



“A painter paints to
unload himself of feelings
and visions.” **Pablo Picasso**

Pablo Picasso, *Family of Saltimbanques* (detail), 1905, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

1 Picasso's Early Years in Paris

Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881–1973) was one of the most exciting artists of the twentieth century. He continually searched for fresh ways to represent the world, and he is admired for his experimentation with styles, materials, and techniques. The years 1901–1906 are often described as Picasso's Blue and Rose periods because he was exploring the ways color and line could express ideas and emotions.

Born in southern Spain, Picasso drew and painted from childhood on, studying at art academies in Barcelona and Madrid. In 1900, at age nineteen, Picasso first visited Paris, then the center of the art world, and was captivated by the vibrant city and museums and art galleries. In 1904, Picasso settled in Paris, and France became his adopted home.

below: Pablo Picasso at Montmartre, Place Ravignan, about 1904, Musée Picasso, Paris, courtesy of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY. Photo: RMN-J. Faujour.

right: Pablo Picasso, *The Tragedy*, 1903, oil on wood, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection



2 Why So Blue?

During his first years in Paris, Picasso was drawn to the grittier side of city life. He sympathized with the poor and hungry, their struggles and isolation. Picasso was also feeling great sadness over the loss of his best friend. These feelings literally *colored* his works. From 1901 to 1904, Picasso experimented with using dark, thick outlines to create figures and shapes on his canvas, filling them with tones of Prussian blue. *The Tragedy* is one painting from his Blue period. It shows three unnaturally tall and thin figures huddled together on an empty beach.

Consider: How might the people be feeling?

3

Feeling Rosy

A few years later, Picasso began to paint with hues of rosy pinks and reds and discovered a new subject of fascination: the circus. The clowns and acrobats who performed in the Cirque Médrano, based in his Parisian neighborhood of Montmartre, captured his imagination. Picasso felt a strong connection with these traveling entertainers—he, too, felt like an outsider who worked here and there making art. The *saltimbanques*, or street performers, who appeared in his paintings and drawings were not shown performing; instead, Picasso captured them in quiet moments. Along with this change of subject, Picasso's colors became lighter and more delicate, dominated by rosy pinks and warm browns. These years, from late 1904 to early 1906, are called Picasso's Rose or circus period.

The Family of Saltimbanques shows a circus family in a sparse setting. A harlequin, or jester, wears a diamond-patterned suit and holds the hand of a young girl in a pink dress carrying a basket of flowers. A large red-costumed clown and two young acrobats, one holding a tumbling barrel, complete the circle. A woman with a flowery hat sits off to one side.

Wonder: What is the relationship among the people?

COMPARE THE TWO PAINTINGS

How are they similar? Different?
What words best describe each painting?



“Colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions.”

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso, *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

book nook

These books about Pablo Picasso can be found at your local library or bookstore

Oooh! Picasso

By Mil Niepold and Jeanyves Verdu
ages 2 and up

Painting with Picasso

By Julie Merberg and Suzanne Bober
ages 2 and up

Picasso (Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists)

By Michael Garland | ages 4 and up

Picasso and Minou

By P. I. Maltbie and Pau Estrada
ages 4 and up

In the Time of Picasso (Art Around the World)

By Antony Mason | ages 9 and up

Pablo Picasso (Masters of Art)

By Stefano Loria, illustrated by Simone Boni and L. R. Galante
ages 9 and up

Pablo Picasso (Artists in Their Time)

By Kate Scarborough | ages 9 and up

Secrets of the Cirque Médrano

By Elaine Scott | ages 9 and up

try this!

activity

Explore *The Tragedy and The Family of Saltimbanques* further through movement.

First, mirror the pose of one character in the painting. Pick the figure you find most interesting and copy his/her pose with your body.

Think about: How is your character feeling? What might he or she be thinking about?

Next, activate your figure. Think about what your figure would do if she or he were to begin moving. This is bringing your character into action.

Discuss: How did you move and why?

Then, cooperate with your family or friends to recreate the entire composition of the painting! This living “image” is called a *tableau vivant*. Make sure that each person takes on a different character in Picasso’s work.

Reflect: Did re-creating the gestures and poses of the characters help you understand something new about the painting?



left: detail from Pablo Picasso's
The Tragedy

above: detail from Pablo Picasso's
Family of Saltimbanques