



PRIMARY
TEACHERS'
NOTES 2014–15

THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY

'MR AND MRS ANDREWS', c.1750

OIL ON CANVAS
69.8 x 119.4 CM

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Thomas Gainsborough (1727 – 1788) was born in Sudbury in Suffolk, and educated at the grammar school there until the age of 14. He then went to London to study drawing with the French artist Gravelot who is probably responsible for introducing him to the circle of artists at the St Martin's Lane Academy, run by William Hogarth.

He married Margaret Burr in 1746 and they returned to Sudbury where their daughters were born. The National Gallery has a 1748 self-portrait of the artist with his wife with their first daughter, who died very young, and two charming portraits of the surviving girls whom he painted throughout their lives.

In 1752 Gainsborough set up practice in Ipswich. He moved to Bath in 1759 where he established a reputation as a fashionable portraitist. He continued to use landscape settings and painted landscapes for his own pleasure. He was also a keen amateur musician, playing the viola da gamba for relaxation. Finally he moved to Pall Mall in London in 1774, where he died 14 years later. He is celebrated both for his portraits and landscapes, two interests which come together in his painting of Mr and Mrs Andrews.

ABOUT THE PAINTING

The Sitters

The couple are Robert Andrews and his wife Frances, who had married in 1748. Robert Andrews, who was two years older than Gainsborough, was in his mid-twenties at the time of the painting. Artist and sitter must have been aware of each other as children, both attending Sudbury Grammar School before Gainsborough left for London. Andrews remained at school and went up to Oxford, although he seems not to have taken a degree. His father, also Robert

Andrews, was a local landowner and his son seems to have devoted his energies to farming and improving the land he inherited.

His wife, also from a local landowning family, was born Frances Carter in around 1732. She was only around 18 at the time of the painting. The match was probably engineered by the two fathers in order to consolidate and secure their lands.

The Setting

Soon after his marriage Robert Andrews inherited the house and estate of Auberries, the setting for the painting. It has been suggested that this is not just a double portrait but a triple portrait of Andrews, his wife and his estate. The painting looks out across the landscape, south over the valley of the River Stour, the county boundary with Essex. The Andrews are looking towards the location of their substantial brick-built house, which cannot be seen. As he owned 3,000 acres, much of the landscape behind them belonged to Robert Andrews.

The scene, well known to both artist and patron, is depicted more accurately than in any other Gainsborough painting. At the far left is a view of the square tower of Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford, three miles away, while in the centre distance there is a glimpse through the trees of the parish church of All Saints, Sudbury, where the Andrews had been married. The oak tree under which they pose still stands, though it is no longer living. The artist has allowed himself some licence by showing a newly harvested cornfield, which stands far too close to the house to be likely.

The Pose

The couple are shown informally. Mr Andrews stands with his hunting gun and retriever. Mrs Andrews, rather more self-conscious and stiff, is perched on a wonderful curving garden bench, which may well be an invention. Its playful curves are echoed in the figures and in the tree roots,

reflecting the contemporary taste for Rococo design that Gainsborough would have absorbed during his London training. His teacher Gravelot was a book illustrator and designer as well as drawing master and played an important role in transmitting Rococo designs from France.

It is intriguing that Gainsborough has left a little of Frances Andrews's lap unpainted, as though there was something to be added in later. There was a popular idea that it was a pheasant shot by her husband, which seems unlikely as it would have been put in a game bag or given to a servant rather than dumped on his wife's beautiful skirt. Work bags, lap dogs and fans have all been put forward, but it is unclear why any of these objects would not just have been painted with the rest of the picture. It is possible that the space has been left for an anticipated child – their eldest was born the following year.

What became of Mr and Mrs Andrews?

The Andrews were to have nine children between 1751 and 1769. Frances died in 1780 aged 48. Robert remarried and lived to the age of 80 dying in 1806. They are buried together in the nearby church of St Andrews, Bulmer. With such a large number of children to provide for, Robert Andrews directed that Auberries and his estate be sold and so it passed in to other hands. The house still exists today as a private home. The painting remained in the family for over two hundred years. It was sold to the National Gallery in 1960 by the sitters' great, great, great grandson.

COSTUMES

Both sitters demonstrate an informality of clothing that was associated with English fashion. Robert wears britches and buckled shoes, but his jacket is practical and comfortable for shooting. His lapels flap casually. His gloves, sleeves, collar and waistcoat are wrinkled with wear. Bags of powder and shot dangle from his pocket. Casual though the outfit may be, it still underlines his right to hunt on his own land and is therefore a symbol of his status. He wears a tricorne hat, typical of the time. His hair is natural, not powdered, nor augmented with a wig, but simply curled at the temples.

In Gainsborough's paintings from the same period male sitters wear a dark frockcoat creating a very different mood. The light cream of Mr Andrews's jacket and the white of his stock (neckcloth) and hose add to the painting's lightness and charm.

Mrs Andrews certainly appears less at ease in her beautiful blue outfit, the panniers beneath her echoing the curving shape of the seat. It is, in fact, a skirt and jacket, which would have been regarded as informal. She is wearing backless mules – shoes that she might have worn around the house – and a fine linen scarf or fichu across the top of her jacket, tucked through a ribbon at her bodice.

Her hair is natural and unpowdered, with soft curls at the nape of the neck. She has it in a cap, crowned by a soft straw 'shepherdess' hat. This is typical of English rather than French fashion, which in England was reserved for special

or formal occasions. Interestingly Gainsborough's teacher Gravelot was partly responsible for introducing English fashions to Paris when he returned, through his drawings, so perhaps he gave the young artist an eye for costume.

PORTRAITURE AND LANDSCAPE

Gainsborough painted landscapes, along with portraits and conversation pieces, particularly early in his career. Pure landscape painting was not respected as a genre, with a higher status given to history painting, depicting narrative scenes from classical mythology and the Bible for example. Portraiture was also not well respected, but the market for it in England was large and it paid the bills. Both Gainsborough and his contemporary Sir Joshua Reynolds, with whom he was a founder member of the Royal Academy in 1768, aspired to paint portraits that transcended these boundaries and demonstrated the artist's skill and intellect.

Gainsborough's later portraits (see for example the National Gallery's *Mr and Mrs Hallett*, known as '*The Morning Walk*') show ravishingly elegant figures. In comparison there is something very natural about *Mr and Mrs Andrews*. The painting is compelling in its freshness and originality, qualities which caused one writer to refer to it as 'one of the eccentric masterpieces of English painting'.

THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE

Views of the countryside are often taken to express something about national, in this case English, identity. Scenes of harvest often indicate harmony between humanity and nature, and the fertility of the land. Here the sheaves of corn may anticipate the birth of Mrs Andrews's future children. In a less figurative sense, the details of the landscape are testimony to good husbandry. Robert Andrews was clearly a skilled agriculturalist. Golden corn shows that this is high summer; the hawthorn hedges in the middle distance are neatly cut; the new five-barred gate encloses a field of sheep of a breed selected for feeding on turnips and artificial grasses. The way in which he managed his farms – publishing a letter in Young's *Annals of Agriculture* in 1768 which comments in rather lengthy detail 'On the Smut in Wheat' – shows something of the spirit of scientific enquiry associated with the Enlightenment.

GAINSBOROUGH'S LEGACY

Gainsborough's portraits certainly influenced subsequent artists, but it was his approach to landscape painting that was particularly personal and innovative. His Suffolk successor, John Constable (1776 – 1837), was indebted to the artist's early landscapes and famously wrote, 'Tis a most delightful country for a landscape painter. I fancy I see Gainsborough in every hedge and hollow tree'.

USING THE PICTURE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

TAKE ONE PICTURE

The National Gallery promotes the use of a single painting for cross-curricular teaching and learning through the Take One Picture programme. The scheme champions engagement with and exploration of a National Gallery painting as inspiration for the enrichment of learning, making meaningful connections both inside and outside the classroom. Further information on the scheme can be found at www.takeonepicture.org.uk

STARTING POINTS

Before looking at the painting

- With the pupils' eyes closed, introduce some key vocabulary from the painting and use 'shared imagining' to build the scene in the children's imagination. 'There is a man with his dog and a woman seated on a bench in the countryside ...'
- Pass around objects from the painting in a canvas bag so that children can feel and describe them, such as silky material, straw hat, dried ears of corn.
- Set the scene: if possible go for a walk in the countryside or local park and note the season, the colours, the smells, the trees. Where can you sit? What would you paint?

Strategies to Support Looking

- Describe the painting to someone who cannot see it.
- Starting with the back and arm of the bench, trace all the curly lines you can find in the picture.

Open questions to initiate dialogue

- Would you like to meet this couple? What would you ask them?
- Imagine what they said to each other while they waited for the artist to paint them.
- Why do you think the artist left part of Mrs Andrews's dress unpainted? Imagine what could be there.
- Imagine going for a walk inside the painting. What might you see, hear and feel?

LINES OF ENQUIRY

Lines of enquiry begin with themes in the painting and extend to make meaningful connections and broad learning experiences. Projects that enrich learning will emerge as you explore the different contexts and possibilities that the painting creates for you and your pupils.

Double Portraits

- Look at other double portraits, particularly of couples, both from similar and different times and places. What do the settings say about the couple, their status and their relationship? How has this changed over time and in different places? This could include photographic portraits.

Landowning

- Explore the history of the site in this painting, or see if you can find out about any large estates or farms in your area. Some might still exist, some might not as towns and cities have expanded, but there may be some clues left.

Farming

- Mr Andrews cared about how his estate was farmed. Find out about how farming has changed since the 18th century, for example the rearing of sheep and the growing of wheat as we see in the picture.

The Landscape

- Mr and Mrs Andrews were painted on their estate because it was important to them. Could you find or imagine an area of landscape or even townscape or cityscape, that is important to you and respond to it. This could be through painting, photography, dance, art, music or ICT.

The Seat

- The seat here is probably imaginary. Design appropriate seating for characters, real or imagined.

Rococo

- Gainsborough was influenced by Rococo design from France. Research the elements of this style and design something inspired by it.

Inheritance

- The painting was passed down in the family through generations. Is there anything in your family that has been treasured and passed down? What would you keep and pass on?

Costume

- Gainsborough's portraits often show his sitters, particularly women, in beautiful and fashionable clothes. Explore the costume of the sitters here – what would it have been like to wear and what did it say about them. Think about how different clothing in Britain is today.

The Seasons

- The painting gives us clues that this is high summer. Compare and contrast this with other paintings of the same or different seasons. Make your own version of this painting set in a different season – the trees, colours, clothing would all be different.

WEB LINKS

www.nationalgallery.org.uk
www.vam.ac.uk/page0-9/18th-century-fashion
www.wallacecollection.org.uk
http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/visitmuseum_old/galleries/agriculture.aspx
www.eastanglianlife.org.uk