This resource was developed for elementary through high school educators to explore the formal elements of art and to draw connections among visual art, language arts, and literacy. Each of the works of art included here has a narrative component. Much like an author or poet tells or evokes a story through words, artists can use visual elements to weave together a story with all the familiar components: characters, setting, plot/scenes, mood, and tone.
This educator resource was written by Lisa Libicki, edited by Michaelyn Mitchell, and designed by Olya Domoradova. At The Jewish Museum, Nelly Silagy Benedek, Director of Education, Michelle Sammons, Educational Resources Coordinator, and Hannah Krafick, Marketing Assistant, facilitated the project’s production. Special thanks to Dara Cohen-Vasquez, Senior Manager of School Programs and Outreach, and Roger Kamholz, Marketing Editorial Manager, for providing valuable input. This resource is made possible by a generous grant from the Kekst Family.
Introduction

Artists use images for many reasons, among them, to express emotions and ideas (whether political, spiritual, or philosophical) and to depict beauty. Sometimes they use images to tell stories. These stories may draw upon personal events, collective traditions, historical or contemporary events, or texts, or they may spring entirely from the artist’s imagination.

Each of the works of art in this section has a narrative component. These Resources are specially designed to help you explore the formal elements of art and to draw connections among visual art, language arts, and literacy.

If your class is studying modern European history, American history, and/or Jewish history and tradition, you may discover direct links between your social studies and history curricula and the works of art discussed here. Though these connections are not the focus of these resources, we encourage you to explore them further and suggest additional research topics where applicable.

With the images in these Resources, students will also discover connections to genres that are familiar from the world of literature, such as drama, suspense, historical fiction, memoir, autobiography, and biography. Much like an author or poet tells or evokes a story through words, artists can use visual elements to weave together a story with all the familiar components: characters, setting, plot/scenes, mood, and tone.

Through the Close Looking and Discussion sections, students will learn how artists use formal elements such as line, shape, color, texture, balance, and rhythm to help the viewer “read” an image. These elements are akin to the diction, syntax, and grammar of writing. An artist brings these elements together in his or her composition to express meaning and tell a story.

Just like authors and poets, artists may choose to be explicit or subtle and open-ended with their stories; they may approach the narrative symbolically or concretely. They may detail their imagery richly or sparsely. And just as every writer has a unique style, so too do artists. You may come across narrative art that is didactic, moralistic, hyperbolic, or understated.
Works of Art

This section offers ideas for exploring narratives in art by highlighting the unique objects from the Jewish Museum’s extensive collection.
Moritz Daniel Oppenheim

The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family...
About the Work

The Return of the Volunteer by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim is generally considered the first example of a known Jewish artist confronting a specifically Jewish subject. It is a historical genre painting—a painting of everyday life—but is also inflected with specific historical content.

The main figure in Oppenheim’s work is a wounded Jewish soldier in a military uniform. The soldier has just returned to his family after helping to defend Germany against the Napoleonic armies of France. In his haste to be reunited with his family, the young man has, contrary to Jewish law, traveled on the Sabbath. The soldier’s mother and siblings appear in various states of concern and delight. Some direct their attention to the soldier himself while others peer at his uniform and other military accoutrements. The father looks at his son’s Iron Cross, a military decoration that is also a Christian symbol. The father’s gaze seems to betray an inner struggle to resolve conflicted emotions of pride, concern, and anxiety.

The Return of the Volunteer was painted at a time when Jewish civil rights in Germany were in a tenuous state. In the wake of the political unrest following the 1830 revolutions in France and their reverberations in Germany, many German states reimposed repressive legislation that affected rights recently won by Jews. Art historians interpret this painting as a reminder to Germans of the significant role played by Jews in the Wars of Liberation, some twenty years earlier. Beyond the son’s military status, the hanging portrait of Frederick the Great, emperor of Prussia, is a visual indicator of the political context of this painting.

Oppenheim’s painting suggests both a tension between country and religion and between generations—between the traditions of the old and the new ways of the young.

Sources:


Visual Analysis

The Return of the Volunteer is set in a domestic dining room. A table in the center of the composition is draped with two tablecloths, one patterned, the other white. Atop the table are a half-eaten loaf of braided challah and a kiddush cup, details that let the viewer know it is the Jewish Sabbath. In this richly detailed setting, other objects of note are two plaques with Hebrew inscriptions, an open book on the table whose page layout identifies it as a Talmud, the family’s cat peering out from underneath the table, and the edge of a doorway at the picture’s far left.

Warm sunlight filters into the room through a large arched window in the center of the background. The time of day is most likely afternoon.

A beam of light guides the viewer’s gaze toward the young man. Seated on a chair at the far left of the composition, the man is wearing a blue and gold military uniform, adorned with an Iron Cross, which identifies him as the soldier in the title. The soldier is looking off toward his sister, who leans over him.

Standing in the foreground, just right of center, the soldier’s mother looks at him; a tear is streaming down her cheek. She wears a red coat and white satin skirt.

The soldier’s father, sitting behind him and to his left, holds his son’s hand and looks intently at the Iron Cross on his chest.

In the center of the background, two younger siblings look over at the soldier, though their gazes appear to be fixed more on his uniform than on him. A third sibling on the right is the only character whose gaze is directed away from the soldier. He seems preoccupied with looking at the soldier’s accoutrement.

All the men and boys in the picture, with the exception of the soldier, wear traditional Jewish skull caps. The soldier is the focal point of this scene. In addition to the light streaming toward him, which leads the viewer’s eye toward him, most of the figures incline and gaze toward him. Through his handling of light, shadow, and patterning, the artist convincingly depicts a variety of textures such as those of the wood floor, the satin dress, and the metal objects.

The color palette of the painting includes many neutral colors that convey a sense of the diffused afternoon sunlight, but there are also some bright colors woven into the composition, especially highly saturated reds, that help keep the viewer’s eyes moving around the scene.

Source:

Resources


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**Close Looking / Visual Analysis:**

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- Describe the different people in this painting. What are they wearing? How old do they seem to be? Describe their poses, gestures, and body language. What are they doing?

- What is the setting for this scene? What visual evidence helps you figure this out? (Encourage students to describe the place/location, as well as the time of day and even the historical period.)
  
  [The inclusion of the kiddush cup and the challah indicate that the setting is a traditional Jewish home on the Sabbath. The sunlight suggests late afternoon. The clothing tells us that these characters are from the past.]

- What is the focal point of the painting? How does the artist draw your attention there?
  
  [The soldier is the focal point of the composition. The viewer’s eyes are drawn to him by the gaze of the other figures, the way in which most of the figures incline toward him, and the beam of light coming through the window.]

- What colors do you see in the painting? How do they help lead your eye around the canvas?
  
  [Reds and oranges highlight the attire of the different figures. The repetition of these hues leads your eye from one to the next.]

- What is the mood of this scene? How does the artist’s rendering of the interior help create this mood? [Oppenheim has created a sense of heightened emotion with the facial expressions and body language of the characters.]

  - How does each member of the family react toward the man in uniform? What is the older man looking at? What is the boy on the right doing? What do all of the reactions suggest to you about the story being told?
    
    [Their reactions range from excitement to intrigue to concern. The soldier wears a military uniform and an Iron Cross, which means he may have just arrived home. The father stares at the cross while the young boy is captivated by the military accoutrements.]

  - How do the gazes, gestures, and facial expressions of the figures help tell the story?

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**For Further Discussion:**

After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, explain its historical context and lead a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Why might the artist have chosen to depict this particular moment in the narrative? What do you think might happen next? If you were the artist, what part of the story would you choose to paint?

- Oppenheim’s painting communicates tensions between generations. What details has the artist included to express those tensions? Have you ever experienced tension with members of an older generation? Between religion and secular culture? Describe your experiences and your responses to them.

- Rather than depict a contemporary scene, Oppenheim chose to paint a scene relating to a war that occurred twenty years earlier. Why do you think an artist would tell a story about the recent past? [He might do this to parallel a current issue with a critical distance from it, or to be more subtle, to remind a viewing audience of a relevant past event, etc.]

- If you were asked to create a painting that reflects a topic, issue, or episode from the recent past, what would you choose and why?

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**Research Topics / Content Connections:**

- Modern European Jewish History
- Genre Painting
- Assimilation and Acculturation
RELATED WORKS OF ART

Maurycy Minkowski

*He Cast a Look and Went Mad*

Maurycy Minkowski (Polish, 1881-1930)

*He Cast a Look and Went Mad*, 1910

Oil on canvas 43 x 52 1/2 in. (109.2 x 133.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Rose Mintz, JM 14-75

As in the Oppenheim, here Polish artist Maurycy Minkowski addresses the relation between tradition and modernity. After discussing this work with students, ask them to compare it with Oppenheim’s *Return of the Volunteer*.

Discuss:

- How are these paintings similar in terms of their themes and the conflicts they explore? [Both deal with conflicts between religious and secular life and between old traditions and modern ways.]

- In what way are the artists’ approaches to storytelling different? Which painting do you think conveys the conflicts more subtly? How so?

- What might be some advantages of communicating a story subtly? What might be some drawbacks to this approach? [One advantage is that it might prevent the painting from coming across as didactic, or intending to teach a lesson. Another advantage is that it encourages viewers to engage deeply with the work of art and spend more time studying it. A possible disadvantage is that the painting could fail to communicate its message.]

Max Weber

*The Talmudists*

Max Weber (American, b. Russia, 1881-1961)

*The Talmudists*, 1934

Oil on canvas 50 1/8 x 34 in. (127.3 x 86.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Nathan Miller, JM 51-48

Max Weber’s painting *The Talmudists* depicts a scene of traditional Jewish life. After discussing this work with students, ask them to compare it with Oppenheim’s *Return of the Jewish Volunteer* in the following ways:

Compare the composition of Oppenheim’s *Return of the Volunteer* with that of *The Talmudists* by Max Weber. Compare the placement of the figures within each work. What is the focal point of each composition? Compare how the two artists represent three-dimensional space.

[The focus of Weber’s painting is in the center, where the viewer’s eyes rest on the two men looking at the orange book with its cover toward us. The artist uses a pyramidal composition. In the Oppenheim painting, the off-center focus]
creates a certain amount of drama. Weber uses the conceit that the area of the picture plane that is higher up connotes a space that is farther away. He tilts the plane of the ground and table to let us see all the characters. Oppenheim’s construction of space resembles a stage set in that we see most of the characters spread out across the scene in a close-up view.

Compare Oppenheim’s application of paint—his brushwork—with Weber’s.

[Oppenheim’s is smooth and detailed. The individual brushstrokes are not evident in most of the composition; Weber’s brushstrokes are looser, more gestural and textural. These distinctions are best observed when standing in front of the paintings and may not be as easily discernable from reproductions.]
Maurycy Minkowski

*He Cast a Look and Went Mad*

Maurycy Minkowski (Polish, 1881-1930)
*He Cast a Look and Went Mad*, 1910
Oil on canvas 43 x 52 1/2 in. (109.2 x 133.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Rose Mintz, JM 14-75
About the Work

The narrative underpinnings of *He Cast a Look and Went Mad* by Maurycy Minkowski are rooted in a Talmudic parable. However, the artist has recast the parable in a contemporary context.

The Talmud is a collection of discourses (ca. 3rd-6th centuries CE) on the Mishnah by the rabbis of Israel and Babylonia. The Mishnah is the earliest written compilation of rabbinic laws that constitute the Oral Law. The Mishnah forms the basis for all subsequent Jewish legal commentaries and codes.

The title of Minkowski’s painting (which is inscribed in Hebrew on its ornate frame) refers to a Talmudic parable about four 2nd-century sages who entered a “Garden.” These men were named Ben Azzai, Elisha ben Auyah, Ben Zoma, and Akiva. The “Garden” is understood as either Paradise or the realm of mystical knowledge. The parable speaks to the dilemma of choosing between faith and secularism. Ben Azzai is said to have “cast a glance and died.” His death is considered saintly. Ben Zoma “cast a look and went mad” (or “was hurt”). By “mad,” it is understood that he was no longer able to study rabbinical texts. Elisha ben Auyah fell under the influence of secular thought and left the Jewish faith as a result. Only Rabbi Akiva emerged unharmed.

Minkowski uses the Talmudic tale as an allegory for the confrontation between tradition and modernity in his own time. The late 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah, in Europe. This movement encouraged intellectual and social interaction with non-Jews while it challenged the observance of traditional Jewish rituals and customs.

Minkowski’s painting depicts twelve figures in a yeshiva. A scholar, perhaps a rabbi, appears to be reading aloud from a text at the back left of the composition. The other characters variously listen or seem caught up in their own thoughts.

The four central figures are contemporary analogues of the four Talmudic sages, reimagined in this early 20th-century yeshiva setting. They, too, have been tempted by the offerings of the “Garden,” but their “Garden” is the world of modern secular thought. The influence of the Haskalah is evident from the clean-shaven faces of some of the students. The central figure—the “Ben Zoma” character—gazes out at the viewer. He has been affected by his experience of the Haskalah. Like Ben Zoma, he cannot fully embrace the new, nor can he return to the life he knew before. He seems stuck, uncertain.

This figure may represent the artist himself. Minkowski was a product of the Enlightenment, and his painting simultaneously reflects the influence of secularism and a preoccupation with Jewish scholarly tradition.

The body language, facial expressions, and gazes of the characters seem to hint at underlying spiritual and psychological struggles—or reactions thereto—suggested by the parallel Minkowski has drawn to the Talmudic parable.

Visual Analysis

*He Cast a Look and Went Mad* is set in an interior space. The details in the background space are blurred, but Hebrew texts are visible on the back walls. Minkowski has compressed this background. The twelve characters in this painting all inhabit the middle-ground or foreground of the painting. On the left, farther away in space than any of the other figures, a rabbi or scholar at a podium gestures with his hand as he expounds a passage from the open book in front of him. The rabbi has a stern brow line and facial expression. The rest of the figures in the painting are arranged in clusters.

Seated below the rabbi are three older men, with long beards and faces wrinkled and worn with age. A cluster of younger men, two of whom are clean-shaven, are on the right side of the painting. There is also the group of four characters standing in the center of the composition.

Within this group in the center is a man with blue eyes who stands in front of the others. This figure is the focal point of the painting. The viewer’s eyes are drawn to him because his face is markedly paler than everyone else’s. Indeed, this is the most highlighted part of the entire composition. In addition, the blue-eyed man is the only figure who engages the viewer—he stares out of the picture plane. His cool, blue eyes also stand out in contrast with the warm, tonal, and neutral colors in the rest of the painting. (Even the whites in this painting are warm whites.) Additionally, this man’s face appears at the apex of a triangle formed by the men seated on either side of him, drawing further attention to him. In spite of the figures’ physical proximity within the space of the picture, there is also a sense of isolation among them, as each seems to be lost in his own world of thought.

Minkowski has rendered the characters with highly individualized gazes and facial expressions, suggesting an array of emotions.

Minkowski’s handling of the paint and his color palette result in some surprising passages. The faces are quite refined in terms of brushwork and level of finish, but many details have been filled in more schematically, such as the rabbi’s gesturing hand. Overall, the colors are muted, but there are dabs of bright teal on the bearded man at the left.

Source:

Resources


Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- Describe the setting. Which details help identify where this scene is taking place?
- How has the artist rendered the space? [Most of the figures are cramped into the foreground, flattening the space and giving it a somewhat claustrophobic quality.]
- What is the focal point of the composition? How does the artist lead your eyes toward the central figure? [The central figure’s face is highlighted. Several of the other figures look toward him. The angular shape of the podium also points toward him. His face appears at the apex of a triangle formed by the men seated on either side of him. In addition, he looks out of the picture plane to engage the viewer.]
- Describe this main character in greater detail. Think about his posture, body language, facial expression, and gaze. What do you think he could be feeling?
- How do the gestures and facial expressions of the other figures help tell a story?
- What is the mood of the painting?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes. Explain the title of the painting and tell students the parable of the four sages.

- How does knowing about the painting’s connection to this Talmudic parable and its historical context alter your reaction to the characters, setting, and scene depicted by the artist?
RELATED WORKS OF ART

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim

The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation...

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800-1882)
The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs (Die Heimkehr des Freiwilligen aus den Befreiungskriegen zu den nach alter Sitte lebenden Seinen), 1833-34, Oil on canvas 34 x 37 in. (86.4 x 94 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Richard and Beatrice Levy, 1984-61

Like Maurycy Minkowski, German artist Moritz Daniel Oppenheim is interested in the relation between tradition and modernity. After discussing this painting with students, ask them to compare it with Minkowski’s He Cast a Look and Went Mad.

Discuss:

• How are these paintings similar in terms of their themes and conflicts? [Both deal with conflicts between religious and secular life and between old traditions and modern ways.]

• How are the artists’ approaches to storytelling similar or different? What other similarities or differences do you notice?

Max Weber

The Talmudists

Max Weber (American, b. Russia, 1881-1961)
The Talmudists, 1934
Oil on canvas 50 1/8 x 34 in. (127.3 x 86.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Nathan Miller, JM 51-48

Weber’s The Talmudists is based on a scene he witnessed in a synagogue on New York’s Lower East Side. Have students compare Weber’s painting with He Cast a Look and Went Mad by Maurycy Minkowski.

Discuss:

• How are the two paintings similar in terms of their content? How are they different?

• How are the two paintings different formally, in other words, in terms of the artists’ use of color, composition, and brushstroke? [Weber uses more color than Minkowski does. Minkowski’s palette is more tonal. Weber’s application of paint is much more painterly (each individual brushstroke is visible) and the brushstrokes are more animated. Weber’s application of paint is textural and sometimes very thick. The compositions are quite different, but they both include groups of clustered figures.]
Ken Aptekar

*I Hate the Name Kenneth*

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) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Barbara S. Horowitz, Howard E. Rachofsky, Ruth M. and Stephen Durschlag, Marcia May, J.W. Heller Foundation, Michael L. Rosenberg, Helga and Samuel Feldman, Caroline B. Michahelles and Robert G. Pollock gifts, and Fine Arts Acquisitions Committe, 1997-26a-h
About the Work

In this work, Ken Aptekar juxtaposes text and images to explore aspects of his identity, as well as the identities of his family members.

I Hate the Name Kenneth is comprised of four painted portraits overlaid with thick panes of glass. The portraits are based on works by the Austro-Hungarian Jewish artist Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921).

Kaufmann began making the portraits in the 1890s, when he traveled to towns throughout Eastern Europe in search of traditional Jewish life. Aptekar appropriated, or borrowed, these images but transformed them in a number of ways. While the Kaufmann portraits are rendered in color, Aptekar’s are in black, white, and grey. In addition, Aptekar includes fragments of trompe l’oeil (“fool the eye”) frames, crops the images, and adds areas of blank white space within his compositions.

Aptekar says he selected these four Kaufmann portraits because they reminded him of his family members, though not necessarily in terms of physical appearance.

Sandblasted onto the glass panes is a text Aptekar wrote about his two grandfathers, his parents, and himself. He offers narrative, biographical fragments that provide brief but poignant verbal portraits of each grandfather. He also hints at some aspects of his identity and that of his parents. The reader learns that both grandfathers were named Abraham and both immigrated to the United States. The brief 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. As the text continues, the viewer begins to understand why Aptekar might dislike the American name his parents gave him.

Aptekar has commented 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 is critical of his own and others’ choice to pursue this route and is more supportive of the other grandfather Abraham’s decision not to do this.

There is another connection between the appropriated portraits and Aptekar’s text: Kaufmann sold his portraits to Viennese Jews who were both anxious to assimilate and concerned about losing their ties to Judaism.

In commenting on his own work, Aptekar says:

“When I work on my paintings, people often ask me, do I arrive at the text first and then go looking for images? Do I see an image and then go looking for text? The answer is, yes, both. And sometimes I’ll start with one text, find an image, and then change the text. Sometimes I’ll write a text, go look for an image, and change the image. There’s no formula for how I arrive at what I do....”

In the case of I Hate the Name Kenneth, I wrote the text knowing about the work of Isidor Kaufmann, because I had already done quite a bit of research about him.... I wrote the text and then I searched through his paintings and located images that essentially reminded me of the characters in my family that I was writing about. Even though they didn’t really look like them per se, there was a kind of quality about them that suggested those people in my history....

I think of my use of paintings from the past as a Talmudic maneuver. By that I mean that much in the way that the Talmud is a reinterpretation, a continuing, ongoing reinterpretation of biblical texts, my paintings, I feel, are a reinterpretation of art historical texts, paintings from the past. I feel that my work is in a sense a commentary on those paintings in the past in an effort to make them come alive in the present, become more relevant to us as contemporary viewers....

Sources:

Visual Analysis

I Hate the Name Kenneth comprises eight glass panes overlaid and bolted to eight painted panels. The panels and panes are arranged in a two-by-four-foot horizontal grid.

The panels are painted with four individual portraits. Two panels, arranged vertically, are dedicated to each portrait, with the portraits arranged side-by-side.

Each portrait has a specific relationship to the two panels it occupies. On some, Aptekar has painted in the frames of the Kaufmann portraits. He has even painted their shadows. Some are tightly cropped. Others are shifted within the space of the panels so there is blank white space above or below the portrait.

While the paintings are rendered as grey grisailles (a grisaille is a monotone painting or drawing), the artist has used different types of grey, some warm, some cool. From left to right, the portraits are in cool greys, warm greys, cool greys, and warm greys or, more specifically, blue grey, brown/taupe grey, green grey, and rose grey. Aptekar uses a gestural application of paint in the background space of each portrait, which in itself modernizes the Kaufmann portraits. The brushwork in the figures is less gestural but still more painterly than Kaufmann’s paintings.

Aptekar’s text is sandblasted onto the glass panes. Each new paragraph is laid out over the subsequent portrait. Each paragraph begins with a name or personal pronoun (Abraham,
Abraham, Kenneth, Il. The content of the text resonates with the imagery below it: the text about Grandpa Al who died an old man is over a picture of an elderly gentleman; the text about Grandpa Abe who died unexpectedly much earlier is over a picture of a middle-aged man; the texts about Kenneth and his boyhood are over images of young boys.

There are also formal connections between the sandblasted panes and the painted images. Three of the sandblasted lines of text line up exactly with the painted frames Aptekar has painted on the panels underneath. Also, the trompe l’oeil shadows Aptekar painted riff off the actual shadows cast by the text/letters onto the panels beneath, as well as with the actual shadow cast on the gallery wall by the whole piece. The wood panels are quite thick and have depth.

Source:

Resources


Jewish Museum Podcast

Ken Aptekar’s Website
http://www.kenaptekar.net

Discuss:
Describe the different characters mentioned in this verbal narrative.

• Who is telling the story?
  (Encourage your students to consider the use of third-person, first-person, and passive voice. Does the use of these different voices change the tone of different passages? If so, how?)

• Does anything about the story surprise you?

• Have students examine the images in relation to the text:

• Describe the figures in this work of art. When do you think they have lived? How can you tell?

• What are some connections between the images and the text? How do the images and text work in tandem to develop the narrative? What does including white space in the
painting and cropping the images in different ways add to the work compositionally? How does it relate to the text? [The placement of the portraits and white space create a varied rhythm as you look at and read the work.]

• The images Aptekar appropriated were originally in color. Why do you think the artist chose to paint them in greyscale?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students an opportunity to examine this work of art, 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? If so, how did it feel? What decision did you ultimately make? Were you happy with your decision?

• Aptekar considers his use of these paintings “Talmudic” (refer to the quotation in the About the Work section). What connections do you see between his work and the Talmud’s function?

Read the following quotation to your students:

Is my work Jewish because I insist on combining text—the Word—with images? Is it Jewish because in my heart I think images can mislead, words you can trust more? Is it the importance I attach to interpretation, or my sometimes insufferable judgmentalism? Is it my mistrust of authority, seen here as Old Master painting, gentile, and male? Or my interest in a physical sense of the body as pleasurable, and as ethnic sign? Or is it simply the question I ask? (Ken Aptekar, 1996, The Jewish Museum, New York, Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey, February 3, 1999–present)

• If it is relevant to your current studies, ask students to break into small groups and consider Aptekar’s artwork in light of the Jewish tradition of questioning.

Research Topics / Content Connections:

• Assimilation and Acculturation
• American Jewish History
• Image and Text

RELATED WORK OF ART

R. B. Kitaj
Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew’s Door)

R. B. Kitaj (American, 1932–2007)
Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew’s Door), 1997–2000
Oil and charcoal on canvas 35 15/16 x 47 15/16 in. (91.3 x 121.8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial and S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation Funds, 2000-71

Eclipse of God by R. B. Kitaj is based on a detail of a 15th-century painting by the Italian artist Paolo Uccello. Like Aptekar’s appropriations of Isidor Kaufmann’s paintings, Kitaj’s work represents an attempt to place an earlier work in a contemporary context. After examining Kitaj’s work with students, have them compare it with Aptekar’s I Hate the Name Kenneth.

Discuss:

• How has each artist reworked their source imagery?
• Why might an artist choose to appropriate an earlier work in this way?
• Can you think of a visual artist, musician, playwright, choreographer, or author working today who has appropriated or borrowed material from another artist and incorporated it into her/his own work?
• What is your personal opinion about appropriation as a creative strategy? Have you ever made use of appropriation in your own creative work?
Ben Shahn

New York

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 *New York* includes a young boy in swimming trunks, a floating fish, a scale, a traditionally dressed Hasidic fish peddler, and the structural skeletons of several apartment buildings. These are all based on two photographs the artist took on New York’s Lower East Side during the 1930s. The collage-like composition suggests elements of the artist’s own past, specifically his experience of New York City.

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

In 1967, the artist 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.”

Source:

Visual Analysis

New York has a dreamlike composition. Images are placed within the space in a collage-like fashion, with unexpected juxtapositions. Objects exist outside the conventions of relative scale and are unbounded by real-life conditions like gravity.

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

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

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

Shahn’s colors throughout are almost chalky or milky looking, suggesting that he mixed white into most colors to create tints of those colors. The sky and the ground are filled in with mottled color. Some forms are translucent.

Source:

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- What are some of the images you see in this painting? Describe the way in which Shahn has combined these images.
- Does anything surprise you about the composition? Why might an artist combine elements in the way that Shahn has? [Shahn’s imagery, composition, and flattened forms suggest a collage of memories. Also note the distorted scale: figures
and objects are out of proportion with regard to one another.]

- How does Shahn use line, color, and shape to connect the different parts of the painting? What shapes and patterns are repeated?
  [The fish and the boy mirror each other; the large forms of the man and the scale similarly balance each other. The horizontal lines of the street, the fish, and the boy help tie the image together, as do the circles of the scale and the man’s hat. These elements give the image coherence despite the collage-like combination of disparate elements.]

- The tempera paints Shahn used to paint this picture allowed him to achieve a translucent effect in certain areas. How does this contribute to the effect of the painting? [It adds to the dreamlike quality of the images.]

For Further Discussion:

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

- What aspects of the neighborhood does Shahn include in this painting? What would you include in a picture of your neighborhood?

- In what ways can the composition be considered a visual metaphor for memory? [The pastiche or collage-like quality of the composition may be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the piecemeal, fragmentary, fleeting qualities of memories.]

Discuss this quotation by the artist Ben Shahn:

“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.”

- What do you think this statement means? How does it relate to the painting?

Related Work of Art

Rebecca Lepkoff

East Broadway and Canal Street

Rebecca Lepkoff (American, b. 1916)

East Broadway and Canal Street, 1948

Gelatin silver print 8 5/8 x 7 3/8 in. (21.9 x 18.7 cm)

The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Photography Acquisitions Committee Fund, 1998-

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?
Maurycy Minkowski

*After the Pogrom*

Maurycy 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
About the Work

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

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

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

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

As in many of his works, the characters in After the Pogrom reflect a sense of psychological isolation and dislocation. Although they are all suffering the same fate, the characters in the painting do not interact with each other. Each seems to be immersed in his or her own thoughts and emotions. Historian Richard Cohen has noted that in Minkowski’s paintings, “often the facial expressions of these wandering Jews do not express anger or struggle but a gloominess that is tempered with a resignation to the victimization” (Cohen, Jewish Icons, p. 245).

Visual Analysis

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

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

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

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

Sources:


Resources


CLOSE LOOKING AND DISCUSSION

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:
Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

• What do you notice in this painting? Describe the different characters that draw your attention.

• How do the gestures and facial expressions of the figures help tell a story? What mood do they lend to the work? What other elements reinforce this mood?
  [The tiny bit of grey sky adds to the sense of gloom.]

• Describe the setting.

• How do your eyes travel around when you are looking at this painting? What choices/strategies has the artist employed to encourage your eyes to move around the pictorial space in this way?
  [The absence of a distinct focal point keeps the viewer’s eyes wandering. The figures look in different directions, which encourages the viewer to look around the space as well. Also, the viewer’s eyes bounce from pattern to pattern within the foreground space.]

• What do you notice about the artist’s brushstrokes? Where does he use broad, loose brushstrokes? Where does he use finer strokes?
  [Minkowski paints the faces in detail, with fine brushstrokes; the landscape is suggested more loosely. This draws attention to the figures and their expressions.]

For Further Discussion:
After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, explain the context of the work. Lead students in a discussion of related topics and themes:

• What do you think could have happened immediately before this scene? What could happen next?

• Why do you think Minkowski painted this particular moment in the story?

• Minkowski’s painting is based on events he witnessed in the aftermath of an Eastern European pogrom. How would a documentary photograph of the same event be different from Minkowski’s depiction? Why would they be different?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

• Modern European Jewish History
• Immigration
• Anti-Semitism
Malcah Zeldis

Noah’s Ark

Malcah Zeldis (American, b. 1931)

Noah’s Ark, 1978

Oil on canvas 22 x 28 in. (55.9 x 71.1 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Jay Johnson, 1980-10 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
About the Work

Malcah Zeldis is a self-taught artist. She has acknowledged influences ranging from Flemish masters to Haitian folk art. For subject matter, she draws heavily from memory and Jewish tradition.

Zeldis’s painting Noah’s Ark depicts the conclusion of the biblical flood story. According to the biblical text, G-d decides to destroy humanity because the people have become wicked. He instructs Noah, the one worthy person remaining, to build an ark that will house his family and two of every type of creature. G-d then sends a mighty flood to wipe out everything else. After floating for six months, the ark comes to rest on a mountaintop. The story continues, as told in Genesis, and as reimagined in Zeldis’s painting:

And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. And he sent forth a raven, and it went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. And he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground. But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him to the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth; and he put forth his hand, and took her, and brought her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came in to him at eventide; and lo in her mouth an olive-leaf freshly plucked; so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; and she returned not again unto him any more. (Genesis, Chapter 8, verses 6–12)

After leaving the ark, Noah makes an offering to G-d. G-d establishes a covenant with Noah—symbolized by the rainbow—and promises never again to destroy humanity. And G-d said:

“This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, that I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” (Genesis, Chapter 9, verses 12–17)

Visual Analysis

Zeldis’s representation of the flood story is highly stylized. The central feature of the work—the ark—almost overflows with people and animals, painted in intense, bright colors. The roiling sea is rendered with twisting tendrils of water, and its curved forms are echoed in the bumps of the hills in the landscape and the arc of the rainbow in the background. The bottom contour of the ark repeats this curved form upside down. The warm, bright red of the ark contrasts with the cool blue of the sea and the greens of the landscape. The contour of the shoreline—a strong, angular zigzag—balances the curved forms found elsewhere in the image.

Most of the forms in the painting are rendered flatly. Zeldis outlines many of them, adding to their flatness. In spite of the flatness of the individual figures, animals, and objects, Zeldis creates a sense of perspective or depth within the picture by making things smaller when they are supposed to be farther away.

Zeldis’s palette is full of primary and secondary colors—or tints of them (white added to them).

The presence of both the sun and moon in the sky in the background suggests that the narrative is conflating episodes from different moments in time.

Resources


CLOSE LOOKING AND DISCUSSION

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

- Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:
  - What do you notice in this painting? What figures or objects can you identify? What details stand out?
  - What shapes do you see? What shapes are repeated?
  - Where is your eye drawn? How does the artist draw your attention there?
  - What colors do you see in the painting?
  - What do you think might be happening in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

For Further Discussion:

- After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes.
  - Compare the story as depicted in Zeldis’s painting with the story as told in the Book of Genesis. What are the differences? In what ways does the artist insert her own interpretations? What choices does she make?
  - Which parts of the Noah story are being told here? Why might an artist depict several parts of a story at once?
  - How would you depict this story? What part of the story would you show and why?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Biblical Stories/Interpreting Texts
- Religious Folk Art
Max Weber

_The Talmudists_

Max Weber (American, b. Russia, 1881-1961)

_The Talmudists, 1934_

Oil on canvas 50 1/8 x 34 in. (127.3 x 86.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Nathan Miller, JM 51-48
Max Weber, who emigrated from Russia at the age of ten, was at the forefront of American modernism in the early decades of the 20th century. His early works focus mainly on the formal elements of color, line, and shape and are highly abstracted. Later, he starts to move away from abstraction, increasingly incorporating figures into his images. Around 1917, Weber began to explore spiritual and religious themes. By the 1920s and ’30s, his interest had shifted decidedly to more representational scenes, especially those showing Jewish men engaged in prayer and study.

In The Talmudists, three pairs of men and one trio are shown immersed in the study of Talmudic texts. The Talmud is a collection of discussions of the Mishnah by the rabbis of Israel and Babylonia from the first centuries of the Common Era. Paired learning—or hevruto—is the traditional manner of Talmud study. In this scene, some of the groups engage quietly with the text; others gesticulate emphatically in their explication of the passages. Each group seems oblivious to the others. The setting appears to be a basement room (note the stairs in the right background and the absence of windows) that serves as a study hall and synagogue (evidenced by the Torah ark against the rear wall).

Weber was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home and retained ties to his Jewish heritage throughout his life, but he did not live as an observant Jew. This painting and many others by the artist are nostalgic recollections of his past and invocations of a traditional life that was no longer the mainstream of American Jewry. In 1935, Weber explained his reasons for painting The Talmudists:

“I was prompted to paint this picture after a pilgrimage to one of the oldest synagogues of New York’s East Side. I find a living spiritual beauty emanates from, and hovers over and about a group of Jewish patriarchal types when they congregate in search of wisdom in the teaching of the great Talmudists of the past.... To witness a group of such elders bent on and intent upon nothing but the eternal quest and interpretation of the ethical, significant, and religious content of the great Jewish legacy—the Torah—is for me an experience never to be forgotten.”

Sources:


Visual Analysis

There are nine characters in The Talmudists, all engaged in the study of the Talmud.

The four characters reading silently from their books give the foreground a calm quality. The middle-ground is energized by the characters engaged in lively discussion and gesturing in an exaggerated manner. The background returns to calm, with two figures facing away from the viewer. Rooms can be seen in the far background, beyond two archways. On the right is a staircase leading upward. On the left is a form that appears to be an ark for a Torah.

Two of the men in the middle-ground are wide-eyed while the other seven characters cast their gazes downward at the text.

The quietly focused figures in the foreground create an almost-perfect symmetry, with the study partners on the right and left appearing almost as mirror images of each other. This symmetry lends the composition a sense of balance. The focal point lies within this group of figures—the viewer’s eyes rest on the orange book, with its cover facing outward at the center of the canvas.

The composition is tightly cropped on both sides—there is barely any space between the chairs and the archways and the edges of the canvas.

The empty space at the end of the table (the nearest part of the pictorial space) almost invites the viewer (and a partner) to pull up a chair and join in the study session.

Weber’s technique vies with his subject matter for the viewer’s attention. He has employed a very textural application of the oil paint. Sometimes he uses paint so sparingly that the weave of the canvas can be seen through it. Sometimes, the paint is quite thick. His brushstrokes are often sketchy, loose, gestural, and expressive. Some areas of the canvas are impastoed—they have raised accumulations of paint.

Weber encourages the viewer’s eyes to move around the canvas by repeating circular and ovular forms throughout (the doorways, the yarmulkes, the hats, the chair back). The blurry, black contours that bound many of the figures and forms serve to unite the composition.

Overall, the work may seem dark and shadowy, but there are accents of teal, orange, burnt umbers, blues, reds, and plums. Weber creates a visual balance by making these colors reappear in various parts of the canvas.

In terms of its style, The Talmudists reveals Weber’s admiration of the Greek painter El Greco (1541–1614). Weber appropriates the gestures of El Greco’s ecstatic Christian figures and saints for the excited gesticulation of the Jewish scholars. The rendering of space, especially the tilted plane of the table, is reminiscent of a pictorial device used by the 19th-century painters.
French artist Paul Cézanne. By tilting the table top, Weber simultaneously reveals the open books and compresses the pictorial space. He further compresses the space by placing his figures in close proximity to one another, filling the room with their forms and gestures. The intimate grouping of the figures underscores the scholars’ mutual devotion to the study of Jewish text and their shared heritage.

Sources:


Resources


RELATED WORKS OF ART
Maurycy Minkowski
He Cast a Look and Went Mad

Maurycy Minkowski (Polish, 1881–1930)
He Cast a Look and Went Mad, 1910
Oil on canvas 43 x 52 1/2 in. (109.2 x 133.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Rose Mintz, JM 14–75
On view

Like Weber’s The Talmudists, this work by the Polish artist Maurycy Minkowski shows a group of men in a traditional Jewish house of study. It also reflects a tension between tradition and modernity. Learn more about Minkowski’s work.

Have students compare Minkowski’s painting with The Talmudists by Max Weber. Discuss:

• In what way is the content of the two paintings similar? How is it different?

• Compare the artists’ use of color, composition, and brushstroke. In what ways is their use of formal qualities different?
  [Weber uses more color than Minkowski does. Minkowski’s palette is more tonal. Weber’s application of paint is much more painterly (each individual brushstroke is visible), and the brushstrokes are more animated. Weber’s application of paint is textural and sometimes very thick. Although the compositions are quite different, they both include groups of clustered figures.]
Moritz Daniel Oppenheim

*The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation*

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800-1882)

*The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs (Die Heimkehr des Freiwilligen aus den Befreiungskriegen zu den nach alter Sitte lebenden Seinen),* 1833-34, Oil on canvas 34 x 37 in. (86.4 x 94 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Richard and Beatrice Levy, 984-61

On view

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim’s painting *The Return of the Volunteer* also depicts a scene of traditional Jewish life, but the composition and style of the painting is markedly different from Weber’s. After discussing Oppenheim’s painting with students, ask them to compare it with Weber’s. Discuss:

- Compare the composition of Oppenheim’s *Return of the Volunteer* with that of *The Talmudists* by Max Weber. What is the focal point of Weber’s painting? What is the focus of Oppenheim’s work? What is the effect of these differences? [The focal point of Weber’s painting is in the center of the composition. Much of the composition is symmetrical, which lends visual balance. The focal point of Oppenheim’s painting is at the far left. The lighting adds a dramatic undertone to the painting.]

- Compare Oppenheim’s application of paint with Weber’s. Pay attention to the different kinds of brushstrokes. [Weber uses loose brushstrokes and focuses less on the details of the setting. Oppenheim’s smooth and controlled brushstrokes and attention to detail make the setting more integral to the story.]
R. B. Kitaj

_Eclipse of God_

R. B. Kitaj (American, 1932–2007)

_Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew’s Door), 1997–2000_

Oil and charcoal on canvas 35 15/16 x 47 15/16 in. (91.3 x 121.8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial and S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation Funds, 2000–71
About the Work

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

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

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

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

By appropriating Uccello’s imagery, Kitaj makes a contemporary connection to these historical events. His title, Eclipse of God, refers to a text by the 20th-century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. This reference implies that the image is meant as a commentary about the absence of G-d during historical moments when the Jewish community’s existence was threatened.

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

The neck of the figure in the orange coat with its back toward the viewer bears the word “God.” Incorporating this figure in the foreground of the composition is enigmatic and open to interpretation. The inspiration appears to be the passage from Exodus 33:23, which states that G-d will never show His face and can only be seen from behind.

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

Sources:

The Independent R.B. Kitaj Obituary

Visual Analysis

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

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

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

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

The weapon puncturing the door and the blood spilling under the wall are the only elements that physically connect the two halves of the composition. The directionally opposite movement of each of these forms balances the other. The orange and blue walls and red and green doorways—which are complementary color pairs—create a visual connection and balance between the different parts of the composition.
Kitaj leaves exposed (but primed) canvas in many places. He also lets his charcoal sketches of the architectural elements show through the paint in many places, lending the figures a transparent quality.

**Resources**


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**Close Looking / Visual Analysis:**

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- What is happening in this painting? What visual evidence supports your ideas? What do you think could happen next?

- Imagine yourself in this scene. What sounds would you hear?

- How do the two sides of the painting differ in terms of color, line, shape, and brushstroke? Why do you think Kitaj rendered the two sides so differently? 
  [These visual contrasts may symbolize ideological differences.]

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

- Notice that the artist left some of his pencil marks visible and included areas of blank canvas in the painting. Why do you think he included these elements?

- Kitaj based his painting on a painting by the 15th-century artist Paolo Uccello. Compare the two works. How does Kitaj’s work differ from the Uccello painting?

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**For Further Discussion:**

After giving students an opportunity to examine the painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes. Show your students an image of the earlier painting by Uccello and explain how it is related to the Kitaj painting.

- Why do you think Kitaj chose to interpret Uccello’s painting? What do you think he is trying to say? Does Kitaj’s work alter your view of the Uccello painting? If so, in what way?

- Notice what is written on the neck of the man in orange. How do you interpret that detail?

- Ask your students if knowing that the title of this painting is *Eclipse of God* influences their understanding of the work. If so, in what way(s)? Then let your students know that the title is a reference to a text by the philosopher Martin Buber. Describe the main idea of the text (see About the Work), or select a passage of it for them to read. How does this allusion further influence your understanding of the painting?

- What are some other examples (historic or contemporary; well known or personal) of people, communities, or cultures trying to invert a negative story or reclaim a negative term or label? Why would this be empowering to that individual or group?

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**Research Topics / Content Connections:**

- European Jewish History
- Anti-Semitism
- Renaissance and Contemporary Art
- Prejudice versus Tolerance
RELATED WORK OF ART

Ken Aptekar

_I Hate the Name Kenneth_

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) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Barbara S. Horowitz, Howard E. Rachofsky, Ruth M. and Stephen Durschlag, Marcia May, J.W. Heller Foundation, Michael L. Rosenberg, Helga and Samuel Feldman, Caroline B. Michaelles and Robert G. Pollock gifts, and Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee, 1997-26a-h

On view

For the painting _I Hate the Name Kenneth_, Ken Aptekar appropriates the imagery of several portraits by the 19th-century painter Isidor Kaufmann. Like Kitaj and his reworking of the Uccello painting, Aptekar does not simply copy Kaufmann’s portraits; rather, both artists attempt to make the earlier paintings relevant in a contemporary context. After examining Aptekar’s work with students, have them compare it with Kitaj’s _Eclipse of God_.

Discuss:

- How has each artist reworked the earlier material? Aptekar interprets Kaufmann’s portraits in his own way. How does he do this? How does Kitaj interpret Uccello’s work?

- Why do you think an artist would appropriate an earlier work in this way?
Marc Chagall

*Moses Receives the Ten Commandments, from The Story of the Exodus Suite*

Marc Chagall (French, b. Belorussia, 1887-1985)

*Moses Receives the Ten Commandments, from The Story of the Exodus Suite*, 1966
Lithograph on paper 18 3/8 x 13 1/2 in. (46.6 x 34.3 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York
Gift of Herman and Sietske Turndorf, 1982-231.14 © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris
About the Work

Chagall is known for his work in a variety of media including stained glass, lithography, stage sets, book illustration, and painting. This work is part of a series of twenty-four color lithographs by Marc Chagall that illustrates the biblical story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Chagall's "Story of Exodus" series is based on a set of etchings he created for a 1956 bible.

In the part of the Exodus story depicted here, the Israelites have left Egypt and have arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, where they are preparing to receive the Ten Commandments from G-d. The Book of Exodus records what happens next:

And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and the voice of a horn growing loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet G-d; and they stood at the bottom part of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the voice of the horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and G-d answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:16-20)

Atop the mountain, Moses receives the Ten Commandments and a series of other laws to impart to the people. These laws include directions for building the Tabernacle (the desert sanctuary) and instructions for the Levites, who will perform the religious rituals on behalf of the people.

Moses Receives the Ten Commandments exhibits many elements of Chagall’s signature style and personal symbolism.

Chagall depicts his internal world—the world as he feels it. The result is a work of art that is dreamlike. The figures float in space, often twisting and turning in all directions. The scale of figures does not follow the rules of traditional perspective. Moses, for example, appears larger than any of the other figures in this work, reflecting his primary importance in the narrative, rather than his relative physical location in space. Animals and humans inhabit a common realm.

The colors are rich and expressive. Moses’ face, for example, is half green. The Tablets gleam with the white light of the divine while the Israelites range from yellow to green to brown. Chagall once wrote, “If every life drifts ineluctably toward its end, we must color ours, while it lasts, with our own colors of love and hope.” (The Biblical Message of Marc Chagall, p. 16).

Chagall’s retelling of the Exodus narrative is more associative than linear. Floating above Moses, for example, is a glowing menorah and a figure in purple (who may be Moses’ brother Aaron). These may be references to the laws of the priesthood, which Moses received on Mount Sinai along with the Ten Commandments.

The artist once wrote, “Since childhood the Bible has fascinated me. I have always thought of it as the greatest source of poetry of all time. I have continued to seek out its reflection in life and in art. The Bible is like a musical vibration of nature, and I have tried to communicate that secret” (The Biblical Message of Marc Chagall, p. 15).

Sources:


Jewish Virtual Library

William Bennett Gallery

Visual Analysis

This lithograph shows Moses with the tablets of the Ten Commandments hovering over a crowd of Israelites below. Moses is huge relative to the other figures. Several angels and animals float on the right side of the composition. The sky, with Moses and these other figures within it, takes up two-thirds of the composition, making this portion of the work most prominent.

The composition is bounded by an uneven, irregular rectangular border.

The black background implies that it is nighttime, but not much more can be discerned about the setting. Two figures go right up to the edge along the right side of the composition.

Almost all the figures have curvilinear, arcing arms (as opposed to L-shapes to express bends at the elbow). These same arced lines are echoed by Moses’ legs, the menorah, and the horns. This repetition of forms and lines leads the viewer’s eyes cycling around the artwork, even though they are ultimately drawn back to Moses, the focal point of the picture.

Resources

CLOSE LOOKING AND DISCUSSION

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:
Encourage students to examine this work of art carefully:

- What is happening in this work? Does anything surprise you about the composition? What questions does the picture raise for you?

- What do you notice about the way the artist uses color?

- What is the focus of the scene? How does the artist direct your attention to the focal point? [Moses is in the center of the lithograph and several of the other figures look or gesture toward him. He also appears larger than the other figures, and his bright white color attracts attention.]

- How would you describe the lines used by the artist? [Chagall’s lines are sketchy and quivering.]

For Further Discussion:
After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Compare Chagall’s depiction of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments with the story as told in the Book of Exodus. How has Chagall altered or interpreted the story?

- How would you illustrate the story? What characters or elements of the story would you focus on? Why?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Bible Studies
- Lithography
- Jewish History
- Religion
James Jacques Joseph Tissot

Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses

James Jacques Joseph Tissot (French, 1836–1902)

Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses, c. 1896–1902

Gouache on board 8 5/8 x 10 7/16 in. (22.5 x 26.5 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the heirs of Jacob Schiff, X1952–146
About the Work

This is one of nearly four hundred paintings by James Jacques Joseph Tissot that depicts a story from the Hebrew Bible. Here Tissot has painted an image based on the story of Moses. The first chapter of the Book of Exodus ends with a decree by the Egyptian pharaoh that all male Israelite children be drowned in the Nile River. Chapter 2 continues:

And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bore a son; and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch; and she put the child therein, and laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it. And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter: “Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her: “Go.” And the maiden went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her: “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said: “Because I drew him out of the water.” (Exodus 2:1–10)

This painting shows Moses as a baby in a basket among the bulrushes. On the left stands Pharaoh’s daughter with her handmaids; on the right, Moses’ sister Miriam and his mother Yoheved bow down before the princess.

Tissot based his biblical works on sketches he made of the landscape, archaeology, and people of the Middle East. His travels to Israel (then Palestine) and surrounding areas in 1886 had been prompted by his decision to illustrate the life of Jesus. He wanted to observe the landscape where the biblical narrative originated, research archaeological sites, and study ethnological details in order to produce a historically accurate visual recreation of the world of the Bible. In Jerusalem, he consulted rabbis on aspects of Jewish ritual. In Egypt, he sketched monuments and artifacts.

Tissot made an additional trip to Israel in 1896 to gather material for a series of drawings illustrating the Hebrew Bible. This project occupied much of the artist’s time until his death in 1902. More than half the works in this series were completed posthumously by other artists. After its publication in 1904, the “Hebrew Bible” suite toured the United States for several years.

Tissot produced two large bodies of paintings—nearly four hundred drawings—devoted to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament during the last two decades of his career. These met with enormous public success and were subsequently published.

Sources:

Tate Online

University of Glasgow: The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler

Visual Analysis

In Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses, the statuesque figure in the center faces outward toward the viewer. The other figures face the center of the composition. The women are not individualized but read more as types. This may be due, in part, to the fact that their eyes are not visible; they are closed, hidden by hair, or obscured by shadow. The baby Moses is sleeping at the lower center of the composition.

The scene takes place within a clearing of tall cornflower blue and tan bulrushes. A slight wind is implied by the movement of brush in the foreground and the back right of the painting.

Amid the mostly vertical lines of the plants, a strong diagonal links the main characters—running from the outstretched arm of Pharaoh’s daughter through the prostrate bodies of Moses’ mother and sister.

The hot orange–yellow of the Egyptian sun in the upper-right corner complements and contrasts with the cool blue of the reeds. Individual brushstrokes are visible throughout the composition. The paint ranges from transparent to opaque, depending on the amount of white mixed in the gouache. The contours of the figures and the sun are painted in a light, transparent brown.

Sources:


Resources


CLOSE LOOKING AND DISCUSSION

Close Looking / Visual Analysis:

Encourage students to examine this painting carefully:

- Describe what is happening in this scene.
- Describe the people you see.
- Describe the setting of the scene. What type of place do you think this is? What kind of weather is implied? What time of day?
- How do the gestures of the figures help tell the story?
- How does the title of this painting—*Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses*—help you understand the scene? Which woman do you think is the pharaoh’s daughter? Why? Which one is Moses’ mother?
- What kinds of lines do you see in the painting? Consider both painted lines and implied lines created by the arrangement of figures within the space. How does the artist use these lines to lead your eye around the picture?
- What do you think could happen next in the story?

For Further Discussion:

After giving students an opportunity to examine this painting, lead them in a discussion of related topics and themes:

- Compare the story depicted in Tissot’s painting with the story as told in the Book of Exodus. What differences are there between the verbal account and Tissot’s image of the scene? What kinds of choices did the artist make?
- How would you depict this story? What part of the story would you want to show and why?

Research Topics / Content Connections:

- Bible Studies
- Watercolor
- Jewish History
- Illustration
# Resources and Web Links

## Books


## Websites

- **The National Arts and Education Network**

- **Jewish Virtual Library**
  [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

- **The Jewish Encyclopedia**
  [http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com)
Abstract
An abstract work of art may have its origins in the real world but exaggerates, distorts, rearranges, and/or simplifies those forms. An abstraction may also be completely non-representational.

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

Balance
The way in which lines, shapes, colors, and textures are arranged to produce an overall harmony that can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical.

Brushstroke
The mark left by a paintbrush on the surface of a painting. Brushstrokes can vary widely in thickness, texture, and quality and can play an important role in conveying meaning or emotion in a work.

Challah
The Hebrew word for a type of bread, usually braided and customarily egg-based, traditionally eaten by Jews on the Sabbath and during festivals.

Collage
A technique in which pieces of paper, photographs, or other media are arranged and adhered to a supporting surface, or a work of art created through this technique.

Color
The effect on the eye of different wavelengths of light. There are three properties of color: hue (the name of the color, such as red, yellow, or blue), intensity (the strength or purity of a color), and value (the lightness or darkness of a color).

Complementary colors
These are located directly across from each other on the color wheel, share no common colors, and contrast with one another. The complementary color of a primary color (red, blue, and yellow) is the color produced by mixing the other two primary colors; for example, green is the complementary color of red, orange is the complementary color of blue, and purple is the complementary color of yellow.

Composition
The structure or organization of a work of art, literature, or music.

Contrast
In an artwork, the pairing of two elements that have a significant difference between them, such as bright and dull colors or straight and curvy lines.

Cool colors
Subdued colors, such as blue, green, and violet. Cool colors generally appear to recede in space.

Cubism
An influential artistic style developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques in the early 20th century, Cubism is characterized by geometric shapes that fragment and reassemble forms and depict objects from multiple points of view.

Culture
The arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought expressed in a particular community or by a particular group.

Focal point
The part of a composition that is meant to draw the viewer’s attention.

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

Form
A three-dimensional geometric figure (such as a pyramid, sphere, or cube) or a two-dimensional depiction of a three-dimensional figure.

Formal elements
The basic building blocks used to create a work of art. Formal elements include line, shape, color, and texture.

Gouache
An opaque watercolor paint or a painting created in this medium.

Genre painting
The depiction of subjects and scenes from everyday life. Genre painting became especially popular in the Netherlands during the 17th century.

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

Judenstern
German for “Jewish star.” A hanging lamp with a star-shaped basin for kindling Sabbath and festival lights. Non-Jews ceased using this type of lamp by the 16th century, but its form remained traditional among Jews well into the 19th century.

Kiddush cup
A wine cup over which a special blessing of sanctification (in Hebrew, the kiddush) is recited on the Sabbath and holidays.

Lithography
A printing process developed in the late 18th century in which an oil-based substance is used to draw on a smooth stone or plate. The plate is then wetted and inked. The ink adheres to the oily areas of the surface and is transferred to the paper during printing.

Menorah
Hebrew for “lamp.” The word traditionally refers to the seven-branched candelabrum that was kept continuously lit in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

Midrash(im)
Hebrew for a rabbinic interpretation of a biblical text. Midrashim is the plural form of the word.

Modernism
A movement relating to a variety of artistic styles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that was marked by a deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression.

Monochromatic
Consisting of just one color.

Narrative art
Art that depicts elements of a story.

Naturalistic
Used to describe art that represents subjects as they appear in the natural world—neither idealizing nor abstracting them.

Palette
A slab of metal, wood, or other material on which an artist mixes paint; also, the range of colors used by a particular artist or in a particular work or art.

Perspective
Techniques used by artists to create the illusion of three dimensions on two-dimensional surfaces such as canvas or paper.

Picture plane
In reference to perspective, the flat level occupied by the surface of the painting, similar to an imaginary plate of glass behind which pictorial elements are arranged in illusionary space.

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.

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

Primary colors
These colors are red, yellow, and blue, the three pigment colors that cannot be made by mixing any other colors.

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

Representational
Art that depicts aspects of reality in a recognizable way, in contrast to abstract or non-representational art.

Rhythm
A visual beat or tempo created by a repetition of the elements of art (color, line, etc.) to produce the look and feel of movement.

Secondary colors
These colors are orange, green, and purple, each of which is created by mixing two primary colors together. Mixing red and yellow produces orange; yellow and blue, green; and red and blue, purple.

Shape
A two-dimensional space enclosed or defined by elements such as line, color, or texture. Shapes can be geometric (triangles, circles, and squares, etc.) or free-form.

Shtetl
A Yiddish word that describes a small Eastern European village with a large Jewish population. The shtetl was home to the majority of Eastern Europe’s Jews up until the early 20th century.

Space
The area in a work of art defined by shapes and forms. Positive space refers to an area that contains shapes or forms; negative space is the empty area around or between the shapes and forms.

Stylized
Using shapes, forms, colors, or textures to create an image in a preset style or manner.

Symbol
An image that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.

Symmetry
Correspondence in size, shape, and relative position of parts on opposite sides of a dividing line or around a center or axis.

Talmud
A collection of commentaries and discussion on the Mishnah (the code of Jewish law written about 200 CE) by the rabbis of Palestine and Babylonia between the 3rd and 6th centuries of the Common Era.

Tempera
A type of paint that uses pigments in a water-soluble emulsion, such as water and egg yolk, or an oil-in-water emulsion such as oil and egg.
**Texture**
The feel of a surface, namely, its smoothness, roughness, softness, etc. Textures may be actual or simulated.

**Theme**
An idea or point of view embodied and expanded upon in a work of art.

**Torah**
Also known as the Five Books of Moses, the Chumash, or the Pentateuch, Torah is a Hebrew word that refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The word is also used to describe the handwritten scroll containing the Hebrew text of those books. All aspects of traditional Jewish life are based on the Torah and on rabbinic interpretations.

**Warm colors**
Vibrant colors such as red, yellow, and orange. Warm colors generally appear to advance toward the viewer.
Themes

**Biblical Narratives**

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of biblical narratives.

Malcah Zeldis (American, b. 1931)
*Noah's Ark*, 1978
Oil on canvas 22 x 28 in. (55.9 x 71.1 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Jay Johnson, 1980-10 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Marc Chagall (French, b. Belorussia, 1887-1985)
*Moses Receives the Ten Commandments, from The Story of the Exodus Suite*, 1966
Lithograph on paper 18 3/8 x 13 1/2 in. (46.6 x 34.3 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Herman and Sietske Turndorf, 1982-231.14 © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

James Jacques Joseph Tissot (French, 1836-1902)
*Pharaoh's Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses*, c. 1896-1902
Gouache on board 8 5/8 x 10 7/16 in. (22.5 x 26.5 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of the heirs of Jacob Schiff, X1952-146

Maurycy 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

R. B. Kitaj (American, 1932-2007)
*Eclipse of God (After the Uccello Panel Called Breaking Down the Jew's Door)*, 1997-2000
Oil and charcoal on canvas 35 15/16 x 47 15/16 in. (91.3 x 121.8 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Oscar and Regina Gruss Memorial and S. H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation Funds, 2000-71

**Memory and Personal Narratives**

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of memory and personal narratives.

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) The Jewish Museum, New York Purchase: Barbara S. Horowitz, Howard E. Rachofsky, Ruth M. and Stephen Derschlag, Marcia May, J.W. Heller Foundation, Michael L. Rosenberg, Helga and Samuel Feldman, Caroline B. Michahelles and Robert G. Pollock gifts, and Fine Arts Acquisitions Committee, 1997-26a-h

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

Max Weber (American, b. Russia, 1881-1961)
*The Talmudists*, 1934
Oil on canvas 50 1/8 x 34 in. (127.3 x 86.4 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Nathan Miller, JM 51-48

**Historical Narratives**

Explore how these works of art relate to the theme of historical narratives.

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800-1882)
*The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs (Die Heimkehr des Freiwilligen aus den Befreiungskriegen zu den nach alter Sitte lebenden Seinen)*, 1833-34
Oil on canvas 34 x 37 in. (86.4 x 94 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Richard and Beatrice Levy, 1984-61

Maurycy Minkowski (Polish, 1881-1930)
*He Cast a Look and Went Mad*, 1910
Oil on canvas 43 x 52 1/2 in. (109.2 x 134.3 cm) The Jewish Museum, New York Gift of Mrs. Rose Mintz, JM 14-75
Activities

Dialogue and Role-Playing

**Aim:** To write a dialogue inspired by a work of art and then act it out.

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

**Themes:** Historical Narratives, Biblical Narratives, Narrative Art

**Artworks:** Oppenheim: *The Return of the Volunteer*, 1833-34; Tissot: *Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses*, c. 1896-1902

**Discipline:** Theater, Jewish Studies

**Materials:** pencil, paper

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss *The Return of the Volunteer* by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim and/or *Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of Moses* by James Jacques Joseph Tissot.

2. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to imagine what the characters in the painting could be saying to each other in the scene depicted.

3. Ask students to imagine that the painting shows a scene in a play and then have them write dialogue for the characters in that scene. Remind them to take into account the poses, gestures, and expressions of the characters as depicted in the painting and also to think about the arc of the story (what happens before and after the scene).

4. Ask students to present their scenes to the rest of the class. (Groups may need to recruit additional actors for the staging.)

5. Alternatively, you might want to begin with an improvisational role-playing. Have students assume the poses of the figures in the painting and then improvise a scene.

**What’s Next?**

**Aim:** To imagine what might happen next in a story suggested by a painting.

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

**Themes:** Narrative Art, Historical Narratives

**Artworks:** Oppenheim: *The Return of the Volunteer*, 1833-34; Minkowski: *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910

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

**Materials:** paper, pencil

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss *The Return of the Volunteer* by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim and/or *After the Pogrom* by Maurycey Minkowski.

2. Ask students to describe, in writing, what the next scene in the story of the painting could be. What might the figures in the painting do or say next? Where might they go? How might they respond to what has happened so far?

3. Alternatively, or in addition, have students use paints, pastels, markers, or watercolors to illustrate a possible next scene.

4. Have students share their work with the class and discuss the different directions the story could go. What details in the paintings lead you to think that the story might take that direction?

5. As an extension or alternative to this activity, have students write and/or draw a scene that projects much farther into the trajectory of the suggested story.
Monologue

**Aim:** To write an internal monologue for a character in a work of art.

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

**Themes:** Historical Narratives, Narrative Art

**Artworks:** Minkowski: *He Cast a Look and Went Mad*, 1910; Oppenheim: *The Return of the Volunteer*, 1833-34; Minkowski: *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910

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

**Materials:** paper, pencil

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss Maury Anzsky Minkowski’s *After the Pogrom* or *He Cast a Look and Went Mad* and Mortiz Daniel Oppenheim’s *The Return of the Volunteer*.

2. Ask each student to choose a figure in the painting and think about what the character could be thinking and feeling.

3. Have each student write an internal monologue for the character they’ve selected. Students should carefully consider the character’s pose, facial expression, and gaze, as well as how the character relates to the other figures in the painting. Students should also take into account the setting, the mood of the painting, and what they imagine could have happened leading up to the scene. Their monologues should describe how the character feels (physically and emotionally), the character’s situation, and what the character intends to do next.

4. Have each student give a dramatic reading of his or her monologue. If relevant, ask the other students to guess which character is being represented.

W Poem

**Aim:** To write a poem that describes the who, what, where, when, and why of a painting.

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

**Themes:** Memory and Personal Narratives, Historical Narratives, Biblical Narratives, Narrative Art


**Discipline:** English Language Arts

**Materials:** paper, pencil

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss one or more of the following works below.

2. Have each student describe their chosen painting by writing a “W Poem”—a five-line poem in which the first line answers the question “Who?”, the second line answers the question “What?”, the third line answers the question “Where?”, the fourth line answers the question “When?”, and the fifth line answers the question “Why?”

3. Remind students that their answers should be based on what they see in the paintings but that they do not need to be literal or obvious. For the painting *After the Pogrom*, for example, the answer to the question “When?” could be “*After the Pogrom*” or “four o’clock in the afternoon.” It could also be “in a time of turmoil” or “before the migration” or “in the dismal twilight of a shattered day.”

4. Have students share their poems and perhaps publish them in a class poetry book.
**Cinquain**

**Aim:** To write a cinquain poem inspired by a work of art.

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

**Themes:** Memory and Personal Narratives, Historical Narratives, Narrative Art

**Artworks:** Weber: *The Talmudists*, 1934; Shahn: *New York*, 1947; Minkowski: *After the Pogrom*, c. 1910

**Discipline:** English Language Arts

**Materials:** paper, pencil

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss one or more of the listed Artworks.

2. Have students brainstorm alternative titles for the selected painting(s).

3. Ask each student to write a cinquain (pronounced “sing-cane”) using one of the suggested titles as the first line of the poem. A cinquain is a five-line poem that follows the following structure:
   - Line 1: one word
   - Line 2: two words that describe line 1
   - Line 3: three action verbs that relate to line 1
   - Line 4: a four-word phrase that relates to line 1
   - Line 5: a one-word synonym for or reference to the word from line 1

   Here is a sample cinquain for the painting *New York* by Ben Shahn:
   - Memories
   - Fragmented pieces
   - Hanging, floating, haunting
   - A world within me
   - Faded

4. Have students share their poems and perhaps publish them in a class poetry book.

**Color Poems**

**Aim:** To use metaphors and similes to write a poem about a particular color.

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

**Themes:** Narrative Art, Biblical Narratives, Historical Narratives


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

**Materials:** paper, pencil, a variety of colored and textured papers

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss one or more of the listed Artworks.

2. Discuss the ways the artists use color in their work. What do the different colors suggest? What words describe the different hues?

3. Have each student choose a color from a painting that particularly stands out for him or her.

4. Ask each student to reflect on the following:
   - Outside of the context of this artwork, what does this particular color remind you of?
   - What objects, places, or memories do you associate with this color?
   - What does the color feel like? What emotions does it elicit? What does it look, smell, sound, and taste like?

5. Have each student write a color poem that uses metaphors and similes to connect their color with specific objects, memories, sensations, and feelings.

6. Share the poems as a class.
Collage Poem

Aim: To create a poem from “found” words.

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

Themes: Narrative Art, Memory and Personal Narratives

Artworks: Shahn: *New York*, 1947

Discipline: Visual Art, English Language Arts

Materials: magazines, scissors, glue, paper

Procedure:

1. Have students view and discuss *New York* by Ben Shahn.

2. Discuss the way the artist combines elements in the composition. [Figures and objects are not depicted the way we would normally see things in the world around us. Rather, they are presented almost like a collage; images and figures connected to the theme of the painting—memory and past experience—are put together in surprising ways.]

3. Explain to students that they will be creating poems that work like collages. First, have each student choose a memory or set of related memories.

4. Have students leaf through magazines and cut out words and phrases that relate to their chosen memories.

5. Finally, have students glue their words and phrases onto a sheet of paper. Students may place the words in any combination or format they like—in a linear format, in the shape of a recognizable object, in an arrangement that leads the reader’s eye around the page in a particular direction, etc.

6. Have students share their poems and perhaps publish them in a class poetry book.

Texture

Aim: To explore how artists create the illusion of texture and to experiment with representing textures.

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

Themes: Historical Narratives, Narrative Art

Artworks: Oppenheim: *The Return of the Volunteer*, 1833-34

Discipline: Visual Art, English Language Arts

Materials: paper, pencil, scissors, glue, a variety of differently textured materials for collaging (sandpaper, cotton balls, foil, Velcro, yarn, fabric, etc.)

Procedure:

1. Have students view and discuss *The Return of the Volunteer* by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim.

2. Ask students to focus on Oppenheim’s representations of different textures. Ask students to identity the different textures they see represented in the painting (for example, students might notice the smoothness of the metal lamp, the fluffiness of the kitten’s fur, the softness of the mother’s jacket, etc.). How does the artist handle his paint differently in each of these instances in order to create these illusions of texture? [By paying attention to reflection and by using quick, gestural brushstrokes.]

3. Ask students to create their own texture studies. Distribute paper, glue, and a variety of differently textured materials for collaging (for example, sandpaper, cotton balls, foil, Velcro, yarn, fabric).

4. After students have created their texture collages, ask them to represent them as a drawing or painting. Remind them to consider the role of light and shadow, different ways of handling the paint or graphite, etc., to achieve the effect of the different textures.

5. Have students reflect on their experience and share their work. How challenging was it to translate actual textures into representations of them?
Self-Portrait in Image and Text

Aim: To combine image and text to create a self-portrait.

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Themes: Narrative Art, Memory and Personal Narratives

Artworks: Aptekar: I Hate the Name Kenneth, 1996

Discipline: English Language Arts

Materials: original photographs, photocopier or computer scanner, paper, pencil, permanent markers, acetate, staplers

Procedure:

1. As a class, look at Ken Aptekar’s work I Hate the Name Kenneth and discuss the artist’s use of image and text.

2. Ask students to bring in photographs of themselves from home (or take photographs in class).

3. Photocopy or scan and print out the photographs, enlarging the portraits as necessary. Make sure the printouts are the same size or smaller than the acetate the students will be using.

4. You may want to give your students the option of altering the image in some way. For example, they might use the entire image or enlarge a detail. You may have them consider cropping their image and even making use of negative space, as Aptekar did. Students may also transform the image by incorporating color (pastels or colored pencil) and collage elements. If time permits, you might give students the option of making a drawing or painting based on the photograph.

5. Ask students to write a story about memorable people or incidents in their lives that relate in some way to the photograph they have chosen. The text should reveal something about the student’s identity. They will later transcribe the story onto a sheet of acetate and place it over the image. Let students know this in advance so they can determine how long their story should be.

6. Provide students with the following guidelines before they begin writing:

   a. Write in the first person.

   b. Use full sentences, sentence fragments, or even a single sentence—or write a free-verse poem.

   c. Make sure 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 staple a sheet of acetate over their image and transcribe their texts onto it using a permanent marker. Tell them to pay close attention to the visual juxtaposition of the text and the image. Encourage them to be as creative as possible when determining the visual relationship between the text and the image.

8. Ask students to title their work.

9. As a class, reflect on the experience of creating these self-portraits. Share the works with the class. It might be interesting to have some students read the text first, without showing the image; or, conversely, show the image with the acetate flipped up and hidden. By subsequently sharing the entire work (with image overlaid by text), your class can discuss how the work changes when text and image come together. How does the text inform the image? How does the image influence the text?
Tagging

Aim: To reflect on the significance of your own name.

Grades: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Themes: Narrative Art, Memory and Personal Narratives

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

Discipline: English Language Arts

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

Procedure:

1. 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 as well. 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 first name have a meaning? If so, what is it? Why did your parents choose it? Are you named after someone? If so, who? Do you have a name in another language? If so, how does it relate to your identity?
   - Do you have any nicknames? If so, where did these come from? Do they describe you? Do you prefer them to your given name?
   - 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 first or last name? Why? What would you change it to?

3. Ask each student to choose a part of his or her name to reflect upon (for example, first name, last name, nickname, Hebrew name). Have the 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 may be drawn, painted, or collaged.

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

Aim: To create a work of art based on an earlier work.

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

Themes: Historical Narratives, Narrative Art


Discipline: English Language Arts

Materials: computer and Internet access; paper; paints, pastels, or colored pencils

Procedure:

1. Have students view and discuss the painting Eclipse of God by R. B. Kitaj. Compare the work with the painting by Paolo Uccello on which it is based. Discuss the ways in which Kitaj changed and interpreted Uccello’s work. Note Kitaj’s use of color, brushstroke, line, and abstraction (for example, the way he abstracts some of the figures into geometric shapes).

2. Ask students to search online for a representational work of art that tells a story. Have each student print out his or her selected work.

3. Have students interpret and recreate their chosen works of art to make them their own. Ask them to first think about the following:
   - What is the story of the original work? How can I revise, recast, or update the story in my work?
   - How will I alter the colors, lines, shapes or brushstrokes to bring my own style to the work?
   - Do I want to focus on a particular portion of the original work? Do I want to recreate the original scene in a new context?
   - Is there anything I want to add to the original in order to change the story or update it?

4. Have students work with paints, pastels, or colored pencils to create their versions of the original works.

5. Alternatively, you might ask students to rework the well-known artwork they chose by manipulating just one element—for example, abstracting the figures into geometric shapes, revising the palette to create a different mood, or recreating the scene with different types of brushstrokes.

6. Display students’ artworks alongside images of the originals.
**Warm and Cool Colors**

**Aim:** To gain an understanding of the effects of warm and cool colors by using them in a drawing.

**Grades:** K-2, 3-5

**Themes:** Narrative Art, Biblical Narratives


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

**Materials:** paper, pencils, markers

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss the painting *Eclipse of God* by R. B. Kitaj and/or *Noah’s Ark* by Malcah Zeldis.

2. Encourage students to examine the colors in the painting(s).
   - Which colors are you drawn to?
   - Which colors seem to pop out at you? Which ones seem to recede into the background?
   - What objects or ideas do you associate with the different colors (for example, fire=red; sky or sea=blue; sun=yellow; grass=green)?

3. Introduce the idea of warm and cool colors. Show students a sample color wheel. Direct their attention to where the warm and cool colors are on the wheel and which colors are opposites.

4. Draw a horizon line on a sheet of paper. Pass this sheet around, asking each student to add an object or figure to the picture. Tell them that their addition should be a simple line drawing. (To save time, you may choose to pass this sheet around during free reading time, etc.)

5. Make a photocopy of the drawing for each student.

6. Ask each student to color in the class’s drawing using a variety of warm and cool colors.

7. Ask students to share their work. Compare which figures pop out in students’ drawings and which recede. Relate this back to your discussion of warm and cool colors. What happens when an object is set against a complementary color (the color opposite it on the color wheel)?

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**Visual Midrash**

**Aim:** To create a visual interpretation of a biblical text.

**Grades:** 3–5, 6–8

**Themes:** Narrative Art, Biblical Narratives

**Artworks:** Zeldis: *Noah’s Ark*, 1978; Chagall: *Moses Receives the Ten Commandments*, 1966; Tissot: *Pharaoh’s Daughter Receives the Mother of…*, c. 1986–1902

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies

**Materials:** biblical texts; paper; paints, markers, colored pencils, or other drawing materials

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss one or more of the following works below.

2. Each of these works is a kind of *midrash*—a narrative interpretation of a biblical text. In Jewish tradition, midrashim often try to fill in blanks in the text or answer questions raised by it. Similarly, Chagall’s lithograph of *Moses receiving the Ten Commandments*, for example, includes details not described in the biblical text. It represents Chagall’s understanding and interpretation of the original story.

3. Have students read the biblical account of one or more of the stories depicted in the works of art above. Ask them to compare the original text with the visual representation. How has the artist interpreted or added to the story? What is included in the work of art that is not explicit in the text?

4. Ask each student to select a biblical story (from a limited selection you have decided upon ahead of time) and create a visual midrash on that story. Students should consider what details are absent in the narrative and decide how they will fill in the gaps. Students can work in whatever medium you choose.

5. Additionally, you may want to ask students to look up traditional midrashim on their selected passages. See, for example, Sefer Ha-Aggadah: *The Book of Jewish Folklore and Legend*, edited by Hayyim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzky (Tel-Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1988). How are the students’ visual midrashim similar to or different from the rabbis’ interpretations?

6. Display students’ artworks along with the original texts.
Neighborhood Collage

**Aim:** To use collage to capture the essence of an immigrant neighborhood.

**Grades:** K-2, 3-5, 6-8

**Themes:** Narrative Art, Memory and Personal Narratives

**Artworks:** Weber: *The Talmudists*, 1934; Shahn: *New York*, 1947

**Discipline:** Visual Art

**Materials:** paper, pencil, scissors, glue, cameras, collage materials

**Procedure:**

1. Have students view and discuss the painting *New York* by Ben Shahn. In his work, Shahn creates a collage-like evocation of the immigrant neighborhood of New York’s Lower East Side in the early 20th century.

2. Take your students on a walking tour of a neighborhood that has an immigrant population.

3. Encourage students to take photographs of the neighborhood, draw sketches, and collect items such as maps, newspapers, and menus during their walk.

4. Afterward, have students use these materials (as well as any additional materials you provide) to create collages that evoke the neighborhood.

5. Alternatively, ask each student to choose a neighborhood to study independently. Students can visit the neighborhoods on their own and collect materials from which to make their collages.

If I were there...

**Aim:** To explore visual imagery by imagining a multi-sensory experience.

**Grades:** K-2, 3-5

**Themes:** Biblical Narratives, Narrative Art

**Artworks:** Zeldis: *Noah's Ark*, 1978

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

**Materials:** chalkboard, whiteboard, SmartBoard, or chart paper; appropriate writing tool

**Procedure:**

1. As a class, look at and discuss *Noah's Ark* by Malcah Zeldis.

2. Ask students to imagine that they are on the ark. What do they think they would see, hear, and smell? What do they think it would feel like to be there?

3. Use students’ reactions to create a class poem.

   - For the first line, call on students, one at a time, to share one or two words, to describe what they would see on and from the deck of the ark.

   - For the second line of the poem, have students share what they would hear if they were passengers on the ark.

   - For the third line, ask students to share what they would smell if they were on the ark.

   - For the final line, ask students to share the emotions they think they would have if they were on the ark.

4. Read the poem aloud to your class (or as a class). When you reach the second line, allow your students to provide the appropriate sound effects.
Art and Memory

**Aim:** To create a visual memoir inspired by photographs and personal memories.

**Grades:** K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Themes:** Memory and Personal Narratives, Narrative Art

**Artworks:** Weber: *The Talmudists*, 1934; Shahn: *New York City*, 1947

**Discipline:** Visual Art, Jewish Studies

**Materials:** student photographs; paints, colored pencils, or pastels; paper or canvas

**Procedure:**

1. The imagery in Ben Shahn’s painting New York is based on photographs Shahn took of New York’s Lower East Side. He used elements of these photos to create a dreamlike evocation of an earlier time. When Max Weber created *The Talmudists*, he also looked to the past, basing the image on a memory. Have students look at these paintings and consider the ways the artists used their memories in their art.

2. Have students reflect on their own past experiences to create works of art based on family photographs combined with related memories. Have students bring in two or three family photos. Encourage them to find photographs that show not just people but important places and events from their lives.

3. Select a medium such as paints, pencils, or pastels for students to use to create works of art that use images, details, and motifs from the photographs. Students should ask themselves the following questions:
   - Which elements—people, patterns, places, objects—from the photos do I want to use?
   - How and where will I use them? What mood or emotion do I want to express through this work of art?
   - What will this work say about me?

4. Ask each student to write a short composition/wall label to accompany his or her work of art.

The Power of Poses

**Aim:** To explore the suggestive and expressive powers of gestures, poses, body language, and facial expressions through a drama activity.

**Grades:** K-2, 3-5, 6-8

**Themes:** Memory and Personal Narratives, Historical Narratives, Biblical Narratives, Narrative Art


**Discipline:** Theater, Visual Art

**Procedure:**

1. Divide students into groups and have them create tableaux vivants based on the artworks in this guide. That is, ask students to assume the relative positions, poses, body language, and facial expressions of the figures in the artworks.

2. Now tell the students to ignore the setting and everything else they know about the artwork that inspired their tableau vivant. Challenge the groups of students to consider what other stories might spring from characters in these poses and with these facial expressions.

3. Have them roughly sketch out the new plot line and then act it out for their fellow classmates.

4. After each performance, have a class critique. Could the audience understand the connection between the tableau and the direction the new story took? To what degree does the plot, mood, setting, and tone depart from that of the original artwork?
Journaling in Character

Aim: To experiment with writing in the voice of a particular character in a work of art.

Grades: 6–8, 9–12

Themes: Historical Narratives, Narrative Art

Artworks: Oppenheim: *The Return of the Volunteer*, 1833–34

Discipline: Visual Art, Jewish Studies

Materials: paper, pens

Procedure:

1. As a class, view and discuss Moritz Daniel Oppenheim’s *The Return of the Volunteer*.

2. Ask your students to choose a character from the painting and write a journal/diary entry in the voice of that character. The journal entry should be for the day depicted in the painting. Ask students to consider their chosen character’s emotions and thoughts about the event depicted. The journal/diary entry should be a creative writing exercise and should extrapolate beyond what is represented in the painting but should also be drawn from details observed in the painting.

3. Ask for volunteers to read their entries aloud to the class.

Reading the Characters’ Minds: Thought Bubbles

Aim: To imagine what a character might be thinking or feeling based on observable details and inference skills.

Grades: 3–5, 6–8

Themes: Narrative Art, Historical Narratives


Discipline: Jewish Studies, Math, Science

Materials: Paper, pencils, post-its, printouts or projections of images

Procedure:

1. Have students view and discuss *The Return of the Volunteer* by Mortiz Daniel Oppenheim and/or *After the Pogrom* by Maurycy Minkowski.

2. Ask each student to choose one figure in the painting and imagine what the character might be thinking and feeling.

3. Have each student draw a thought bubble on a small post-it.

4. Students should fill in their thought bubble with one or two sentences based on a careful consideration of what their character might be feeling or thinking in light of his or her pose, body language, facial expression, and manner of relating to the other figures in the painting. Students should also take into account the setting and the mood of the painting when inferring what their character might be thinking about or feeling.

5. Depending on your resources and preference, you may have students stick their post-its to a printout or to a projection of the image.

6. Have students share and compare their responses.
Student as Curator

Aim: To further explore connections among the works in this guide and to practice both persuasive and concise writing skills.

Grades: 9-12

Themes: Memory and Personal Narratives, Historical Narratives, Biblical Narratives, Narrative Art


Discipline: Visual Art, Jewish Studies

Materials: paper, pens, color printouts of the works in this guide

A museum curator selects works of art to be exhibited and is also responsible for helping her/his audience discover and understand connections among those works. Your students will try their hand at the curatorial process.

Procedure:

1. Tell your students to imagine that The Jewish Museum has invited a guest curator to create a special focus exhibition drawn from works of art in the permanent collection. The gallery space will only be big enough for three works of art. Your students will pretend they are vying for this spot as guest curator and will write an exhibition proposal to the Director of the Museum.

2. Focusing on only the works in this guide that you have already explored as a class, ask your students to choose three works that they think have interesting and engaging connections. These connections may be thematic, content-based, and/or visual, etc. Encourage your students to also think about the type of audience they want to target [a mixed public; teenagers; younger students; artists; writers, etc.].

3. To help your students in their brainstorming and writing processes, encourage them to look at blurbs describing various special exhibitions on The Jewish Museum and other museums’ web sites. This will give them more insight into how curators think about connections among works of art.

4. Remind your students that their essay is supposed to be a proposal for an exhibition—in other words, they need to convince The Jewish Museum that they should be selected as the guest curator. Their writing should be detailed and persuasive. In addition to exploring the connections they see among the artworks, they should explain why they think this show would appeal to their intended audience and why the Museum should value reaching out to that particular audience.

5. Have students share their proposals with the class. Compare students’ art work selections and their curatorial agendas.

6. As an extension of this activity, ask your students to pretend the Director of the Museum selected their proposal. Ask students to write a concise text that would go on a wall in the exhibition space to introduce visitors to the ideas behind the exhibition. Remind students to keep their intended audience in mind [e.g. if a student curated a show for young students, make the language age-level appropriate].