure from the painting (copy, or photocopy) and then give that figure a completely new setting.
- Do a still life based on the silver basket of fruit.
- What will happen next? (Use video?)
- Make models of the children, dress them and build the room out of a box.

Music

- Anna Maria looks as if she is about to dance. Listen to dance music from around this time (e.g. Handel, Rameau, Couperin).