This resource was developed for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Art is an invaluable source for the study of history and for the exploration of immigration in particular. With art drawn from The Jewish Museum’s vast collection, this online educator resource features diverse works that relate in to the topic of immigration.
Acknowledgments

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Works of Art

This section offers ideas for exploring Jewish immigration through art and artifacts by highlighting ten unique objects from The Jewish Museum’s extensive collection.
Ken Aptekar

*I Hate the Name Kenneth*

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Ken Aptekar (American, b. 1950),
*I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996,
oil on wood with sandblasted glass and bolts 69 x 120 7/8 x 3 in. (175.3 x 307.1 x 7.6 cm)
About the Work

In this contemporary piece, artist Ken Aptekar juxtaposes text and images to explore aspects of his own family, identity, and personal beliefs. His complex work of art challenges viewers to do the same.

In *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, the artist has laid thick panes of glass over painted reproductions of four portraits by the Austrian Jewish artist Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921). At the time of their creation, Kaufmann's portraits of devout Jews hung in well-appointed parlors, enhancing the social status of the collectors who could afford to purchase them. Though idealized and nostalgic, they linked the world of cosmopolitan turn-of-the-century Vienna to a traditional lifestyle that was in decline in more distant regions of what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Aptekar uses these images to draw attention to the dichotomy between these two worlds in his own life.

Superimposed on the glass through a sandblasting technique is the story of Aptekar’s two grandfathers. Both were named Abraham, and both emigrated from Europe to the United States. The account describes how one changed his name to Albert and assimilated while the other maintained his European Jewish identity by preserving his customs and his name. Through this brief yet poignant narrative, Aptekar reveals why he dislikes the American name his parents gave him, using the story of his two very different grandfathers as a means of examining his own identity.

Aptekar has stated that he is conflicted about his Jewish heritage: “Jewish names ... interest me. Perhaps because of pangs of guilt at my own willingness to pass as not Jewish, I have little tolerance for Jews who change their names to sound less Jewish.” On the one hand, he understands the impulse of his grandfather Abraham to assimilate and change his name. On the other, he resents his own and others’ desires to pursue this route, admiring the other grandfather Abraham who did not change his name.

As our society embraces greater diversity, multiple expressions of American culture exist simultaneously. Today, metaphors like “salad bowl” and “mosaic” are sometimes used to describe the American social landscape. But any such analogy still serves to simplify an inherently complex situation.

Resources


http://www.kenaptekar.net

Further Information

Mixed Identities

Finding a comfortable balance between ethnic identity and American culture is a struggle for many immigrants and their descendants. Each individual approaches the challenge in his or her own way. Social or economic pressure to be less “Jewish” or less “Asian” or less “Hispanic” can be strong, and efforts to “pass” as completely “American” are common. On the other end of the spectrum, some choose to remain largely isolated from American culture so as not to risk losing any of their ethnic identity. Most people fall somewhere in between.

What it means to be American remains an open question. The “melting pot” is no longer the favored analogy. It is not clear that there is even such a thing as a singular American culture.
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine I Hate the Name Kenneth carefully. Have them read the text that is sandblasted onto the glass:

Abraham from Odessa changed his name. He had to if he wanted to get ahead at Ford where he got a job painting stripes on Model Ts. Fifty years later Albert retired, a vice-president in the tractor division.

Abraham from a shtetl near Minsk never changed his name. He lived in an apartment near the oldest synagogue in Detroit, ran a bicycle shop with my grandmother his whole life.

Kenneth was what my parents named me. They said it was the closest they could come to my Jewish name, “Chaim,” Hebrew for “life.” Abraham from the shtetl called me “mein Kenny.”

I was seven when I lost Grandpa Abe. When he had to face a small claims judge, he collapsed from a heart attack on the floor of the courthouse. Grandpa Al died much later. I hate the name Kenneth.

Discuss:

• Does anything about the story surprise you?
• Have students examine the images in relation to the text.
• Describe the images in this work of art. What do they make you think of? What time and place do they suggest?
• What do the pictures have to do with the text? How do the images help the artist make his point? What is the effect of superimposing text on top of images?
• Why do you think the artist included the frames of some of the images in the painting?
• What is the effect of including white space in the painting and cropping the images in different ways? Is the location of the white space significant? How does it relate to the text?
• What colors does the artist use? What do these colors suggest to you?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine I Hate the Name Kenneth, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

• Have you ever had to make a choice between being yourself and trying to fit in? How did you deal with the conflict? How did it feel? What decision did you ultimately make? Were you happy with your decision?
• One of Ken Aptekar’s grandfathers felt he had to choose between getting a good job and expressing his Jewish identity. Have you ever felt a need to hide aspects of your ethnic or cultural identity? What did you do?
• Aptekar seems to feel more of a connection with the grandfather who retained his Jewish identity. Which one of Aptekar’s grandfathers do you identify with more? Why?

Research Topics / Content Connections

• Names and Family History
• Personal and Ethnic Identity
• Assimilation
• Contemporary Art
• Writing Memoirs
Isidor Kaufmann
*Mann mit Fellhut*


The portraits in Ken Aptekar’s *I Hate the Name Kenneth* are based on paintings by the Jewish artist Isidor Kaufmann. Kaufmann was born in Arad (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Romania) in 1853. He studied art in Budapest and Vienna. Beginning in the 1890s, Kaufmann traveled to towns throughout Eastern Europe in search of traditional Jewish life. He created genre paintings and iconic portraits of pious Galician Jews, whose striking realism and exotic costumes reflect his close attention to detail and search for authenticity.

Although Aptekar copies Kaufmann’s meticulously detailed portraits, he makes them his own. While Kaufmann’s works are vibrant and colorful, Aptekar recreates them in black, white, and gray. This nearly monochromatic palette and the inclusion of the painted frames indicate that the works are not mere reproductions. By incorporating paintings of the frames, cropping the images in a seemingly arbitrary way, and interrupting his imagery with areas of white space, Aptekar reminds the viewer that he is offering his own take on Kaufmann’s portraits.

Discuss:

• Compare *Mann mit Fellhut* with the portraits in Ken Aptekar’s work. How are they similar or different?

• *Mann mit Fellhut* was painted by the Jewish artist Isidor Kaufmann about a hundred years ago. Aptekar copied the images in *I Hate the Name Kenneth* from portraits by Kaufmann. Why do you think Aptekar incorporated images of Kaufmann’s work? What effect does Aptekar create by altering Kaufmann’s paintings for his own work of art?
New Year Greeting
Attributed to Happy Jack

*New Year Greeting*
Attributed to Happy Jack (born Angokwazhuk) (Inupiaq, b. Alaska, c. 1870–1918) Nome, Alaska, United States, 1910
Walrus tusk: engraved; gold inset, 10 x 1 in. (25.4 x 2.5 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the Kanofsky Family in memory of Minnie Kanofsky, 1984–71
About the Work

This unusual Alaskan artifact combines the Jewish custom of sending Rosh Hashanah cards with the centuries-old Inuit craft of walrus-tusk carving. With the arrival of the whaling industry in the 19th century, Inuit carvers exchanged techniques and materials with whalers who practiced the western art of scrimshaw (carving whale bones). The complexity and diversity of Inuit subjects increased as more sophisticated interpretations displaced schematic figures and linear ornamentation. Inuit carvers quickly learned to copy illustrations or photographs in what is called a “western pictorial style.”

This carving in attributed to the most innovative and influential of the Alaskan Inuit carvers, a man named Angokwazhuk—also known as “Happy Jack.” Happy Jack is credited with the introduction, sometime after 1892, of the art of engraving walrus tusks with a very fine needle. This technique resulted in an almost perfect imitation of newspaper halftones and fabric textures. Happy Jack enhanced the incised lines by filling them with India ink, graphite, or ashes. Even though he could not read or write, Happy Jack could reproduce written inscriptions with great skill.

On this tusk, Happy Jack has ably recorded the faces and attire of a religiously observant Jewish couple believed to have run a store in Nome. The woman seems to be wearing a wig and is dressed in typical turn-of-the-century style. The man’s beard is neatly trimmed; his top hat suggests a holiday or formal occasion. The Hebrew inscription delivers the traditional Jewish New Year salutation: “May you be inscribed for a good year, 5671 [1910].” In English is added: “Nome, Alaska.”

Further Information

Jewish Immigrants in Alaska

For 350 years, Jewish immigrants have brought to America their talent and drive to succeed, displaying entrepreneurship, patriotism, and often a great spirit of adventure. New opportunities combined with few restrictions allowed Jews to participate actively in the economic life of the United States. Because of their willingness to settle in less desirable areas, Jews also played an important role in the western migration.

It is believed that some Jews sailed to Alaska with Russian fishing fleets in the 1830s and 1840s, although it was not until a Jewish-owned firm, the Alaska Commercial Company, secured the seal-fishing rights that known Jewish traders began making regular visits to the territory. In 1885, the first permanent Jewish settlers arrived in Juneau. The Klondike gold rush of 1897, soon followed by another discovery of gold near Nome, brought 30,000 miners, fortune hunters, and businessmen into Cape Nome. A number of Jews were part of this migration.

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine the New Year’s Greeting carefully:

• Describe the images and writing you see on this object. Look closely at the shape, color, and apparent texture of the object. What do you think this object is made of? What do you think it was used for?

• Notice the way the people are depicted. What do their depictions tell you about the origin of this object?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine the Jewish New Year’s Greeting, translate the Hebrew inscription and explain the object’s use. Lead students in a discussion of related topics and themes:

• Why do you think new immigrants to this country would move to a frontier like Alaska?

• How would the life of Russian Jewish immigrants in Alaska have differed from the life of Russian Jewish immigrants living on the Lower East Side or in another urban area?

• Jewish New Year’s greetings are generally written on paper, not engraved on walrus tusk. Why do you think the couple featured on the tusk commissioned such an unusual greeting? Do you think the use of a traditional Inuit craft makes their greeting any less “Jewish”? Why or why not?

Research Topics / Content Connections

• American Jewish Life in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

• The American Frontier in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

• Ethnic Traditions

• American Folk Art
Weegee (born Arthur Fellig)
_Max Is Rushing in the Bagels to a Restaurant on Second Avenue for the Morning Trade_

About the Work

In this photograph, a bright flash illuminates a bagel man as he emerges from the early-morning darkness. The title for this photograph derives from a longer caption, in which the photographer Weegee (born Arthur Fellig) indicates that his encounter with Max occurred at six in the morning near the Consolidated Edison Company building on 14th Street in New York.

Calling his protagonist by his first name, Weegee alludes to camaraderie with the workers with whom he regularly shared the deserted streets in the dead of night and the early hours of the morning. He captures Max mid-step as he looks and moves self-assuredly toward the fleeting glare of the photographer’s flash. Weegee’s flash, which he called his “Aladdin’s lamp,” allowed him to achieve his “Rembrandt light.” This is the term he used to describe the way his glowing figures emerge from the darkness. Although the street is shrouded in blackness and the cement squares on the ground are obscured by enigmatic shadows and grime, Weegee creates a sense of place with the silhouette of a lamppost in the background.

Weegee was born Usher Fellig on June 12, 1899, in the village of Zloczew, Austria. In 1910, he arrived at Ellis Island with his mother and brothers, joining his father who had immigrated earlier. It was at Ellis Island that his name was changed from Usher to Arthur. The transformation to Weegee would come later.

Arthur’s family settled in New York on the Lower East Side, living in tenements and struggling to get by. Arthur left school in the eighth grade, working a variety of odd jobs to earn money for the family. At 18, he left home for good, taking a circuitous route to fame as the renowned photographer Weegee.

As a photographer, Weegee captured the many realms of New York City in vivid, sharp detail. His work often illuminates the seedy side of city life. Weegee probably earned his nickname from his almost supernatural, “ouija”–like ability to arrive at crime scenes and take pictures before even the police arrived. The police radio in his car certainly helped as well.

Resources


Bar–Am, Micha. Weegee the Famous. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1990.


Further Information

Life on the Lower East Side

During the height of Jewish immigration around the turn of the 20th century, a number of American cities became home to distinctly Jewish neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were often crowded, urban districts, where new arrivals could find an inexpensive room and a menial job alongside those who spoke their language and shared their background. Despite the shock of a new world, these newcomers were comforted by the familiar sounds of Yiddish and given practical assistance by more “seasoned” immigrants from their home countries.

New York City’s Lower East Side was the largest of these neighborhoods. Historically, the Lower East Side stretched from the East River west to Broadway, and from Canal Street up to 14th Street. Before the influx of Eastern European Jewry, the area had served earlier immigrants, including many from Ireland and Germany. By 1900, as new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe moved in, most of the earlier inhabitants relocated to other parts of the city. In 1915, an estimated 350,000 Jews (along with about 150,000 non-Jews) lived on the Lower East Side—an area less than two square miles. The neighborhood percolated with a vibrant Yiddish culture.

Most residents of the Lower East Side lived in tenements—apartment buildings five to eight stories high, typically with four three–room apartments on each floor. Usually, only one room in each apartment had windows to the outside, and often a dozen or more people would occupy a single apartment. Some families took in boarders to help cover the cost of rent. Immigrant families who “made it” were often able to leave the Lower East Side for more affluent neighborhoods in other parts of the city.

By the 1930s and 1940s, many of the Lower East Side’s Jewish immigrants (or their children) had relocated to neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Upper Manhattan, and the Bronx. (In fact, many of the photographers working in the Lower East Side at this time tried to capture vestiges of the neighborhood’s disappearing Jewish culture.) But as earlier residents moved away, the Lower East Side remained an important stepping stone for new immigrant populations. In more recent decades, the neighborhood has served as a center for immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries.

http://museum.icp.org/museum/collections/special/weegee/

http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=1887

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**Close Looking / Visual Analysis:**

Encourage students to examine *Max Is Rushing in the Bagels to a Restaurant on Second Avenue for the Morning Trade* carefully:

- Describe the mood of this photograph. How has the artist created this mood? How would you describe the expression of the man in this photograph? What effect does the use of light have on the impact of the photograph? What about the placement of the figure within the frame of the photo? What did the photographer choose to leave out of the photograph?

- What clues does the photographer include about the time and place of the photograph?

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**For Further Discussion:**

After giving students ample opportunity to examine *Max Is Rushing in the Bagels to a Restaurant on Second Avenue for the Morning Trade*, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- What story could you tell about this man? Where do you think he is coming from? Where do you think he is going? What do you think he is thinking?

- This photograph was taken on New York’s Lower East Side, a popular neighborhood among Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century. Why do you think immigrants often choose to live in the same neighborhoods as other immigrants? What are the pros and cons, for an immigrant, of moving into an “immigrant” neighborhood?

- By the time this photograph was taken, many Jewish immigrants (or their families) had moved away from the Lower East Side. Why might they have left?

**Research Topics / Content Connections**

- The Lower East Side
- Immigrant Communities
- Photography
RELATED WORKS OF ART

Andreas Feininger

Jewish Store, Lower East Side


Andreas Feininger was born in Paris to an American family of German descent. He grew up in Berlin and studied architecture in Germany but soon realized that photography was what he really loved. Feininger, whose mother was Jewish, moved to New York in 1939, where he became known for his photos of the city. His work captures not only the architecture of the urban environment but also the dynamic relationship between the physical setting and the human experience. To Feininger, the city was a vibrant, living organism.

While photographers at the turn of the 20th century, often sought to record the difficult conditions of immigrant life on the Lower East Side, the photographers of the 1930s and 1940s took a slightly different approach. They documented the full range of the neighborhood’s life, capturing ordinary people in ordinary moments. Many also looked to savor the remnants of the neighborhood’s storied Jewish culture, as the immigrants and their descendants moved to other parts of the city.

Discuss:

• What can you tell about this shop and the man in front of it? What clues do you see?
• What does this image make you think of?
• Compare this image to Weegee’s photograph of the bagelman. What similarities are there in content? What differences are there in mood, composition, and the use of light and shape?
• Do you have an emotional response to this photograph? If so, what is it? What about the photograph gives you that feeling?

Simpson Kalisher

Untitled (Schechter Furriers)

Simpson Kalisher (American, b. 1926), Untitled (Schechter Furriers), 1963, gelatin silver print 14 1/16 x 16 7/8 in. (35.7 x 42.9 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Photography Acquisitions Committee Fund, 2005-41.

Simpson Kalisher was born in 1926 in New York City, where he has worked as a freelance photographer since the late 1940s. This untitled work, like Feininger’s Jewish Store, Lower East Side, depicts a small shop somewhere in the city. There is no human figure in this scene, however—just the rectilinear geometry of the shop interior and the lettering stenciled on the window, which seems to float in space.

Discuss:

• What does Kalisher focus on in this photograph? What can you tell about Schechter Furriers from looking at this photograph?
• How does this work compare with the photographs by Weegee and Feininger? What connections do you see in both content and composition?
• What do you think is the effect of not having any human figures in this photograph? How would the effect of this photo be different if it did?
Abraham Shulkin

Torah Ark

Torah Ark
Torah ark from Adath Yeshurun Synagogue
Abraham Shulkin (American, b. Russia, 1852-1918)
Sioux City, Iowa, United States, 1899,
pinewood: hand-carved, openwork, stained, and painted 125 x 96 x 30
in. (317.5 x 243.8 x 76.2 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the
Jewish Federation of Sioux City, JM 48-56a-s
About the Work

Abraham Shulkin, a peddler and junk dealer, carved this piece for the Orthodox synagogue in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1899. It is an ark—a cabinet designed to hold the scrolls of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses).

Shulkin was among the Russian Jewish immigrants who arrived in Sioux City in the late 19th century. In creating this ark, he drew heavily from the artistic traditions of the old world. The intricate style of the carving and many of the ark’s motifs show a close connection to wooden Torah Arks of Eastern Europe, most of which were destroyed during the Holocaust. In fact, the synagogue of Izabielin, Lithuania, not far from Shulkin’s native village, had a wooden ark similarly carved with animals and vegetal motifs. Shulkin’s ark also includes numerous Jewish symbols—six-pointed Jewish stars, seven-branched menorahs or candelabras, lions, the Ten Commandments, and hands outspread in the priestly blessing—as well as an eagle, a symbol of America used in Eastern Europe as an emblem associated with the ruling power.

The proud artist inscribed his name on the work in Hebrew. On either side of the Ten Commandments is written, “This is the hand-work of Abraham Shulkin.” Below the Commandments is a dedicatory inscription that reads, “This Torah Ark was donated by Simhah, daughter of the esteemed David Davidson.” David Davidson owned a department store in Sioux City, and he provided the lumber to build the ark.

Shulkin’s ark incorporates a symmetrical design and the intricate use of positive and negative space, much like Eastern European papercuts of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, Shulkin may even have created a preparatory papercut to use as a model for his carved-wood ark.

Further Information

The Jews of Sioux City, Iowa

In the late 19th century, nearly five million Jews lived in czarist Russia, the largest concentration of Jews in the world at the time. Political oppression, government-condoned anti-Jewish riots (pogroms), and economic need prompted more than two million Jews to immigrate to the United States between 1880 and 1924. Most new arrivals settled in large urban centers in the Northeast, but some ventured farther west in search of opportunities in the new country. A number of Jewish immigrants, primarily from the small Russian town of Kapulie, reached Sioux City, Iowa, where a few German Jews had lived since the late 1850s, when the city had just been settled. By 1896, the Russian Jews had founded congregation Adath Yeshurun, erecting Sioux City’s first Orthodox synagogue soon after. The magnificent Torah Ark carved by Abraham Shulkin is one of many interior furnishings made by members of the congregation.

Resources


Conner, Susan M. Remember When... Personal Recollections and Vignettes of the Sioux City Jewish Community 1869–1984: Based on Oscar Littlefield’s History. Sioux City, IA: Jewish Federation, 1985.


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine this work of art carefully:

• What materials were used to make this Torah ark? How do you think it was made? How do you think it feels to the touch?

• What do you think this object was used for? What parts of the object make you think this? Does the object remind you of anything you have seen before?

• What colors do you notice? What effect do the colors have on the way you respond to the piece?

• Compare the bottom third of this object to the top two thirds. How are they different? What is the effect of this difference?

• What shapes do you see on this ark? What designs do you see? What do you think they mean?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine this Torah ark, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

• Why would an immigrant retain the artistic styles of his or her homeland? What traditions does your family—or other families you know—retain from past generations? Do you think it is important to pass these traditions on to a person’s descendants? Why?

• Do any of the symbols on this ark look familiar? What do you think they mean? Do you see anything that looks American? What symbols have meaning to you?

• What American traditions do you—or people you know—follow? How have you seen American and religious/ethnic traditions interact with each other?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

• American Jewish Life in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

• The American Frontier in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

• Ethnic Traditions

• Folk Art
Thomas Sully

Sally Etting

Thomas Sully (American, b. England, 1783–1872), Sally Etting, 1808, oil on canvas 30 x 25 in. (76.2 x 63.5 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of William Woolman Foundation, F 4610
About the Work

Thomas Sully was one of America’s leading portrait painters in his time. Sully painted numerous portraits of America’s tiny Jewish community during the Federal Period. Here, he depicts 32-year-old Sally Etting in a Roman-inspired hairstyle and wearing the type of high-waisted white neoclassical gown that was just coming into fashion in Philadelphia at the time. This, however, is not how she would have dressed on a daily basis.

Sully began this portrait on May 16, 1808, and completed it nine days later. The depiction of Etting shows a freshness and a softness of light and line that are typical of Sully’s portraiture. It is a sensitive portrait of the young woman—sympathetic without idealizing her likeness. During this period, portraits held a special significance in the homes of many American Jews. These likenesses served their traditional purpose in asserting the subject’s status and ensuring some measure of immortality. They also acted as daily reminders of family members distanced by geography. Most important, these portraits affirmed their sitters’ identities as Americans in the open, democratic society of which they were a part. For those Jews who could afford them, commissioned portraits reflected a sense of belonging.

Notice that there is nothing in this portrait that identifies Etting as distinctively Jewish. There is no Hebrew writing, no ceremonial object like a Hanukkah lamp or Sabbath light. American Jews frequently have such objects on display in their homes but rarely were these objects included in commissioned portraits. By choosing to omit these identifiably “Jewish” elements, Etting presented herself as she wanted to be seen—as an upper-class American woman.

Further Information

About Sally Etting

Sally Etting (1776–1863) was born in York, Pennsylvania, to a family that would maintain civic and social prominence for generations. Her father, Elijah Etting, arrived in the United States from Germany in 1758. He traded with Native Americans and was a supplier to the Continental army. He died when Etting was a child, and she and her four young siblings subsequently moved to Baltimore with their mother, Shina Solomon Etting.

Etting’s portrait may have been commissioned by her brother Reuben, an important political figure in Baltimore and Philadelphia. In 1801, President Jefferson appointed Reuben Etting United States Marshal for the state of Maryland—although it was another quarter of a century before Jews gained full civic equality in the state. Solomon Etting, another of Etting’s brothers, was also a prominent figure in Baltimore during this period. At age 18, Solomon Etting became the first American shohet, a butcher trained to slaughter animals according to Jewish dietary laws. Solomon went on to become an important businessman and a leader in the defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812. He also fought for Jewish civil rights, challenging the Maryland law that required officeholders to take a Christian oath. His struggle was successful, and Solomon Etting eventually served as a councilman for the city of Baltimore.

The Early American Jewish Community

In the first few decades after American independence, the Jewish community in this country was small, and most American Jews were highly acculturated. There was a strong sense of kinship with family and European Jewry but also a fierce attachment to American life and society. Though the majority of Jews lived on the East Coast, there were Jewish merchants and traders spread throughout the states. The small size of the community and high level of acculturation probably contributed to the relatively high rate of intermarriage with non-Jews.

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- Describe the sitter. What do you notice about the way she’s dressed, her hairstyle, the setting? What choices did the artist make in representing his subject? What do you notice about the background? Why might an artist choose to include few details in the background? How does the artist depict light to focus your attention?

- What is the mood of the painting? How has the artist created this mood with his use of color and brushstroke? If you were going to add a soundtrack to this painting, what would it sound like? Based on your observations, when do you think this portrait might have been painted?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine Sally Etting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- This portrait was painted in 1808. Why do you think someone would commission a portrait of himself or herself at that time? Is there anything comparable today?

- This woman is Sally Etting, a member of the small Jewish community in the United States in the early 19th century. Most portraits of American Jews at the time did not identify the sitters as Jewish. Why might that have been?

- In the portrait, Sally Etting is presented as an American woman. What do you think it means to look or act “American”? Do you think it means the same thing today that it did in Sally’s time? Do you think it is reasonable to draw conclusions about Sally Etting’s identity solely from her portrait?

- Although American Jews in Sally’s time did not usually identify themselves in their portraits as Jewish, they often identified with being Jewish in other ways (for example, by engaging in religious practice, giving children Hebrew names, or being involved in the Jewish community). Do you present different aspects of your identity in different situations? Why?

Research Topics / Content Connections

- The Federal Period in America
- Early Jewish Life in America
- Identity, Assimilation, and Acculturation
- Portraiture
Abraham Manievich

*Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*

Abraham Manievich (American, b. Russia, 1881-1942),
*Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev,* 1919,
About the Work

*Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* by Abraham Manievich represents both a personal and public 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 combine 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.

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. Or does he symbolize a sacrifice—the “scapegoat” of ancient times? Even the brighter colors in the distant background are ambiguous. Do they depict a fire raging across the landscape or the dawning of a new, better day?

Abraham Manievich was born in 1881 in Mstislavl, Belorussia. He studied at the Imperial Art School in Kiev (1903–1905) and then at the Academy in Munich (1905–1907). Manievich is known primarily as a landscape painter. His subjects include the small wooden houses of the Ukrainian and Lithuanian countryside, as well as street scenes of Moscow and Kiev. He is especially known for his vigorous brushwork and expressive use of color.

Manievich traveled through Europe and settled for a few years in Moscow before returning to Kiev in 1917 to become a professor at the Ukraine Academy of Arts. Rising antisemitism led him to incorporate Jewish themes increasingly into his work. In 1919, during the civil war in the Ukraine, Manievich’s son was killed in a pogrom; Manievich responded to this tragedy with the painting *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*. Three years later, Manievich immigrated to New York, where he continued his successful painting career. He died in the Bronx in 1942.

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.

Many Jews responded by immigrating to the West. The development of railroad lines and steamships meant that travel to the United States and Western Europe was more convenient. 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.

Resources


Further Information

**Antisemitism and Immigration**

The reasons for Jewish emigration from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are complex. Population growth, economic stagnation, and political failures all played a part in pushing Jews to leave. Another “push” factor was antisemitism.

In 1881, a wave of pogroms spread across southern Russia. During the ensuing decades, anti-Jewish violence and terror remained an ever-present threat throughout czarist Russia.
Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* carefully: Describe what you see in this painting. What colors do you notice? What kinds of shapes, textures, and forms has the artist used? What do you think the forms represent? What mood has the artist created? Describe the artist’s depiction of space. How does this affect the work’s composition? What has the artist depicted here? 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?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- What does the title *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* tell you? What does the fact that it was painted in 1919 tell you? What does the word ghetto mean in this context? What do you think is depicted here?

- Pogroms such as the one referred to in this painting were one reason many Jews immigrated to the United States in the early 20th century. What are some other reasons for immigration? When did your family arrive in the United States? Do you know why they immigrated?

Research Topics / Content Connections

- Antisemitism and Racism
- Late 19th- and Early 20th-Century Immigration
- Push Factors for Immigration
- Abstract Painting

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Abraham Manievich

*Napoleon Street, Montreal*

Abraham Manievich (American, b. Russia, 1881-1942), *Napoleon Street, Montreal*, 1930, oil on canvas 36 1/4 x 40 1/4 in. (92.1 x 102.2 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Bequest of Saul Kasdan, 2002–20

Abraham Manievich painted this scene many years after he created *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* and after he immigrated to America. Although both works are cityscapes painted with expressive colors and brushwork, they are drastically different in the use of color and rendering of form. There are still Cubist facets and sharply differentiated planes in this painting, but a different mood is created. The dark colors and sharp angles of the ghetto have been replaced with the light and life of the streets in the Jewish section of Montreal. Nature is more visible here. While there is no life at all (other than the goat) in *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, here the trees bristle with lush leaves.

Discuss:

- Describe what you see in this painting. What do you notice about the colors, shapes, and subject matter? What adjectives would you use to describe this painting? How does this painting compare with *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*? How are the two works similar? How are they different?

- Compare the environments in both works. How are the two landscapes different?
Maurycey Minkowski  
*After the Pogrom*

Maurycey Minkowski (Polish, 1881-1930), *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910, oil on canvas, 40 7/8 x 60 in. (103.9 x 152.4 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Lester S. Klein, 1986-80

A group of women and children—the survivors of a pogrom—sit silently in the midst of their belongings. Perhaps lost in thought, they seem physically and emotionally exhausted. Behind them, townspeople trudge along the dusty road of the village, many bent under the weight of their worldly possessions and burdened emotionally by their life experience.

Maurycey Minkowski painted this scene in 1910. Born in Warsaw, Minkowski interpreted the lives and suffering of Eastern European Jews through his realist-style paintings. Like many of his works, *After the Pogrom* reflects a keen sense of isolation and dislocation. Although the characters are all suffering the same fate, there is no interaction among them. Each seems to be caught in his or her own universe of despair. The grey-brown palette contributes to the painting’s somber tone.

Although Minkowski’s painting is less abstract than Manievich’s *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, it is not purely realist in its representation either. The figures are somewhat idealized, and the juxtaposed patterns and textures create an almost collage-like effect. The arrangement of figures in the background recalls a classical frieze. Note also the visual reference to the *Madonna and Child* in the foreground.

Discuss:

- What is the mood of this painting? How does the artist communicate this mood through his use of color, composition, and line?
- Look at this painting in relation to *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* by Manievich. How do the paintings compare in terms of style? Subject matter? Mood? Which painting do you find more compelling? Why?

- Describe what you see in this painting. What do you notice about the figures—their expressions, their clothing, their body language?
- What story is suggested by this painting? What do you see to support your ideas? Where and when is it taking place? Why are there no men in the group? Where might these people be going? What might they be thinking?
Quilt

Russia and United States, c. 1899,
velvet: embroidered with wool, silk, and metallic thread; glass beads 81 1/2 x 65 in. (207 x 165.1 cm).
The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Judaica Acquisitions Fund, 1986–199
About the Work

This colorful patchwork quilt bearing Eastern European and American imagery is a visual testimony to the acculturation process undergone by Jewish immigrants as they arrived in the United States. Originally owned by a Russian Jewish family believed to have immigrated to the United States, the quilt, which incorporates Russian textiles and motifs, was begun in Russia and probably completed in America.

Although the maker of the quilt seems to have organized the individual panels in rows, the overall arrangement of the multicolor triangular panels creates a visual effect reminiscent of crazy quilts. This form of quilting, which involves assembling pieces of fabric of various shapes and sizes, became highly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Of particular interest in this quilt are four panels featuring figures dressed in Russian costumes: two women raising the side of their skirts, a common gesture in folk dancing; a dancing man; and a seated musician playing the balalaika. The source for these four figures can be traced to Russian folk art.

Four panels feature roosters, a motif also found in late 19th-century Jewish textiles from Eastern Europe. In the 1880s and 1990s, the rooster was also used in America as a symbol for the Democratic Party; however, it is difficult to ascertain whether the rooster in this quilt has political significance.

The decoration in the border relates mainly to life in America. Symbols of patriotism such as the American flag are combined with the Star of David, a symbol of Jewish heritage. Two crossed American flags are flanked by depictions of Admiral George Dewey and of a typical Russian woman dancing, representing the old and new worlds. The popularity of Admiral Dewey was at its peak in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (Since Dewey was not promoted to the rank of admiral until March 1899, the quilt could only have been completed after this date, although the central panel bears an 1898 date.)

Several motifs in the border are related to sports that became popular in America beginning in the late 19th or early 20th century, including tennis and hot-air ballooning. The Davis Cup tennis tournament was inaugurated in 1900, and the first international hot-air balloon competition was launched in Paris in 1906 and won by an American, who popularized the sport in the United States. The inclusion of these motifs reflects a vivid interest in pastimes that were a novelty to Jewish immigrants coming from Eastern Europe, where life, especially for Jews, was harsh.

Further Information

Becoming American
The influx of immigrants to this country in the 19th and 20th centuries raised a challenging question for many: What does it mean to be American? Speaking and dressing like everyone else? Pledging allegiance to the American flag? Giving up one’s ethnic or religious identity in favor of a more “acceptable” American identity?

In the early 20th century, the notion of a “melting pot” emerged. The United States was seen as an environment in which all religions, nationalities, and creeds could be amalgamated into a homogeneous American soup. Many independent and government programs were established to “Americanize” new arrivals—to encourage them to assimilate into an American way of life. Some employers required workers to take English classes. Some classes aimed to teach women American cooking and homemaking skills. (The concept of the melting pot was later replaced by alternative constructs such as “cultural pluralism” and, more recently, the “salad bowl” and the “American mosaic.”)

Some immigrants resented attempts at Americanization, but most newcomers embraced aspects of American society while still retaining elements of their native or ancestral cultures. Often the two were combined to create new cultural patterns and practices.

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine the quilt carefully:

- What images and symbols do you recognize? What do they make you think of? What significance, if any, do you think they have? Do they seem to tell a story? If so, what story do they tell?

- What materials were used? What kind of texture do you think this quilt has? What patterns are featured in the quilt? Do you think the quilt was hand-made or machine-made? What makes you say that? What do you know about this form of artwork?

- When and where do you think this quilt is from? Why?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine the quilt, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- What does this object suggest about the identity of the person who made it? Is this person American? Jewish? Russian? Can a person be all three? What makes someone American?

- How do you define your identity? What’s most important to you? Your religion, your nationality, your ethnicity, or something else?

Research Topics / Content Connections

- Americanization

- Cultural and National Identity

- Folk Art Traditions

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Lori Grinker
Morning Prayer on Subway

Lori Grinker (American, b. 1957), Morning Prayer on Subway, 1984, gelatin silver print 8 7/8 x 13 1/8 in. (22.5 x 33.3 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the artist, 1994-575

This image by Lori Grinker was published in her 1989 book The Invisible Thread: A Portrait of Jewish American Women. The Invisible Thread features 120 black-and-white photographs that explore the diverse experience of Jewish women in the United States. Grinker writes, “I discovered the complex tapestry woven by Jewish women; sixty women, of all ages and backgrounds, shed light on the multifaceted reality of being Jewish in the late 20th century” (http://www.lorigrinker.com/projects_invisible_t.htm).

The subject of this photograph is Judith Kramer of Brooklyn, New York. She says, “When I’m late for work, I daven [pray] on the subway. It doesn’t matter where I pray. God is everywhere. There is no place where He is not” (http://www.loriginker.com/projects_invisible_t.htm).

Discuss:

- What seems to be happening in this photograph? What do you think this woman is doing? Where is she? How are other people reacting to her?

- How does this photograph show multiple identities? How does it relate to the quilt in The Jewish Museum’s collection?

- Do you think it is easier or more acceptable to express one’s ethnic identity in certain places than others? Why?
Alfred Stieglitz

The Steerage

Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)
The Steerage, 1907,
photogravure 15 7/8 x 11 1/16 in. (40.4 x 28.1 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Mr. and Mrs. George Jaffin Fund, 2000–6 © 2008 Georgia O’Keefe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
About the Work

_The Steerage_ epitomizes Alfred Stieglitz’s straightforward style of photography, which emphasizes clarity of detail and photography’s ability to capture reality. Taken on a large ship bound for Paris, the photograph is evenly divided between the upper, or first-class, and lower, or steerage, decks of the ship, separated by the sharp diagonal of the suspended walkway. Both decks are crowded with people: Stieglitz was traveling on the top deck, which was populated with well-off leisure travelers; the steerage level below held lower-class immigrants returning to Europe. The question remains as to whether the immigrants are being forcibly returned to Europe by the United States government—as many were for reasons of disease, “poor moral health,” or lack of financial support in the States—or if they are returning of their own accord, disillusioned with the country they had believed would change their fate.

Notice the juxtaposition of circular shapes with straight lines, and the balanced composition bisected by the white walkway, or the intersecting diagonals that lead the eye in several directions at once. This photograph typifies Stieglitz’s dual interests in modernity and formal harmony, in this case played out through the saga of American immigration.

Stieglitz began his photographic career as a student in Germany in 1883. Although he was born in New Jersey, Stieglitz moved with his family to Germany in 1881. He returned to the United States in 1890 and became active in the New York photography scene. Through the galleries he founded, the journals he edited, and the exhibitions he organized, Stieglitz helped elevate the technical art of photography to the status of painting and sculpture. He also did much to advance the careers of many young artists, as well as the field of modern art in general.

Further Information

_Stieglitz on The Steerage_

Alfred Stieglitz wrote about the experience of taking this photograph:

> As I came to the end of the deck I stood alone, looking down. There were men and women and children on the lower deck of the steerage. There was a narrow stairway leading up to the upper deck of the steerage, a small deck right at the bow of the steamer.

> To the left was an inclining funnel and from the upper steerage deck there was fastened a gangway bridge which was glistening in its freshly painted state. It was rather long, white, and during the trip remained untouched by anyone.

> On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a young man with a straw hat. The shape of the hat was round. He was watching the men and women and children on the lower steerage deck. Only men were on the upper deck. The whole scene fascinated me. I longed to escape from my surroundings and join those people.

> A round straw hat, the funnel leaning left, the stairway leaning right, the white draw-bridge with its railings made of circular chains—white suspenders crossing on the back of a man in the steerage below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape. I stood spellbound for a while, looking and looking. Could I photograph what I felt, looking and looking, and still looking? I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life… (Whelan, Stieglitz on Photography, pp. 194–95)

_The Immigrant Journey_

Immigrants coming to this country by ship in the 19th and early 20th centuries could travel in first class, second class, or steerage accommodations. Steerage was by far the cheapest and therefore the only real option for the vast majority of immigrants. But it was the most unpleasant way to travel. Sequestered in the bowels of the ship, steerage passengers endured horribly smelly, dirty, and cramped conditions for the entire journey—sometimes for as few as ten days but sometimes for longer than a month. By the time they reached New York, these immigrants were mentally and physically exhausted.

But their journey was not yet over; they still had to pass medical inspection in order to enter the country. All first- and second-class passengers were quickly examined by medical inspectors aboard ship and allowed to disembark in Manhattan. The steerage passengers went on to Ellis Island. As the immigrants filed through the Registry Room, a doctor would examine the face, hair, neck, and hands of each new arrival. Those suspected of physical or mental defects were marked with white chalk for further inspection. Every immigrant was also checked for trachoma, a serious eye disease. Immigrants who carried infectious diseases or were deemed too ill or feeble-minded to earn a living were not granted entry into the United States. About two percent of the arrivals at Ellis Island were sent back to their countries of origin.

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine *The Steerage* carefully:

- Does Stieglitz’s photograph express class consciousness, or is it simply an observation of his surroundings, focusing as much on the shapes formed by the picture’s elements as much as its subject?

- Look closely at the people, the clothes, and the setting in this photograph. When and where do you think the photograph was taken? What clues tell you this? From what vantage point was it taken?

- How would you describe the people in the top portion of the photo? How do they compare with the people in the bottom section? What possible conclusions can you draw?

- What is the focal point of the photograph? What kinds of lines and shapes do you see? How has the artist structured the composition?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students ample opportunity to examine *The Steerage*, share with them the date and title of the photograph. Lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- How do the date and title help you understand the photograph?

- Who do you think these people are? Where do you think they are going (or coming from)?

- This photo was taken on a boat leaving New York for Europe. Why might these people be leaving New York?

- People often mistakenly think this photograph shows immigrants coming to New York. Can this photograph be used to teach about immigration, even though it doesn’t truly show immigration? How? What makes a photograph “true”?

- Would this photograph look different if it showed immigrants coming to America? How?

- How might this photograph look if it showed immigrants coming to or from the United States today?

Research Topics / Content Connections

- Ellis Island
- Immigration in the Early 20th Century
- The Process of Immigration
- Photography


http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/stieglitz_a.html/

http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=1851/
Vik Muniz
*The Steerage (After Alfred Stieglitz)*

Since the mid-1990s, the Brazilian-born artist Vik Muniz, who lives and works in New York, has been creating images out of dirt, dust, sugar, peanut butter, ketchup, string, and other unusual materials. This recreation of Stieglitz’s *The Steerage*, for example, is made from chocolate syrup. Typically, the artist borrows images from pop culture or art history, recreates them with non-traditional (and usually impermanent) materials, and then photographs the results. In doing so, Muniz challenges our perceptions, forces us to reconsider our notions of permanence and photographic reality, and asks us to look again at images that we often take for granted.

**Discuss:**

- Compare Muniz’s *The Steerage (After Alfred Stieglitz)* with Stieglitz’s *The Steerage*. How are the two works similar or different? How do you think the Muniz image was made?

- Is the Muniz work an exact copy of the Stieglitz? Is the original work any more “real” or “true” than Muniz’s copy? How so? Does this copy make you think about the image any differently?

- What do you think about Muniz’s choice of medium? Would you feel differently if he simply used paint or pencil? What material would you use?

- Do you think it is okay for an artist to borrow from an existing work? Why would an artist want to recreate an image that already exists?

Marcia Muth
*The New Immigrants – 1935*

The process of immigration did not end with Ellis Island. In this painting, Marcia Muth recalls the experiences of new immigrants as they settled into American life. Muth was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1919, and her art reflects her memories of her 1930s childhood. Her paintings, however, do not depict specific places or events; instead, she evokes the experiences of the time, filtered through her own recollections.

**Discuss:**

- What is happening in this painting? What clues do you see about the time period or the identity of the figures?

- The artist calls this painting *The New Immigrants – 1935*. How does the title help you understand the image? What does the painting suggest about immigrant life in the 1930s (at least from the point of view of this artist)?

- What do you notice about the perspective in this painting and the way the artist deals with space? How does it affect your experience of the work?

- Marcia Muth calls her works “memory paintings” because she does not paint actual places or events but rather imaginative scenes that draw on her memories of the 1930s. Do you think this kind of “memory painting” offers a useful perspective on the past? How does it compare with a photograph like Stieglitz’s *The Steerage*?
Ben Shahn (American, b. Lithuania, 1898–1969),

*New York*, 1947,

tempera on paper mounted on canvas and panel 36 x 48 in. (91.4 x 121.9 cm). 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


**About the Work**

Ben Shahn's nostalgic and dreamlike composition New York recontextualizes a visual pastiche of images culled from memory and reality, from present and past. It is a haunting and disjunctive scene based on two photographs Shahn had taken years earlier on the Lower East Side. By borrowing elements from the photographs and combining them in new ways on the canvas, Shahn creates a collage–like effect. From one image, a photograph he took in 1936 outside Gelbwach's fish market, Shahn borrows the image of a bearded traditional Jew—a fish peddler—at right, and a scale, at left. He replaced the carp painted on the shop's window in the photograph with a pike. Because Shahn left out the glass-plated storefront visible in the original photograph, the fish floats surreally in the air at the center of the composition.

In the foreground of the painting, a young boy wearing swimming trunks lies prone, apparently in the street. This figure has been taken from the second source photograph (c. 1932–35), which also includes windowed apartment and factory buildings surrounding a park. Such a sparsely landscaped city park would have had great significance for Shahn, who as an adult remembered his childhood yearning for the countryside of his native Vilkomir, Lithuania, and as a boy in Brooklyn searched desperately for whatever small patches of green might be found in his new urban milieu. The young boy in the painting, one of two in the original photograph, perhaps alludes to Shahn's younger brother, Hymie, who drowned at the age of 17 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." In New York, using a limited array of personally resonant symbols from his photographs of the 1930s, Shahn communicates a powerful visual impression of a particular immigrant Jewish experience—one haunted by an irredeemable sense of loss yet recognizable to those who share a similar journey or to others who may seek their own roots through a connection to the collective experience of a remembered past.

Ben Shahn was born in Lithuania in 1898. He immigrated to the United States with his family in 1906 and grew up in a working-class Brooklyn neighborhood. Skilled in many mediums, Shahn became a painter, photographer, illustrator, and printmaker. As a young man, he worked as a lithographer's apprentice, and he later continued to use text as an important element of his designs. Shahn's career became established in 1930 with a series of paintings concerning the controversial murder trial of Ferdinando Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Political themes are often part of his work. He used his art to depict social ills and raise awareness about social injustice and is associated with the social realism movement of the 1930s. Shahn died in New York City in 1969.

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**Further Information**

**Life on the Lower East Side**

During the height of Jewish immigration around the turn of the 20th century, a number of American cities became home to distinctly Jewish neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were often crowded, urban districts, where new arrivals could find an inexpensive room and a menial job alongside those who spoke their language and shared their background. Despite the shock of a new world, these newcomers were comforted by the familiar sounds of Yiddish and given practical assistance by more “seasoned” immigrants from their home countries.

New York City's Lower East Side was the largest of these neighborhoods. Historically, the Lower East Side stretched from the East River west to Broadway, and from Canal Street up to 14th Street. Before the influx of Eastern European Jewry, the area had served earlier immigrants, including many from Ireland and Germany. By 1900, as new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe moved in, most of the earlier inhabitants relocated to other parts of the city. In 1915, an estimated 350,000 Jews (along with about 150,000 non-Jews) lived on the Lower East Side—an area less than two square miles. The neighborhood percolated with a vibrant Yiddish culture.

Most residents of the Lower East Side lived in tenements—apartment buildings five to eight stories high, typically with four three-room apartments on each floor. Usually, only one room in each apartment had windows to the outside, and often a dozen or more people would occupy a single apartment. Some families took in boarders to help cover the cost of rent. Immigrant families who “made it” were often able to leave the Lower East Side for more affluent neighborhoods in other parts of the city.

By the 1930s and 1940s, many of the Lower East Side's Jewish immigrants (or their children) had relocated to neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Upper Manhattan, and the Bronx. (In fact, many of the photographers working in the Lower East Side at this time tried to capture vestiges of the neighborhood's disappearing Jewish culture.) But as earlier residents moved away, the Lower East Side remained an important stepping stone for new immigrant populations—in more recent decades, the neighborhood has served as a center for immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries.

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**Resources**


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**Close Looking / Visual Analysis:**

Encourage students to examine *New York* carefully:

- What are some of the images you see in this painting? How are the images composed, or combined together? Does anything surprise you about the composition? Why do you think an artist would combine elements in this way?

- How do you think the different parts of the picture fit together? How does the artist connect the different parts of the painting through his use of line, color, and shape?

- What do you think this scene would sound like? What would it smell like?

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**For Further Discussion:**

After giving students ample opportunity to examine *New York*, explain that the painting was inspired by the artist’s memories from his own childhood in Lithuania and by photographs he took of the Lower East Side. Lead students in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- What does the painting show you about the artist’s memories? What aspects of the neighborhood does he include? What do they suggest to you?

- What would you choose to include in a picture of your neighborhood?

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**Research Topics / Content Connections**

- The Lower East Side
- Immigrant Communities and Neighborhoods
- Memory and Experience

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**RELATED WORKS OF ART**

**Rebecca Lepkoff**

*East Broadway and Canal Street*


Rebecca Lepkoff was born on the Lower East Side in 1916. Her parents had emigrated from Minsk in 1910, and Lepkoff grew up in a two-bedroom tenement apartment (along with her five brothers and sisters). Despite the cramped conditions, Lepkoff retained many happy memories of her childhood, including Friday night dinners and accompanying her father to synagogue on the Sabbath. She bought her first camera with money earned at the 1939 World’s Fair, and with it, she began to document the vibrant spirit of the neighborhood in which she grew up. In this photograph, a religious Jew is purchasing a lulav—a bundle of palm, willow, and myrtle branches—for the holiday of Sukkot.

**Discuss:**

- Describe what you see in this photograph. Where and when do you think it is? What clues make you think that?

- What do you think is happening in this scene?

- Compare this photograph with Ben Shahn’s painting *New York*. What visual connections do you see between the works? How are the works different in terms of medium, composition, or mood?

- How does each artist use the medium (photography versus painting) to his or her advantage in depicting the neighborhood?
The works of art and artifacts featured on this site have been grouped into four themes. Select an immigration theme.

### Assimilation / Acculturation

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of assimilation/acculturation:

- **Ken Aptekar**
  *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996

- **Happy Jack (born Angokwazhuk)**
  *New Year Greeting*, Nome, Alaska, United States, 1910

- **Abraham Shulkin**
  *Torah Ark*, Sioux City, Iowa, United States, 1899

- **Thomas Sully**
  *Sally Etting*, 1808

- **Abraham Manievich**
  *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919

- **Ben Shahn**
  *New York*, 1947

### Family

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of family:

- **Ken Aptekar**
  *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996

- **Happy Jack (born Angokwazhuk)**
  *New Year Greeting*, Nome, Alaska, United States, 1910

- **Thomas Sully**
  *Sally Etting*, 1808

- **Abraham Manievich**
  *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919

- **Ben Shahn**
  *New York*, 1947

### Symbols

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of symbols:

- **Happy Jack (born Angokwazhuk)**
  *New Year Greeting*, Nome, Alaska, United States, 1910

- **Abraham Shulkin**
  *Torah Ark*, Sioux City, Iowa, United States, 1899

- **Abraham Manievich**
  *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919

- **Quilt**
  Russia and United States, c. 1899

- **Ben Shahn**
  *New York*, 1947

### The Lower East Side

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of The Lower East Side:

- **Weegee (born Arthur Fellig)**
  *Max Is Rushing in the Bagels to a Restaurant on Second Avenue for the Morning Trade*, c. 1940

- **Alfred Stieglitz**
  *The Steerage*, 1907

- **Ben Shahn**
  *New York*, 1947
Books for Students – Primary Grades:


Books for Students – Secondary Grades:


**Books for Teachers***:


*Many of the resources for educators are appropriate for high school students as well.

**Links:**

The American Jewish Historical Society  
http://www.ajhs.org

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Homepage  
http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm

“Immigration … the Changing Face of America” (Library of Congress educational resource)  
http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/immigration_set2.html

“Selected Images of Ellis Island and Immigration, c. 1880–1920” (from the collections of the Library of Congress)  
http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/070_immi.html

“The New Americans” (PBS educational page)  
http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
(U.S. Department of State)  
http://www.state.gov/g/prm/

“Immigration: Stories of Yesterday and Today” (from Scholastic)  

Lower East Side Tenement Museum  
http://www.tenement.org

Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation  
http://www.ellisisland.org

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
http://www.nnirr.org

JewishGen: The Home of Jewish Genealogy (An affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust)  
http://www.jewishgen.org

From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America (An online exhibition from the Library of Congress)  
http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/haventohome/
Glossary

Abstract
Art is described as abstract when it exaggerates, distorts, or simplifies recognizable forms. Abstraction may also be completely non-representational.

Acculturation
The process by which the characteristics and behavior of a group of people are modified as a result of contact with the dominant group or culture.

Antisemitism
Hatred, hostility, or discrimination directed at people because they are Jewish.

Ark
A protective box or chest. The term is used to refer to the cabinet in the synagogue in which the Torah scrolls are kept.

Ashkenazi
Term used to designate Jews of Western or Eastern European origin.

Assemblage
A three-dimensional work made by combining an assortment of found materials or the process by which such works are created. The practice goes back to Pablo Picasso’s Cubist constructions and the “ready-mades” of the Dadaists, but the term is most often applied to a group of artists—among them, Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Cornell—who produced a variety of assemblage works in the 1950s and 1960s.

Assimilation
The process of adapting one’s behavior and attitude to those of the surrounding dominant culture.

Colonial Period
The period in American history beginning with the establishment of the British colonies and ending with the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Composition
The arrangement of line, shape, color, and form in a work of art.

Crazy quilt
A patchwork textile made from irregular pieces of fabric without any discernable design. Crazy quilting was popular in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Cubism
Started in 1907 by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, an art movement that sought to break down and analyze the two-dimensional, pictorial representation of form and space. In Cubism, objects and pictorial space are broken down into faceted planes and reassembled in ways that often suggest spatial shifts and different perspectives within the painting.

Czarist (or tsarist)
Relating to the period preceding the Russian Revolution of 1917, during which time Russia was ruled by a series of czars (or tsars). The term czar derives from caesar, the Latin word for emperor. The first czar of Russia was Ivan IV, who ruled from 1533 to 1584.

Emigrant
One who leaves his or her country of origin to live elsewhere.

Federal Period
The period in American history beginning with the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and continuing until approximately 1830.

Frieze
A decorated horizontal band. In classical architecture, a frieze is a long horizontal strip above a colonnade or doorway, or on the upper part of a wall, often decorated with painting or relief.

Futurism
Begun in Italy in 1909, an art movement that glorified the energy and dynamism of modern life and technology. Futurists used interpenetrating planes and shifting forms to represent objects in motion. Futurism’s leading practitioners include Umberto Boccioni, Giacomo Balla, and Tommaso Marinetti, the movement’s founder.

Ghetto
The word ghetto originated in Venice, Italy. In 1516, Venetian Jews were forced to live in an area called the Ghetto Nuovo (New Foundry). Eventually, the word came to be used for any area in which Jews were forced to live. During World War II, the Nazis created ghettos in cities and towns throughout Eastern Europe. They were usually enclosed within walls or barbed wire, and the residents were not free to enter and leave as they wished. Starvation, disease, and overcrowding were common.

Great Depression
A worldwide economic crisis that began with the stock market crash of 1929 in the United States and continued through the 1930s.

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 the Master of the Good Name), emphasized spirituality and joyful observance of commandments in contrast to the more academically based mode of mainstream Judaism of the time. Hasidism (related to the Hebrew word for “pious”) spread quickly throughout Eastern Europe. Today, there are about a dozen Hasidic sects, the largest of which is the Lubavitch Hasidim, headquartered in Brooklyn, New York.
Immigrant
One who comes to live permanently in a country that is not his or her native country.

Isolationism
A focus of American foreign policy in the period following World War I, isolationism is characterized by efforts to become less involved in world affairs. The high costs of the war (financial and human) had left many Americans wary of future European entanglements. In addition to political and economic isolation, American isolationist policy also led in part to stricter limits on immigration during the 1920s and 1930s.

Landsmannschaften
A German term referring to the “home-town societies” that were established by and for immigrants who came from the same towns in Europe, in order to help new arrivals adjust to life in America. These were common in Jewish immigrant neighborhoods around the turn of the 20th century.

Mizra
A plaque with the word east in Hebrew that is placed on the eastern wall in a home or synagogue to indicate the direction of prayer toward Jerusalem.

Monochromatic
Consisting of just one color.

Nativism
The policy of favoring the interests of native inhabitants of a country over those of newcomers. The United States saw a rise in nativist sentiment after World War I, as many Americans feared new immigrants would bring radical ideas and take American jobs.

Negative space
Empty space or the areas in a work of art that surround the forms and images.

Neoclassical
An art movement that began in France in the middle of the 18th century. Neoclassicism sought to revive the ideals of ancient Greek and Roman art.

Orthodox
Conforming to established doctrine or traditional practice, especially in religion.

Portait
A work of art that represents a specific person or group of people.

Pogrom
From the Russian word meaning “havoc.” A mob attack in which Jewish men, women, and children were brutalized and killed and their homes sacked and looted. Pogroms in Eastern Europe were often carried out with the support of local authorities.

Positive space
The areas of a work of art that are filled with forms or images.

Push factors
Adverse conditions that motivate people to leave their places of residence, such as famine, poverty, or political and religious persecution.

Rosh Hashanah
Hebrew for “Head of the Year,” Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. It usually falls in September or October.

Sephardi
Jews or Jewish communities that trace their origins to Spain and Portugal before the expulsions of 1492 and 1497.

Shamash
The servitor or “helper” candle used to light the other flames on a Hanukkah lamp.

Shohet
One who is trained to slaughter animals according to the Jewish dietary laws.

Social realism
Art that realistically depicts the everyday life of the working classes and the poor and is critical of the social environments that caused their condition. Practiced by such artists as Ben Shahn and Diego Rivera, social realism was an influential movement during the first half of the 20th century.

Steerage
The lowest decks of a ship, named for their proximity to the ship’s steering mechanism. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, passengers who booked the cheapest tickets on transatlantic trips (including the majority of immigrants) were usually housed on the steerage decks. Conditions in steerage were often unpleasant because of overcrowding, lack of light and fresh air, and poor sanitation.

Sweatshop
A shop or factory in which employees work long hours for low pay under poor conditions. Sweatshops were especially common in the garment industry during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, before stricter labor laws improved conditions for workers.

Tenement
The word tenement originally referred to any rented dwelling that housed three or more separate families. Today, the term is generally used to describe the kind of overcrowded urban apartment buildings that many immigrants lived in during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tenement conditions were often harsh, with poor ventilation and sanitation. A series of housing reform laws, however, gradually improved conditions somewhat by the 1930s.

Texture
The feel of a surface—its smoothness, roughness, softness, etc. Textures may be actual or simulated.

Torah
Hebrew for “teaching.” This word usually refers to the first five books of the Bible or to a handwritten scroll containing the Hebrew text of those books. All aspects of traditional Jewish life are based on the Torah and ongoing rabbinic interpretations.

WPA
The Works Progress Administration (renamed the Works Projects Administration in 1939). Introduced in 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt to provide economic relief during the Great Depression, the WPA created jobs in construction and skilled labor and included programs to support the visual and performing arts.

Yiddish
A language historically spoken by Jews of Central and Eastern Europe, based in German with Hebrew and Slavic influences.
Activities

Each activity is connected to works of art and relates to specific academic disciplines, themes, and grades.

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Treasure Boxes

**Aim:** To use Abraham Shulkin’s Torah ark as the inspiration for a container for a special object.

**Grades:** 3–5

**Themes:** Symbols, Assimilation/Acculturation

**Artwork:** Shulkin: *Torah Ark*, Iowa, United States, 1899

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies

**Materials:** Shoeboxes, scissors, pencils, markers, tape, and collage supplies

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view the Torah ark made by Abraham Shulkin.

**Discuss with your students:**

- How do you think this object was used?

- What do you notice about the decorations? How do the decorations fit the object’s purpose?

- Shulkin’s Torah ark was designed to honor and safeguard a special object—the Torah.

2. Discuss the purpose of a Torah ark. Then encourage students to think about something they would want to build a special container for (family photographs, letters, jewelry, etc.). It doesn’t have to be something that could actually fit in a shoebox—the box could be a symbolic home for this item.

3. Distribute shoeboxes for students to use to create their own containers for something special. Students can cut the box top to create “doors,” tape the top down, and decorate the outside of the box using markers, pencils, collage paper, and/or other art supplies. Students should consider the purpose of the box in developing the decorative motifs. Students can also cut patterns or shapes out of the cardboard (and back it with colored paper) to create a “carved” look.
Names

Aim: To reflect on the significance of one’s name.

Grades: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Themes: Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artwork: Aptekar: I Hate the Name Kenneth, 1996

Discipline: Visual Art, English Language Arts

Materials: Paper and pencil; magic marker; paints, colored pencils, or collage materials

Procedure:

Names often have multiple layers of meaning. Most have a literal translation. Frequently, they also serve as ethnic or national signifiers and have personal or family meaning.

1. Have students view Ken Aptekar’s work I Hate the Name Kenneth. Discuss:
   - Why does the artist hate his name?
   - What is so important about a name? Why are names significant?

2. Ask your students to consider their own names. For example:
   - Think about your first name. Do you like it? Why or why not? Does your name have a meaning? If so, what is it? Why did your parents choose it? Are you named after someone? Who? Do you have a name in another language? How does that relate to your identity?
   - Do you have any nicknames? Where did these come from? Do they describe you?
   - What about your last name? Does it have a meaning? If so, what is it? Where does it come from? What does it say about you?
   - Would you want to change your name if you could? Why? What would you change it to?
   - What’s so important about a name? Why is it so bad to “call people names”?

3. Ask each student to choose a part of his or her name to illustrate (e.g., first name, last name, nickname, Hebrew name, etc.). Have students write their names in large, thick bubble letters and then fill in the letters with images that reflect the meaning or personal significance of the name. These images can be drawn, painted, or collaged.

4. Ask each student to write a paragraph explaining how the work reflects the personal, literal, or symbolic meaning of his or her name.
Image and Text

Aim: To create a personal statement with an artwork that combines image and text.

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Themes: Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Aptekar: *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996

Discipline: Visual Art, English Language Arts

Materials: Paper and pencil, markers, acetate, poster board or mat board, glue, scissors, magazines, or photographs

Procedure:

1. Show students Ken Aptekar’s work *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, and discuss the artist’s use of image and text.

2. Have each student choose a reproduction of a portrait—either a photograph or a painting—that depicts a person he or she finds compelling or embodies a quality the student relates to. This may be a physical characteristic, an attitude, facial expression, etc. Students can find portraits in art books and magazines and on museum websites. You can also distribute postcards from museum shops from which they may make their selection.

3. Photocopy and enlarge each of the portraits.

4. You may want to give your students the option of altering the image in some way. For example, instead of using the entire image, they might opt to enlarge a detail. Have them think about cropping and the use of negative space as evidenced in the work by Aptekar. Students can also alter the image by incorporating color (pastels or colored pencil) and collage elements.

5. Have students write a story from the character’s point of view. So they can properly gauge the length of their text, let them know they will be asked to transcribe their story onto a sheet of acetate that can be placed over the image.

6. Provide students with the following guidelines before they begin writing:
   - Write in the first person. You can use full sentences, sentence fragments, or even a single sentence. You may also write a free-verse poem.
   - Your story can be easy for people to understand or it can be cryptic and open to interpretation; you might be the only one who knows the full story.
   - Consider how your text reveals something about the image you have chosen.

7. The next step is to combine the image with the text. After students have refined their texts, have them lay a sheet of acetate over their image and transcribe their texts onto it using a black sharpie marker. Ask them to pay close attention to the visual relationship between the text and the image and to be as creative as possible.

8. When students are satisfied with the final result, staple the acetate to the paper. Have them think of a title for their work. A good idea for the title may be the last line of their text.

9. Another option is to create self-portraits using this activity. In this case, have students bring photographs of themselves from home. Enlarge the photos in school and photocopy them. If you have a computer and can scan them and print them out, that would work as well. Then have students engage in the same activity as above, asking them to choose memorable incidents in their lives as the subjects of their stories. Their stories might be about people who have had an impact on their lives or about family members who have qualities they admire. The text should reveal something about the student or relate to his or her identity in some way.
Identity Collage

**Aim:** To use collage to reflect on the complexity of individual identity.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Symbols, Assimilation/Acculturation

**Artworks:** Tupa: *Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp*, United States, 1974; Sully: *Sally Etting*, 1808; *Quilt*, Russia and United States, c. 1899; Aptekar: *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper, pencil, magazines, scissors, and glue.

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view Thomas Sully’s *Sally Etting*. Like most people, Sally Etting may have felt she had many identities—in her case, as an American, a woman, a Jew, a child of immigrants, etc. You might also look at Ken Aptekar’s *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, Mae Rockland Tupa’s *Hanukkah lamp*, or the Russian American quilt and discuss which aspects of the artist’s multiple identities are reflected in each work.

2. Encourage students to consider their own multiple identities. Do students define themselves according to their gender, ethnicity, race, religion, interests, age—or all of these things? Which elements of their identities are most significant to their sense of self? How do these elements of identity interact? Are they separate? Overlapping? Intermingled?

3. Ask students to create Venn diagrams on large pieces of paper to show how their multiple identities combine to make up who they are. Students can vary the sizes and overlap of the circles according to the relative importance of each element of their identity.

4. Next, have students fill each circle with collaged images from magazines to help illustrate these various aspects of their selves.
Positive and Negative Space

**Aim:** To explore symmetry and the use of positive and negative space.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8

**Themes:** Symbols

**Artworks:** Shulkin: *Torah Ark*, Iowa, United States, 1899

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies

**Materials:** Construction paper, glue, pencils, and scissors.

**Procedure:**

1. Abraham Shulkin’s ark incorporates a symmetrical design and the intricate use of positive and negative space, much like Eastern European papercuts of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, Shulkin may even have created a preparatory papercut to use as a model for his carved-wood ark.

   - Show students the works below, Abraham Shulkin’s Torah ark, as well as the papercut, made in Ukraine in 1877. This papercut is a mizrah—a sign that shows the direction of prayer and is meant to be placed on the eastern wall of a home or synagogue. Ask students to compare the papercut with Shulkin’s ark. For example:

     - What similar designs and images do you see? How are the two similar in their overall structure (e.g., symmetry, architectural forms)?

     - In both works, the shapes (positive space) are defined by what’s been cut away (the negative space). Where do you see positive space? Where do you see negative space? How have the artists created this negative space?

     - In what ways are the two works of art different (e.g., materials, the use of color)?

2. Have students create their own works of art that incorporate symmetry and explore positive and negative space. Give each student two sheets of paper in contrasting colors.

3. Ask students to cut one of the pieces in two and discard one half. On the other half of the paper, each student will create a line drawing—it can be abstract or figurative.

4. Have students cut the negative space out of the drawing and glue the remaining (“positive”) pieces onto one half of the other sheet of paper. They should hold onto the pieces of “negative space” they cut out. Have each student glue these cutout pieces into place on the other half of the paper to create a mirror image of the original design, made from negative space.
Family Traditions

**Aim:** To examine the power and importance of cultural and family traditions.

**Grades:** 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Symbols, Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

**Artworks:** Tupa: *Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp*, United States, 1974; *Quilt*, Russia and United States, c. 1899; Shulkin: *Torah Ark*, Iowa, United States, 1899; Happy Jack: *New Year Greeting*, Alaska, 1910;

**Discipline:** Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper and pencil

**Procedure:**

1. Religious, cultural, and family traditions help sustain identity from one generation to the next. Have students view and discuss the works below. Discuss:
   - What traditions are reflected in these objects?
   - What different kinds of traditions are represented (e.g., religious traditions, craft traditions, cultural traditions, national traditions)?

2. Have each student write about a tradition in his or her family that is particularly meaningful or significant. It could be a religious, cultural, national, or family tradition. If necessary, have students conduct additional research to learn more about the tradition. If students have trouble coming up with ideas, they can interview their parents or grandparents to elicit their experiences. Students should consider the following:
   - Where does this tradition come from?
   - What does it mean?
   - Why did you choose it?
   - Why is it important?
   - How is it passed down from generation to generation? Will you continue to pass it down to your kids?

3. Hold a “Traditions Fair” in your classroom. Ask each student to present his or her tradition to the rest of the class. Each student might, for example, bring in and discuss a traditional craft or related object, perform a dance, teach a song, or cook and share a special dish.

Objects Tell Personal Stories

**Aim:** To reflect on one’s identity through exploration of a personal object.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** Symbols

**Artworks:** Shulkin: *Torah Ark*, Iowa, United States, 1899; Tupa: *Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp*, United States, 1974; *Quilt*, Russia and United States, c. 1899; Happy Jack: *New Year Greeting*, Alaska, 1910

**Discipline:** English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper, pencil, and student objects

**Procedure:**

1. An object often says a lot about the person who owns it or made it. Have students examine some of the objects below. Discuss:
   - What do these objects tell us about their owners or makers?
   - How are aspects of their identity expressed through these objects?

2. Ask each student to bring in one object (or if that’s not possible, a picture of one object) that the student believes says something important about him or her. Stress that you’re not necessarily looking for the object that is most special to the student but rather one that reflects something significant about his or her identity—personal, cultural, or otherwise. The object might be a family heirloom, something made by the student or a family member, a religious article, or something that reflects the unique interests and personality of its owner.

3. Each student should write a reflective essay about the object and why he or she chose it. Then ask students to present their objects to their classmates, explaining their significance.

4. Alternatively, have students place their objects anonymously on a table in the classroom and then ask each student to choose one object (not his or her own) to observe closely and describe. After students have formulated some ideas about the objects they chose, ask each object’s true owner to explain its personal meaning and significance.
Self-Portraits

Aim: To represent aspects of one’s identity through portraiture.

Grades: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Themes: Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Sully: Sally Etting, 1808

Discipline: Visual Art, English Language Arts

Materials: Paper or canvas; paints, colored pencils, or pastels; mirrors

Procedure:

1. Ask students to examine Thomas Sully’s portrait Sally Etting below. Sally Etting chose to have Sully present a particular image of herself. The portrait highlights her identity as an American, dressed in the style of the day. Discuss the choices of clothing, background, hairstyle, pose, expression, light, and artistic style used in the painting.

2. Have your students create portraits of themselves that emphasize their own identities. Students can work in a range of media, including watercolor, colored pencils, or pastels, and they can use hand-held mirrors in order to capture their physical features. They should carefully consider what is most important about who they are and then explore ways that these aspects of identity can be communicated visually—through pose, clothing, setting, symbol, line, and color.

3. Ask each student to produce a written description or audio piece to accompany the portrait. The text should explain how the work of art reflects the student’s unique identity.

4. Alternatively, you might ask students to create two portraits—one that reflects how they see themselves and one that expresses how they think others see them.

Ethnic Identity on Television

Aim: To examine the representation of identity and ethnicity on television.

Grades: 9-12

Theme: Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Sully: Sally Etting, 1808

Discipline: Social Studies, English Language Arts

Materials: Television, paper, and pencil

Procedure:

1. The media constantly presents us with images of ethnic identity on television, in movies, and on the Internet. Whether we realize it or not, we are perpetually being shown what popular culture thinks a Jew, an African American, or a Latino looks and acts like. Unlike commissioned portraits, such as the one of Sally Etting, these images are often presented by people outside of the groups they represent. Ask students to watch a television show that features a character from a minority group and consider some of the following questions:

   • What is the “identity” of this character? How is this identity expressed?
   
   • Is the character’s ethnic identity presented in a sympathetic light? Is it a stereotyped depiction? Is it exploited for humorous purposes?
   
   • Are ethnic issues dealt with in a complex or superficial way? Does it feel “true” to you?
   
   • Is the show a comedy or a drama? How might that influence the way ethnic identity is represented?
   
   • What do you think is the effect of these depictions? How influenced do you think we are by the presentation of ethnicity on television?

2. Back in class, encourage students to share their findings in small or large group discussions.

3. You might, instead, choose to bring in a relevant film or television program, watch it as a group, and have a class discussion based on the questions above.
Monologues and Dialogues

Aim: To explore narrative painting through writing.

Grades: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Themes: Symbols, Family

Artworks: Manievich: *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919; Minkowski: *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910

Discipline: Theater

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Have students examine the painting *After the Pogrom* by Maurycy Minkowski. After discussing the work, ask each student to choose one character in the painting and consider the following:
   - What do you think this character’s story?
   - What do you think this character might be thinking or feeling?
   - What do you think this character has experienced up until now?

2. Have each student write an internal monologue from the perspective of this character. The monologues should describe what has occurred so far, what the character is currently thinking and feeling, and what he or she thinks or hopes will happen next. (Alternatively, have students write a monologue from the point of view of the goat in Abraham Manievich’s *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*. What has this animal seen? What would it say if it could talk?)

3. Ask each student to perform his or her monologue for the rest of the class, without disclosing which character is speaking. After each student performs, have the other students guess which character it was.

4. Finally, have each student pair up with someone who chose a different character. Have each pair write and perform a dialogue between their two characters.

Suitcase Collage

Aim: To reflect on values and choices through artistic expression.

Grades: 3-5, 6-8

Themes: Symbols, Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Manievich: *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919

Discipline: Visual Art, Social Studies

Materials: Paper, pencil, magazines, scissors, glue, paints, or markers

Procedure:

1. Immigrants frequently have to make difficult choices about what to bring with them when they leave home. Your students can simulate this dilemma through a simple art activity.

2. Provide each student with a large sheet of paper decorated with the outline of a suitcase.

3. Have students use collage and/or illustration to fill the suitcase with the items they would take with them if they were immigrating to a new place. These can include practical items, such as money and clothing. They might also consist of intangible things, like memories, traditions, and hope.
Where Would You Go?

**Aim:** To explore some of the choices immigrants face when leaving home.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8

**Theme:** Assimilation/Acculturation

**Artworks:** Manievich: *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev, 1919*

**Discipline:** Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper, pencil, and research materials

**Procedure:**

1. The choice to leave home is often very difficult; decisions about one’s destination can be equally challenging. Have students imagine that they have to leave North America. They can go anywhere else in the world, but they have to leave. Where would they go?

2. Students must think carefully about their options and conduct the necessary research. In considering a destination, for example, they must consider the following:
   - How much will it cost to get there?
   - Do I need a visa to get in?
   - What is the economy like there? How is the standard of living? Is it expensive to live there? Will it be easy for me to get a job or go to school?
   - How do people feel about Americans there? Will I have to learn a new language?
   - How far will I be from my family back home?
   - What is the weather like?

Making Scrimshaw

**Aim:** To explore the technique of scrimshaw carving.

**Grades:** 3–5

**Theme:** Symbols

**Artworks:** Happy Jack: *New Year Greeting, Alaska, 1910*

**Discipline:** Visual Art

**Materials:** Plaster of Paris or soap, plastic knives, pencil and paper, and shoe polish

**Procedure:**

1. Show students the carved Jewish New Year’s Greeting from The Jewish Museum’s collection. (You might also want to show them additional examples of scrimshaw. See, for example, the online collection at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

2. Then give students the opportunity to carve their own artistic vision into either plaster or soap. Plaster offers a closer approximation of bone or tusk than soap does and allows for more intricate carvings. But it also requires more preparation.

3. If you choose to use plaster, mix the plaster according to the instructions on the packaging. Pour the wet plaster into molds, such as paper cups or muffin tins, so that each student will have a small flat medallion to carve once the plaster has dried. If you use soap, choose a smooth, white bar soap.

4. Have students design their scrimshaw with paper and pencil first. Then have them translate the drawings into carvings using plastic knives. Encourage students to use images and symbols that have personal or cultural meaning for them.

5. When the carvings are completed, students can cover the surface of the plaster or soap with shoe polish, then wipe it clean. Some shoe polish will remain in the incisions, highlighting the carved lines of the students’ designs.
Painting and Poetry

**Aim:** To examine literary and visual responses to similar historical events.

**Grades:** 9-12

**Theme:** Symbols

**Artworks:** Manievich: *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev*, 1919; Minkowski: *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910

**Discipline:** Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** A copy of the poem “On the Slaughter” by Hayim Nachman Bialik.

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**Procedure:**

Have students work together to read and interpret the following poem, which was written by the renowned Hebrew poet Hayim Nachman Bialik in response to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903.

*On the Slaughter*

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 darknesses and rot
all the dark foundations of the earth.


Ask students to compare Bialik’s literary reaction to the aftermath of a pogrom with the visual responses by Manievich in *Destruction of the Ghetto, Kiev* and Minkowsky in *After the Pogrom*.

- What is the mood of Bialik’s poem?
- How does it compare with the mood of the paintings?
- Does the poem complement the paintings in any way?
- Which do you respond to more? Why?
Sculpting America

Aim: To express the essence of America through an assemblage artwork.

Grades: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Theme: Symbols

Artworks: Tupa: Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp, United States, 1974

Discipline: Visual Art, Social Studies

Materials: Assorted found materials, newspapers, magazines, scissors, and glue

Procedure:

1. In Hanukkah Lamp: Miss Liberty, Mae Rockland Tupa uses found materials to sculpt a tribute to the American ideals of freedom and liberty. Have your students use found materials to create their own sculptures representing America.

2. Provide students with as many varied supplies as possible—pieces of wood, fabric, beads, wire, dime-store knickknacks, and household objects. Also make magazines and newspapers available to them.

3. Students can combine materials in any way they wish in order to represent the theme of "America." They might make use of traditional icons, personal symbols, pop-culture references, abstract designs, etc. Students might also want to include a quote (as Tupa does) to support or emphasize the meaning of their work.

The New Colossus

Aim: To interpret the meaning of "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus.

Grades: 6-8, 9-12

Theme: Symbols

Artworks: Tupa: Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp, United States, 1974

Discipline: English Language Arts

Materials: Copies of Lazarus’s poem, paper, and pencil

Procedure:

1. Have students read Emma Lazarus’s famous poem in its entirety:

   The New Colossus
   
   Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
   With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
   Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
   A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
   Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
   Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
   Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
   The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame."
   Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
   With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
   Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
   The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
   Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
   I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

2. Discuss:

   • What kind of image of the Statue of Liberty does Lazarus "paint" with her words? How does this compare with the image you already have in your mind of Lady Liberty? How does Lazarus describe the immigrants? What kind of image does she create?

   • Think about Tupa’s Hanukkah Lamp: Miss Liberty in the context of this poem. How do the poem and the work of art relate to each other? Do they offer similar impressions of the Statue of Liberty? Do they contradict each other in any way?

3. Ask students to write their own poetry reflecting on the Statue of Liberty or on the topic of immigration more generally.
Lady Liberty in Popular Culture

**Aim:** To examine the way a national symbol can be used and transformed by popular culture.

**Grades:** 9-12

**Theme:** Symbols

**Artworks:** Tupa: *Miss Liberty, Hanukkah Lamp*, United States, 1974

**Discipline:** Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper, pencil, and Internet access

**Procedure:**

1. The Statue of Liberty is ubiquitous in our society—she appears in ads, in movies, and in a wide range of pop-culture contexts. But how is the statue depicted? And what does it represent in these different settings?

   After showing Mae Rockland Tupa’s *Hanukkah Lamp: Miss Liberty* to students, discuss:

   • What does the Statue of Liberty mean in the context of Tupa’s work?

   • What does the statue mean to you? Where else have you seen this symbol used?

2. Ask students to search the Internet for at least three depictions of Lady Liberty (other than simple documentary photographs). Have students reflect on these questions:

   • How is the Statue of Liberty presented in each context—for example, in a humorous way, a serious way, a nostalgic way? Is her image changed or revised in any way?

   • Is she used to sell or market anything? To make a political statement? Who is the target audience?

   • What does she symbolize here? Is her meaning different in different contexts?

   • How do you feel about the way she is presented?

Creating a Class Quilt

**Aim:** To create a collaborative work of art that reflects the diversity of the class.

**Grades:** 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Symbols, Family

**Artworks:** *Quilt*, Russia and United States, c. 1899

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies

**Materials:** Fabric, scissors, paints and/or markers, glue and/or needle and thread, and pencil and paper for sketching

**Procedure:**

1. America is sometimes compared to a quilt insofar as it is a merging of diverse elements that together make up a complex pattern but that also retain their uniqueness and individuality. Your students can create a quilt that similarly reflects the diversity and unity of your class.

2. Bring in a variety of fabrics for students to work with. Have each student create an individual panel, which will subsequently be joined with the rest.

3. Students should choose their fabrics carefully and think about how they want to represent themselves. They might paint or write on their panels; they may sew or glue additional pieces of fabric on. But every student should include at least one piece of text, one image representing his or her personal identity, and one symbol of his or her family, nationality, or ethnic background.

4. Encourage students to plan their panels thoughtfully before they begin. When all the pieces are finished, sew or glue the sections together to create your class quilt.
Photographing My Community

**Aim:** To reflect on the nature and importance of community.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** The Lower East Side, Family

**Artworks:**
- Weegee: *Max is rushing in the bagels to a restaurant...*, c. 1940;
- Feininger: *Jewish Store, Lower East Side*, 1940s;
- Kalisher: *Untitled (Schechter Furriers)*, 1963;
- Lepkoff: *East Broadway and Canal Street*, 1948;
- Shahn: *New York City (Merchant, Bleecker Street)*, 1932–35

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper and pencil, cameras and film

**Procedure:**

1. Show some of the works to students. Discuss:
   - What do these images suggest about the community they represent?
   - How would you describe the neighborhoods?
   - What do you think the residents of these neighborhoods receive from their community?

2. Immigrant communities, like those depicted in the works of Weegee, Ben Shahn, and others, often provide practical and emotional support for their residents. The same is true of all communities. Encourage students to consider their relationships with their own communities by reflecting on the following questions:
   - How do you define a community?
   - Who makes up your community? Are you part of more than one community?
   - What do you receive from your community?
   - What do you contribute to your community?

3. Many artists have documented their communities through photography. Your students can do the same. Have students take photos of their community (whether it is their neighborhood community, their school community, their religious community, etc.) that reflect what they think is important or essential about it. Students can create an exhibition or photo essay of their work, including reflective writing pieces along with the images.
Life on the Lower East Side

**Aim:** To relate images of life on the Lower East Side to literary descriptions of the neighborhood.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

**Themes:** The Lower East Side

**Artworks:**
- Shahn: New York City, 1947;
- Weegee: *Max is rushing in the bagels to a restaurant...*, c. 1940;
- Feininger: *Jewish Store, Lower East Side*, 1940s;
- Kalisher: *Untitled (Schechter Furriers)*, 1963;
- Lepkoff: *East Broadway and Canal Street*, 1948;
- Shahn: *New York City (Merchant, Bleecker Street)*, 1932–35

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Books about the Lower East Side, paper and pencil, and illustration materials

**Procedure:**

1. **Look at images showing life on the Lower East Side.** See, for example, works by Ben Shahn, Weegee, Arnold Eagle, Andreas Feininger, Simpson Kalisher, and Rebecca Lepkoff below. Discuss:

   • Collectively, what kind of picture do these images create of the Lower East Side?

   • How do the different images complement each other?

   • Which images make life in the neighborhood look hard? Which make it look fun or happy? Why do you think different artworks depict the same neighborhood differently? Do you think everyone who lived on the Lower East Side experienced the community in the same way?

   • What questions about life on the Lower East Side do these works raise for you?

2. **Have students read narrative accounts of life among New York City’s immigrants.** Many suitable books are included among the resources on this website, such as *East Side Story* (Bonnie Bader) and *All-of-a-Kind Family* (Sydney Taylor) for younger students. *Dreams in the Golden Country: The Diary of Zipporah Feldman, a Jewish Immigrant Girl* (Lasky) or selections from *A Bintel Brief* (Metzker) would be appropriate for students in middle and high school, respectively.

3. **Ask students to compare the literary representations with the visual depictions of life on the Lower East Side.** Which images, for example, most closely fit your impression of the Lower East Side, based on your reading?

4. **You might ask students to create their own illustrations of the stories they have read about life on the Lower East Side.**
Quilting Traditions

Aim: To connect the quilt in The Jewish Museum’s collection with quilting traditions from other cultures.

Grades: 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

Themes: Symbols, Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Quilt, Russia and United States, c. 1899

Discipline: Visual Art, Social Studies

Materials: Images and information about various quilting traditions

Procedure:

1. Quilting is a part of many cultural traditions. It is often associated with the Amish of Pennsylvania and the Midwest. But it’s also an important thread in African American craft history, where quilting designs frequently draw on African textile traditions. The Gullah people from the Sea Islands of Georgia and the women of Gee’s Bend, Alabama, are particularly known for their rich, sophisticated quilting styles. Hawaiian culture offers yet another distinctive quilting tradition.

Quilting techniques and designs often reflect long-standing cultural beliefs and practices. They sometimes carry symbolic significance or narrative meaning. In recent decades, the contemporary artist Faith Ringgold has recast the craft of quilting as fine art. Her series of “story quilts” from the 1980s uses image and text to tell elaborate personal accounts. Several of her quilts, including the famous Tar Beach, have been made into children’s books.

2. You might take this opportunity to explore with your students the quilting traditions of other cultures. Students can examine the history, design, and cultural significance of these various quilting styles. They can also try their hand at the different techniques used. A few sources for information about quilting are listed below:

www.quiltsofgeesbend.com
www.knowitall.org/gullahnet/index.html
www.womenfolk.com/historyofquilts
www.nvo.com/poakalani/historyofhawaiianquilting

The Geometry of Photography

Aim: To use photography to explore geometry in everyday objects.

Grades: 3–5, 6–8

Themes: Symbols

Artworks: Quilt, Russia and United States, c. 1899; Stieglitz: The Steerage, 1907

Discipline: Visual Art, Math

Materials: Cameras

Procedure:

1. Stieglitz’s photograph The Steerage is, among other things, a keenly observed study of the geometry in the world around us. The lines, patterns, and interaction between shapes create a taut, dynamic photograph. Have students examine Stieglitz’s photograph, paying close attention to the geometry of the composition.

2. Ask students to find interesting shapes and patterns in their own worlds and capture them on film. This may require them to look at common objects and familiar scenes in new ways. Students will need to think carefully about the composition of their photographs. For example:

   • What shapes and patterns do you see?
   • How are the shapes interacting?
   • What kind of movement is created by the lines?
   • What are you including in the photo? What are you leaving out?

3. Encourage students to mount their photographs and create a class exhibition of their work.
A Letter Home

**Aim:** To reflect on the experiences of immigrants in the early 20th century through writing.

**Grades:** 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Family, Assimilation/Acculturation

**Artworks:** Stieglitz: *The Steerage*, 1907

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Social Studies

**Materials:** Paper and pencil

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**Procedure:**

1. After students have studied the experiences of people who immigrated to this country in the early 20th century, ask them to take another look at *The Steerage* by Stieglitz.

2. Have each student choose a figure in the photograph and write a letter from that person to his or her family in Europe or America.

3. Ask students to draw as much as possible from both the imagery of the photograph and their own knowledge of the historical period. Letters can describe the conditions on the ship; what their experiences have been leading up to this point; what they expect to happen next; what they see, smell, and hear; and how they feel about what is happening.

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Family History

**Aim:** To relate the experiences of other immigrants to students’ own families.

**Grades:** 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Family

**Artworks:** Stieglitz: *The Steerage*, 1907

**Discipline:** Social Studies, English Language Arts

**Materials:** Paper and pencil; research materials; markers, poster board, photos, glue, etc., for presentations

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**Procedure:**

1. The vast majority of Americans trace their roots to somewhere else. Have students investigate the immigrant histories of their own families.

2. Have students conduct interviews with older family members in order to create presentations that answer some of the following questions:

   - When did members of your family first arrive in this country?
   - Where did they come from? How did they get here?
   - Did they come together or at different times?
   - Do your family members come from different places?
   - Why did they leave their homes?
   - What were their experiences like before, during, and after the trip to this country?
Then and Now

Aim: To compare and contrast aspects of the current immigration process with that of a hundred years ago.

Grades: 3–5, 6–8, 9–12

Themes: The Lower East Side, Assimilation/Acculturation

Artworks: Stieglitz: The Steerage, 1907

Discipline: Social Studies, English Language Arts

Materials: Paper and pencil, research materials

Procedure:

1. Have students conduct research to learn about the procedures most immigrants to the United States must undergo and compare the immigrant experience today with the experience in historical times. For example:
   - How did most immigrants arrive 100 years ago?
   - How long did it take?
   - What costs were involved?
   - What kinds of paperwork were required?
   - What happened immediately after the immigrants arrived?
   - How is the process similar or different today?

2. Ask each student to interview a recent immigrant as part of his or her research.

Poetic Response

Aim: To respond to a work of visual art through poetry.

Grades: 3–5, 6–8

Themes: Symbols


Discipline: English Language Arts

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Together with students, make a list of adjectives describing Ben Shahn’s painting New York. You might also make lists of verbs or nouns that come to students’ minds when they view the painting.

2. Then ask each student to use words from these lists to write a poem that captures the mood and spirit of the painting.

3. Afterward, have students share their poems or publish them in a class poetry book.