

Jewish Museum

The Jewish Museum is an art museum located on Fifth Avenue and East 92nd Street in New York City. Our exhibitions and programs explore the intersection of art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. The Museum's collection spans 4,000 years and includes nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, media, and antiquities from around the world.

This lesson plan can be used to support discussion and exploration of immigration or New York City using works from the Jewish Museum's collection. For a more extensive look at the theme of immigration, visit our [online collection](#) and [Immigration Experiences in Art](#) Educator Resource.

Morris Shulman: *Tompkins Square Park*, 1938

Oil on canvas, 30 × 36 in. (76.2 × 91.4 cm). Gift of Mrs. Sarah Shulman



About the Artwork

The painting *Tompkins Square Park* is by the artist Morris Shulman. Shulman was born in Savannah, Georgia but spent most of his working life in New York City. Tompkins Square Park is a park in the East Village of Manhattan located between 7th and 10th Streets and Avenues A and B. The park opened in 1834 and was named for Daniel Tompkins, a U.S. Vice President. In the early 1900s, many new immigrants moved to the East Village and Lower East Side. Just as it does today, Tompkins Square Park attracted people of all ages from all over the globe when Morris Shulman painted this work in 1938.

Discussion Questions

1. Look closely at this painting and describe what you see. What do you notice about the people? What are they doing? Why might they be gathered here? Do they look like people you may see today? What is the same or different?
2. Where is this scene taking place? What do you see in the painting that gives you clues about the setting?
3. Can you tell the time of day, the season, or the weather by looking at the painting? How do you know?
4. Shulman once described Tompkins Square Park as a meeting point for the many immigrants who flocked to

New York in the early 20th century. Read this quote from the artist about the park and discuss what you think he meant by this with a family member or friend:

There were never enough benches . . . New York could have a hundred times as many parks. This one is between 10th and 7th Streets and Avenue A and Avenue B. It serves a whole tremendous overpopulated area. Every spring they seed the ground, and in two weeks the grass has been trampled out. They can't put up 'Keep Off the Grass' signs, for where would people go? In the dog days (hot days of summer), families spend their evenings there, and various national groups discuss politics.

Activities

1. Choose a person or one of the groups of people in the picture. Imagine what they are saying, feeling, or thinking. Write a story about that person or group and act it out with a friend or family member.
2. Think about a park near your home. Draw a picture of what and who you might see in that park today. How is this similar or different from Morris Shulman's painting?
3. Take a picture of your drawing and share it with the Jewish Museum [here](#).

Related Works of Art in the Jewish Museum's Collection

- Ben Shahn: [*New York*](#), 1947
- Raphael Soyer: [*Dancing Lesson*](#), 1926
- Arnold Eagle: [*New York*](#), 1936
- Leonard Freed: [*New York, Harlem \(Fire Hydrant\)*](#), 1936
- Walter Rosenblum: [*Celebration, Block Party, Pitt Street, New York*](#), 1940