



**Paintings Tell Stories**  
**Grades 3–5**  
**Pre - and Post -Visit Materials for Educators**

**Program Overview**

This program provides an opportunity for students to examine paintings, photographs, and sculptures in the Museum’s permanent exhibition. Students will gain insight into how an artist chooses a particular color, form, and medium in order to communicate themes and ideas. Participants will also discuss how artists create works of art that connect to their own culture and identity.

**Goals**

- Explore the Museum’s fine arts collection and learn how to analyze individual works of art.
- Understand how works of art communicate ideas and tell stories through their forms and subject matter.
- Examine the variety of approaches artists use in interpreting the world around them.

**Vocabulary**

<b>Background</b>	The part of a pictorial representation that appears to be in the distance.
<b>Composition</b>	The structure or organization of a work of art, literature, or music.
<b>Cool colors</b>	Subdued colors including blue, green, and violet.
<b>Culture</b>	The arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought expressed in a particular community or by a particular group.
<b>Foreground</b>	The part of a picture or scene that appears nearest to the viewer.
<b>Identity</b>	The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
<b>Pattern</b>	A repeated design of natural or accidental origin.
<b>Portrait</b>	A painting, photograph, or other likeness of a person, especially one showing the face.
<b>Sculpture</b>	A three-dimensional work of art.

<b>Shape</b>	The outline or contour of a form.
<b>Symbol</b>	An image that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.
<b>Texture</b>	The feel and appearance of a surface e.g., rough or smooth.
<b>Theme</b>	An idea or point of view embodied and expanded upon in a work of art.
<b>Utopia</b>	An ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects.
<b>Warm Colors</b>	Vibrant colors including red, yellow, and orange.

### **Pre-Visit Activities**

#### *1. Examining a Work of Art*

The program *Paintings Tell Stories* invites students to explore the forms and subject matter of works of art in The Jewish Museum’s permanent exhibition. Look at the enclosed image of Marcel Janco’s *Ma’abarot in Gray*, c. 1950.

### **Background Information**

The masses of refugees who flocked to Israel after the founding of the State in 1948 preoccupied the artist Marcel Janco. In this painting, new immigrants sit in the foreground, while the tents of makeshift transit camps (the *ma’abarot*) rise among the palm trees in the middle ground. The yellow hills of the Israeli landscape are in the background. Janco uses geometric forms and interlocking shapes to depict this scene. Born in Bucharest, Janco was a founder of the Dada art movement in Zurich—an artistic and literary movement of the early 20th century founded on a rejection of traditional artistic and cultural values. He immigrated to Israel in 1940, where he joined the “New Horizons” group, which brought abstraction to the Israeli art scene in the 1950s.

#### Discussion Questions:

- What do you see when you first look at the painting?  
*Allow students to make general comments about color, line, shape, and composition. Ask them to refrain at this point from commenting on the subject matter of the painting.*
- What do you notice about the way in which the people are depicted in the foreground? How does this representation compare to more realistic images, such as photographs?
- What do you think the people in the painting are doing? Who do you think the man is on the left side of the canvas?
- What do you see in the middle ground of the painting? What do you think the triangular shapes represent?

- What colors does the artist use in the middle ground and what effect do these colors have? How do these colors compare to those in the background of the painting?
- What do you see in the background of the painting? What emotions do the colors in the background evoke?
- Do you think the place depicted in the background exists? If so, where do you think it is?

## 2. *Create Your Own Utopia*

In *Ma'abarot in Gray*, Marcel Janco represents Israel as a golden utopia—an ideal place—with yellow hills glistening in the landscape. Ask students to imagine their own utopia. Students should write a description of the place and create an accompanying image. Emphasis should be placed on color and geometric forms. Preferable materials for this activity include watercolor, oil pastels, and colored paper.

Questions to consider:

- What is the climate of this place? Is it warm, cold, or tropical?
- What natural resources are available there? Is the ocean nearby? Is it in the forest or near a river?
- What does the place look like? What does it feel like? What smells are in the air? What colors and forms will you use to show this?
- What are the people like who live in the utopia? How do they occupy their time?

## Post-Visit Activities

### 1. *Responding to the Museum Visit*

Many of the works of art in The Jewish Museum's collection are inspired by artists' personal experiences. Some tell stories about family traditions, and others are about historical events. Ask students to think about the artwork they observed during their visit to The Jewish Museum. In pairs, students should discuss an image that was meaningful or memorable—considering the artist's use of line, shape, and color to express ideas and emotions.

### 2. *Paintings and Their Stories*

Ask students to write a story that is either inspired by a personal experience or motivated by one of the works they viewed at the Museum. Afterwards, students should create a visual image of this story in the form of a drawing, painting, or collage.

## Resources

### Books

Acton, Mary. *Learning to Look at Paintings*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

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

Goodman, Susan Tumarlin. *Artists of Israel: 1920–1980*. New York: Wayne State University Press for The Jewish Museum, 1981.

Grossman, Grace Cohen. *Jewish Art*. Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1995.

Saccardi, Marianne. *Art in Story: Teaching Art History to Elementary School Children*. New Haven: Linnet Professional Publications, 1997.

Taylor, Joshua. *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981.

### Websites

**[www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org](http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org)**

The National Arts and Education Network

*Includes lesson plans and ideas for teaching about the arts.*

**[www.thejewishmuseum.org](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org)**

The Jewish Museum Website

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

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



Marcel Janco (Israeli, b. Romania, 1895–1984)

*Ma'abarot in Gray*

Israel, c. 1950

Oil on canvas

30 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 38 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (78.1 x 97.8 cm)

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