

Fantastic Chagall

by Joan Sterling

I've always enjoyed the fantasy style of Marc Chagall since I first saw his paintings in college. Soon after graduating, I passed up the opportunity to purchase a signed and numbered lithograph from his "Daphne and Chloe" series for \$100, a week's salary at that time. Years later, I learned that the same print was worth over \$100,000, which added to my reverence for his work.

This lesson, suitable for upper-elementary children and older, was inspired by Michelle Markel's book, *Dreamer from the Village: The Story of Marc Chagall* (Henry Holt and Co.; 2005). The striking illustrations by Emily Lisker capture the feeling of Chagall's works with vibrant colors and whimsical figures.

I began by reading *Dreamer from*

Paige >
Nikita >



^ Brianna
< Alexa

the Village and discussing the information on Chagall and the illustrations presented in the book, which explain his works. We discuss his colorful, upside-down world and how we might see things in dreams: floating, upside down, unusual size relationships and mixed-up colors. By understanding that his paintings have dream-like qualities, Chagall's artworks make more sense to young children.

Looking at several of his prints, we discuss the use of color, size and position. One thing that creates inter-

est in his paintings is the way he divides up the space using lines and shapes. Ask the students if they can trace some lines and shapes, particularly circles, which run through *I and the Village* (1911), for example. We also talk about the elements from Chagall's village, such as people, animals, farm tools and churches, and windows with views.

Now students are ready to sketch some dreamscapes of their own. We start by drawing four to five wavy lines horizontally, vertically or diagonally

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upper-elementary students will...

- create fantasy landscapes using tints, shades and blends.
- understand and appreciate the art of Marc Chagall.

MATERIALS

- Color wheel
- Practice drawing paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Permanent fine-point black markers
- Crayons
- 12" x 18" heavy drawing paper
- Tempera paints
- Brushes and water containers
- Paper towels
- Optional: scissors, pop-out foam or cardboard pieces



across the paper from edge to edge. This is an easy way for students to overcome "fear of the pure white paper," and breaks up our background into spaces on and through which we can build our landscape.

Three elements must be included in their landscape: a person or animal, a building or buildings, and trees, flowers or landscape features. The sizes should vary and they must turn their paper as they work so elements are oriented in different directions. They should draw these elements going across the wavy lines rather than staying inside the spaces, although some may be placed inside the shapes as well.

Students should experiment blending colors using crayons, with each space having at least two different colors blended. As they get to a wavy line, they should change the color with analogous colors, tints and/or shades. Remind them to use

see **CHAGALL** on page 50

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CHAGALL unexpected colors.
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During the next session we re-draw our designs on heavy paper, starting with four to five wavy lines vertically, horizontally or diagonally. Next, draw the elements: people/animals, buildings and trees/flowers/landscape features. Remind them to change the orientation of the paper in all directions and vary the sizes, and to outline them in permanent black marker to keep the pictures from getting lost as they paint.

In preparation for painting, we discuss the color wheel, focusing on warm and cool, complementary and analogous colors, and the opaque quality of tempera compared to watercolors. I demonstrate how to mix tints with white, shades with black, and use analogous colors as blends. As students are painting, they must change the tint, shade or blend of each color as they get to one of the black lines.

The painting process takes several one-hour classes depending on the pace of each student. If the outlines get lost, students can re-draw them at the beginning of a new class when the paint is dry, which especially helps younger students who may have difficulty with brush control.

If some students finish earlier than others, they can create one more element on a separate paper, paint it, cut it out and attach it with foam or cardboard pieces so it pops out from the background as a 3-D element. Students may also write about their fantasy landscape as another option.

The children enjoyed creating their own upside-down, vividly colored fantasy world à la Chagall. The paintings made quite a splash as students, parents and visitors stopped to view them on the bulletin board in the hallway. Everyone was impressed with the quality and sophistication these fourth-graders achieved with this project. ■

Joan Sterling teaches art at Hickory Woods Elementary School in Walled Lake, Michigan, and is coauthor of "Art by the Book" published by Pieces of Learning (piecesoflearning.com).

RESOURCES

- Chagall prints (including this month's Clip & Save Art Print)
- *Dreamer from the Village: The Story of Marc Chagall*, by Michelle Markel (Henry Holt and Co.; 2005)

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