



Hassidic Dance
Todros Geller
Chicago, 1928

This painting was created by an artist named Todros Geller who immigrated to Chicago from Russia. Geller was called the “dean” of Chicago’s Jewish artists because he brought artists together and encouraged them to make Jewish art.

On Friday nights they would gather at his home to discuss their work over his wife’s delicious matzah ball soup. Geller was also passionate about teaching children and offered classes at the local Jewish community center. This painting was based on a scene that Geller observed on a trip to Palestine in the 1920s (before the creation of the modern State of Israel). In it he shows a joyous bride and groom dancing at their wedding.

Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

Observe, Describe, Infer

Begin by carefully looking at the image for several moments. Write down or share as a group everything you notice in the image. Notice the expressions, poses and clothing of the figures. Look at the background of the scene. Can you infer what is happening in the painting? Can you sense the mood of the painting? Can you discover what the scene would have sounded like? Write down as many details as you can and then use them to tell a story from the perspective of one of the characters.

The Cubist Canvas

Todros Geller lived in a time during which great changes took place in art. Pablo Picasso began painting figures that were made up of cubes, spheres, cylinders, cones, and other geometric shapes. His paintings looked like someone had cut them up and glued them back together. This style of painting is called Cubism. What shapes do you notice in this painting? How do they help move your eye around the work of art? Search online for other examples of cubist artwork and note any similarities to *Hassidic Dance*.

Mitzvah Dancing

Another name for this painting is “The Mitzvah Tanz” (or commandment dance). At Hassidic weddings it is a tradition for the groom or male members of his family to dance before the bride with a kerchief or sash between them. The goal of the dance is to honor the bride and give her joy. Have you ever danced at a wedding? What was the mood? Can you come up with a dance that you would perform before a bride and groom?