

# OCCUPATIONS PAST AND PRESENT THROUGH THE PAINTINGS OF MAYER KIRSHENBLATT AND OTHERS:

## A VISUAL LITERACY CURRICULUM KIT FOR EARLY ELEMENTARY GRADES

TEACHER'S GUIDE

By Deborah Berman



## **Overview**

This kit provides material for teachers of middle-elementary grades to facilitate an exploration of occupations past and present through images—primarily paintings by Mayer Kirshenblatt but also including the work of other artists. Some of the paintings do not depict occupations. Instead, they depict the Jewish society and traditions with which Mayer grew and in which these occupations were embedded.

Mayer's paintings initially grew out of a parent-child relationship. For many years his daughter, Barbara, asked her father questions about his childhood and nagged him to paint pictures of Apt, the town in Poland where he grew up. Finally, at the age seventy-three, he painted the kitchen of his boyhood home and was amazed at what he had done. He has since painted hundreds of paintings.

Children will respond to the colorful scenes and the lively stories associated with them. Upon closer observation, and after learning about the inspiration for their creation, they will want to know more about the person who made the paintings and how anyone could remember everything in such exquisite detail. They will want to know more about that world and what it was like to be a child in it. They will be encouraged to be as curious as the artist, who loved to watch all the different occupations in the town.

After studying a variety of images and reading or listening to the stories that they illustrate, children will work in groups to engage in their own research about contemporary occupations through observation and short interviews. They will use a variety of media in both their research and their presentations to the class. Whatever the research and presentation style used—paintings, photographs, audio and video recording, written or printed word—the class will respond to each group, focusing on why the group chose their particular medium and what can be shown about the occupation by using that medium.

## **Optional**

A toy theater performance may be introduced as a presentation choice. Toy theater is a form of miniature theater using small stick puppets made from original drawings, photographs, or any type of image that can be cut and pasted. In a toy theater presentation, children can use a wide variety of media including original photos, magazine and painted images, and sound within a dramatic framing device, providing a form through which students can experiment with manipulating media to convey their own truths. While a toy theater is usually on a small scale, these

miniature presentations can be projected through the use of video and made available to a larger audience.

**Over the course of the unit, students will engage in the following activities:**

1. Observe paintings closely and in relation to the stories associated with them and discuss how information about occupations is communicated through images and words.
2. Compare and contrast similar images in different media or by different artists and identify how style and medium influence information garnered from image.
3. Observe the portrayal of contemporary occupations as seen in television and magazines.
4. Formulate a research question regarding a contemporary occupation, including Jewish occupations, of their choice. These questions may evolve as the children become more familiar with the occupation.

The teacher will introduce a variety of media available for conducting research. Students will decide on a medium through which to conduct their research: interviews, photography, paintings or drawings, books, videos, audio recording, etc. They will be encouraged to closely observe an occupation in action and ask the worker questions about the occupation.

When they have finished their research, students will present the material they have collected. Presentations will include comparisons of contemporary occupations with historical ones.

Presentations will be followed by class discussions comparing contemporary occupations to historical ones and debating the effectiveness of each medium and how it influenced the information students collected and presented.

**Optional**

Prepare a toy theater presentation. Write a summary of the presentation, including a description of the specific occupations to be presented. Prepare puppets, backdrops, and music based on research. The show will be presented in real space and simultaneously projected in large scale.

## **Goals: Students will...**

### **Jewish Studies**

- ❖ become familiar with the occupations Jews engaged in to meet the particular needs and wants of the pre-war European Jewish community;
- ❖ become familiar with Jewish community life in pre-war Europe;
- ❖ consider how Jewish life and occupations have changed over time.

### **Social Studies**

- ❖ become familiar with a variety of occupations individuals engage in to meet the needs and wants of particular communities and society at large;
- ❖ consider how occupations have changed over time and in particular how technology has changed occupations;
- ❖ develop critical thinking skills as they begin to think about occupations they may be interested in;
- ❖ consider how goods and services have been delivered and how that has changed over time.

### **Language Arts**

- ❖ write interview questions;
- ❖ read print and non-print texts to answer research questions;
- ❖ work cooperatively in small groups to organize results of research and produce class presentations;
- ❖ develop skills for constructive criticism and observation of peer presentations (e.g., Stuart took a close-up photograph of the baker so we can see the hat he wears when he cooks).

**Media Literacy**

- ❖ gather information from images in paintings, photographs, and film;
- ❖ distinguish between various media and the kinds of information they convey;
- ❖ become aware of different painting styles and learn how style and medium affect information communicated;
- ❖ make informed choices about the media they use to convey information.

**Information Literacy**

- ❖ frame pertinent research questions and revise these questions as necessary in the course of research;
- ❖ become familiar with print and online resources and search techniques applicable to research questions;
- ❖ develop observational skills and develop questions based on their observations.

**Paintings included in the curriculum (all images from Kirshenblatt except as noted):**

**Individual Paintings:**

Painting 1: *Blessing the New Moon*

Online: [http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/blessing-rosh-chodesh\\_small.jpg](http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/blessing-rosh-chodesh_small.jpg)

Painting 2: *Blessing the First Rays of the Sun*

Online: [http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/blessing-sun\\_small.jpg](http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/blessing-sun_small.jpg)

Painting 3: *The Milk Lady*

Painting 4: *The Bagel Seller*

Painting 5: *The Water Carrier*

Online: <https://fritzaschersociety.org/exhibition-event/mayer-kirshenblatt/>

Painting 6: *Jadwiga Washing Laundry*

Online:

<https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/kirshenblatt-jadwiga.htm>

Painting 7: *The Wigmaker*

Painting 8: *The Shilklaper*

Online: [http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/sabbath-2-shulklapper\\_small.jpg](http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/sabbath-2-shulklapper_small.jpg)

**Image Pairs:**

Image Pair #1:

*The Bagel Seller*

*Bagel Seller*, photograph, anonymous c. 1920

Image Pair #2:

*Jadwiga Washing Laundry*

*Our Kitchen*, painting, Toby Flueck

Image Pair #3:

*Saturday Afternoon Stroll on the Town Square*

*The Porter*, photograph, Roman Vishniac

Other Mayer Kirshenblatt paintings can be found at

<https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/ce/kirshenblatt/kirshenblatt-main.htm>

## Teaching with This Guide

Teachers may wish to read more about Mayer Kirshenblatt and read his book, *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust*. It can be purchased through the Yiddish Book Center's store: [https://shop.yiddishbookcenter.org/products/they-called-me-mayer-july-painted-memories-of-a-jewish-childhood-in-poland-before-the-holocaust-by-mayer-kirshenblatt-and-barbara-kirshenblatt-gimblett?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=438ebf0d3&\\_ss=r](https://shop.yiddishbookcenter.org/products/they-called-me-mayer-july-painted-memories-of-a-jewish-childhood-in-poland-before-the-holocaust-by-mayer-kirshenblatt-and-barbara-kirshenblatt-gimblett?_pos=1&_sid=438ebf0d3&_ss=r)

Mayer Kirshenblatt painted hundreds of paintings of the shtetl that are not included in this guide. Other occupations are depicted in his work, including the butcher, the chimney sweep, the blacksmith, musicians, and more.

Suggested questions in the guide are divided into two groups. The first limits discussion to what is observable. The second may introduce additional information that will influence observations or comparison of past and present.

## *Occupations Past and Present: A Curriculum for Early Elementary Grades*

Most of the paintings included in this curriculum were painted by Mayer Kirshenblatt, who was born in Opatów (“Apt” in Yiddish), Poland, in 1916. In 1934 he and his family settled in Toronto, Canada, where he married, had three daughters, and owned a paint and wallpaper store. Barbara, his eldest daughter, knew he had a very good memory because she had been interviewing him for many years, and she encouraged him to paint his memories of Apt. One day when he was seventy-three years old he began to paint, and he has since painted hundreds of paintings. Barbara discovered that one of the reasons he was able to include so much detail in his paintings was that he had spent a year playing hooky and observing everything going on in his town. In this unit we will look at Mayer’s paintings of occupations. Then we will do the same kind of close observation that Mayer did, focusing on occupations in our community and comparing them to what Mayer saw as a child and young man.

## I. OCCUPATIONS

### *Blessing the New Moon*



“Jews say a blessing on the new moon. The moon is a heavenly body and it is customary, every month, when there is the first hint of a new moon, to go outdoors and say a blessing. [ . . . ] The synagogue was the center of Jewish life so in my painting I show the people saying the blessing in front of the synagogue. I took artistic liberty in showing a full moon.”

Mayer Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Polish Childhood Before the Holocaust* (University of California Press, 2007) 57.

Question: What do you see in this picture?

Answer: The full moon. Stars. Windows in the shape of Jewish stars. Colored windows. Men looking at books they hold in their hands. The men are outside, and they are wearing tefillin. The men have beards. They all seem to be wearing the same kind of clothes, and they all wear hats. There are two buildings, and both are lit inside. There are no windows on the lower story but there are windows higher up. There is an outdoor staircase to an upper story.

Q: What time of day do you think it is? How do you know?

A: It is evening.

Evidence: The moon is out. The sky is dark. The lights are glowing from inside the buildings. We know that in Jewish tradition prayers for the

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new moon are said in the evening.

Q: Because we know about Jewish traditions, do we understand what we see differently than children who do not have Jewish backgrounds? What does it mean that the artist took “artistic liberty”?

A: The Jewish stars on the building suggest that this may be a painting with Jewish people. We know that Jews say prayers in the evening, especially at a new moon. We know that Jewish men wear tefillin. The term “artistic liberty” means that an artist may show something that would not be true in real life. In this case, Mayer Kirshenblatt showed a full moon in his painting. When the blessing is said on the new moon, however, there would be only the tiniest sliver of a moon. He thought the painting would look better that way.

Did you know? *Birkat HaLevana*

ברכת הלבנה

The Blessing for the Moon (*Birkat HaLevana*), mandated by the Talmud, is recited once a month when the moon appears to be growing in size. Over the centuries, other prayers have been appended to it and now the whole service is known as the *Kiddush Levana*. The service is said outside the synagogue, in a group. It is customary to say it immediately after Shabbat, while everyone is still dressed festively.

## ***Blessing the First Rays of the Sun***



"It is also a custom to say a blessing on the sun every twenty-eight years. Although this happened in my time, I did not witness it. I read about it in the Apt chronicles. [ . . . ] Uris Lustig, a renowned fiddler in Apt, composed a special tune for the occasion. . . . I envision the rabbi standing on a table, and that is how I painted the scene."  
Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 58–59.

Q: What do you see in this painting?

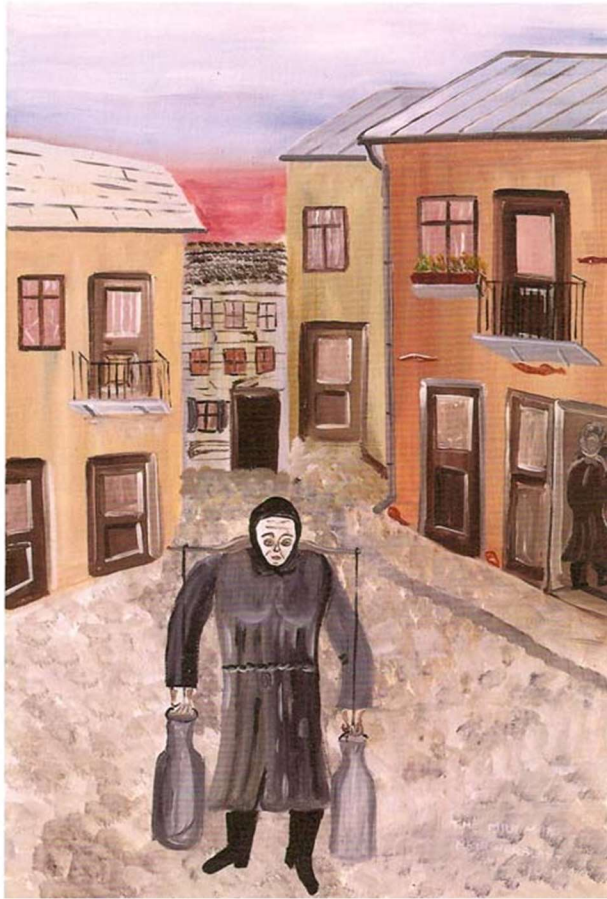
A: Sunrise. Sunset. Many men with beards holding books. A band with a drum, a cymbal, a horn, a fiddle. A building, perhaps a synagogue. We see the backs of the men. Their faces are smaller than in the painting *Blessing of the Moon*. The colors of the men's clothes and most of the painting are browns and golds. The sun and the area around the sun are a bright orange. The lights are not glowing from inside the buildings as they are in the painting with the moon. There is one man standing on a table at the front of the group, and he is not looking at them. Perhaps he is looking at the sun. The men seem to be looking at him. The man in the front of the group is wearing a different hat than everyone else.

Did you know? *Birkat HaChama*

ברכת החמה

The Blessing for the Sun (*Birkat HaChama*), mandated in the Talmud, is a blessing in appreciation of the sun that is recited once every twenty-eight years. Over the centuries, other prayers have been appended to it. The service is said outside, where the sun is visible, in a group. The last time the blessing was said was on April 8, 2009.

## *The Milk Lady*



“The milk lady would go every morning to a farmer about four miles out of town. She would be back by eight o’clock in time for Mother to boil the milk (to pasteurize it) and give it to us for breakfast. We poured milk on boiled millet [. . .], seasoned with a little salt, for breakfast or lunch. The milk lady carried the milk in a can, with a dipper and a measurer hanging at the side of it. She would come to your door—she had her customers—and she would sell you one or two quarts of milk, whatever you needed. If she had any milk left over, she would leave it to ferment, and we used to buy that too, although most of the time mother made sour milk herself. The milk lady’s husband was a sort of furrier.” Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 119.

Q: What occupation do you see in the painting? Or perhaps: Do you see an occupation in this painting? (Again, children may need to talk about the historical context of the painting in order to see an occupation. On the other hand, observation before information can lead to a discussion of how context affects what you see.)

A: A lady carrying heavy jugs. Her shoulders are bent. The rope carrying the buckets is straight, and it looks like it is carrying a load.

Q: Where is the milk lady?

A: On a street showing many doors. An open door with a woman standing in it behind her. Milk is delivered house to house in a crowded residential neighborhood.

Q: Is her work hard or easy?

A: Hard.

E: She looks like she is bent over from the weight she is carrying. She has very wide shoulders that might mean she is strong from working hard.

### **Additional Questions**

Q: How do we get our milk today?

A: From the supermarket, from the gas station, from a dairy store.

Q: Milk was delivered every day. Why did the milk lady deliver milk every day? Do you get milk every day?

A: Farmers couldn't store milk. Stores couldn't store milk. Most people in the town had no refrigeration.

Q: Milk was boiled before drinking. Why was the milk boiled? Do your parents boil your milk before you drink it?

A: Milk was boiled because when it comes directly from the cow it may have germs in it that can make you sick. A scientist, Louis Pasteur, discovered that boiling it kills the unsafe organisms. Milk that we buy in grocery stores today has already been through pasteurization (it has been treated with heat to eliminate germs) before we buy it.

## ***Bagel Seller***



There were four bakeries in Mayer's town. One made most of the bagels. Mayer describes how they were made and with what ingredients in some detail in his book. He writes: "I remember a woman who walked around selling bagels from a basket that she carried on Wednesday, when there were lots of people in town for market day." Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 44.

Q: What occupation do you see in this painting, or, again, do you see an occupation in the painting? (This may lead to a discussion of how bread is sold today.)

A: A bagel seller.

Q: How is she carrying the bagels?

A: In a basket.

Q: How does she dress for work?

A: She is wearing a long-sleeved dress and a kerchief. She is wearing sandals. It might be cool out or she may have to wear long sleeves because people are expected to dress a certain way.

Q: Where does she work? Does she sit or stand to do her work?

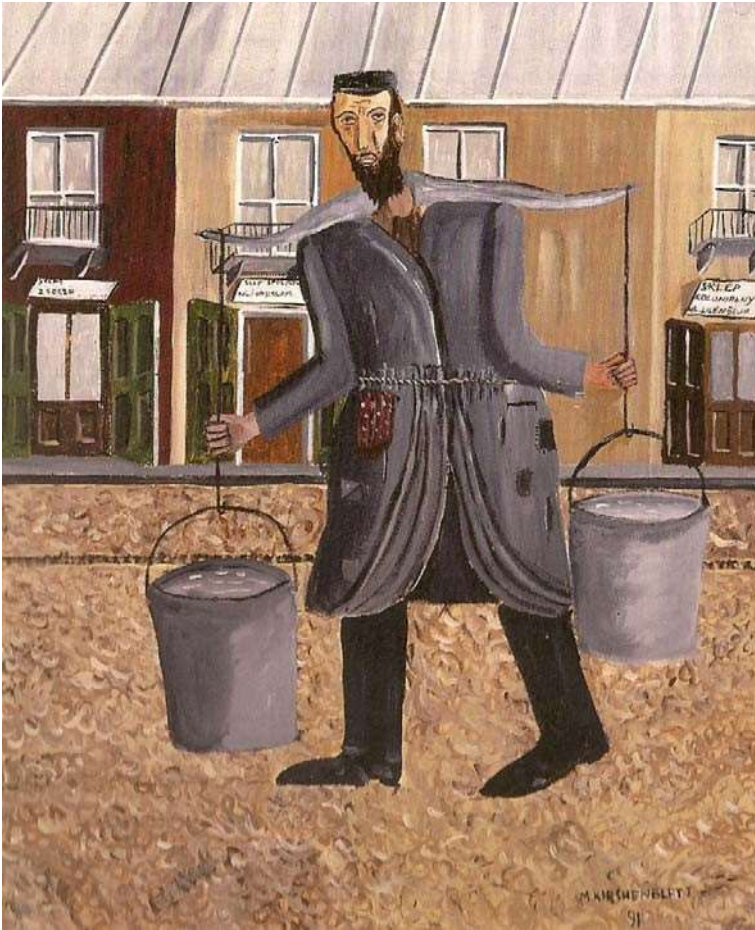
Where does she have lunch? Where does she go to the bathroom?

A: This picture gives us answers to some of these questions and not others. But we can make some informed guesses. The bathroom is not right in the workplace we see her in.

Q: What does the image tell you about how it might feel to work as the bagel seller?

A: The streets are made of stone. Carrying the bagel basket might hurt her back or her neck all day. The street doesn't look flat. There are lines making circles that could be bumps, stones. It might hurt to walk on the stones. She is wearing sandals that don't look very thick. She might trip on the stones carrying a heavy load.

## The Water Carrier



“The water carrier, the *vaser-treyger*, was one step above the beggar. What did he have around his waist? A rope to hold his things and a red kerchief sticking out of his pocket. He had the corners of his coat tucked under his belt so they didn’t get in his way as he walked. Carrying water was a difficult job. [. . .] The water carrier in my painting is hauling about eighty pounds in those two buckets.” Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 30.

Q: What occupation do you see in this painting? What is the man in the painting carrying? (Again, the discussion of context can take place before or after observation of the painting.)

A: A man carrying buckets of water, a bucket carrier. A water carrier.

E: His buckets are filled with liquid that looks transparent.

Q: How is he carrying the water?

A: In big buckets hanging from string on a yoke across his shoulders.

Q: Is his job easy or hard?

A: It is hard.

E: He is holding up the buckets with his hands maybe to take some of the weight off his shoulders. His shoulders look wide and strong.

The buckets come up to his knee and nearly reach the ground—they are very big and water is heavy. They are almost as wide as he is. His neck looks like it is straining.

Q: Do you think that this is a well-paying job?

A: The water carrier's clothes have many patches. It looks he is not well paid because his clothes look old.

### **Additional Questions**

Q: Where do we get our water today?

A: From the sink, from the store, from a water fountain, from a stream, from a well. From a reservoir through underground pipes leading to homes, offices, schools, etc.

Q: Where did the water carriers get their water?

A: From a well.

Q: Do we have water carriers today?

A: When we go camping we might carry our own water. We carry water in water bottles. Usually pipes carry our water, or trucks carry bottled water to the store. Some people get big jugs of water delivered by truck and carried to their houses by the driver, who may wheel the jugs in on a dolly.

Q: Do people pay for water today?

A: No. Yes. We pay when we buy bottled water from the store. Each community charges for the use of water in its own way, but we do pay to take care of pipes and reservoirs.

**Portrait of Jadwiga, detail from *Jadwiga Doing the Laundry***



Q: What occupation do you see in this painting?

A: Washing the laundry. Washing. Cooking. Boiling water.

E: One woman is scrubbing on a board. There are suds in a barrel. She has her sleeves rolled up so they don't get wet.

Q: What is the woman at the stove doing?

A: Lifting a pot. Boiling water. Bringing a pot of hot water to the woman washing. Starting to boil a pot of water.

E: We may assume that the water is hot because there is a fire in the stove. There is an orange glow at the side of the stove in two windows. There is a door open to let oxygen in (if children are familiar with wood stoves). The woman at the stove is perhaps looking at the woman washing, which may indicate her intention to bring water over to her. It looks like it is cold because she is carrying the pot with her bare hands.

Q: Where are the women?

A: At home in the kitchen. In someone else's kitchen.

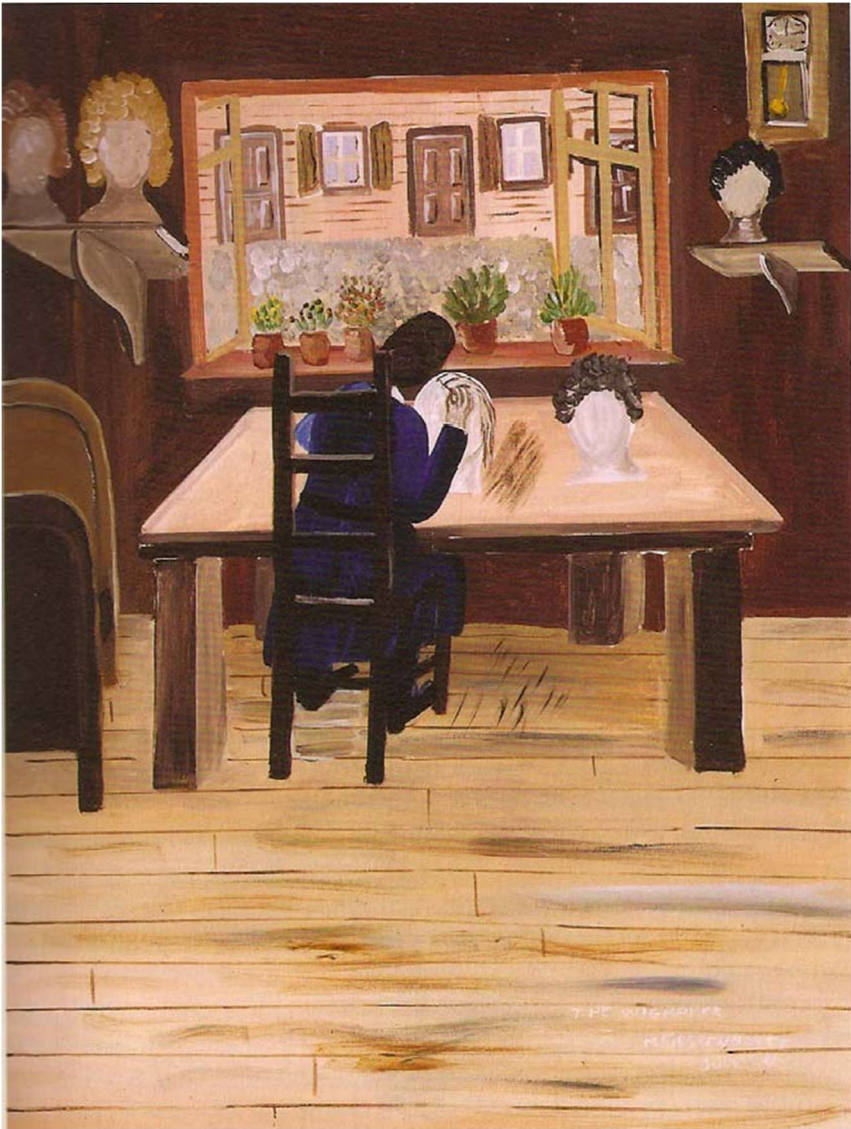
E: There are cooking pans above the stove. The room is decorated with paintings of flowers more like a home than a store.

Q: Is this work hard or easy?

A: Hard.

E: We see wrinkles in the forehead of the woman at the wash tub, which may be a sign that she has to strain in her work. Her open, frowning mouth, and the lines around it, give the appearance that she is working hard. Her eyes seem not to be focused, if she were daydreaming trying to forget her work.

## *The Wigmaker*



"I remember the wigmaker in Apt [ . . . ] I seldom went to their place, but I remember that they lived and worked in one relatively large room in a nice brick building, with a big window that faced *Ivansker gas*." Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 188.

Q: What do you see in this painting?

A: A woman with her back to us sitting on a chair at a table. The window is open in front of her, and the table is right up against the wall under the window. The table is a light color. There are two model heads on the table. There are more model heads on shelves on the wall in front of the woman to either side of the window. The heads have curly hair/wigs. We can see the underside of the shelves, which means that the point of view the painting is showing is that of a short person (or that the shelves were quite high). The artist tells us that he paints from his childhood memories, which means he would have been quite small and seen the undersides of the shelves. There is a clock with a pendulum on the wall and a bed by the side of the table.

Q: What do the colors express in this painting?

A: There is a contrast between light and dark in this painting. The window and the area around it are painted in lighter colors. The wig near the window is light, and the one next to it is in shadow. The plants are lit by the sun and suggest that the wigmaker has something pretty to look at. The dark browns of the room, not lit by the window, may suggest tranquility and safety. We see that the wigmaker has both her work area, which opens her to the outside world, and an area in her home where she can rest.

Q: How is this painting of an occupation different from the milk lady, the bagel seller, or the water carrier?

A: The person in the painting is sitting and resting her work on a table. She is inside. We do not see her face. She is not carrying anything. Her body does not appear to be straining. She is making something. She has some privacy.

Q: What is the woman doing?

A: She is sewing. She is making a wig. She is repairing a wig. She is cleaning a wig.

E: The woman in the painting is holding something with her thumb and forefinger the way you might hold a needle and has her head tilted toward the model head in front of her. There are lines in the head, and some hair is hanging down on one side of the model. There are thin strokes of paint on the table that may be the hair she is using to make the wigs.

Q: How does our knowledge of Jewish life help us understand this painting?

A: We know that in the past almost all Jewish women shaved their heads and wore wigs after they married. Some Jewish women do this today.

## ***The Shilklaper***



“A shilklaper, or knocker, went from house to house. He would rap on the shutters and cry out, ‘Women, women! It’s time to light the candles and go to the synagogue.’ Through the window in my painting you can see the table set for the Sabbath.” Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 209.

Q: What do you see in this painting?

A: Sunrise. Sunset. A man with a grey beard and a cane is holding a stick outside the open window of a house. A wooden house with one window and a door. Two houses with lights on inside. The houses are right next to each other. There are smokestacks on the houses. We can see a table and a stove in the house. Along one wall there is a shelf displaying dishes. There is another window in the house, or maybe a door. The man is knocking on the shutter. Perhaps it is early morning because at sunset more people might be outside or visible in the house.

Q: What was the *shilklaper's* job?

A: He was the designated town crier whose job it was to walk up and down the Jewish area of the town heralding the arrival of Shabbat. The *shilklaper* made sure that the community observed Shabbat on time every week. The *shilklaper* would probably not have access to a chart or a calendar with reliable times, so he would have to rely on the time of the last sunset he witnessed.

Q: How do people today know what time Shabbat begins?

A: Most communities publish a calendar or a chart with dates and times.

## II. COMPARING IMAGES

### 1. Bagel Sellers



Q: Compare these two images of bagel sellers. Do you learn the same things about bagel sellers from each one?

A: We see that bagel sellers can be men as well as women. A photograph reflects an individual person. In the painting we don't know if this is a specific person. The painting uses color. Photographs from this period were only in black and white. The photo looks old. The painting shows a long time ago but looks fresh and new. In the painting the person fills a large part of the image, and she is centered. In the photo the figure is toward one side, and the background conveys a sense of deeper space. In the painting the space is not as deep. The figure in the painting is in bright colors, keeping our attention focused on it.

## **Additional Questions**

Q: Where do we get bagels today?

A: At a bakery, at the supermarket, fresh, frozen, as a sandwich.

Q: Who makes the bagels we eat today?

A: Bakeries, supermarket bakeries, factories.

Q: Are the bagels sold like the bagels we see in the painting and photograph?

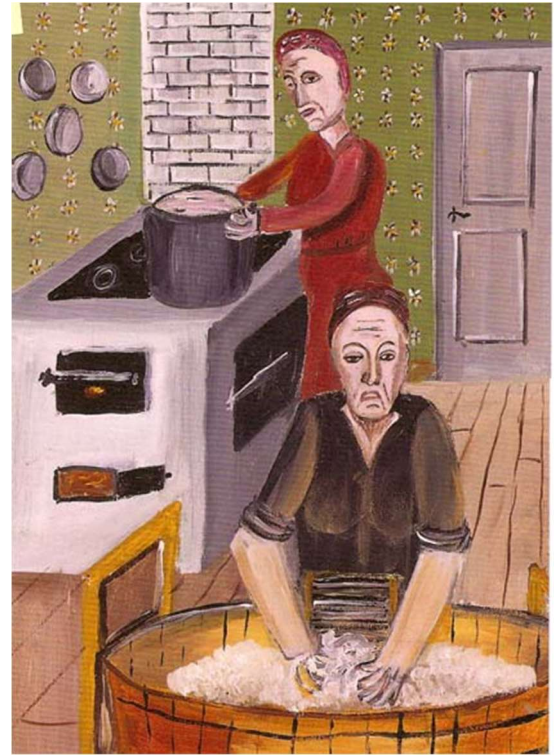
A: In some cities, bagels are sold in carts or stands on the street. The vendors use them for sandwiches. Pretzels sometimes are sold in small stands on the street and in subways. The bagels in the photograph are made of two thin coils of dough that have been twisted together and have a big hole; bagels today are usually made from one thick rope of dough and have a small hole.

## 2. Washing Women



OUR KITCHEN

*Our Kitchen*  
Artist: Toby Flueck



*Jadwiga Washing Laundry (detail)* Artist: Mayer Kirshenblatt

Q: What occupation do these paintings show?

A: Women doing laundry. Washer women.

Q: What do you see that is similar in these two paintings?

A: In each, there is a woman bent over a barrel with her hands in the suds. There are fires in the stove in both paintings. Wooden barrels. Stoves. Dishes or pots hanging on the wall. Pots on the stove. The women at the barrels are both in dark colors and have their sleeves rolled up.

Q: How are the two paintings different?

A: The style is different. In *The Kitchen*, by Toby Flueck, the sunlight is flooding into the room. The paint the painter uses to show the sunlight forms a triangle with its point outside the door and its base within the kitchen. The use of perspective gives the feeling of a larger space, and the lighter colors used to paint the outdoors adds to that feeling. The open door in Toby's painting adds to the sense of space and suggests the figure takes pleasure in the light and warmth of the sun as well as in the outdoor world.

In Mayer Kirshenblatt's painting the people are not realistic looking. The way Mayer used his brush allows you to see brush strokes. There are no shadows or natural light in his painting, which makes the space look small. The door is closed, reinforcing the sense of restricted space. The room depicted is a plain box shape, compared with the nooks and crannies of Flueck's painting. We focus on the expressions on the women's faces.

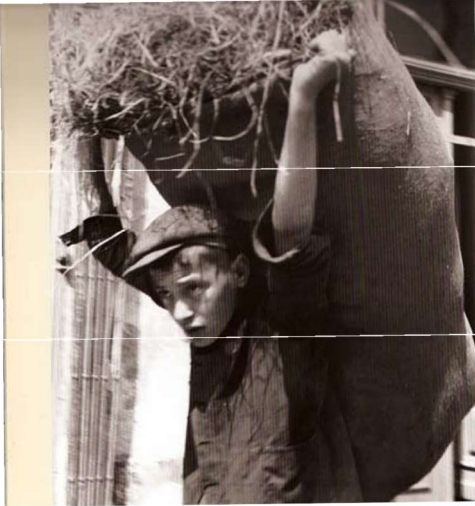
Q: Was washing a hard or easy task? How is it done today?

A: Washing was hard physical work involving bending, lifting, and scrubbing. It took a long time to do the laundry. Today it is much easier to do laundry. It involves very little effort. A machine does the laundry so you can do something else simultaneously.

Q: Where is laundry done?

A: People own washing machines. If you don't have a washing machine, you can go to a laundromat, a store with lots of washing machines that you pay to use.

### 3. Work and Rest



*The Porter* (black and white photograph)  
Artist: Roman Vishniac



*Saturday Afternoon Stroll on the Town Square*  
Artist: Roman Mayer Kirshenblatt

“The north side was the more exclusive side. That’s where the more exclusive shops were located. We used to stroll back and forth on the north side for hours on end on Saturdays and holidays. This was the place to see and be seen. If you had a nice new dress, you showed it off there. There was a saying that what you put in your stomach no one could see, but what you put on your back everyone could see.”  
Kirshenblatt, *They Called Me Mayer July*, 20.

Q: Which of these images depicts work and which depicts rest? What do you see in each image that helps you decide?

A: The photograph of the boy carrying the bag of straw depicts work. His arms are stretched, straining to balance an overfilled load of straw. His back is bent, indicating that the load is heavy. His hands are rigid, helping to balance his bag. His face looks like he might be in pain; he is concentrating hard. Even though it is a black and white photo, it looks like his clothes are not colorful or nice. They are work clothes.

The painting depicts leisure or rest. It shows many people in colorful clothes. The people appear not to be working and at ease. The people do not appear to be straining or rushing. They are interacting with each other for social purposes, not performing tasks or producing products.

The color and lighting of the painting communicate a lighter mood than

the photograph. People are standing and talking in groups. Some are bent toward others, not carefully balanced to support a load or perform a difficult task. Figures seem to be thoughtfully listening, talking freely, or just peacefully standing still. Clothing is colorful. Some women are wearing white collars that look festive.

Did you know? Shabbat

שבת

Shabbat, the weekly Jewish holiday, begins Friday night at sundown and continues until sunset on Saturday. On Shabbat, people go to synagogue for prayers, eat festive meals, and enjoy leisure time. They do not work.

### III. OCCUPATIONS PROJECT

After studying the images and reading or listening to the stories that they illustrate, the class should brainstorm occupations in their community.

Sample list within the general community: teacher, doctor, nurse, firefighter, store owner, librarian.

Within the Jewish community: rabbi, butcher (*shochet*), scribe (*sofer*).

Talk about the occupations with the students.

Each child should choose an occupation, either general or Jewish, that they want to research. Students should formulate a big-idea research question regarding their occupation. The questions may evolve as the children become more familiar with the occupation.

The teacher should introduce students to a range of media available for conducting research. This includes explaining how interviews are conducted (you may wish to provide a list of sample questions: What is involved in being a \_\_\_? What kind of work is it (artistic, social, physical)? Where does a \_\_\_ work? Does a \_\_\_ work alone/in a team? Does a \_\_\_ use tools to do their job? Which ones?); exhibiting photographs, paintings, and drawings; visiting the library to see books and reference materials; and showing websites that feature online databases, videos, and audio recordings.

The students should then begin their research. Students should be encouraged to closely observe the occupation in action and interview a worker who engages in this occupation. In addition, they should gather information using a variety of media about their chosen occupation. Students should determine which medium is the best one in which to highlight their occupation. For instance, a cantor's work will be best understood through audio/video media, whereas a painter's work will be best understood using visual materials.

When they have finished their research, students will present their occupation to the class. The teacher should lead discussions comparing contemporary occupations with the historical ones we have discussed. Students will also evaluate how various media were used to communicate research and how effective each medium was. They should also discuss how the chosen medium influenced the information students collected and presented.

## Works Cited

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