

MARC CHAGALL

CONCEPT

With the goal of fostering love and brotherhood, Marc Chagall integrated his art with symbols, vivid colors, fantasy, and mystery in order to create visual poetry. He believed that the use of color in a work connected the art with human emotion.



detail: Marc Chagall, *The Red Rooster*, 1940, Bequest of Mary E. Johnston, 1967.1426

BACKGROUND

One of the greatest Jewish artists of the twentieth century, Marc Chagall (1887–1985) earned his fame from his ability to emotionally affect his audience by using nostalgic symbolism and dramatic color. Chagall's work, which enhances great public buildings and world famous collections of art, can be studied through its history, symbolism, and color.

Chagall was born in Vitibsk, a rural, snowy village in northeastern Russia, to a Jewish working-class family. Vitibsk; his beloved wife, Bella Rosenfeld; and the social dynamics of Jewish identity deeply molded him and his art.

Chagall studied art in St. Petersburg,

Paris, and later in museums, opera houses, orchestras, and poetry societies all over Europe. Later in his career he studied in both Israel and the United States. However, he considered France his home for most of his life. It was there that he saw the color of Fauvism, the fantasy of Surrealism, the composition of Cubism, and the emotional power of Expressionism.

Chagall drew upon his past to form a “historical museum” of memories ready to inspire his art. Chagall sought to integrate his history with his deeply emotional soul by simple but effective improvisation of symbols. Just as in poetry and music, he used symbols as

CRITICAL THINKING

How did Chagall use color in *The Red Rooster*? Did he choose primary, secondary, or intermediate hues?

Where do you see tints and shades? How does it make you feel?

In the *Red Rooster*, what are the unnatural color choices and how do they make you feel differently about the work?

If you were to paint a symbolic picture of you listening to your favorite music what color would you choose to express your feelings? Why?

in a dream or fantasy, improvising and realigning. Often he would use a few basic symbols as a musician uses a theme with subsequent variations. His favorite symbols were a strutting rooster, an embracing couple, a fiddler, a candelabra, a cow, and an upside down face on a figure. His subjects would float and dance, alluding to mystery, making a visual poem.

However, it was Chagall's use of color that gave his nostalgic symbolism its punch. Unnaturally vibrant colors gives his work emotional impact—a red rooster, a yellow crucifix, a blue landscape, a green face. The colors and shapes transport the viewer from present reality to the emotional responses evoked by music and literature of the past, the warmth of an embrace, the celebration of life, the

suffering of war, and sorrow and grief.

So we see Chagall, maker of murals, ceilings, mosaics, tapestries, graphics, and paintings. Whether his work embodied the triumph of music, a wedding feast, or the suffering of Israel, he integrated the disciplines of art—story, symbols, and color—to touch the heart.

Chagall said, "Everything can and will be transformed in life and in art, if we speak the word love without shame...in it lies true art..."



VOCABULARY

hue

primary colors

secondary colors

tint/shade

warm/cool color

complementary color

analogous color

Fauvism

Surrealism

Cubism

fantasy

abstract

Bible story

Jewish tradition

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Write a story or poem about a walk through your neighborhood.

- Tell where you walked.
- Describe what you saw and heard.
- How did you feel at the end of your walk.

Read the story of *Beauty and the Beast*. Make a crayon resist in the style of Chagall. Remember to use unnatural color, placement, and organization to enhance the dreamlike quality of the work.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Study the history and geography of Russia and France in Chagall's time.

SCIENCE

Study the difference between color combinations of pigments and light. (The primary colors of paint are yellow, blue, and red. The primary colors of light are blue, green, and red.)

VISUAL ART

Draw a picture while listening to mood music. How does it affect your art? How did it affect Chagall's work? After listening to John Philips Sussa, Mozart, and Bartok, describe the colors that you associate with each and explain why. Make rainbow color wheels of twelve overlapping silhouettes each colored a hue of the color wheel. (y-yo-o-or-r-rv-v-vb-b-bg-g-gy)

Study the combinations of color by making graded strips of the following:

- complementary mixtures of hue.
- analogous mixtures of hue
- values (tints/shades)
- intensity (gray to vibrant hue)

ART HISTORY

Study how Chagall compared with the following artists as he used the elements of style for which they were famous.

- Monet, Impressionism (color mixtures)
- Henri Matisse, Fauvism (vivid color)
- Picasso, Cubism (and monochromatic palette)

Below are recommended works for comparison from the Cincinnati Art Museum permanent collection.

- Claude Monet, *Rocks at Belle-Isle, Port-Domois*, 1886, Fanny Bryce Lehmer Endowment and The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, 1982.282
- Henri Matisse, *Rumanian Blouse*, 1937, Bequest of Mary E. Johnston, 1967.1427
- Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Glass and Lemon*, 1910, Bequest of Mary E. Johnston, 1967.1428

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