



Art, Identity, and Change in the Modern World

Grades 9-12

Pre - and Post -Visit Materials for Educators

Program Overview

In this program students will observe a variety of paintings, sculptures, and photographs from the past 150 years that take their inspiration from extraordinary historical occurrences such as immigration, the Industrial Age, World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, and the Civil Rights movement. Students will discuss particular works of art and examine artists' responses to these events.

Goals

- Explore the Museum's fine arts collection and learn how to analyze individual works of art.
- Understand how works of art communicate ideas through their forms and subject matter.
- Examine how artists respond to historical events.
- Discuss personal reactions to historical events and the works of art that reference them.

Background Information

Art, Identity, and Change in the Modern World examines works of art from the Museum's permanent exhibition which date from the 19th century to present and relate to historical events in Jewish history and the history of the modern world. This period in Jewish history begins with the Jewish Enlightenment (haskalah) movement, which developed from the mid-18th century to the late 19th centuries in Europe. Led by German Jewish intellectuals, the movement sought to emancipate Jews and granted them equal rights under the law. By the start of World War I in 1914 many Jews were integrated into secular society. They established themselves professionally and intellectually and many fought in World War I as representatives of their respective countries; Britain, France, and Germany had many Jewish soldiers in their armies.

The Enlightenment occurred during a period of industrialization and urbanization. Many Europeans found these times difficult because they resulted in economic hardship and political upheaval. Anti-Semitism—discrimination and prejudice against Jewish people—provided an outlet for these frustrations. The Jews were perceived as being responsible for these changes, since they benefited from emancipation and modernity. In Russia, Jews faced organized attacks (pogroms) on their villages sponsored by the government.

One response to anti-Semitism was the Zionist movement, led by Theodor Herzl. Zionism aimed at re-establishing a Jewish nation in Palestine and ultimately brought about the creation of the modern State of Israel in 1948. Another response to anti-Semitism was emigration. Many Jews who felt discriminated against in their homeland moved elsewhere; the two most popular destinations were the United States and Palestine. The first wave of immigration began in the 1880s, followed by periods after the first and second World Wars.

The Jews who remained in Europe withstood the repercussions of World War I, with all other Europeans. One such repercussion was the reorganization of the German government. In 1933, the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party, with Adolf Hitler as chancellor, attained power. The ideology of Hitler and the Nazis was that Jews—along with Sinti (Gypsies), disabled individuals, political prisoners, homosexuals, and Slavs—should be eradicated. Between 1933 and the end of World War II in 1945, the Nazis killed six million Jews and millions of others. These atrocities have come to be referred to as the Holocaust.

The destruction of two-thirds of European Jewry as a result of the Holocaust led the United States to become the most prominent center of Jewish life. In the United States, Jewish immigrants had to find ways of integrating into American society. Like all immigrants, Jews face questions concerning their identity: What is their place in the world and relationship to their collective past and family history? What are their rights as citizens of the United States? How does their collective experience as a minority group compare to the experiences of others? The relationship between African Americans and American Jews and their encounters with historical events such as the Holocaust and the Civil Rights movement, for example, demonstrate these shared experiences. Today, the Jewish community all over the world is united by a collective history and culture. The works of art in the Jewish Museum’s permanent exhibition reflect this particular experience; they also connect to the history of the modern world.

Vocabulary

Anti-Semitism	Discrimination and prejudice against Jewish people.
Civil Rights Movement	A movement to end segregation and extend full voting rights to African Americans in the Southern parts of the United States.
Composition	The structure or organization of a work of art, literature, or music.
Culture	The arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought expressed in a particular community or by a particular group.
Holocaust	The systematic mass slaughter of European Jews in Nazi ghettos, concentration camps, and death camps just before and during World War II. Also known by the Hebrew term, “Shoah.”
Identity	The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
Monument	Something designed and built as a public tribute to a person, a group of people, or an event.

Modernity	Something which is typical of the present or recent times.
Nationalism	The belief that nations would benefit from acting independently rather than collectively, emphasizing national rather than international goals.
Pogrom	An organized attack by a mob of people in which Jewish men, women, and children were brutalized and killed and their homes sacked and looted.
Symbol	An image that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.
Theme	An idea, or point of view, embodied and expanded upon in a work of art.
Zionism	The name for the organized movement of those Jews who wanted to create a national home in Palestine.

Pre-Visit Activities

1. Examining a Work of Art

Art, Identity, and Change in the Modern World explores works of art that evoke artist's responses to particular historical events. Through close examination of these images, students will learn to analyze works of art and explore the historical context in which they are framed. Look at the enclosed color photograph of Moritz Oppenheim's *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living In Accordance with Old Customs*, Frankfurt, 1833–34.

Background Information:

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer*, 1833–34.

Moritz Daniel Oppenheim was the first Jewish artist to achieve a considerable reputation throughout Europe during the 19th century. He was also the first to depict specifically Jewish subjects. He painted during the Jewish Enlightenment (haskalah) movement, which was spearheaded by German Jewish intellectuals who sought to increase their involvement in general European culture, while creating a modern culture in which Jews could still retain their identity. Oppenheim's work reflected the tastes of a rapidly rising middle class who craved art that reflected their hard-won place in society.

Oppenheim represents a wounded soldier in a Hussar's uniform who has just returned to his family after defending Germany against the Napoleonic armies. In his haste to reunite with his family, the young man has, contrary to Jewish law, traveled on the Sabbath. The father turns from a Hebrew text to regard the Iron Cross displayed on his son's chest with a mixture of pride and suspicion. The medal is awarded for bravery, yet incorporates a Christian symbol. *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer*, painted during a period when Jewish civil rights were again in a tenuous state, has been interpreted as a reminder to Germans of the significant role played by

Jews in the Wars of Liberation. The painting conveys the tension between country and religion, modernity and tradition; the soldier encounters both adoration and scrutiny as he returns home from the War to observe the Sabbath with his family.

(Source: www.thejewishmuseum.org/home/content/collection/online_exhibition/index.html)

Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial observations of the painting?
- Who do you think is the main subject of the painting? What elements of the painting lead you to think this?
- Where is the main subject located in the painting? Why do you think Oppenheim did this?
- What are the relationships between the figures in the painting?
Think about the placement of the figures in the composition, as well as their roles e.g., soldier's mother, father, sister.
- What do you notice about the gestures and expressions of the father and mother? What kinds of emotions do they evoke regarding their son's return home?
- How do you think the soldier is feeling?
- What is the setting of the painting? (What time of day is it? What is being celebrated?)
- In this painting, Moritz Oppenheim depicts a Jewish family's reactions to their son's choice to participate in secular matters (fighting in the Wars of Liberation). Can you think of a time in your life when you had to make a difficult choice—one that may have compromised your family values or beliefs?
- What response did your family have regarding this decision?

2. *Point of View*

Ask students to focus on the soldier in the painting and how he feels about returning to his family. Afterwards, have students write a letter from the soldier's point of view to his parents. Students may wish to write a story explaining how the soldier received an Iron Cross. Ask them to also consider researching the Wars of Liberation and include this information in the letter.

Post-Visit Activities

1. Responding to the Museum Visit

During their visit to The Jewish Museum, students view works of art that reflect a variety of historical occurrences such as immigration, World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, and the Civil Rights movement. Have a class discussion about this experience and allow students to make general comments. Afterwards, ask students to choose one image from the tour that was particularly meaningful or memorable for them and discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- Among the works of art you observed at The Jewish Museum, which was most meaningful or memorable?
- What features of this work do you remember?
- What feelings does this piece evoke in you?
- What historical events or themes does this work consider—World War I or II, immigration, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement, identity?
- In what ways does the artist respond to these ideas or events?
- A major theme in the program is “change.” How does the artwork you have been discussing reflect the idea of change? Consider: changing one’s beliefs or traditions, changing the location of one’s home, changing one’s name, changing one’s profession.

Follow-up Activity:

- Research the historical event(s) that is (are) referenced in the work of art you have been discussing. Create your own work of art in response to this event.

3. *Presenting Your Identity*

Discuss Ken Aptekar’s *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996. Ask students to write a short piece about their identity. They may wish to include information about their family or aspects of their identity that have changed e.g., changing of family name, changing location of one’s home or school. Afterwards, have students create a self-portrait that considers the aspects of their identity which they have included in their writing. Most mediums—including photography, painting, and drawing—are appropriate for this activity. Ask students to then combine the text with the image using Aptekar’s technique of overlaying the text on top of the image.

Background Information:

Ken Aptekar, *I Hate the Name Kenneth*, 1996.

Ken Aptekar overlays autobiographical narratives—sandblasted on glass—on appropriated images.* While Aptekar’s earlier works appropriated images from the European old masters, in this example Aptekar paints reproductions of portraits by the Jewish Austro-Hungarian artist Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921).

In this work, Aptekar addresses the relationship of naming to identity—from identifiably Jewish names, which were historically assigned in Europe to mark and separate Jews, to the transformation of these Germanic-sounding Jewish surnames into “ethnically neutral” English versions. Aptekar also examines his conflicting feelings about his Jewish heritage: “Jewish names . . . interest me. Perhaps because of pangs of guilt at my own willingness to pass as Not Jewish, I have little tolerance for Jews who change their names to sound less Jewish.”

(Source: www.thejewishmuseum.org/home/content/collection/online_exhibition/index.html)

* See attached for the text of *I Hate the Name Kenneth* and a reproduction of the work.

Resources

Books

Berger, Maurice, et al. *Masterworks of The Jewish Museum*. New York: The Jewish Museum; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul R. and Reinhartz, Jehuda, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Sachar, Howard M. *The Course of Modern Jewish History: The Classic History of Jewish People, from the 18th century to Present Day*. New York: First Vintage Books, 1990.

Walker, Rebecca. *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2001.

Websites

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org

The Jewish Virtual Library: A Division of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise
Includes a section on Jewish history, maps, and in-depth discussions of key terms and events.

www.thejewishmuseum.org

The Jewish Museum Website

*Includes an online exhibition entitled, **Making Connections in Art and Jewish Culture.***

The Jewish Museum is under the auspices of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.



Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800–1882)

The Return of the Jewish Volunteer

Frankfurt, 1833–1834

Oil on canvas

34x 36 in. (86.4x 91.4 cm)

Gift of Richard and Beatrice Levy, 1984-61

The Jewish Museum, New York

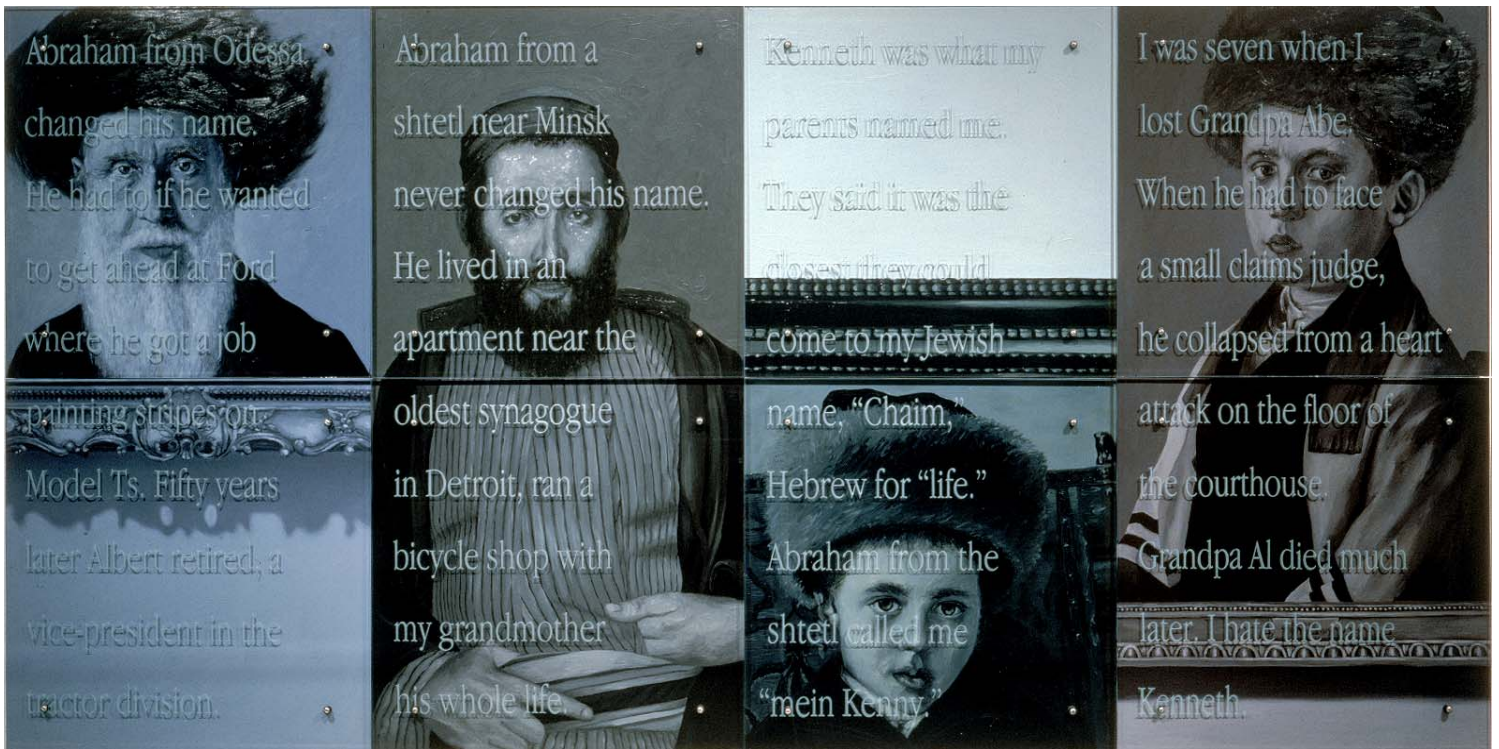
Text from Ken Aptekar's *I Hate the Name Kenneth* (1996).

Abraham from Odessa
changed his name.
He had to if he wanted
to get ahead at Ford
where he got a job
painting stripes on
Model Ts. Fifty years
later Albert retired, a
vice-president in the
tractor division.

Abraham from a
shtetl near Minsk
never changed his name.
He lived in an
apartment near the
oldest synagogue
in Detroit, ran a
bicycle shop with
my grandmother
his whole life.

Kenneth was what my
parents named me.
They said it was the
closest they could
come to my Jewish
name, "Chaim,"
Hebrew for "life."
Abraham from the
Shtetl called me
"mein Kenny."

I was seven when I
lost Grandpa Abe.
When he had to face
a small claims judge,
he collapsed from a heart
attack on the floor of
the courthouse.
Grandpa Al died much
later. I hate the name
Kenneth.



Ken Aptekar

I Hate the Name Kenneth, 1996.

Oil on wood, sandblasted glass, and bolts.

Overall: 69 x 120 7/8 x 3 in. (175.3 x 307.1 x 7.6 cm) Each: 30 x 30 x 3 in. (76.2 x 76.2 x 7.6 cm)

The Jewish Museum, New York

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