

Teaching with Marc Chagall

An Educator's Guide



AN EDUCATOR'S RESOURCE

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Highlighting Selected Works of Art from the Exhibition *Chagall: Love, War, and Exile* and from the Collection of the Jewish Museum



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Teaching with Marc Chagall: An Educator’s Guide

Introduction

Designed as a resource for K–12 educators, this guide focuses on three paintings by Marc Chagall (1887–1985) that were in the special exhibition *Chagall: Love, War, and Exile* (on view at The Jewish Museum, September 15, 2013–February 2, 2014). These are juxtaposed with works in the Jewish Museum’s collection: a number of paintings and works on paper (including a watercolor by Chagall) and a photograph.

How is the art of Marc Chagall relevant to your curriculum? Analyzing works of art inspires creativity, stimulates conversation, and sharpens critical-thinking skills. For each artwork there are suggested discussion topics and activities. These discussions also offer students fresh perspectives on other subjects, including history, English, and creative writing.

The discussion questions and activities relate to various areas of the curriculum. The guide will be of most interest to those teaching English language arts, visual arts, art history, 19th- and 20th-century European history, social studies, global studies, World War II/Holocaust history, and immigration/emigration history but also can be used to provide students with opportunities for creative expression.

Additional topics explored in this guide include storytelling/narrative, the life cycle, appropriation, symbolism, metaphor, and dreams.

Following the discussion questions and activities for each of the three main paintings highlighted in this guide are short sections devoted to visual analysis, the historical and personal context of the painting, and an exploration of the symbolism of the imagery. Each of the highlighted artworks is subsequently compared and contrasted—thematically, visually, and conceptually—with one or more works from the Jewish Museum’s collection via further suggested discussions and activities. Additional background information on these paintings is also provided.

How to Use This Guide

Discussion questions and activities are intended to encourage thoughtful observation, visual analysis, student-generated interpretations, critical thinking, and creativity. Discussions and activities may be modified to fit your students’ specific grade level.

Students will benefit most from their study of the works of art in this guide if they are allowed to explore and discover on their own and to build meaning based on their own observations, interpretations, and visual analysis. Biographical and background information and symbolic interpretations by art historians or even Chagall himself should not be shared with students until after they have explored the paintings on their own. This information will add another dimension to students’ interpretations and understandings but if introduced too soon could limit the students’ ability to bring their own interpretations to the work.

When discussing symbolic interpretations of Chagall’s imagery, it is important to emphasize that there is no single way to understand his paintings. His images and idiosyncratic symbol systems are enigmatic and open to different interpretations by viewers bringing their own perspectives and personal experiences to the work.

Supporting Your Curriculum

Discussion questions and activities have been designed to support and align with the goals of the Common Core Learning Standards.

As described in the “Key Design Considerations” of the Common Core Learning Standards (from the “Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science, and Technology Subjects”), students who are college and career ready exhibit the following traits:

They demonstrate independence

The discussion questions provided in this guide will create a forum in the classroom where students can share their observations and thoughts and articulate their understanding of the works of art. By answering the suggested follow-up questions, students will be able to build directly on each other’s ideas.



The suggested art and writing activities encourage students to use critical-thinking skills, exercise imagination, and share individual perspectives as they create their own works of art or writing samples.

They build strong content knowledge

Through the exploration of the 20th- and -21st century works of art highlighted in this guide, students will expand their knowledge of a wide range of subject matter and will share that knowledge through discussion and writing activities.

With the introduction and exploration of new art-related concepts, students will learn a wide range of art-related vocabulary. (The Glossary will help you teach students this vocabulary as it comes up during discussions and activities.)

They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline

The investigation of paintings, works on paper, photography, and other primary sources in this guide provides students with a platform to adapt their communication in relation to task, purpose, and discipline. Students can discuss how form (color, shape, composition, etc.) and content convey meaning in works of art and call on visual, textual, and empirical evidence to support their opinions.

They comprehend as well as critique

Students will engage in discussion with you and their classmates to gain an understanding of the themes and symbolism related to works of art. The students will also be asked to consider and question artists’ choices—their modes of expression and narrative strategies. Students will also have the opportunity to debate others’ interpretations and use reasoning and writing activities to express their own opinions.

They value evidence

The inquiry-style discussion methods employed in this guide will encourage students to cite specific visual evidence in the artworks to support their interpretations. By responding to follow-up questions—such as “What do you see that makes you say that?”—students will look more closely at the artwork (the primary source) and be able to visually support their reasoning.

They come to understand other perspectives and cultures

The works of art highlighted in this guide reflect a range of experiences and perspectives. Moreover, in many of the activities students are asked to relate themes from the artworks to their personal experiences, current events, and contemporary political and social issues. Collectively, these activities and the sharing of students’ artworks and writing samples create a platform for students to share and understand their peers’ perspectives.

Discussions and activities in this guide also address the New York State Learning Standards in the Arts as they apply to the visual arts (texts below have been edited to reflect the specific areas of the standards that this guide targets):

STANDARD 1

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

Students will make works of art that explore different kinds of subject matter, topics, themes, and metaphors. Students will learn about and use sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive images to communicate their own ideas in works of art. In creating and exhibiting their visual artworks, students will use a variety of art materials, processes, mediums, and techniques, as well as appropriate technologies.

STANDARD 2

Learning about and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Students will learn about a variety of visual arts materials, techniques, and processes. They will learn about resources and opportunities for participation in visual arts in the community (exhibitions and museums) and use appropriate materials (art reproductions, print materials, electronic media).

STANDARD 3

Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will reflect on, interpret, and evaluate works of art, using the language of art criticism. Students will analyze the visual characteristics of the natural and built environments and explain the social, cultural, psychological, and environmental dimensions of the visual arts. Students will compare the ways in which ideas, themes, and concepts are expressed through the visual arts with the ways they are expressed in other disciplines.

STANDARD 4

Understanding the Cultural Contributions of the Arts

Students will explore art from various historical periods and world cultures to discover the roles that art plays in the lives of people of a given time and place and to understand the influence of time and place on the visual characteristics of the artwork. Students will explore art to understand the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of human society.



Marc Chagall, a Brief Biography

Chagall's artistic style does not fit neatly into any of the prevailing art historical movements of the 20th century. In some ways, however, his style overlaps with some of the early 20th-century "isms." His use of shapes to structure and activate his compositions and the way he fractures his forms and shows multiple perspectives simultaneously reflects the influence of Cubism. His bold, rich colors have much in common with the palettes of Fauve painters. And his interest in dream imagery and our "interior world" show a strong affinity with the preoccupations of the Surrealists (although many of his paintings predate the movement's founding). In addition to drawing inspiration from these different strains of 20th-century modernism, Chagall was also influenced by the folk art traditions and icon paintings of his native Russia.

Chagall was born in 1887 outside of Vitebsk, Russia, into an observant Jewish family. He began his artistic studies in earnest in 1907, after moving to St. Petersburg to attend art school. In 1910, he moved to Paris to further his studies. It was there that he first came into contact with modernist poets and artists and where his unique style—blending emerging modernist trends, Russian and Jewish imagery, and his own idiosyncratic, fantastical, and magical symbols and dream imagery—began to flourish. In his work, animal and human characters populate the same spaces in a manner that defies singular or straightforward readings. Memories of his past often commingle with his contemporary experience and symbolism drawn from art historical references.

While Chagall's style would evolve over the years, these artistic preoccupations remain constant throughout his career.

In 1914, Chagall returned to Russia to marry Bella Rosenfeld but was unable to return to Europe because of the outbreak of World War I. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, he found favor and artistic opportunity under the new regime; however, by 1921, famine and economic hardship had become widespread, hampering those opportunities.

In order to escape the hardships of Soviet life, Chagall ultimately moved back to Paris with his family (in 1923). Here, he once again became part of the lively modernist art scene.

In 1941, following the Nazi occupation of France and the escalating threats to French Jews, Chagall and his family escaped Europe and moved to New York City with the help of Alfred Barr, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, and the

Guggenheim family. However, Chagall didn't adapt to life very easily in New York and never truly felt at home. In 1948, after Bella's passing and the end of the war, Chagall moved back to France, spending the rest of his career in Paris and then in the south of France.

Chagall's extensive body of work comprises paintings, drawings, printmaking, ceramics, stained glass, studies for tapestries, poetry, and an autobiography.

Chagall's Legacy

Marc Chagall gained popular acclaim during his own lifetime and continues to be much beloved by international audiences. His unique mixture of fantastical, coloristic, dream-life visions is influenced by elements from the different prevailing styles of the early 20th-century Paris art scene (Cubism, Fauvism, Surrealism, Symbolism), as well as nostalgia for his Russian homeland and Jewish roots. This offers points of entry for many types of audiences and has given his work an enduring appeal. Whether one is intellectually engaged by experimental abstraction, mystical symbolism, folkloric traditions, poetic imagery, or dream interpretation, the viewer finds much to look at and contemplate in Chagall's work. Viewers are also rewarded by Chagall's expressive coloristic, deft brushwork, inventive compositional structures, and endless experimentations.



A brief chronology of Marc Chagall's life

1887

Born in Vitebsk, Russia.

1907–10

Studies art in St. Petersburg.

1910

Leaves Russia to study art in France.

1910–14

His first Paris period, during which he comes into contact with the Cubists and Fauves but also remains inspired by Russian folk art motifs and icon traditions.

1914

Travels to Russia and is unable to return to France because of the outbreak of World War I.

1914–22

Works in Vitebsk and then Moscow. Marries Bella Rosenfeld, and they have a daughter, Ida.

1922–23

Leaves Russia with Bella and Ida to escape the hardships of Soviet life following the revolution. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

1923

The Chagalls move to Paris (second Paris period).

1941

The threat of World War II forces the Chagalls to immigrate to the United States in 1941.

1944

Bella dies unexpectedly.

1945

Chagall begins a relationship with Virginia Haggard McNeil.

1946

Son David is born.

1948

Chagall, Virginia Haggard McNeil, and the children move to France.

1952

Chagall's relationship with Haggard McNeil ends; he meets then marries Valentina Brodsky.

1985

Dies in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France.



Teaching with Marc Chagall: Solitude



Marc Chagall, *Solitude*, 1933, oil on canvas, 44 × 66 in.
The Tel Aviv Museum of Art, gift of the artist, 1953.
© 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.



Introduction

With *Solitude*, Marc Chagall tells the story of the aftermath of a **pogrom**. In its depiction of the physical, psychological, and emotional effects wreaked by the pogrom, the painting incorporates realistic details, some with added **symbolism**.

The discussions and activities will help students create their own stories and narratives based on their interpretations of the figures and details in the painting.

Solitude also lends itself to class discussion about symbolism, exile, immigration/emigration, pogroms, the lead-up to World War II and the Holocaust, and Eastern European history

Discussion

- Describe the figures you see in this painting. What can you tell about them from their appearance?
- Describe the man's facial expression and body language. How do you think he is feeling?
- Describe the setting.
- What seems to have just happened? What do you imagine might happen next?
- Consider the viewer's **perspective** or **point of view**. Why do you think Chagall made the village appear so far off in the distance? What effect does this have on us as viewers?



Visual analysis

This image draws the viewer's attention to the two main characters in the grassy foreground. A bearded man sits at the left of the composition, and a wide-eyed, white cow with golden horns kneels at right. The man holds a Torah scroll in his left hand and rests his cheek in his right hand. He is wrapped in a white shawl. His gaze is cast downward, and he seems lost in thought. His countenance looks forlorn and troubled. He sits with his back toward the village, the cow, and the angel. The cow appears to be playing a fiddle. Above these principal characters floats an angel, with wings outspread and gaze directed upward. In the background is a smoking village, suggesting the aftermath of fires. The smoke fills most of the sky, with only a few scattered blue patches. The village can be identified as Russian by the domed architecture of the buildings in the middle background. Homes can be seen to the left, towers to the right. The billows of smoke partially echo each of the characters' contours. And the blackness of the smoke seems to meld with the man's shadow, enveloping him almost like his shawl.

Chagall makes striking use of contrast in the composition—the black of the smoke and the man's clothing and beard play off the bright white of his shawl, the cow, and the angel. In the middle band of the composition, Chagall uses (near) primary colors: the reddish Torah, the golden yellow cow horns, and the blue towers.

Historical and Personal Context

- Pogroms, episodes of violence inflicted upon Jewish communities in the Russian Empire, occurred throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These pogroms were supported and enabled, either explicitly or implicitly, by the Russian authorities and the official anti-Semitic policies in place at the time.
- Additionally, the year *Solitude* was painted, 1933, witnessed the Nazis' rise to power in German government and Adolf Hitler's appointment to the position of chancellor.
- During the 1920s and 1930s (Chagall's second "Paris period"), Chagall reconnected with his Jewish identity—partly as a result of a commission he received to illustrate the Hebrew Bible, a second commission to illustrate the poems of Yiddish poet Abraham Lyesin, and a trip to Israel in 1931—and this came through in his art.

Symbolic Interpretations

Note to teachers: When discussing symbolic interpretations related to Chagall's imagery, it is important to emphasize that there is no single way to understand his paintings. His images and idiosyncratic symbol systems are enigmatic and open to different interpretations by viewers bringing their own perspectives and personal experiences to the work. Below are some possible symbolic interpretations offered or suggested by Chagall, art historians, and other scholars.

The man

- He could represent a Russian Jew lamenting the destruction of his village during a pogrom.
- He could represent the Prophet Jeremiah mourning the destruction of Jerusalem (source: Tel Aviv Museum of Art Web site).
- He might be a more open-ended representation of a persecuted Jew.
- Given the historical context, the destruction and the man in exile could symbolize Hitler's campaign against the Jews.

The white cow

- The cow could represent the idea of sacrifice while his violin, a recurring Chagall motif, could allude to Eastern Europe.

The angel

- The angel could be a symbol of hope within the otherwise sad and somber composition.



Activity: Visual Metaphor, Verbal Metaphor

Aim

To explore Chagall's use of visual metaphor and use figurative language to create a poem that describes his painting *Solitude*.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Creative writing, poetry, visual arts, metaphor, symbolism

Procedure

1. Discuss what metaphors and similes are. (This can be an introduction to these types of figures of speech or a refresher conversation.)

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that describes an object or situation by stating that it is in some way the same as another object or situation. Metaphors are sometimes used to convey the symbolism of an object, person, or situation. (A **symbol** is an object or image that represents a larger idea.)

A **simile** also creates this type of analogy but uses the words like or as.

2. Share the following with your students:

André Breton, the French writer and poet and founding father of **Surrealism**, once said,
"With Chagall alone, the metaphor made its triumphant return into modern painting."

Discuss how a metaphor can be visual, as opposed to language-based.

As a class, look at *Solitude* and focus on one or more of the elements of the painting, such as the **Torah**, the violin, the cow, or the smoke. Think about these objects as visual metaphors and as symbols of larger ideas. What might the element(s) you have chosen to focus on represent in the context of the painting? (For example, the Torah might represent the Jewish community, collective learning, tradition, bonds between the generations, etc. The smoke might represent destruction, persecution, obliteration of traditions, etc.) As a class, experiment with expressing these interpretations as verbal metaphors. (For example, the Torah is the man's bond to his ancestors; the smoke is the end of a way of life, etc.)

3. After practicing using metaphors and similes, give your students the homework assignment of writing poems about the painting, using metaphors or similes exclusively to create the verses. Remind them that their metaphors and similes can be symbolic or more straightforwardly descriptive. (For example, "The smoke is as black as a moonless night," "The angel is like a beacon shining through the darkness," "The cow is wide-eyed like a night watchman," etc.)
4. After students have submitted their homework assignments, ask for volunteers to share their poems with the class. Ask students to pinpoint examples from their peers' poems of metaphors/similes that are symbolic and others where the metaphors/similes are descriptive and poetic.



Activity: Symbolic Portrait of Your City

Aim

To use collage elements to create a drawing that symbolically represents your hometown.

Materials

Colored pencils or oil pastels and graphite pencils, magazines (and other collage materials such as brochures, maps, etc.), glue sticks, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, symbolism

Procedure

1. The town seen in the **background** of Chagall's *Solitude* looks similar to the town in which Chagall grew up, Vitebsk. Ask your students to describe this place by looking at the buildings in the background.

The main characters and objects in the painting can be seen as representing different facets of life in Vitebsk and other towns like it. What might the cow represent? The fiddle? The Torah? Encourage your students to come up with multiple interpretations.

2. Ask your students to turn their attention to your own town/city. As a class, brainstorm objects, animals, images, and/or symbols that could represent your town. What is the connection between these things and your town? Encourage a diversity of responses, and let students know that they do not have to agree on a particular object as a symbol. If there is disagreement or debate, encourage students to discuss why they have different ideas about which symbols are apt. (For example, maybe they live in different neighborhoods, are part of different communities, value different aspects of their city, etc.)
3. Ask your students to continue to brainstorm on their own. What additional objects, animals, images, and symbols could represent their town? Why?
4. Ask your students to create their own symbolic portraits (either drawings or collages) of your town.
5. To symbolically represent their town, encourage your students to layer in the elements they have brainstormed and to take their lead from Chagall's mix of the realistic (things that look like they might in real life), fanciful, and symbolic. Let students know that they can pick and choose elements from their own brainstorming and the class brainstorming.

When depicting details from their town (such as the skyline, buildings, landmarks, school, their home, etc.), students can draw them and/or cut them out from magazines, newspapers, brochures, and maps.

Encourage your students to be creative in how they draw and weave in their symbolic representations of your town/city. If appropriate, they may also make use of collage elements for their symbolic imagery.

6. Have the students share their drawings. What are some symbolic elements that reappear in many of the artworks. Why is this symbol popular? Are there any elements that are unique to a single student's drawing? Ask students to share what that symbol means to her/him.



Activity: An Imagined Dialogue

Aim

To use observation and imagination in creative writing.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Creative writing, English language arts

Procedure

1. Referring back to your class discussion about *Solitude*, focus on the two main figures: the man and the cow. The man seems lost in his own thoughts, and of course a cow cannot speak, but ask your students to imagine that the cow initiates a conversation with the man. What might the two say to each other? What might they say about what has just happened to their village? What might they make of the angel flying overhead? What might they imagine of their future? You may want to begin with a group conversation to explore these questions or, alternatively, write these questions on the board or on a handout for students to consider individually or through talking about it with a partner.
2. Ask your students to write a dialogue (with each character speaking in first-person) between the man and the cow. They can do this as an independent writing exercise or in pairs.
3. Ask students to share their dialogues with the class. What common themes emerge? What range of attitudes and emotions do the man and the cow express in the dialogues that were shared?

Activity: Same Title—New, Personal Significance

Aim

To explore the theme of Solitude as it relates to personal experience.

Materials

Ebony pencils, colored pencils, drawing paper

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, autobiography

Procedure

1. Ask your students to consider the title of this painting: *Solitude*. What does this word mean to you? How does the title affect your understanding of this artwork? How does that theme relate to the painting? In what ways is the man alone? Isolated? (Consider his physical, emotional, and psychological situations.) Conversely, in what ways is the man not alone?
2. Tell your students they will be creating their own drawings on the theme of Solitude but with a personal inflection. Ask them to create drawings that speak to a Solitude they have personally experienced. The particular instance of Solitude they focus on can be physical, emotional, psychological, social, political, environmental, or circumstantial. It can be associated with positive or negative feelings. (For example, a drawing might reflect on a student's being an only child; on going on a wilderness survival solo journey; on carving out alone time to write each evening, etc.)
3. Ask students to consider how their use of color, line quality, and compositional choices, as well as figures' facial expressions, gestures, and body language, can help express this particular experience.
4. Ask for volunteers to share their drawings with the class and explain what they were trying to convey about their experiences of Solitude.



Activity:

Make It Contemporary

Aim

To create a topical social or political artwork inspired by Chagall's *Solitude*.

Materials

High-resolution color print-outs of *Solitude* (to scale on 8.5 x 11" paper or, preferably, cardstock), 8.5 x 11" vellum or acetate sheets, colored pencils (for vellum) or markers (for acetate), stapler

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, social studies, global studies, current events

Procedure

1. As a continuation of your class conversation about *Solitude*, ask students to consider the historical context of the painting. What was going on in Europe in the year it was painted (1933)? What events had transpired in recent decades in Russia? (This may be a review or an opportunity to introduce students to the history surrounding the buildup to World War II and the history of pogroms in Russia under the Russian Empire.) How does this painting address these historical situations? How can an artwork respond to a political situation differently from an article, essay, or a poem?
2. Tell your students that they will be reimagining *Solitude* in a contemporary context. Ask them to choose a current political or social issue or circumstance they feel strongly about, one that concerns or worries them and that they would like to speak up about.
3. Pass out color print-outs of *Solitude* with sheets of vellum/acetate stapled over them, hinged at the top edge or the paper only (so you can flip up the vellum/acetate). Tell your students they will be drawing on the vellum/acetate on top of Chagall's painting. They will keep only the figure of the man—using his facial expression to reflect their own concern—and will change all other details and the background to speak to their contemporary issue. In other words, they will let the figure of the man show through the vellum/acetate but will obscure all other elements with their own drawing. Encourage students to think about what object/accessory/attribute their man should hold that resonates with the theme of their drawing. (They can even change the man's clothing to make him a contemporary figure. For example, a student who is against fracking might draw farmlands with fracking machinery in the background, might even keep the cow and then reimagine the man in farmer's clothing holding a baby, suggesting concern for the impact on future generations.)



Activity:

Examining Exile: Prose-Poems

Aim

To explore and express through creative writing what it means to be an exile—both historically and as it relates to the present.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Creative writing, poetry, symbolism, metaphor/simile, social studies, global studies

Procedure

1. Ask your class to share what the word **exile** means to them. Discuss the ways in which the man depicted in *Solitude* is an exile. (He has been forced to leave his home as a result of religious persecution, evidenced visually by the burning of his village.)
2. People experience exile for many reasons. As a class, discuss factors and situations (both contemporary and historical) that can cause people to live in exile. Consider political and social, temporary and sustained reasons for exile. Encourage students to be specific with historical, contemporary, and even literary examples they may be familiar with. (For example, the current Dalai Lama, Napoleon, Medea, Romeo, Dante, Leon Trotsky, many Persians after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, many Cubans after the Cuban Revolution [1953–59], etc.)

At an appropriate point in the class discussion, explain that Chagall was an exile twice over: first when he left Russia for France in 1923 in the face of post-Bolshevik Revolution hardships and then again when he was forced to leave France for America in 1941 because of World War II. (Chagall identified himself as an exile. In reference to his living in exile in America, he said, “My enemy forced me to take the road of exile” [from his open letter “To the Paris Artists.”])

3. Ask your students to work in small groups to compose prose-poems that express what they have discussed and learned about exiles. Their poems should have the following format, using a poetry scheme of repetition:

An exile _____,
An exile is (like) _____,
An exile _____,
An exile is (like) _____,
[And so forth...]

The first line of each couplet should describe the circumstances that can cause someone to live in exile or describe the situation of a person living in exile. These lines should be literal descriptions. (For example, “An exile is someone forced to leave their homeland because of her political beliefs”; “An exile finds himself in a land whose language he may not know.”) For the second verse of each couplet, students should use a **metaphor** or **simile** to express what living in exile might be like. (For example, “An exile is like a cub separated from his mother”; “An exile is like a pawn in chess—he can never go back.”)

4. Ask for volunteers to share their poems with the class.



Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *Refugees Looking at List of Survivors, Shanghai, China* by Arthur Rothstein.



Arthur Rothstein, *Refugees Looking at List of Survivors, Shanghai, China*, 1946, gelatin silver print, 9 × 11 in. The Jewish Museum, New York. Gift of Arthur Rothstein Family, 1999–51.

What seems to be happening in this image? What are the people doing? Describe the setting.

Explain that the people in this photograph are Jewish refugees from Europe, who fled their home countries during World War II by immigrating to China. Share the title of the photograph.

What range of emotions might these people be experiencing at the moment captured by this photograph? How would you describe the mood of this photograph? Is this mood based on what you are seeing or on the title? Or both?

In what ways might the experiences of the man in *Solitude* and those of the people in this photograph be similar? What emotions might they both be experiencing? In what ways are their experiences different? Ask your students to consider the scenes depicted, the facial expressions, and the historical context of the two works.

Visual Analysis of *Refugees Looking at List of Survivors, Shanghai, China*

In this black-and-white photograph, a group of men and one boy crowd in front of a set of lists posted to the storefront of a building. The men wear jackets, and some also wear hats. We see the men either from behind or in near profile. Most of them focus intently on the lists while a couple faces away from the lists, as if they have already looked and are heading off. The man and boy at the center of the composition seem to be standing on something—the man appears significantly taller than the others. The facial expressions that can be seen seem somber. The scallops of an awning or tied-up banner-like sign hang above the lists, and above that, the upper edge of the photograph cuts off a sign. We are presumably looking at the corner of a building. This corner divides the composition—the two-thirds to the left are filled with the men; the remaining third, to the right, is taken up by the adjacent brick wall of the building, which displays a painted sign with text and names.

Background Information for *Refugees Looking at List of Survivors, Shanghai, China*

During World War II, more than 18,000 Jews from Iraq, Russia, Germany, Austria, and Poland fled to China, one of the few countries that did not limit immigration or require visas or passports for entry. From 1943 to 1945, most refugees were restricted to a square-mile area known as the Shanghai Ghetto, where this photograph was taken after the war. (Source: Klein, Mason and Catherine Evans. *The Radical Camera: New York's Photo League, 1936-1951*. Exh. cat. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.)

Activity: A Picture Is Worth...

Aim

To use a photograph as a springboard for writing poetry.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Creative writing, poetry, English language arts, visual arts

Procedure

Share with your students the following poem, "Where is the Day" written by Chagall in 1940–45:

An old man wrapped in his white shawl
Falls down with his book of Psalms
Misery pours forth from his eyes
Give him life, my Lord.

—

While written long after he painted *Solitude*, the poem resonates with the painting's imagery and mood. Discuss as a class the connections between the poem and the painting.

1. Ask your students to write a poem that describes *Refugees Looking at List of Survivors, Shanghai, China*. Encourage them to describe what they see in the photograph, the mood of the scene, and the circumstances surrounding the image.

Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *After the Pogrom* by Maurycy Minkowski.



Maurycy Minkowski, *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 60 in.
The Jewish Museum, New York. Gift of Lester S. Klein, 1986–80.

Describe the characters in this painting. What are they doing? Describe their facial expressions and body language. Describe the setting.

Ask your students to compare *After the Pogrom* to *Solitude*. Explain that both paintings depict the aftermath of a pogrom. Compare the figures' facial expressions, gestures, and poses. Describe the mood of the respective paintings. Which details in each painting contribute to the overall mood? How are the compositions similar/different? What is the focus of each image? Compare the use of colors.

Visual Analysis of *After the Pogrom*

In the foreground, a group of women and children—some asleep, some seated—rest among their bags of belongings. The girl at the far right is covering her ears for a reason that is not evident. The figures have somewhat idealized features, and their facial expressions and body language convey physical and emotional exhaustion. Their clothing is a jumble of many patterns.

In the middle ground, a wooden house serves as a backdrop to these figures. The “white” of the house is actually made up of very pale pastel blues, pinks, and lavenders. Alongside the house is an open field. Minkowski appears to have painted a ground layer of deep red before applying the tans and greens of the field.

In the background, a line of figures carrying their possessions walks off toward the left edge of the composition. In most cases, their features are just barely painted. Given the implied distance between these background figures and those in the foreground, the scale shift seems exaggerated.

In the upper left of the composition—beyond the walking figures, whose arrangement resembles a classical frieze—are more houses and a very small fragment of grey sky.

In *After the Pogrom*, a group of women and children, victims of a pogrom, sit silently amid their belongings. They seem physically and emotionally exhausted. Behind them are other people trudging along the dusty road of the village, many bent under the weight of their possessions. They have been forced to flee their homes, and the viewer encounters them en route to an unknown destination.

As in many of Minkowski’s works, the characters in *After the Pogrom* reflect a sense of psychological isolation and dislocation. Although they are all suffering the same fate, characters in the painting do not interact with each other. Each seems to be immersed in his or her own thoughts and emotions. Historian Richard Cohen has noted that in Minkowski’s paintings “often the facial expressions of these wandering Jews do not express anger or struggle but a gloominess that is tempered with a resignation to the victimization.”

Sources: Richard I. Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Susan Goodman, *The Emergence of Jewish Artists in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2001).

Background Information for *After the Pogrom*

This painting by Maurycy Minkowski depicts the survivors of a pogrom. In 1881, a wave of pogroms spread across southern Russia. Anti-Jewish violence remained an ever-present threat throughout czarist Russia during the ensuing decades. Jews were expelled from Moscow in 1891, and a bloody massacre in the town of Kishinev in 1903 set off another round of anti-Jewish violence. Pogroms in Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe were perpetrated by local residents but often instigated by police and government officials.

Many Jews responded to these pogroms by immigrating to Western Europe or the United States. The development of railroad lines and steamships made this travel possible. Prospective immigrants could get from their Eastern European towns to New York Harbor in just a couple of weeks. Often, husbands and fathers made the trip first, hoping to gain a foothold in the new country before sending for their families.

In 1905, Minkowski witnessed pogroms in Bialystok and Siedlce, and this had a profound impact on his work. He began to depict the displacement, poverty, and persecution of the victims of such violence in his paintings. Jewish women and their religious traditions also became an important part of his work.



Activity: Image versus Word as Primary Source

Aim

To examine primary sources and compare visual with verbal primary sources.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, English language arts, poetry, immigration/emigration, primary source research

Procedure

1. Both of these artists witnessed pogroms firsthand. Ask your students to read the following document of written firsthand accounts of pogroms (or other resources of your choice).
http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/colonies_of_ukraine/pogroms/pogroms1881.html
2. Have your students form small groups to compare the verbal descriptions with the visual descriptions of Chagall and Minkowski. What information do these primary documents offer that the paintings do not? What details do the paintings express that the articles and accounts do not? What might be an advantage of communicating the trauma of a pogrom visually rather than verbally?
3. Next, have students work together to read and interpret the following poem, "On the Slaughter," which was written by the renowned Hebrew language poet Hayim Nachman Bialik in response to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903.

Sky, have mercy on me!

If there be in you a God and to that God a path
and I have not found it—
you pray for me!
I—my heart's dead and there's no prayer left
in my mouth
and no strength and no hope any longer—

How long, and until when, just how much longer?
Hangman! Here's a neck—come kill!
Crop me like a dog, you have the axe—arm,
and all the earth is to me a block—
and we—we are the few in number!
My blood's fair game—hack skull, let
murder's blood leap,
the blood of suckling babe and sage is
on your shirt
and will not out for good, not for good.

And if there is justice—let's see it now!
But if after my "cleansing" under this sky
justice comes—
let its chair be cast out for all time!
And with the evil of all days the sky rot;
you too go, fiends, in this viciousness here
and in this blood live and give suck.
And cursed be he who cries: vengeance!
Such a vengeance, the vengeance for a small
child's blood
—Satan himself never dreamed—
and blood would fill a space!
Blood will fill the dark abyss
and eat away in darkensses and rot
all the dark foundations of the earth.

From *Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of Hayim Nahman Bialik*. Edited and translated from the Hebrew by Atar Hadari (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

4. Ask students to compare Bialik's literary reaction to the aftermath of a pogrom with the visual responses by Chagall and Minkowski and with the (prose-based) personal accounts you read in Step 1.
 - What is the mood of Bialik's poem? How does it compare with the mood of the paintings? How does it compare with the prose accounts?
 - Does the poem complement the paintings in any way?
 - Which reaction (Chagall's painting, Minkowski's painting, Bialik's poem, or the prose accounts) do you respond to the most? Why?



Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *Untitled (Old Man with Beard)* by Marc Chagall.



Marc Chagall, *Untitled (Old Man with Beard)*, c. 1931, gouache and watercolor over charcoal or graphite on paper, 24 ¼ × 19 in. The Jewish Museum, New York. Gift of Frances Gershwin Godowsky and family in memory of George Gershwin, 1999–77
© 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Compare *Untitled (Old Man with Beard)* with *Solitude*.

In what ways are the two paintings similar? Consider such elements as composition, color palette, perspective or point-of-view, and the main figures.

Both pictures feature a main character who is alone, but the characters exude different moods. Based on what you see in the paintings, describe the mood of the two characters and the surrounding circumstances of those moods.

Visual Analysis of *Untitled (Old Man with Beard)*

A portrait of a man centered in the foreground looms large. He is an older man, as evidenced by his long, full, white beard and greying hair. He wears dark, simple clothing and a visored cap. He touches his beard with his left hand while his right hand rests at his hip. His right hand is disproportionately small; perhaps we are seeing a foreshortened view. The man's body faces forward, squared with the picture plane, but his face turns in two-thirds view and tilts slightly to his right. He glances downward, with heavy lids, his eyes mere slits. His facial expression is somber, and he seems lost in thought or memories. The colors of his clothing, skin, beard, and hair are mottled. The middle ground is filled with an empty grey expanse, which reads as a snowy landscape. The background is filled with a horizontal band of houses, with the sketchy underdrawing exposed, and with only summary color applied—mostly muted, transparent yellows and oranges. There is also a church in the village, with green domes, on the left side of the work. The village reads as a collection of geometric shapes—triangles, predominantly, with squares, rectangles, and semicircles. The overcast sky is nearly the same tone as the grey middle ground.

Background Information for *Untitled (Old Man with Beard)*

Old Man with Beard depicts the outsize figure of a grey-haired, elderly man standing alone in a snowy landscape against the backdrop of a village. The Russian-style green-domed church identifies this as a Russian village. There are no others in the scene, not even a human footprint on the ground. The man's head is framed in the center of the canvas by the houses of the village. Wearing a Russian-style visored cap and dark caftan, he projects an aura of meditation. His long beard suggests that he is an observant Jew, who, in accordance with religious beliefs, has not shaved his beard. This depiction of a religious Jew derives from Chagall's store of images of Russian shtetl life. Although this painting was created long after Chagall's departure from the Soviet Union in 1922, his fantasy world and artworks were still peopled with the ordinary figures of Vitebsk, his hometown. As Chagall states in his book *My Life*, his models were old beggars or itinerant Hasidic rabbis. Here, the image is generalized and timeless. The dominance of the figure in the space, the tilt of the head, the hand gesture, and the houses that frame the head illustrate the artist's use of the idiosyncratic and folk art-inspired stylistic devices he had employed prior to his involvement in the Parisian avant-garde. The figure in *Old Man with Beard* is not merely an actor in a scene. Rather, the singular nature of the figure expresses a sense of his profound humanity.

Adapted from Maurice Berger et al., *Masterworks of the Jewish Museum* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2004), pp. 52–53.

Activity: Internal Monologues

Aim

To use both visual evidence and your imagination to develop a character.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

English language arts, creative writing, visual arts

Procedure

1. Ask your students to write a short internal monologue for the main character in each of these two paintings. Remind them to ground their writing in what they see in the images, your class discussion, their background knowledge of the paintings, and any symbolic interpretations they may have formed. Let them know that they can also use their imagination to fill out the monologues.

Activity: Bringing Two Characters into Contact—An Imaginary Conversation

Aim

To use observation, subjective interpretation, and imagination to develop characters and a narrative.

Materials

pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum connections

English language arts, creative writing, history

Procedure

1. After having a discussion about the two artworks, ask students to imagine that the *Old Man with Beard* happens to meet the man in *Solitude*. What might the two men say to each other? What advice or warnings might they offer one another? What questions might they ask of one another? What consolation might they offer? What stories might they share?
2. Ask your students to write a dialogue between these two characters. Remind them to make sure their writing stems both from details within the paintings and from their imaginations.



Teaching with Marc Chagall: *Flying Fish*



Marc Chagall, *The Flying Fish*, 1948, oil on canvas, 26 × 25 ½ in. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.
© 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.



Introduction

In *Flying Fish*, Chagall weaves together autobiographical details into an enigmatic, collage-like array of figures and objects that invites viewers to build their own narratives.

Through discussion and activities, students will be encouraged, in a parallel fashion, to reflect on their own lives, memories, and dreams and to develop personal narratives.

The painting will also spark class conversations on the themes of dreams, memory, symbolism, love, and the life cycle.

Discussion

Describe the figures you see in this painting, both human and animal.

What objects do you see in this painting?

Describe the setting.

Describe Chagall's use of color. What types of color does he use? Where is he using his imagination with respect to his color choices?

Beyond his use of color, what other details show that Chagall is using his imagination?

Chagall often took inspiration from his own dreams. Does anything about this painting remind you of a dream? If so, what, and in what ways?

Describe Chagall's use of scale in this painting.

Chagall once said, "All our interior world is reality, and that, perhaps, more so than our apparent world." Discuss this quotation as a class. How does it relate to *Flying Fish*? How does it relate to your personal experiences and/or worldview?

Visual Analysis

The composition contains a number of seemingly incongruous human and animal characters. An embracing bridal couple at the far right floats among the flowers of a bouquet. A fish, with an outstretched human arm holding a candelabrum, floats mysteriously overhead. A rooster stands in the foreground next to a vase of flowers. Cropped off at the far right edge of the canvas is a man playing a violin. In the background is a village enveloped by the blue hue of the majority of the canvas. The house at the end of the main thoroughfare is upside-down. A Russian Orthodox-style church can be seen in the distance. The composition is collage-like, with its layers of seemingly disconnected, sometimes floating, subjects, varying in scale and orientation.

Historical and Personal Context

- In 1944, just days before they planned to move back to France from the United States, Chagall's first wife, Bella, passed away unexpectedly. He was conflicted about leaving the country where his wife was buried, but in 1948, he finally moved back to France. On the day before he emigrated, which roughly coincided with the anniversary of Bella's death, he wrote the poem "Bella: On the Fourth Anniversary of Her Death, August 16, 1948," reflecting on how ever-present she was to him.
- Chagall's work in the mid-to-late 1940s often expresses a tension between his memory of Bella and his new love, Virginia Haggard McNeil. Gradually, as the artist emerged from his mourning period, his paintings become more joyful and characterized by intense colors, levitating figures, and imagery directly or symbolically evoking love.

Symbolic Readings

Note to educators: When discussing symbolic interpretations of Chagall's imagery, it is important to emphasize that there is no single way to understand his paintings. His images and idiosyncratic symbol systems are enigmatic and open to different interpretations by viewers bringing their own perspectives and personal experiences to the work. Below are some possible symbolic interpretations offered or suggested by Chagall, art historians, and other scholars.

The couple

- The couple could represent Chagall and his first wife, Bella (with her black hair), but could also be a more general evocation of love.

The rooster

- The rooster could allude to fertility/virility, vitality, and/or creativity.

The candles

- The light of the candles could represent hope, or spirituality.

The fish

- Chagall's father worked in a herring factory; the fish in many Chagall works could therefore stem from this autobiographical detail.



Activity: Let Your Imagination Fly: Creating Stories about *Flying Fish*

Aim

To use your imagination to create a story or poem inspired by *Flying Fish*.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

English language arts, poetry, visual literacy

Procedure

1. Before sharing any background information about the painting (including biographical information about Marc Chagall), ask students to look closely at *Flying Fish*. Ask them to think about the figures they see in the painting and to imagine what they might be doing, thinking, and/or saying. Encourage students to consider the setting as well (in terms of both where and when). Ask students to also think about the tone or mood of the artwork.
2. Ask students to write a short story or poem about the painting. Remind them to anchor their ideas in their visual observations of the painting.
3. *Note to teachers:* If you choose to make this a poetry-writing exercise, you may want to have the students practice writing specific types of poems you have been exploring in your curriculum (e.g., Haikus, sonnets, etc.).
4. Ask for volunteers to share their stories or poems with the class.

Activity: Life-Cycle Milestone Essays

Aim

To self-reflect and develop personal writing skills.

Materials

Pencils or pens, paper

Curriculum and content connections

English language arts, autobiography/personal writing, memoir

Procedure

1. As a class, discuss what the term life cycle means. What are the different stages in an individual's *life cycle*? Also discuss what a **milestone** is. What milestones typically occur over the course of a lifetime? Remind students that different cultures, religions, and communities often have different types of events, ceremonies, and celebrations to mark milestones. Have students share some examples from their own cultures and heritages. (For example, a Latina quinceañera, a Jewish Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a Christian confirmation, a sweet sixteen, a Korean 100th-day celebration, a Muslim shahada coming-of-age ceremony, etc.)
2. After providing students with further time to observe, follow up on your earlier class discussion by asking them to share references to life-cycle events and stages they observe in *Flying Fish*. Depending on where the conversation has gone thus far, you may choose to share some additional biographical information about Chagall at this point. (Chagall references his childhood [showing the village and a villager of the town where he grew up, Vitebsk], marriage [the bridal couple representing Chagall and his first wife, Bella], his time living in Paris [which the bouquet symbolically refers to], and, more indirectly, death [Bella's]). Ask students to reflect on their own lives. Have them write short essays about a meaningful or transformative life-cycle event, stage, or milestone.
3. Ask for volunteers to share their essays with the class.



Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *New York* by Ben Shahn.



Ben Shahn, *New York*, 1947, tempera on paper mounted on canvas and panel, 36 × 48 in. The Jewish Museum, New York. Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Charitable and Educational Foundation Fund, 1996–23. Art © Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Compare Shahn's *New York* to Chagall's *Flying Fish*.

What similarities do you notice in the imagery?

Explain to your students that each artist was mining his memories of past experiences when creating these visual narratives. Using what you see, together with your imagination, what stories can you build from these images?

In what ways does each of the paintings evoke dreams? Is there anything about the quality of either painting that reminds you of your own dreams?

Visual Analysis of *New York*

New York has a dreamlike composition. Images are placed within the space in a collage-like fashion with unexpected juxtapositions. Objects exist outside the conventions of relative scale and are not bounded by real-life conditions like gravity.

At the center of the composition, a large, striped fish floats in the air. At the right, in the extreme foreground, is a man in Hasidic attire who takes up the entire height of the panel. The edge of the panel is cropped tightly to his profile, making it impossible to know what he is looking at or where he is headed. On the left is a large scale, the hanging element of which is cropped off by the top edge of the panel. In the middle ground is a boy in swim trunks. In the background are grid-like skeletons of buildings. Two whitish horizontal bands run the length of the painting. It is not clear whether they are the sidewalks of the street along which the buildings are located or if they mark the perimeter of the body of water in which the youth swims.

The man and the swimmer move toward the right side of the composition while the fish faces the left.

There is an emphasis on linear elements: the grids of the buildings, the stripes of the fish, the hatch marks of the scale, and the features of the Hasidic man's face and body.

Shahn's colors throughout are chalky or milky looking, suggesting that he mixed white in the colors to create a hazy, dreamlike quality. The sky and the ground are filled in with mottled color. Some forms are translucent.

Background Information for *New York*

Ben Shahn's *New York* includes a young boy in swimming trunks, a floating fish, a scale, the structural skeletons of several apartment buildings, and a bearded man shown in profile from the chest up. The style of the man's hat, jacket, and beard identify him as a **Hasidic** Jew. (Hasidic Jews traditionally wear garments whose origins can be traced back to dress that was popular among Eastern Europe Jews at the time of Hasidism's founding in the 18th century.)

The images in this composition are based on two photographs the artist took on New York's Lower East Side during the 1930s. The collage-like composition suggests elements of the artist's past, specifically his experience in New York City.

Shahn was born in Lithuania but immigrated to the United States as a young boy. He did not adjust quickly to his new life in Brooklyn, but at the same time, he was amazed by the city's technology and scale, the buildings, streetlights, and subways. The photographs that served as reference images for this painting were taken on the Lower East Side, which, like the area of Brooklyn where Shahn grew up, was a Jewish immigrant neighborhood. The image of the boy—borrowed from a photo of two children sunbathing—may allude to Shahn's younger brother, Hymie, who drowned at the age of seventeen near the artist's home in Truro, on Cape Cod, in 1926.

In 1967, Shahn observed, "For imagination is images, traces of experience, the residue of impacts made upon us by all sorts of forces both from outside and inside ourselves. It is such images retained, and the power to re-invoke them, the power to re-group them and out of them to create new images according to our uses and intentions."

Adapted from Maurice Berger and Joan Rosenbaum (eds.), *Masterworks of The Jewish Museum* (New York: The Jewish Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).



Activity:

Collecting Images, Remembering Dreams, Telling Your Story

Aim

To create an artwork that incorporates memory, dreams, and autobiographical detail.

Materials

Student photographs; magazines; paints, colored pencils, or pastels; paper or canvas

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, memoir, autobiography

Procedure

1. Explain to your students that some of the imagery in Ben Shahn's *New York* is based on photographs Shahn took of New York's Lower East Side. The images are also drawn from memories of his adolescence. He combined these elements to create a dreamlike urban vista.

Chagall also based his *Flying Fish* on a combination of memories and dreamlike imagery.
2. Building on your class discussions of these two works, have students further consider which elements in the works seem to have sprung from the artists' imaginations or dreams. What makes you think that? Which elements might have been rooted in memory?
3. Ask students to reflect on their own experiences to create works of art that combine family photographs with related memories and dreams.
4. Have students bring in three to five family photos to use as references. Encourage them to find photographs that show not just people but also important places (their community, neighborhood, city, school, home, recreation center, favorite vacation spot, etc.) and events from their lives.
5. In addition, students can search through magazines for images that relate to their personal experiences. They can also use these as visual references for their drawings/paintings. Ask students to make a list of images from their own dreams that relate to the imagery in the photos they have selected.
6. Ask students to create works of art that reference, reimagine, and combine images, details, and motifs from their photographs, magazine images, and dreams.

7. *Note to teachers:* Depending on your resources and which art supplies you want your students to explore, you may choose any drawing or painting medium for this activity. Alternatively, this activity can be a collage project in which students paste the photographs and magazine cut-outs into the final artwork rather than just referencing them.
8. Students should ask themselves the following questions as they plan their compositions:
 - Which photographs will I choose? Will they relate to important events or milestones or smaller moments?
 - Which elements—people, patterns, places, objects—from the photos do I want to use?
 - How and where will I use them?
 - What will my overall composition look like?
 - What mood or emotion do I want to express through this work of art?
 - What will this work say about me?
9. Ask each student to write a short essay or museum-style object label to accompany his or her work of art. Share students' work.



Activity:

Collage Poem

Aim

To create a poem from “found” words.

Materials

Magazines, scissors, glue, paper (optional: computers with internet access and printers)

Curriculum and content connections

English language arts, creative writing, poetry, visual arts.

Procedure

1. Discuss the ways in which Chagall and Shahn juxtapose different elements in their compositions. (Figures and objects are not depicted the way we would normally see things in the world around us. Rather, they are presented almost like a collage, with objects and figures combined in unexpected, imaginative, dreamlike ways.)
2. Ask your students to create poems that are like collages. First, have each student choose a memory or series of related memories.
3. Have students leaf through magazines and cut out words and phrases that relate to their chosen memories. (Optional extension: If you have access to computers and printers in your school, you can also let students obtain their words from online sources, such as social media and news outlets.)
4. Finally, have students glue their words and phrases onto a sheet of paper. Students may place the words in any combination or format they choose—in a linear format, in the shape of a recognizable object related to their memory, in an arrangement that leads the reader’s eye around the page in a particular direction, etc.
5. Have students share their poems and perhaps publish them in a class poetry book.



Teaching with Marc Chagall: Calvary



Marc Chagall, *Calvary*, 1912, oil on canvas, 68 ¾ × 75 ¾ in.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired through the Lillie P. Bill Bequest.
© 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
Digital image © 2002 MoMA, New York.



Introduction

Calvary reflects the profound impact of **Cubism** on Marc Chagall's style following the artist's arrival in Paris in 1910. The preponderance of geometric forms in the composition, as well as the fragmented, compressed space and volumes transformed into shifting planes, all stem from the **avant-garde** Cubist repertoire. More specifically, the circles and curvilinear shapes that anchor the composition evidence the influence of **Orphic Cubism**, an offshoot of Cubism pioneered by Chagall's close friends Sonia and Robert Delaunay.

Calvary also exemplifies the way in which Chagall **appropriates** Christian **iconography**, reinventing it and investing it with contemporary Jewish symbolism.

As Chagall said, "My Christ, as I depict him, is always the type of the Jewish martyr, in pogroms and in our other troubles, and not otherwise." He is referring to the pogroms that took place throughout Russia beginning in the 1880s. Calvary, or Golgotha, was, according to the Gospels, the site just outside Jerusalem's walls where Jesus was crucified.

Through discussions and activities, students will explore various strategies of **abstraction**, including those of Cubism.

Students will also be asked to examine the symbolic potential of images and to experiment with and question strategies of appropriation.

Examining *Calvary*, together with other artworks, will also generate conversations about the uses of narrative, symbolism, and appropriation as artistic strategies and of pogroms, anti-Semitism, and exile as thematic content.

Discussion

Describe the people in this scene. What are they doing? How are they responding to each other?

Describe the characters' gestures. What emotions do they seem to be experiencing?

Describe the setting.

What types of colors and shapes does Chagall use in the painting? Is there anything striking about his use of color?

Which of Chagall's artistic choices makes the composition more abstract?

How does his treatment of the space, shapes, and color affect your interpretation of the scene?

What do you think are the focal points of the scene? Why?

Ask students to consider the historical context of Calvary. How might the pogroms taking place when it was painted have influenced Chagall's choice of subject matter? How might the narrative of this scene be **symbolic**?



Visual Analysis

The entire image—figures, objects, and the space itself—is fractured into angular and curvilinear geometric shapes. This reflects the influence of **Cubism**, particularly Orphic Cubism, which was championed by Chagall’s friends and fellow painters Robert and Sonia Delaunay. The colors are non-naturalistic though complementary to one another. The narrative of the painting unfolds under a green-hued sky, with a complementary orange-red foreground. The painting depicts the crucifixion of Jesus. Unlike traditional representations, this painting depicts Jesus as a child. Joseph and Mary mourn his fate from the foot of the cross. Mary’s figure is out of scale with that of her husband. Another character paddles along in a boat in the middle ground. There is also a man at the far right who carries a ladder away from the cross but glances back over his shoulder toward Jesus. Even though Chagall includes distinct foreground, middle, and background elements, the entirety of the space feels compressed and shallow.

Historical Context

According to the Gospels, Calvary, or Golgotha, is the place where Jesus was crucified. Chagall first used the image of Jesus on the cross in 1908 and in 1912 returned to it in two compositions, *Calvary* being one of them. Reflecting in 1977 on his earlier use of this image, Chagall said, “For me Christ has always symbolized the true type of the Jewish martyr. That is how I understood him in 1908 when I used this figure for the first time... I was under the influence of the pogroms.” The pogroms were violent attacks against Jewish communities in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chagall saw a parallel between Jesus and the Jews—both were misunderstood and mistreated, and both had been and were being killed because people believed they didn’t belong.

Symbolic Readings

Note to teachers: When discussing the symbolism of Chagall’s imagery, it is important to emphasize that there is no single way to understand his paintings. His images and idiosyncratic symbol systems are enigmatic and open to different interpretations by viewers bringing their own perspectives and experiences to the work. Below are some possible interpretations offered or suggested by Chagall, art historians, and other scholars.

Here Jesus becomes a surrogate figure representing the martyrdom and suffering of the Jewish people under the duress of the pogroms. What do you think of Chagall’s decision to use Jesus on the cross as a symbol of Jewish suffering? Why do you think he made this choice? Do you think the image is effective? Does it shock you? Do you find it compelling?

For Chagall, Joseph and Mary also represented his parents: “When I painted Christ’s parents I wanted to bring them down to more intimate dimensions...and I was thinking of my own parents. My mother was about half the size of my father when they got married... The bearded man is the child’s father. He is my father and everybody’s father.” As such, the figure of Jesus can be interpreted as representing not just the Jewish people but also, more specifically, Chagall’s feelings about the suffering of Jews in Russia.



Activity:

Activism through Appropriation

Aim

To examine and experiment with appropriation strategies.

Materials

Sketch pencils, paper

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, social studies, global studies, symbolism

Procedure

1. In *Calvary*, Chagall **appropriates** a Christian narrative and its art historical iconography.

Discuss what **appropriation** is.

Appropriation is the use of a pre-existing idea, image, or object to create a new artwork. In *Calvary*, Chagall appropriates a potent Christian symbol of martyrdom to tell the story of the suffering inflicted on the Jews by anti-Semitism and the Russian pogroms.

What are some examples of appropriation in pop culture? In music? In fashion? In television? (For example, musicians who use other musicians' lyrics and chord progressions, camouflage patterns lifted from military uniforms being used on regular street wear, shows like *Parks and Recreation* borrowing the camera-style of a documentary, etc.)

Show your students, or have them research, examples of political or social activism movements that have appropriated images, narratives, or symbols to express ideas about their cause. (For example, the red ribbons associated with AIDS awareness and solidarity were appropriated from the yellow ribbons used to support American troops, in particular during the 1991 Gulf War; artist Shepard Fairey appropriated an Associated Press photograph of Barack Obama to create the iconic "Hope" poster in support of Obama's 2008 presidential candidacy; supporters of gay civil rights and the 2013 Supreme Court rulings on the Defense of Marriage Act and gay marriage in California appropriated the mathematical equals sign (=) to rally support for equality for gays, etc.)

Ask your students what they think of the practice of appropriation. Are there times when it seems improper or wrong? Are there times when it seems like a particularly effective strategy?

2. Ask your students to think of a current event or issue that's important to them. What symbol, narrative, or imagery would you appropriate if you were to create a painting or poster to support/raise awareness about your cause?
3. Ask students to sketch and/or write out their ideas.
4. Explain that Chagall's use of Christian imagery to tell a story about Jewish suffering was met with some controversy by both Christians and Jews.

Analyze and Discuss:

- What do you think might have caused this controversy?
- Ask your students to consider the following questions:
 - Do you think your chosen appropriated image might be met with controversy, misunderstanding, or resistance? In what ways, by whom, and why?
 - How would you respond to the criticism?
- 5. Break students up into small groups and ask them to share their sketches and ideas, as well as their reflections on the anticipated reception of their appropriated images.



Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew's Door)* by R. B. Kitaj.



R. B. Kitaj, *Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew's Door)*, 1997–2000, oil and charcoal on canvas, 35 ¹⁵/₁₆ × 47 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. The Jewish Museum, New York. Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial and S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation Funds, 2000–71. © R. B. Kitaj Estate.

What is happening in this painting? What visual evidence supports your ideas?

What do you think could happen next?

How do the two sides of the painting differ in terms of color, line, shape, and brushstroke? Why do you think Kitaj rendered the two sides so differently?

How does the artist's use of formal elements such as color, line, and shape help him tell his story? What does he communicate through these formal elements?

Visual Analysis of *Eclipse of God*

Eclipse of God has a bipartite composition. On the left, taking up more than half the canvas, is an interior space. On the right, separated from the interior space by a wall that the viewer sees crosswise (almost like a stage set), is an exterior space.

The interior space represents a room in a Jewish home. There are four or five figures, all of whom are rendered with gestural brushstrokes. The blue background is also filled with loose, quick, multidirectional brushstrokes.

The Christian mob depicted outside on the right is in a brighter and lighter palette and includes more geometric forms. The light blue sky indicates that it is daytime. There are larger planes of solid color on this side of the canvas. Within the mob, one character's brow line and nose appear to make a cross.

Within each of the two sides of the composition, the viewer's eyes travel along a lower-right to upper-left diagonal line, following the figures' bodies.

The weapon puncturing the door and the blood spilling under the wall are the only elements that physically connect the two halves of the composition. The directionally opposite movement of each of these forms balances the other. The orange and blue walls and red and green doorways—which are complementary color pairs—create a visual connection and balance between the different parts of the composition.

Kitaj leaves the primed canvas exposed in many places. He also often lets his charcoal sketches of the architectural elements show through the paint, lending the figures a transparent quality.

Background Information for *Eclipse of God*

R. B. Kitaj appropriates the subject matter and composition of *Eclipse of God* from the painting *The Miracle of the Profaned Host* (1467–68) by the Italian Renaissance artist Paolo Uccello.

Commissioned for a church in Urbino, Italy, Uccello's work depicts a woman who sells a sacred Host (a Eucharist wafer believed to represent the body of Jesus) to a Jewish merchant who then throws it into a fire. Miraculously, according to the story, the Host bleeds under the wall of the house into the street, which alerts local Christians who then break down the door and rescue the Host. The Jewish merchant and his family are eventually burned at the stake for their crime against the Christian faith.

Accusations of Host desecration began in Europe in the 13th century. During the Middle Ages, thousands of Jews were falsely accused of this crime and burned at the stake for these alleged acts.

Uccello uses the story of the desecration of the Host to portray Jews as heretical and faithless. This was part of a campaign that sought to replace the Christian dependence on Jewish moneylenders with a new Catholic agency. (The church's regulations against loans with interest, combined with Jews having been generally denied admittance to craft guilds and other professional opportunities, had led many medieval Jews to become moneylenders.) Uccello's painting was intended as an attack on Jewish moneylenders.

By appropriating Uccello's imagery, Kitaj links these historical events. His title, *Eclipse of God*, which refers to a text of the same title by the 20th-century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, implies that the image is meant as a commentary about the absence of God during times when the Jewish community's existence was threatened.

Kitaj reworks the figurative material in Uccello's 15th-century painting to create an abstract composition. Moreover, he inverts the meaning of Uccello's work through his reformulation of details. He employs rigid, geometric forms to portray the mob in all of its intolerant fury. The Jews, in contrast, are rendered with looser brushstrokes. Kitaj also seems to suggest an "us/them" mentality on the part of the players in this incident by focusing on formal contrasts: the Christians' side of the canvas features geometric forms, hard lines, solid planes of colors, and warm colors; the Jews' side features looser brushstrokes, gestural, uneven paint application, and predominantly cool colors.

The neck of the figure in the orange coat with its back toward the viewer bears the word *god*. The meaning of this figure in the foreground of the composition is enigmatic. It may relate to the passage from Exodus 33:23 that states that God will never show his face and can only be seen from behind.

In 1989, Kitaj published his *First Diasporist Manifesto*, a terse, personal, and playful treatise in which he muses about what it means for an artist to be an outsider, in particular, a Jew. Modern Jewish history—especially related to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust—is of paramount importance for Kitaj's textual and visual explorations. Dubbing his artistic movement "Diasporism," he deploys this shrewd terminology to underscore the paradox of his outsider status.

Matthew Baigell, *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Maurice Berger and Joan Rosenbaum (eds.), *Masterworks of The Jewish Museum* (New York: The Jewish Museum; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1990).



Activity: Art History Remix

Aim

To experiment with appropriation strategies

Materials

Computer and Internet access; paper; paints, pastels, or colored pencils

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, narrative, symbolism, appropriation

Procedure

1. Remind your students that Kitaj's *Eclipse of God* and Chagall's *Calvary* each draw upon pre-existing paintings by other artists for their **composition** and/or **iconography**. Tell students that they will be working with appropriated imagery.
2. Have a brief discussion comparing R. B. Kitaj's *Eclipse of God* with the painting on which it is based, Paolo Uccello's *The Miracle of the Profaned Host* (1467–68). Discuss the ways in which Kitaj interpreted and changed Uccello's work. Note Kitaj's use of color, brushstroke, line, and abstraction—for example, the way he abstracts some of the figures into geometric shapes. Compare Chagall's *Calvary* to earlier images of crucifixions. (A Google image search will turn up many examples in European painting and Russian icons.)
3. Ask students to search online for a **representational** work of art that tells a story. Have students print out their selected work.
4. Have students appropriate their chosen works of art to create a work of their own. Tell them to first think about the following:
 - What is the story of the original work? How can I revise, recast, or update the story in my work?
 - How will I alter the colors, lines, shapes, or brushstrokes to bring my own style to the work?
 - Do I want to focus on a particular portion of the original work? Do I want to re-create the original scene in a new context?
 - Is there anything I want to add to the original in order to change the story or update it? Is there anything I want to subtract?
5. Have students work with paints, pastels, or colored pencils to create reworkings of the selected works.
6. Alternatively, you might ask students to rework the artwork they chose by manipulating just one element—for example, abstracting the figures into geometric shapes, revising the **palette** to create a different mood, or recreating the scene with different types of brushstrokes.
7. Display students' artworks alongside images of the originals.



Compare/Contrast

Discussion

As a class, look closely at *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* by Abraham Manievich.



Abraham Manievich, *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919, oil on canvas, 70⁵/₈ × 72¹/₈ in.
The Jewish Museum, New York.
Purchase: Gift of Deana Bezark in memory of her husband, Leslie Bezark, 1991–30.

Describe what you see in this painting. What colors do you notice? What kinds of shapes and textures has the artist used?

What things and types of places are represented in this image?

Describe the artist's depiction of space. How does this affect the work's composition?

What don't you see in this painting that you might expect to see?

Where do you think the people are?

What do you think the goat symbolizes?

What mood has the artist created? What contributes to this mood?

How does knowing the title affect your interpretation of the painting's colors, shapes, and images? In what ways might Manievich's color and shape choices be symbolic or metaphoric?

Compare this painting to Chagall's *Calvary*. What do the two works have in common stylistically? How is their symbolic content similar/different?



Visual Analysis of *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*

In the **foreground** of this painting, the viewer sees a goat, from behind, looking off at a town from a rocky precipice. In the **middle ground** of the space is a town densely packed with buildings—including, at center, an Eastern European-style synagogue with a two-tiered roof. The buildings seem precariously perched on the hillsides, as if ready to tumble down. The streets and buildings are empty, showing no sign of life. The sky above the town has been fractured into a puzzle-like array of geometric forms. Throughout the composition, Manievich uses angular lines, in many places defining his forms with thick, black outlines. Triangular forms dominate the composition. Manievich uses strong, textural, directional brushstrokes to define the planes of the buildings, the shards of sky, the rocky landscape, and even the goat's body. The dense, shallow, and fragmented space, together with the angular forms and lines and brushwork, reflect Manievich's strong ties with **Cubism**. Throughout the fore and middle grounds, the artist's colors are earthy and dark, his palette mostly reduced to browns, grays, black, and rusts. Again, these mostly neutral colors are characteristic of the typical color palette of the Cubists. In contrast, the sky seems aglow with blues, reds, and ochers. These colors might represent a distant fiery blaze; alternatively or additionally, the colors may be more symbolic in their comparative brightness, suggesting a sense of hopefulness, of there being something positive on the horizon. Overall, however, the mood remains ominous and foreboding.

There is a great deal of ambiguity in the scene. Where are the people? In hiding? Have they died, or have they escaped to the West? The goat in the foreground is the only living thing visible. Perhaps he is picking over the scraps of the abandoned town. Maybe he represents the sole witness to the horrifying pogrom. Perhaps he is a symbol of the former Jewish presence. Or does he symbolize a sacrifice—the “scapegoat” of ancient times? Even the brighter colors in the distant background are ambiguous. Do they represent a fire raging across the landscape or the dawning of a new, better day?

Background Information for *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*

Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev by Abraham Manievich represents a personal response to the **pogroms** that raged in parts of Europe well into the 20th century. The painting depicts the artist's apocalyptic vision of devastation in the Jewish quarter of Kiev, Ukraine. Manievich painted in the Russian Cubo-Futurist style, which combined bold colors and lines with **Cubism's** fragmentation of forms and the dynamic movement characteristic of Italian **Futurism**. The jumble of houses, painted with dark colors and angular forms, creates an ominous, threatening environment. One of the centrally located buildings is a typical Eastern European double-roofed synagogue of the type once found in Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Abraham Manievich was born in 1881 in Mstislavl, Belorussia. That same year, a wave of pogroms spread across southern Russia. During the ensuing decades, anti-Jewish violence remained an ever-present threat throughout czarist Russia. Jews were expelled from Moscow in 1891, and in 1903 a bloody massacre in the town of Kishinev set off another round of anti-Jewish violence. Pogroms in Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe were perpetrated by local residents but often instigated, or at least overlooked, by police and government officials.

In 1919, during the civil war in Ukraine, Manievich's son was killed in a pogrom in the once-great Jewish community of Kiev. Manievich responded to this tragedy with the painting *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*.

Many Jews responded to the violence and **anti-Semitism** of the pogroms by immigrating to the West. The development of railroad lines and steamships meant that travel to the United States and Western Europe was less arduous. Prospective immigrants could get from their Eastern European towns to New York Harbor in as little as a couple of weeks. From there, entry into the United States was virtually free.

Manievich immigrated to New York three years after the pogrom that killed his son. In the States, he continued his successful painting career.

Some information adapted from The Jewish Museum, New York, *Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey*, 1993.



Activity:

Abstraction: Taking It One Step Further

Aim

To experiment with strategies of abstraction.

Materials

Pencils, colored pencils, pastels, or oil pastels; square sheets of drawing paper (optional: square sheets of vellum or tracing paper)

Curriculum and content connections

Visual arts, abstraction

Procedure

1. Both Chagall and Manieievich use Cubist techniques to **abstract** their compositions.

Building on your earlier conversations about *Calvary* and *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, come up with a class definition for abstract art. Discuss in detail the ways in which Manieievich and Chagall abstract their subject matter. (Students might mention the artists' emphasis on shape, line, and color; their use of non-representational/non-naturalistic color; simplification of various details; flattening out of the space, etc.)

Explain to your students that Chagall's and Manieievich's breaking down into shapes of the composition—everything from the objects, people, and animals to the space itself—owes a debt to the early 20th-century modern art movement known as Cubism.

2. Tell your students they will be taking the abstraction of these works a step further by creating a **diptych**, a two-part artwork, based on the shapes found in *Calvary* and *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*.
3. Ask your students to look closely for the circles in *Calvary*. Encourage them to look for implied or partial circles such as arcs as well.
4. Ask your students to sketch, in outline form, all the circles and arcs they see in the composition. You can ask them to do this by sight or give each student a printout of the image to trace (using vellum or tracing paper), depending on their skill and grade level. (Whether you work on drawing paper or vellum/tracing paper, the paper should be square because *Calvary* is roughly square.)

5. On a separate piece of paper of equal size and shape, repeat the same basic process in Step 4. But this time ask students to draw only the triangles (or triangle-like shapes, such as chevrons and V's) in *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*. (Again, whether students work on drawing paper or vellum/tracing paper, the paper should be square because *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* is roughly square.)
6. Tell students to use these two shape-based drawings as the point of departure for their diptychs. Ask them to make the drawings their own by reintroducing colors (of their choice), lines, patterns, and shading. Ask them to keep the compositions completely abstract. Tell them they are free to change the mood of the artworks. As students make their choices about how to complete their artworks, remind them that the two parts of a diptych are meant to complement each other in some (or multiple) way(s).
7. Share the final diptychs with the class. Did students see the same set of circles/triangles underpinning *Calvary* and *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*? How do the final diptychs differ from one another?



Glossary

Background

The part of a pictorial representation that appears to be in the distance and provides relief for the principal objects in the foreground.

Composition

In the visual arts, the arrangement of elements within the artwork.

Cubism

An early 20th-century art movement (c. 1907–14) founded by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and French artist Georges Braque (1882–1963). In Cubist works, forms, volumes, and space are broken up into two-dimensional planes, fractured and faceted. The style also champions the use of simultaneous, contrasting, multiple perspectives of a given subject.

Dptych

An artwork made up of two parts. The two parts usually complement each other in some way (formally, thematically, etc.).

Emulate

In the arts, to mimic the style or structure of another person's artistic output (literary, poetic, visual, musical, etc.).

Exile

Someone who is either forced to or by choice leaves his/her home country. Also, the state of being in this situation.

Fauvism

An early 20th-century art movement most closely associated with the French artists Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and André Derain (1880–1954). Derived from the French word *fauves*, literally meaning "wild beasts," the style is noted for its use of bright, bold, and/or non-naturalistic colors and assertive brushwork.

Foreground

The part of a picture or scene that appears nearest to the viewer.

Hasidic

Relating to Hasidism, a Jewish religious movement founded in Eastern Europe in the 18th century. The movement's founder, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (also known as the "Baal Shem Tov" or "Master of the Good Name"), emphasized spirituality and joyful observance of the commandments in contrast to the more academically based mainstream Judaism of the time. Hasidism (related to the Hebrew word for "pious") spread quickly throughout Eastern Europe. Today, there are a dozen or so Hasidic sects, the largest of which is the Lubavitch Hasidim, headquartered in Brooklyn, New York.

Icon Paintings

Religious paintings, usually Christian, depicting members of the Holy Family and/or saints.

Iconography

Traditional ways of representing certain subjects or ideas in the visual arts, often based on religious conventions or collective symbol systems.

Metaphor

A figure of speech that describes an object or situation by stating that it is in some way the same as another object or situation that it is otherwise unlike. Metaphors are sometimes used to highlight the symbolism (see definition in this Glossary) of the object or situation being described. A simile also creates this type of analogy but uses the words like or as.

Middle Ground

The part of the picture that lies between the foreground and background.

Milestone

An important event that often marks a transition to a new stage in one's life.

Modernism

In the arts, modernism refers to the departure from tradition that is characteristic of many artistic styles in the art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With a spirit of experimentation and a move away from straightforward representation, these styles took the arts in new directions.

Palette

A board used by an artist to mix paints on while painting. Also, the array of colors an artist uses.

Perspective or Point of View

In the visual arts, the vantage point from which the artist and/or the viewer sees the subjects in an artwork. The term perspective can also refer to sense of depth or the illusion of three-dimensional space created by an artist within a two-dimensional painting.

Primed

Refers to a canvas or surface that has been prepared and sealed with a coating to create a ground for a painting.

Representational Art

Art that depicts subject matter in a way that is recognizable and based in real life.

Shtetl

The Yiddish word for "little town." The term is generally used to refer to pre-World War II Central or Eastern European towns with large Jewish, Yiddish-speaking populations.

Surrealism

A literary and artistic movement officially launched in 1924 with a manifesto written by French writer and poet André



Breton. The movement comprised writers and artists who worked in different countries and in different styles but who shared a common interest in the subconscious mind and dream imagery.

Symbol

An object or image that represents a larger idea.

Symbolism

Begun as a literary movement in the late 19th century. Symbolist artists believed their art should subjectively express ideas and emotions rather than attempt to objectively render the real world.

Tallit

A Jewish prayer shawl worn while saying daily prayers and on certain holidays.

Torah

The Torah, literally meaning “teaching,” comprises the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. As an object, a Torah is traditionally a scroll, handwritten in Hebrew on parchment. All aspects of traditional Jewish life are based on the Torah and on rabbinic interpretations.

Wandering Jew

A legendary character whose story was popularized in Medieval Europe. According to the legend, he was a Jewish person who taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was therefore cursed to wander the earth until Christ’s Second Coming (his return to Earth). The term has been appropriated to refer to Jews uprooted and forced to wander due to other causes of exile.



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