

Wordbox

A toy cart : une petite carriole

An apothecary

Luxury : (faux ami) luxe.

A bird **flutters** its wings before flying away.

The Graham Children

Thomas, Henrietta, Anna Maria and Richard Graham were the children of a famous apothecary in London, living in the rich and fashionable district of Pall Mall.

From left to right, Thomas aged two, Henrietta, the elder, then, five-year-old Anna Maria and their brother, Richard, who was 7.

Thomas, the toddler, died before the painting was finished, and yet The Grahams and Hogarth decided to keep the picture of the baby in the painting as if he was still alive. You'll see how Hogarth alludes to the child's tragic destiny in the details and the composition of this painting.

Obviously, this a very wealthy family; you can find details showing that these children lived under exceptionally happy conditions. The way they are dressed, the furniture and different accessories.

Give a list of all the details showing they live in luxury.

We can also see that they are brothers and sisters. **You can describe their features.**

You might think that these children are a bit too quiet and too polite. Children never behave this way!!! Well have you ever watched a child posing for a photo? Even the very young can be very conscious of the necessity of posing before a camera!



The Graham Children, 1742 - Londres, The National Gallery, NG 4756 ©The National Gallery, London

Nowadays, people sometimes go to the photographer's studio but most of the time, they just take snapshots of their children and relatives. At the time, rich people commissioned portraits. They were the emblem of your success in life. The purpose here was to show how happy and harmonious their family life was.

Say what each child is looking at. **Who is the only child looking at us?**

What in Henrietta's attitude shows that she's the elder?

Let's focus on lights and lines.

Observe the clothes, the material, the girls's gestures: **show how these illustrate the serpentine line.**

Now follow the light line in the painting. It follows the shape of a semi-circle. Starting from the toddler, rising in the middle and then going down on the right.

Focus on the colours. What are the two predominant colours? What about the colours of the toddler's dress, his toy-cart, the fruits at his feet?

There might be a link between the spot of yellow, golden colour and the light line in the painting. Now keep these features in mind and at the end you might suggest an interpretation.

Let's analyse how Hogarth alludes to Thomas's premature death. First, let's take a closer look at the accessories around the children.



WILLIAM HOGARTH (1697-1764)

The clock for example. The small figure with wings, standing on the top, is a cherub. Note that it holds a scythe.

What is the scythe the allegory of? What does this illustrate given the context?

Now go to the right and look at the organ which Richard's playing. Hogarth painted a scene representing Orpheus, playing the lyre to charm a circle of animals.

What do you know about the legend of Orpheus? Who did he play the lyre for? Who was he in love with? What happened to them? Again, there may be a symbol here, which one, given the context?

Note that Richard is looking at the bird in the cage. You can see that the bird is fluttering its wings as if it was about to fly.

What is it looking at? What is it afraid of?

What does the cat call to mind here?

There's another bird in the painting; **where and what is it? Describe the position of the head and bill; and give your interpretation.**

Now observe Thomas. His little arm is reaching for the two cherries his sister is delicately holding between two fingers.

What could the two cherries represent? How could you interpret the child's gesture?

The two red flowers on the floor echo the two red cherries, **how do you interpret the link between the two?**

Finally, let's go back to the colours and the light: the round, yellow surface of Thomas's dress might be compared to the rising sun, starting its daily course in the sky, going up and down, except that this light and life will forever escape little Thomas. Isn't this sad?

However, remember that it's not the symbol that makes the work of art, but the way the artist subtly combines colours and lights to convey his meaning.