"Marc Chagall's Windows" LESSON PLAN

by Miriam Spitzer

LESSON AT A GLANCE

This lesson plan focuses on the Chagall windows as "visual *midrash*" of the blessings that Yaakov gave his sons before he died. Students will play a game to match the blessings in the text with the imagery in Chagall's art. This lesson can be done on its own, as a *Parashat Vayehi* class, or as part of a larger unit on Jewish artists.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will study the Torah text dealing with Yaakov blessing his children.
- Students will compare the Torah text to Marc Chagall's interpretation of the Torah text as depicted in the Hadassah Medical Center stained glass windows.
- Students will learn about the artist Marc Chagall and about Hadassah Medical Center.

ACTIVITY

1. To Life! Ask students if they know what "*l'hayim*" means. Sing the *Fiddler on the Roof* song to jog students' memories. Explain that *hayim* means life. The text we will be studying today comes from *Parashat Vayehi*, from the same root. *Vayehi,* the final *parashah* in the book of *Bereishit*, is about the end of Yaakov's life when he blesses his many sons (the 12 tribes) before he dies.

2. Text study Pass out the text of *Bereishit* chapter 49, which includes the blessings that Yaakov gave his sons. Students can find the text in a Humash or Tanakh, or the text can be downloaded in facing Hebrew and English from http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0149.htm .

Explain that the poetry of the Hebrew text is very difficult and that Jewish scholars have different ideas about what it means. One way to interpret the blessings is to draw pictures of them, and the most famous pictures are from stained glass windows in the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem, designed by artist Marc Chagall.

3. Art Game Divide students into teams. Pass out full-color pictures of the Chagall windows from Hadassah Medical Center, each window on a separate piece of paper, unlabeled. (Images are available by scrolling down to the bottom of this page: http://www.hadassah.org.il/English/Eng_MainNavBar/About/Art+at+Hadassah/.) The goal of the game is to match the text of the blessings with the pictures and to explain why that blessing matches that picture. Students may notice that tribe names in Hebrew are included in the windows. That will make matching easier, but they still have to find the imagery in order to explain the symbolism.

Allow each team a chance to describe the imagery in at least one picture and support its claim of which tribe it represents. Allow a rebuttal from any group who disagrees with another group's assessment. The goal is that students explore and talk about the symbols in the windows more than that they get it "right".

4. Follow-up and Enrichment. Show the following video, which gives the biography of Marc Chagall's life. http://mediamidrash.behrmanhouse.com/watch.php?VID_ID=70yVLHIoKYU

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