

I and the Village by Marc Chagall

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1911
- Size: 192.1 x 151.4 cm (over 6 feet tall)
- Location: Currently (2012) exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, NY
- This painting is based on memories of Chagall's childhood in a small farming village in Russia. Chagall lived in France for most of his adult life. The painting shows that people remember many separate events from the past, but by rearranging events, some aspects of their experiences are more vivid than others (like in our dreams).
- The picture is full of real and make-believe images.
- Chagall painted tender expressions on the faces of the peasant and the large-eyed animal (usually referred to as a cow, but sometimes as a goat, sheep or donkey). A line joins their eyes.
- For Hasid Jews, 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 peasant wears a hat and holds a sprig of blossoms (symbolically the tree of life and the reward of the partnership between the peasant and cow).
- Near the top of the picture (in the background) is a row of village houses and a domed church. Notice that a face peers from a window and two of the houses are upside down.
- A woman is milking a goat and a peasant is carrying a scythe (SIGH-th) which is a long, curved, knife-like tool used for harvesting crops. The peasant seems to be following a woman who walks upside down.

Artist Facts for Marc Chagall

- Pronounced (sha-GAHL)
- Born July 7, 1887 in Liozna, Russia which is near the city of Vitebsk
- Died March 28, 1985 (age 97)
- Married Bella Rosenfeld who he said was his inspiration.
- Chagall was the oldest of nine children.
- His mother bribed a professor to let Chagall attend a high school that did not allow Jews.
- A turning point of his artistic life came when he first noticed a fellow student drawing. Chagall would later say that there was no art of any kind in his family's home and the concept was totally alien to him. When Chagall asked the schoolmate how he learned to draw, his friend replied, "Go and find a book in the library, idiot, choose any picture you like, and just copy it." He soon began copying images from books and found the experience so rewarding he then decided he wanted to become an artist. (From Wikipedia)
- Chagall wanted to study art in Petersburg, Russia. He had to get a temporary visa from a friend to even get into the city because Jews were not allowed there without an internal passport.
- In 1910 Chagall left Russia to study art in France. He spent the next 30 years mostly in France, Germany and Russia painting and working.
- In 1941 Chagall was trapped in France when the borders were closed. He was saved by having his name added to the list of prominent artists whose lives were at risk, who the United States should try to extricate. Varian Fry, the American journalist, and Hiram Bingham IV, the

American Vice-Consul in Marseilles, ran a rescue operation to smuggle artists and intellectuals out of Europe to the US by providing them with forged visas to the US. Chagall was one of over 2,000 who were rescued by this operation. He left France in May 1941, "when it was almost too late". Picasso and Matisse were also among artists invited to come to America but they decided to remain in France. Chagall and Bella arrived in New York on June 23, 1941. His daughter Ida and her husband followed on the refugee ship SS Navemar with a large case of Chagall's work.

- After the war, Chagall returned to France where he lived for the remainder of his life.
- Chagall is said to be one of the most successful artists of the 20th century.
- It is believed that he created art in every artistic medium including painting, book illustrations, stained glass for cathedrals, stage sets, ceramic, and tapestries.
- He is considered to be an early modernist, and his paintings had a fantasy feel to them.
- His work "was one long dreamy reverie of life in his native village of Vitebsk".
- He painted his memories of life growing up in Russia along with other things inserted in (like the Eiffel Tower or a portrait).
- He had an amazing ability to use color when he painted.
- In 2010 one of his paintings sold for \$4.1 million.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Shape** is a two-dimensional line with no form or thickness. Shapes are flat and can be described as being geometric or organic. Geometric shapes have hard, defined lines and angles. Often man-made things have these kinds of forms, which usually must be measured to come out correctly. Circles, squares and rectangles are geometric shapes. Organic shapes have no set form, and no geometric lines or angles. Things found in nature are often organic shapes such as clouds.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Shape

- What shapes did the artist use to create this painting? Are they soft, organic shapes (irregular in outline like cloud shaped, tree shaped, hand shaped) or hard, geometric (squares, triangles, circles)? (Both organic and geometric shapes can be found in the painting, but most of the shapes are geometric shapes.) How many circles can you find? How many triangles?
- Are any of the shapes repeated or are they always different?
- A change in color or shading can define a shape.
- Why do you think the artist painted smaller shapes inside the larger ones? (He used those spaces to show other things he remembered. Some memories affect others or are a part of other memories.) Why do you think some of the shapes are upside down? This is a painting of Chagall's memories of the village he grew up in and dreamed about when he left it. Do you ever have crazy dreams that are all mixed up? Does this painting remind you of a dream? Do your memories ever start to get fuzzy? Do you ever start to forget exactly how something was when you were little?
- Chagall planned his painting so that all the largest shapes meet near the center. What shapes do you see? (The cow's face, the overall shape of the tree and the nose are all very triangular. A circle encloses them. The empty spaces between the cow, face and tree are also triangular. All of the triangles point to and meet in the center which is the focal point.)
- Do you think you could cut out the shapes in this painting and make them into a puzzle?

(You could cover this painting with the "puzzle" pieces in the packet to begin the presentation.)

- Rotate the painting and look at the shapes from different angles. Can memories or dreams change depending on how you look at them? (For example, a dream can seem scary when you are in the middle of it, but then silly in the morning.)

Keywords

- Shape, color, line, perspective

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- There is a dotted line between the eye of the cow and the boy. What do you think that means? How do you think the man feels about the cow? (He is fond of it.) What other lines do you see?
- Are the colors realistic? What are the strangest ones you can see? How do you know it is still a face if it is green?
- Where has the artist created textures or patterns? Which ones do you think look invented? Which ones look real?
- Which parts of the painting look very near? Which parts look far away? Why?
- What colors do you see in this painting? (Red, green, blue, yellow, white, black) What four colors did Chagall use the most? (White, red, blue and green.)
- Do you see more than one shade of red? Where? (In the background shapes, the cow's head, the man's hat and the village buildings.) What color do you add to make a darker shade? (black) A lighter tint? (white)
- When asked why his paintings had flying or floating objects, his reply was, "I often paint the way things 'feel.'" How does this painting make you feel?
- How do the bright colors in this painting make you feel? (joyful)
- Is this picture painted in a realistic style? Why or why not? (The man's face and cow's head are painted unrealistic colors; things in the picture float in unusual places and some are upside down; the picture is broken up into colorful shapes.)