



A PICTURE FOR MARC

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Growing up in a shtetl in Belarus, young Marc Chagall has never met an artist... but that's what he is. And because no one ever told him that art shouldn't be about shtetl life, his drawings are filled with rabbis, wedding canopies, even fiddlers on roofs! It turns out that's partly what makes his art so special.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Marc Chagall, the famous Jewish painter (1887-1985), is one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. When Chagall rose to prominence, few Jewish artists had achieved his fame and influence; even fewer had done so painting overtly Jewish imagery. Born Moishe Segal, Chagall left his home in Belarus to study and make art in big cities like St. Petersburg and Paris. But no matter where he went, his heritage followed him, and unlike some other Jewish artists, Chagall let his artwork reflect that.

Many of Chagall's most well-known works feature Jewish scenes, such as "The Canopy," which portrays a couple getting married beneath a *chuppah* (wedding canopy), or "The Praying Jew," featuring a man wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl). But as Chagall's fame attests, his appeal stretches beyond the Jewish community. He is remembered not only as a major Jewish artist but also one of the major modernists. "If a painter is Jewish and paints life," he once said, "how can he help having Jewish elements in his work? But if he is a good painter, there will be more than that. The Jewish element will be there, but the art will tend to approach the universal." The art world – and the Jewish world – is richer for it. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/apictureformarc.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

One of Chagall's famous paintings, "The Fiddler," is shown on the back of this book. This evocative 1913 painting was part of the inspiration for the 1964 Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, which depicts life in a Jewish *shtetl* (Yiddish for "little town") very similar to Chagall's hometown, Vitebsk.

- Can you find the place in the book where Marc describes some elements of this painting?
- Chagall once described himself as "a dreamer who never woke up." What's dreamlike about this painting?
- Search the web for other Chagall paintings. Be on the lookout for flying, dreamlike scenes, and elements that represent life in Vitebsk.
- Try making some of your own Chagall-style art. Which scenes from your life would you include?