Note to Presenters:

Please bring the following with you to the classroom:

- *I and the Village*, *Chambon Sur-Lac*, and *Artist and Model*
- The Elements of Art posters
- *The book Life is a Dream*
THE BIG PICTURE: MARC CHAGALL

PERSONAL DATA

Name: Marc Chagall(originally Moishe Segal)
Born: July 7, 1887, in Vitebsk, Russia (Vitebsk is pronounced “Vee-see-eds”).*
Died: March 28, 1985, in France. He was 97.
Lived: Marc Chagall was the oldest of nine children in a Hassidic Jewish family. He lived in Vitebsk for his entire childhood.
Family: Chagall was married to Bella Rosenfeld, they had one daughter, Ida. Bella died in 1944. They were married for 29 years. Chagall married Valentina (Vava) Brodsky in 1952. They were married until his death.

PROFESSIONAL DATA

Type of Artist: While his work is often associated with several art types (Surrealism, Cubism, Expressionism, Fauvism), Chagall was never a part of any particular art movement. He borrowed techniques and ideas from his peers as it suited him. The result is a highly creative and personal style, which incorporates a rich use of color and form. His work is often described as dreamlike, humorous and fantastical.
Chagall painted with a variety of media including oils, water colors, and gouaches.

Style: Chagall himself said:

“The style has no importance. The thing is to express oneself. Painting should have a psychical content...the psyche should get into the paint. You must work the painting with the thought that something of your soul penetrates it and gives it substance. A picture should be born and bloom, like a living thing. It should seize some soft and unseizable something, the allure and profound meaning of whatever interests you.”

Chagall’s work is most often categorized as Russian Expressionist or Cubist.
Thinkquest has defined these styles as follows:

Expressionism – In Expressionist Art, the artist tries to express certain feelings about something. The artists that painted in this style were more concerned with having their paintings express a feeling than in making the painting look exactly like what they were painting.

Cubism – Cubism is modern art made up mostly of paintings. The paintings are not supposed to look real. The artist uses geometric shapes to show what he or she is trying to paint. Early cubists used mainly grays, browns, greens and yellows. After 1914, Cubists started to use brighter colors. Cubism was the beginning of the Abstract and Non-objective art styles.
Some have described Chagall’s style as “childlike” and images from his childhood are often embedded in his work. Many of his paintings are inspired by themes from the Bible. “His fascination with the Bible culminated in a series of over 100 etchings illustrating the Bible, many of which incorporate elements from Jewish folklore and from religious life in Vitebsk,” (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/chagall).

Chagall is recognized as one of the most significant painters and graphic artists of the twentieth century.

One source suggests that his painting, “…offers a dream world in which anything delightful may happen as laws of gravity are overturned, fairy tales come true, or gentle mystics come to life.” Chagall’s world is seen as “…a happy mixture of dream and reality, fantasy and nostalgia, delight in nature and in music, and a genuine love of humanity.” (The Art Reference Guide, Shorewood).

In addition to his many paintings, he also created stained-glass windows, designed stage sets, created ceramics and mosaics and illustrated books. He also completed many building decorations and murals on buildings including the Opera House in Paris, the New York Metropolitan Opera, the United Nations and the Vatican.

Artistic Credo: “It [painting] was more necessary for me than food. It seemed to me like a window through which I could have taken flight towards another world.”

Best Known Works: Please review the paintings in the book Life is a Dream and select two or three paintings to share with your class. Descriptions accompany each painting – please pick paintings that might speak to the age group to which you are presenting!

THE LIFE OF MARC CHAGALL

Moishe Segal was born the oldest of nine children. His father worked in a herring packing house and his mother supplemented the family income by keeping a small shop in her home. The Segal’s had a large extended family in Vitebsk, one of whom was Neuch, Marc’s favorite uncle who played the violin. This recollection, as well as that of a Yiddish folktale about a fiddler who played from the rooftops, account for the frequently used image of a fiddler in Segal’s work. His experience growing up in Vitebsk and his Jewish heritage were major influences on his work. His artistic talents were recognized early, and he was enrolled in art school in Vitebsk.

In 1910, at the age of 22, Segal decided that he could only grow as an artist if he went to Paris. It was here that he adopted the name Marc Chagall and used this name for the rest of his career. Paris at this time was the artistic and cultural capital of the world. Artists came from all over the world to work and study there. Chagall studied the masters of art as well as contemporary French painters. Highly stimulated by the environment, he set about painting many of his own works. “Since Chagall had very little money, he took tablecloths, sheets and even his nightshirt, cut them up into pieces and painted on them instead. He painted pictures of Paris, Vitebsk and all his dreams and fantasies.” (Life is a Dream, Höpler, 1998).

Chagall returned to Russia in 1914 shortly before the onset of World War I. He married Bella Rosenfeld who also was from Vitebsk. Bella is featured in many of Chagall’s paintings. In 1916, their daughter, Ida, was born. The family lived in Vitebsk where Marc founded an art school. They then moved to Moscow, Berlin
and Paris. Chagall’s fame was growing steadily. He traveled frequently with his family and received French citizenship in 1937. He moved to the United States during World War II (1941-1948).

In 1944 Bella died and Chagall was unable to paint for many months. In 1948 he returned to Europe. He married Valentina (Vava) Brodsky in 1952. They lived in France until his death in 1985.

**SUMMARY OF HIS ARTISTIC PERSONA**

Picasso himself, in attempting to describe Chagall’s style, said, “When Chagall paints, one is not sure if he is asleep or if he is awake. He must have an angel somewhere in his head.”

In 1910, Paris, for Chagall was a kind of rebirth. It was here that he began to use his brilliant colors. Many of his important works date from this period. In *Half Past Three (The Poet)*, Cubist influence is apparent in his use of geometric shapes (Chagall, page 22). He humorously puts the poet’s head on upside down as though the poet is deep in thought. The bright colors create the dynamic character of this composition.

In *Paris Through the Window* (see *Life is a Dream*, page 15) and *The Yellow Room* (see Cassou book, page 94), this use of form, color and imagination also can be seen. These two paintings have a surrealistic element in that they seem to be paintings of some type of dream or daydream.

**REPRODUCTION: I AND THE VILLAGE**


“Painted the year after Chagall came to Paris, *I and the Village* evokes his memories of his native Hasidic community outside Vitebsk. In the village, peasants and animals lived side by side, in a mutual dependence here signified by the line from peasant to cow, connecting their eyes. The peasant’s flowering sprig, symbolically a tree of life, is the reward of their partnership. For Hasids, animals were also humanity’s link to the universe, and the painting’s large circular forms suggest the orbiting sun, moon (in eclipse at the lower left), and earth.”

The geometry of *I and the Village* is inspired by the broken planes of Cubism, but Chagall’s is a personalized version. As a boy he loved geometry. “Lines, angles, triangles, squares,” he would later recall, “carried me far away to enchanting horizons.” Conversely, in Paris he used a disjunctive geometric structure to carry him back home. Where Cubism was mainly an art of urban avant-garde society, *I and the Village* is nostalgic and magical, a rural fairy tale: objects jumble together, scale shifts abruptly, and a woman and two houses, at the painting’s top, stand upside-down. “For the cubists,” Chagall said, “a painting was a surface covered with forms in a certain order. For me painting is a surface covered with representations of things...in which logic and illustration have no importance.”

Another impression: “The picture tells many stories and is made up of different shapes and colors – like a kaleidoscope, in which a new pattern appears each time you turn it: small, brightly-colored wooden houses, two of which are upside-down, a man looking out of the church with its round dome, a farmer walking across
the field with a scythe, the farmer’s wife showing him the way – but wait: she is upside-down too! And the white cow appears twice in the picture.” (Life is a Dream, page 2).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does this painting look realistic?
2. Does this painting convey a certain mood or emotion? (happy)
3. What do you think Chagall was thinking about when he painted this? (his memories of a Russian village from his childhood)
4. What would a dream or memory look like if you were the artist? (Would people be flying or upside down? Would you put things in illogical places?)
5. Chagall said that geometry “carried [him] far away to enchanted horizons.” Do you relate to this?

I and the Village is a study of geometric shapes, form and color. Using the Elements of Art chart, discuss:

Shape/Line:
What geometric shapes are repeated throughout the painting? (triangles, squares, rectangles, circles)

How does Chagall create balance using these shapes? (by placing the largest elements of the cow and profile opposite one another)

Space:
Is the composition divided by a foreground/background? (no, it appears as a flat space divided into 4 quadrants)

Color:
Are the colors vivid or pale? Are they colors that you see in everyday life or are they colors we might see in a dream?

Compare the other Chagall reproductions to I and the Village. How are they similar? How do they differ? (Use the Elements of Art chart to discuss the characteristics of each painting.)

IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM PRESENTATION:

Play “I Spy” with the students (ie: Find a blue, red, yellow or green triangle, find a pink semi-circle, white semi-circle, a cross, a bucket, a hat, a face in the buildings, etc.)

Read the passage about I and the Village in the book Life is a Dream.

Ask the students what they see in Chagall’s work that makes them think of dreams. What would the students do in their artwork to show a dream?

Remind the students that if they are ever at Lincoln Center in New York City, murals painted by Chagall are hanging in the Metropolitan Opera House. You don’t need to enter the building to see them – they are visible from the outside via the oversized windows.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cassou, Jean, *Chagall*, New York, 1965

Harris, Nathaniel, *The Life and Work of Chagall*, New York, 1994


**(Pronunciation of Vitebsk found at www.vitebsk.com)** Vitebsk was destroyed during World War II and is now Belarus.
Art in the Classroom

Program Goal:

The foremost goal of this program is to help children to enjoy and appreciate looking at art, whether it be that of a Master or a contemporary artist. We want them to develop their natural talents as observers and to feel free to articulate what they think without the impediments of “right” or “wrong.” We believe an effective art appreciation program should encourage children to:

1. Look at art and be inquisitive about it;
2. Learn the fundamentals and vocabulary of art;
3. Think visually to look and analyze what they see;
4. Become familiar with famous artworks, artists and art history;
5. Appreciate different styles of art.

Helpful Hints and Reminders

Length of Presentation: Your presentation should be half an hour.

Materials for the Presentation: The artwork and materials from the bin in the AIC closet area marked “do not remove from school” should be removed only when doing a presentation, and returned immediately thereafter. Sometimes presentations are scheduled back to back, and the next presenter will need the materials – there is only one set.

Materials That May Be Signed Out: Materials in the closet and materials in the bin that are not labeled “do not remove from school” may be borrowed overnight. Please sign out the materials on the Sign Out Sheet after 3:30 p.m., and return by 9:00 a.m. the next morning. The whole bin cannot be signed out – only individual materials in the bin. Please be respectful of other presenters who may also wish to review the provided materials.

Tailor the Presentation: Practice with your child at home to see how the interest level holds. You may find that you need to adjust your presentation and the content for your class’s age level and appropriateness.

Activities: This program is a general overview of the featured artwork and artist. Activities for the classroom are designed to be group-discussion-related, and not an actual art project. Some art activities may be suggested for the students to try at home.

Siblings: There is only a limited amount of time for the presentation. We ask that siblings not join you for the presentation – it can be overwhelming to the younger sibling, and disruptive to the students, the teacher, and you.

Have Fun!