

# Artists IN FOCUS

Thomas Gainsborough: Landscape & Portrait Artist



## What We Learned:

- Gainsborough was born to a middle-class cloth merchant's family in Sudbury, England in 1727.
- As a young teen Thomas went to London and was an apprentice to the engraver, Hubert Gravelot. Here he was introduced to Rococo style art, sometimes called Late Baroque, which was very decorative—full of fancy curves, gold, and pastel colors.
- He loved and preferred painting landscapes. But, because he needed to make a living, he became a portrait artist, often painting the backgrounds as a landscape.
- His portraits gained the attention of King George III, and Gainsborough became a favorite of the royal family.
- His most famous painting is *The Blue Boy*.



## Art Activity: *Landscape*

Although Gainsborough is known as a portrait artist, his passion was painting landscapes. Gainsborough's landscapes include a variety of trees and many of his portraits had trees in the background. His sketches were drawn loosely and drafted quickly.

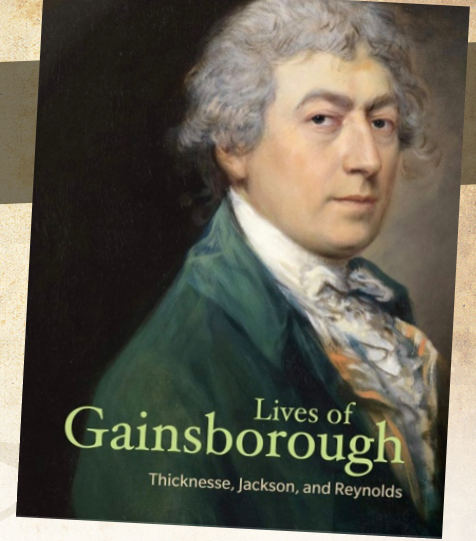
As the steps of drawing a landscape were taught, the students drew their own landscape on canvas. The focus of their drawing was on the trees. Once completed the landscape was painted.



# Book Nook

*Lives of Gainsborough*

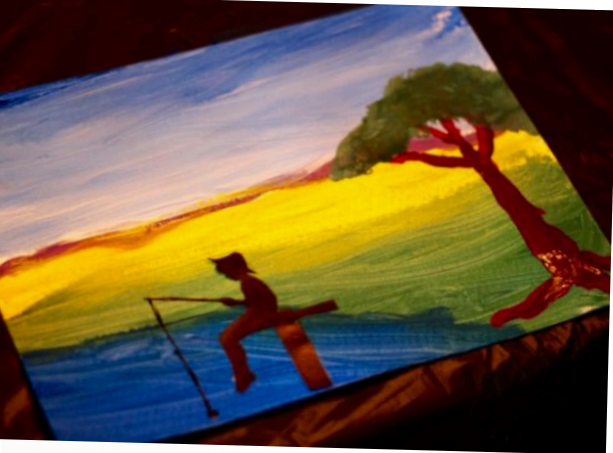
By Philip Thicknesse, William Jackson, Sir Joshua Reynolds



## Connections at Home: Portrait on a Landscape

For more detailed instructions and to print silhouettes:

<https://www.halfahundredacrewood.com/gainsborough-art-project-portraits-on-landscape/>



### SUPPLIES:

- Watercolor Paper
- Printed silhouettes for cutting out or print the chosen silhouette on the watercolor paper
- Watercolor paints or tempera paints
- Paintbrushes
- Jar of water
- Paper towels

### INSTRUCTIONS:

**Step 1:** On the watercolor paper, draw a horizon line in purple or gray (You can add the silhouette later OR if you are drawing on the printed watercolor paper, draw the line behind the portrait figure/s).

**Step 2:** Paint the sky using a back-and-forth swiping motion all the way across the page, emptying the brush. Color should be dark at the top and fade to lighter as you approach the horizon line. Beginning at the bottom of the paper, paint a darker color that fades to lighter as you approach the horizon line.

**Step 3:** Add a tree. If doing the boy fishing, add a blue lake.

**Step 4:** Paint the portraits or cut out and glue the black silhouettes to the picture.

# For Parents

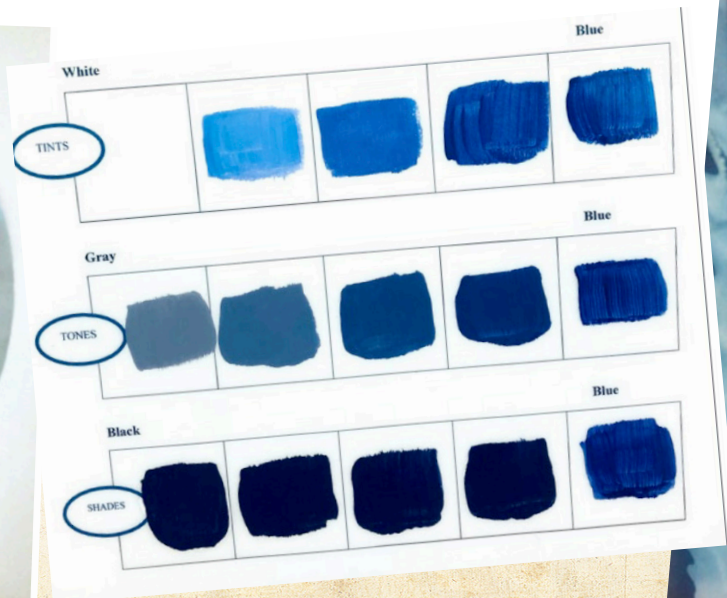
As a boy, Thomas Gainsborough drew pictures of the English countryside, and throughout his career landscape paintings were his passion. He was born in Sudbury, England in 1727. At age 14 he went to London to assist Hubert Gravelot, an illustrator and engraver. He also studied under Francis Hayman, a portrait and history painter. Thomas married at age 19 and continued to live in the country for 14 years. He then moved to Bath and later London where he began to paint more portraits. He did not like making portraits. His clientele was mostly upper class, which he also disliked. King George III noticed his paintings and commissioned Thomas to paint the royal family. Gainsborough laid the foundation for realist artists and the future movements of Romanticism and Impressionism. He died in 1788 at the age of 61.

**Please note:** As M&G's host location for *Homeschool Days*, Mack Library will feature books each month for parents to reference as resources. We hope these additional features will further support your teaching at home.

## Connections at Home: Project Blue Boy Activity Guide

Through this special activity guide provided by the Huntington Art Museum, you can "explore the intersection of art, primary sources, and science." Thomas Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* received special conservation treatment after an interesting technical examination, revealing the ideas of Gainsborough as a draftsman and how he changed his mind in finishing the portrait of this unknown young man. Follow this link for a variety of interesting activities including one on chromatography; tint, tone, & shade; sun prints, and more:

<https://www.huntington.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/activity-guide-project-bue-boy.pdf>



# Additional Resources

To learn more about Gainsborough, click on the links below:

- To see the x-rays of Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*, visit:  
<https://www.ovationtv.com/project-blue-boy-reveals-dog-other-conservation-findings-beneath-surface-of-iconic-painting/>
- The Huntington Museum's short video on the conservation of their painting, *The Blue Boy*:<https://huntington.org/exhibition/project-blue-boy>
- Scroll through "7 Works That Define Thomas Gainsborough's Legacy":  
<https://www.thecollector.com/thomas-gainsborough-works/>
- Follow a timeline of Gainsborough's paintings in art history and read a comprehensive summary of his life and accomplishments: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/gainsborough-thomas/>
- "Meet the Gainsborough Family" by visiting here:  
<https://ascholarlyskater.com/2019/05/20/meet-the-gainsborough-family/>
- Read interesting facts about Thomas Gainsborough and see a gallery of his paintings at Kiddle:  
[https://kids.kiddle.co/Thomas\\_Gainsborough](https://kids.kiddle.co/Thomas_Gainsborough)
- Fun fact: there is a Gainsborough portrait in Greenville located in the president's house, White Oaks, on the campus of Furman University. See the picture and read the controversy about the painting of Portrait of *Lady Impey* here:  
<https://www.furman.edu/news/is-the-painting-a-real-thomas-gainsborough-only-english-scholar-knows-for-sure/> and here: <https://www.furman.edu/news/the-verdict-the-lady-is-for-real/>



Due to the changing nature of web resources, M&G strongly urges you as the parent to preview these sites before your child accesses them. The fact that these sites are available on this handout does not imply that M&G endorses their content from the standpoint of morals, philosophy, theology, or scientific hypotheses.

## M&G Educational Mission:

Through tours, events, and publications, the Museum & Gallery seeks to partner with educators in fulfilling all of the National Visual Arts Content Standards. By integrating art into the core curriculum, M&G's goals are to teach children to value the arts, to communicate through the arts, to become creative problem solvers through the inclusion of STEAM-related concepts and fully-developed STEAM units, to understand history and culture in light of the arts, to improve literary interest and understanding through visual storytelling, to critique the arts, and to develop an aesthetic awareness of the arts. Through fulfilling the mission, M&G is able to help develop citizens who have the ability to think, feel, and understand the world in which they live.

