Art Masterpiece: Marc Chagall “I and the Village”, 1911
Oil on canvas, 6' 3 5/8" x 59 5/8"
Current Location: Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

Keywords: symbolizism, shape, color,
Grade: 5th grade
Activity: “Visual Diary” Drawing

Meet The Artist:
• Marc Chagall was born in a small Russian village named Vitebsk (VEE-tepsk) in 1887. If he were alive today he’d be ________ years old.
• His spent much of his childhood daydreaming, drawing and spending time with animals in the village. He also enjoyed the stories and the Jewish folktales his family members told him.
• Marc Chagall’s village was very small and he did not see his first painting until he was 13 years old. It was around this time that Marc knew he wanted to be an artist.
• His family was poor, Jewish shop-owners and disapproved of Marc’s desire to be an artist. Eventually they gave in and sent him to art school in St. Petersburg, the capital city of Russia.
• There Marc discovered work by great Impressionistic artists like Monet, Cezanne and Van Gogh. He travelled to Paris where he was influenced by cubist artist, Picasso. These artists inspired him to use more color and simple shapes to convey emotion.
• Marc kept his work original by using dreams and memories as his subjects. He was famous for taking ordinary scenes and transforming them into dream-like worlds. This was sometimes called Surreal or Fantastic Art.
• Back in Russia, Marc met his wife Bella in 1914. He was deeply in love with her and painted her many times. They had a daughter and moved to Paris together.
• During World War II Chagall had to leave Paris because he felt it was unsafe for Jewish people there. He moved to America where he continued to work. Eventually he retired to the South of France where he died at the age of 97.
I and the Village -History

I and the Village is a "narrative self-portrait" featuring memories of Marc Chagall's childhood in the town of Vitebsk, in Russia. The dreamy painting is ripe with images of the Russian landscape and symbols from folk stories. The picture can be broken down into five distinct sections. The first at the top right includes a rendering of Chagall's home town, with a church, a series of houses and two people. The woman and some of the houses in the village are upside down, further emphasizing the dreamlike quality of the work. Below that we see a green-faced man who some say is Chagall himself. At the bottom of the work, we see a hand holding a flowering branch. Next to that, an object which some say is a child's bouncing ball – perhaps a plaything from Chagall's earlier days. Finally, we see the image of a milkmaid layered atop the head of a lamb – a motif common to Chagall. (Cows, bulls and lambs figure in many of Chagall's paintings as cosmic symbols).

The important thing to note about this picture is that it is a reflection of Marc Chagall's dreams and memories. Also relevant is the fact that many of Chagall's pictures (including this one) have symbols that relate specifically to Jewish folklore.

I and the Village is one of Chagall's earliest surviving works. In it, he ignored the laws of gravity. Objects are upside down, things appear to float and perspective is disregarded entirely. Instead, Chagall chose to focus on color, form and shape. The result is a very emotional work – a visual diary of Marc Chagall's life.

Discussion:

What colors do you see in the painting? 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 does an artist mix with red to get a lighter red? (White)

What kinds of shapes do you see? (circles, triangles, rectangles, squares)

Do you see the line between the man's eye and the cow's eye? How do you think the man feels about the cow? (He seems to be fond of the cow)

What other things do you see? (Woman milking a goat, a man with a scythe, a village with a church, an upside down woman)

Is this picture painted in a realistic style? Why do you say that? (The man's face and the cow's head are painted unrealistic colors; objects float in unusual places and some are upside down; the picture is broken up into colorful shapes)

Chagall used his imagination to create this fantasy picture. Does the painting remind you of a dream?

Why do you think he chose all those unrealistic colors? (Chagall would paint things that were significant to him the color green. Green symbolized a person of importance to him.)
Why do you think he painted some people upside down or up in the air? (If Chagall felt joy or that the person he painted was happy, he would place them up in the air or flying)

**Activity Option One:  “My Visual Diary “Drawing**

**Materials:** white construction paper, oil pastels or crayons.

**Procedures:**

1. Introduce students to the art and style of Chagall, engaging them in discussion about his work, and use of intense color to create a dreamlike effect.
2. Explain project to the students first. Challenge students to really think about their project before they start. It should reflect their thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes. They should pull their subjects from childhood memories or dreams like Chagall did.
3. Using black oil pastels or crayons, have students draw their home, then turn their papers, and draw themselves holding their favorite thing, turn the papers again and draw a place they like to be (garden, room, town, ballfield etc.), Have students include a face of someone important in their lives and encourage them to use personal symbols and favorite colors.
4. Once their paper is filled, they may render their illustrations with intense color and divide it into sections like Chagall did.

**Activity Option Two:** “My visual Diary” Magazine pictures cut out to display things that represent the student.

**Materials:** Construction paper, glue sticks, scissors, and magazines.

**Procedures:** Same as above except use Magazine images to display who they are. Most kids really enjoyed this lesson.

**IDEAS FOR ACTIVITY – Significant events, people, places and things in my life:**

**PEOPLE:** parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, special friends, teacher, doctor, etc.

**PLACES:** where you were born, where you live – past or present, church, school, where you play – park, pool, room, playground, where you've traveled, etc.

**THINGS:** music, books, toys, sport, dance, pets, etc.

**SPECIAL MEMORIES / EVENTS:** birthday, favorite vacation, Christmas or other special holiday, 1st time riding a bike, going to school, etc.