Note to presenters:
Please bring the following with you...

1. The painting *People and Dog in Sun*
2. The comparative print *Woman Birds and a Star*
3. Postcard size prints in sets for each pair of students. In each set, there will be both surrealistic and non-surrealistic prints, for the students to sort.
4. The contrasting print Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*
HIS LIFE
Joan Miro was born in Montroig in the Province of Catalonia, Spain on April 20, 1893. His father was a jeweler and watchmaker, and his mother was a housewife. When he was only 7 years old, he was sent to drawing classes.

Even though Miro’s parents were in favor of his receiving artistic training, they were initially opposed to his choice of art as a career. Being an artist, at that time, was regarded by many as not having a profession at all. And, Miro’s parents’ reaction against their son’s artistic inclinations was a perfectly natural one.

At the age of 14, Miro began to study art at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts. Miro’s parents insisted that he study business as well, which he did at the School of Commerce.

At the age of 16, and very much against his will, Miro was taken on as an apprentice clerk at a long-established grocer’s shop.

In 1911, when Miro was 18, he became seriously ill. The illness caused him to give up clerking—much to his delight. During his recovery from the illness, he spent time on his family’s property on Montroig. Here he spent all of his time painting and he shared this artwork with his family. Eventually, due to this, his parents resigned themselves to the fact that Joan would pursue a career in art.

Joan Miro married Pilar Juncosa on October 12, 1929. The newlyweds settled in Paris. The couple had one daughter, Dolors, who was born July 17, 1931 in Barcelona. Joan Miro died December 25, 1983 at the age of 90.

Adapted from *Miro and his World* by Alexandre Cirici

HIS WORK
Upon Miro’s first visit to Paris in 191, he came under the influence of Braque and Picasso, and for a time he painted in the Cubist manner. (Cubism is an art style developed in the early 20th century, characterized by natural objects transformed into geometric shapes and seen from different visual standpoints at one time.) By 1925, however, he had become a member of the Surrealist group. He exhibited with them in their first show, and his work began to take on the style and character now associated with his name. At about this time he worked with Max Ernst on the sets and costumes of *Romeo et Juliette*, a Diaghilev Ballet Russe production. His famous *Harlequin’s Carnival*, now in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, was also painted at this time.

In 1928, Miro traveled to Holland and was exhibited for the first time in New York. He then began producing a group of collages that was shown in Paris in 1930, and in 1937 he
painted a large mural for the Paris Exhibition. Miro left France in 1940 and went to the island of Majorca, where he continued to paint, began to make lithographs, and did ceramic work with Artigas. He returned to Paris in 1944, and divided his time between that city and Barcelona, continued to paint, but also designed tapestries and rugs, made ceramics, and created sculptures in stone and wood.

Miro's work, sometimes called "himorphic abstraction" is brilliant in color. It is carefully composed of curvilinear shapes that are as mobile and fluid as the changing shapes of the amoeba. He was the leader of the school of Surrealists whose work was disciplined yet not intellectual. His melting forms transport us to a timeless universe furnished with magical symbols and characters which approach human individuality. The fascination of Miro lies in the fact that we can never quite transform the ideas he offered into specific words or thoughts.

From: The Shorewood Collection Art Reference Guide

Surrealism
Some of the strangest and most fantastical pictures ever painted were made by a group of artists who began to work together in Paris in the 1920s. These artists called themselves the Surrealists.

The word "sur" means 'on top of' in French, and 'beyond' when it is used at the beginning of English words. These artists invented the word Sur-realism to describe their work because what they painted was beyond what everyone thought of as being normal reality. Instead of trying to paint pictures that showed the real world, the Surrealists wanted to conjure up the world of the imagination-where anything at all is possible. Many of the magical things that they painted were inspired by their dreams. The Surrealists believed that dreams contained hidden meanings.

From Optical Illusions in Art by Alexander Sturgis
People and Dog in Sun, (1949)
Oil on canvas 24 ½” X 16 ½” Kunstmuseum, Basel

This painting is a most characteristic example of Miro’s work: It is two-dimensional and flat, painted in bright primary colors. In this Surrealist distortion, the superimposition of images and metamorphic painting upside down we can see the metamorphosis perfectly, and we have an equally perfect composition. In China and Japan, there is a form of art called “Calligraphy.” This is also the name given to Chinese and Japanese writing. Each letter of the alphabet is a kind of abstract design. Can you see how Miro, in this painting, did the same kind of thing with the line? He has used a few lines to create an image of a person or a dog. Then he added abstract shapes of color to fill in part of the images of his people and dogs. This creates a whimsical scene of people doing a very ordinary activity.

Adapted from The Shorewood Collect Art Reference Guide

Suggestions for Dialogue
Look closely at the picture:

- Can you find more than one person and a dog?
- What happens if you turn the picture upside down? Look carefully. Does the head of the dog become the head of a new person?
- When the picture is right side up, can you see other figures besides that of the man and dog?

Surrealism: A painting which has futuristic or dream-like qualities; tends to depict a vision

- Does the painting show a certain mood or emotion? Clues?
- Does the painting have detail, or does it just give the impression of something?
- Would you see this scene in real life? Explain.
- What do you “see”, “hear”, “feel” or “smell” in the painting?
Activity
Fantasy:
Ask the students if they have a dog that they walk, or if they see people in their neighborhoods walking dogs? Ask them if the people or dogs sometimes do things that are funny? Help them make up a story about someone walking a dog. Alternatively, have them discuss the fantasy that Miro was telling in this painting.

Surrealism:
Give each pair of students a set of postcards. Ask them to sort out the surrealist paintings. Additionally, using the comparative print, discuss what makes a surrealist painting different from other types we’ve looked at. Compare and contrast People and Dog in Sun with Seurat’s A Sunday Afternoon in the Island of La Grande Jatte which also has people and a dog in the sunlight.

Woman Birds and A Star

1949 Medium: Oil on canvas Dimensions: 36 x 28 7/8 in. (91.4 x 73.3 cm)

Feel free to use this comparative painting by Miro as part of the discussion.