**PICTURE 1: The Ambassadors (1533)**

This picture memorialises two wealthy, educated and powerful young men. On the left is Jean de Dinteville, aged 29, French ambassador to England in 1533. To the right stands his friend, Georges de Selve, aged 25, bishop of Lavaur, who acted on several occasions as ambassador to the Emperor, the Venetian Republic and the Holy See.

The picture is in a tradition showing learned men with books and instruments. The objects on the upper shelf include a celestial globe, a portable sundial and various other instruments used for understanding the heavens and measuring time. Among the objects on the lower shelf is a lute, a case of flutes, a hymn book, a book of arithmetic and a terrestrial globe.

Certain details could be interpreted as references to contemporary religious divisions. The broken lute string, for example, may signify religious discord, while the Lutheran hymn book may be a plea for Christian harmony.

In the [foreground](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/foreground) is the distorted image of a skull, a symbol of mortality. When seen from a point to the right of the picture the distortion is corrected.

**PICTURE 2:THE MADONNA OF THE MEADOW (BELLINI)**

'The Madonna of the Meadow' shows Jesus sleeping in the [Virgin](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/virgin-mary)'s lap. It is a natural pose yet anticipates the [Pietà](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/pieta), in which his dead body is laid across his mother's lap.

The landscape shows the farmland and fortified hills of the mainland provinces of Venice. To the left of the Virgin a wading bird, possibly a crane, attacks a snake. This may be intended to symbolise the struggle of good and evil. The vulture in the tree may be symbolic of death.

**PICTURE 3: THE ARNOLFINI MARRIAGE (VAN EYCK)**

*The Arnolfini Marriage*, is a record of the marriage of the two people in the picture. In modern days, a couple would hire a photographer to record their wedding. Giovanni Arnolfini hired an artist to paint the picture. In addition to being a portrait, it is also a legal record showing that the marriage took place. The artist signs it as a legal document.

In *The Arnolfini Marriage* all the objects in the room have meaning. Oranges and lemons were very expensive because they had to be imported from Spain. There are four oranges in the picture suggesting the wealth of the couple. The little dog is also an expensive breed.

The way the women wore their dresses gathered up in front made them look pregnant whether they were or not. Some historians surmise this painting is an actual wedding portrait and that the figures in the mirror might be witnesses. Others say the couple was only engaged and one source will tell you his marriage was recorded in 1447 and the picture was painted in 1434. So, who was that woman? We can only surmise.

**PICTURE 4: THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS (RAPHAEL)**

The fresco itself includes 21 distinct figures set against a backdrop of a school. The figures are engaged in conversation, work or games. All of the figures are male and are believed to represent all significant Greek philosophers. The fresco also includes images of statues within the school displayed within the school. One statue is Apollo, the Greek god of light, archery and music, holding a lyre. The other statue is Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, shown in her Roman form as Minerva. The building itself is shown in a cross-shape with the figures in the foreground and the interior receding behind them.

**PICTURE 6: THE MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN-RAPHAEL**

Interpretations of Mary’s marriage vary; some biblical interpretations say that she gave birth to Jesus before she was officially married, while others say that Mary was pregnant during the wedding. In Raphael’s painting, it is clear that he agreed with the translation of the bible saying that Mary was pregnant during the wedding, because he paints Mary as being pregnant (as does Perugino). Raphael proved that he was a more evolved Renaissance painter; he developed more classic Renaissance-style techniques, as can be seen by the use of perspective, background, and especially detail in portrayal of humans.