At the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, seeing our rooms as a space for traversing and exploring different itineraries is nothing new. We have always sought to identify themes, ideas or motifs that facilitate the progression from one work to another rather than simply relying on the chronological factor.

Now we have added a new component, namely to try to analyse some of these journeys of discovery and link them to a road which, since the Middle Ages, has been a path of shared knowledge and fortuitous encounters: the Way of St James.

The Way of St James has been given World Heritage status, declared a European Cultural Route and granted the honorary title of Main Street of Europe, all of which highlight its importance as a European cultural network.

*Tales for the Way* is the title of a joint project launched by La Compagnie Créative, O Bichinho de conto and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in association with the publishing house OQO, under the auspices of the European Union’s Culture Programme 2007–2013.

This learning resource for teachers and pupils explores the idea of the “way” as a vast network of human culture. Based on this narrative thread and using the museum collections for inspiration, we have created the following three thematic itineraries:

1. A Maze of Paths
2. Travels and Travellers
3. Trailblazing
1

A Maze of Paths

This itinerary is based on the idea of the museum as a maze, as a space in which every visitor plots his own path and turns the museum into a series of intersecting routes. It also involves the idea of the maze as a game, linking it to traditional games such as the Game of the Goose.

2

Travels and Travellers

Throughout the ages, man’s wanderlust has led him to explore different countries and create routes that have yielded discoveries and knowledge. Aided by the works in the collection, we take a closer look at great routes such as the Silk Road, learn all about the Grand Tour, and see the discoveries of scientific routes on the American continent.

3

Trailblazing

The course of art history has been determined by artists who have staked out new paths. Changing schools of thought and aesthetic changes have modified – sometimes subtly, sometimes radically – the way in which the reality around us is represented.
1

A Maze of Paths
Activity 1

Find out how the Game of the Goose originated. It shouldn’t be too difficult to identify works in the museum collections that will help you create your own Game of the Goose. This is a task you can do in teams. We have already pointed out some works, but we know you can find a few more. There are other works with scenes showing a well, geese, bridges and skulls. The prison is also out there somewhere, and it should be easy to find paintings of mazes.

André Derain
*Waterloo Bridge*, 1906
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
Activity 2

How is the Game of the Goose related to the nautilus? Here’s a clue: you need to see a picture of the inside of a nautilus to understand how it is related to the game.

Willem Kalf
*Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Ewer, Dish and other Objects*, c. 1660 (detail)
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

Activity 3

The game is present as a theme in numerous pictures. Often, they are works with hidden meanings. Two squares represent the dice in the Game of the Goose: 26 and 56. Dice symbolise luck and chance. If you throw a nine, you can move forward and avoid the obstacles of the well and the skull.

Here we show you an example with a painting from the collection in which a group of people are playing cards. Now you have to find more works in which games are present and ask yourself the meaning of the game in each case.

Balthus
*The Card Game*, 1948-1950
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
Activity 4

Lots of pilgrims continued to travel even after they had reached Santiago. They are said to have followed the stars in the Milky Way by night and the migratory path of geese by day until they reached the place which the ancient Romans believed to be the end of the earth.

Explore the meaning of this work by Joseph Cornell. Do you think there is any connection between *Blue Soap Bubble* and the Way of St James? Or between that painting and the Game of the Goose?

Joseph Cornell
*Blue Soap Bubble*, 1949-1950
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
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What is the museum if not a maze, a space in which every visitor plots his own path and, in short, a meeting of ways? If we imagine a journey through the museum, starting on the second floor and working our way down to the ground floor, we will plot a spiral itinerary through time, a type of loop journey illustrated by the images in the pictures.

Some scholars claim that the main routes of the Way of St James are in fact a legacy of much older routes, such as the stars in the Milky Way that travellers would follow by night or the migratory path of geese that they could follow by day. It is said that both of these routes led to Finisterre or finis terrae, the site of the Ara Solis, where the sun set and where the known world ended.
Emil Nolde  
*Marsh Bridge*, 1910  
(detail)

Isaack van Ostade  
*Traveller at a Cottage Door*, 1649  
(detail)

Duccio di Buoninsegna  
*Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, c. 1310-1311  
(detail)

Frank Stella  
*Untitled*, 1966  
(detail)

Theo van Rysselberghe  
*The Mansur Gate in Meknes, Morocco*, 1887  
(detail)

Edvard Munch  
*Geese in an Orchard*, c. 1911  
(detail)
If we use our imagination, the structure of the museum can be seen as an enormous Game of the Goose board. To reinforce this idea, we have chosen a series of works that can be associated with the main motifs in the game.

The bridge runs from squares 6 to 12 and enables the player to get round obstacles, cross a barrier, connect something that is separate or distant. But this knowledge comes at a price.

The idea of the bridge can also be found in art history. In 1905, a group of young painters in Germany formed a collective called Brücke [Bridge]. Their aim was to cross the current of the times and reach the other shore of art. Emil Nolde joined the group in 1906 and stayed for approximately one year. Nolde’s technique and devotion to landscape themes were an important contribution to the group.

*Marsh Bridge* depicts the landscape of northern Friesland, the place where Nolde spent his summers. The central element of the composition is the path that advances diagonally, crosses the bridge and disappears into the horizon. The way the path is plotted invites the observer to enter the landscape and walk along the path.
Isaac van Ostade
*Traveller at a Cottage Door*, 1649

Oil on panel. 48.3 x 39.4 cm
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

The inn is on square 19 and symbolises a place where we can rest and regain our strength before continuing on our way. But resting implies a delay in our journey, in reaching our final destination. As a pleasant place, it might also distract us from our purpose.

In this work entitled *Traveller at a Cottage Door*, we see a simple scene of a conversation between the traveller and the cottage occupants. Surrounded by lush vegetation, the cottage is home to a family consisting of a woman seated by the door with her work at her feet, a child who hides his head in her lap, and the man peering out through the top half of the stable door.

The man who has stopped to talk to the family of peasants must be a traveller, pilgrim or journeyman who goes wherever he finds work. His simple clothing, bag, backpack and worn shoes are indicative of his social status.
The well is on square 31. If you fall into it, you have to stay there until someone lands on the square and rescues you. The well symbolises error and pardon and appears before the goose.

For our board, we have chosen this panel by Duccio di Buoninsegna entitled Christ and the Samaritan Woman. The work depicts an episode from the New Testament that narrates Jesus’s encounter with a woman in the town of Sychar, in Samaria.

Jesus is sitting on the parapet of Jacob’s well waiting for his disciples, who have gone into the city in search of food, and there He has a conversation with the Samaritan woman. “Give me a drink”, says Jesus, and she is surprised that he, a Jew, should ask her, a Samaritan, for water. Jesus speaks to her of the living water, the water he offers which gives eternal life. In his illustration of the scene, Duccio uses hand gestures to insinuate the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.
The maze is on square 42. Anyone who loses his way in it has to go back to square 30, just before the well and on the verge of reaching the goose. Mazes have often been associated with the Tower of Babel, the confusion of physical paths, languages and ideas.

We can see the shape of a maze in Frank Stella’s abstract work *Untitled*. The composition could not be simpler: concentric squares in which the colour contrasts create a spiral motion that seems to continue beyond the frame.

The picture is also simple in terms of the colours used: white, black and different shades of grey. Ochre emphasises the lines which define the different colour blocks and create the diagonals. The alternating colours produce an optical illusion that creates a sensation of depth in the canvas and draws our eye to the centre of the square.
Square 63 is the garden gate, the entrance to the goose’s garden, and in our particular journey it is the entrance to the city of Santiago. To enter, you have to throw the exact number as this is the end of the journey. To arrive at the Pórtico de la Gloria, the main entrance to the cathedral in Santiago, was to arrive at the Civitas Dei, the heavenly city of Jerusalem on earth. Crossing that threshold meant that you had reached another level and that a new journey was beginning.

The Belgian painter Theo van Rysselberghe travelled to Morocco on numerous occasions, attracted by the country’s light and colours. The purpose of this particular journey to Morocco was to accompany a writer and make sketches for a series of lithographs to illustrate a book. We do not know whether he painted this picture from life or in the studio from his sketches. Perhaps the most striking thing about this canvas is the blinding light that emanates from it, reinforced by the shadows on the gate and city wall.

For those who travel to the historic city of Meknes, the equivalent of the gate which every pilgrim on the Way of St James aspired to reach is undoubtedly the nearby city of Moulay Idriss and the shrine dedicated to the founder of the Idrissid dynasty, Moulay Idriss I, a descendent of the prophet Muhammad.
The great goose is on square 64, although the number is never shown. She is the holder of secret wisdom and marks the end of the journey. But here the initiated end one journey and embark on another, armed with the wisdom gained along their journey through time and space.

Farm animals, and geese in particular, appear in several works by Edvard Munch. *Geese in an Orchard* dates from a period of the painter’s life in which he returned to bright, luminous colours and began to use lighter brushstrokes, tending towards splashes of colour rather than precise outlines. In this work he uses strong colour contrasts, setting black against white and green against purple.
For the rules of play for the Game of the Goose, we consulted A. Fuentes ©juegodelaoca.com