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
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.

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.

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.
3

Trailblazing

Learning Activities
Activity 1

The object of this theme is to explore the relationship between paths and the marks left on them. Create a long path on the floor with continuous paper and leave your mark on it using methods such as Pollock’s drip technique. That way, your gestures and body movements will become creative materials just like the paint. Use liquid tempera for this task. Like Pollock, you might also find it helpful to use sticks and other objects to spread the paint.

Willem de Kooning
*Red Man with Moustache*, 1971
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
**Activity 2**

In the second half of the 20th century, some artists returned to the path of reality and figurative representation. Hyperrealism or photorealism gave rise to works that looked very much like photographic reproductions, in which the artist adopted a mechanical gaze, becoming a fixed, unmoving eye. Their images often showed the city as a cold, empty environment, uninhabited or with just a few isolated figures.

Working with a digital camera, choose a theme and make a digital photo album. For example, you might want to explore aspects of your school, your surroundings or your neighbourhood. You can either concentrate on just the architecture, trees or billboards, or you can be like Richard Estes and look for reflections.

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

**Activity 3**

Use this work to examine the contributions to painting that Edgar Degas made. Think about the theme of this work and find out what other themes this painter was interested in.

Degas was interested in photography: try to discover how this technique might have influenced his painting. Where do you think the painter is observing this scene from?

Edgar Degas  
*At the Milliner’s*, 1882  
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
Activity 4

Surrealist painters captured dream-like images or images from the subconscious on their canvases. They were attracted by everything that was irrational. They introduced new creative techniques such as automatic writing and, in painting, for example, the “frottage” technique, which consisted of rubbing a paper or canvas over a textured surface or object to produce a new image of the object in question.

You can do this, too: choose a few fairly small objects, such as a coin, stick, pebble or anything else you can think of. Arrange them randomly, place a sheet of paper over them and then go over it with a pencil until their shapes appear. Finish off your composition with the collage technique or apply paint however you wish.

Max Ernst
_Solitary and Conjugal Trees, 1940_
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
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Tales for the Way

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.

The art of the late 19th century opened up an infinite number of thematic possibilities. Impressionism, for example, used the representation of reality to pursue its exploration of light and capture scenes of contemporary living: life in the modern city, the bustling crowds, literary and artistic gatherings at cafes, nightlife and the possibilities of artificial lighting, picnics in the country, horse races and strolls in the garden.

In addition to the inversion of the traditional hierarchy of genres, favouring the lesser genres over the supposedly higher ones, another aspect that changed radically was the way in which paintings were produced. While academic painting had deliberately removed all traces of the working process and attempted to conceal the materials and technique, modern painting chose to exalt these elements. A picture was now a stained canvas rather than the window it had been in the Renaissance. Painters eventually started to use unblended pigments directly out of the tube, show the unprepared canvas and work with textures to highlight the expressive power of the brushstroke.
Trailblazing

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
*Woman with a Parasol in a Garden*, 1875
(detail)

Vincent van Gogh
*Les Vessenots* in Auvers, 1890
(detail)

Pablo Picasso
*Man with a Clarinette*, 1911-1912
(detail)

Wassily Kandinsky
*Painting with Three Spots*, 1914
(detail)

Jackson Pollock
*Brown and Silver I*, c. 1951
(detail)

Richard Estes
*Nedick's*, 1970
(detail)
Women with a Parasol in a Garden illustrates many of the preoccupations of Impressionist painters. The horizon has disappeared and Renoir concentrates on showing us the exuberance of a garden by using small daubs of colour. The contrasting colours and the use of pastose brushstrokes create a richly textured surface.

This was the garden of Renoir’s house in Montmartre, and its wild, overgrown state was one of the things that he loved most about the house. In addition to the bushes and clumps of flowers, two figures appear in the scene: a woman in a dark outfit carrying a white parasol and, next to her, a man who appears to be crouching down to pick a flower. Judging from his clothing – dungarees and a straw hat – he is probably a gardener.
Art history is not a linear progression but a series of intersecting paths and trends. In its annals we find great masters such as Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin who made it possible for new movements to emerge, but we also find the irruption of younger painters such as Picasso, Braque and Kirchner who made a radical break with everything that had gone before and blazed new trails.

Vincent van Gogh was influenced by the painters of his day. He learned the technique employed by the Impressionists and then used it to create a personal style that paved the way for future generations. Van Gogh’s work was admired by the Fauvists and Expressionists, who were inspired by his exaltation of colour and the power of his vibrant, pastose brushstrokes.

“Les Vessenots” in Auvers was the area where Doctor Gachet lived, the person who looked after the painter’s health at the request of his brother Theo. In his last landscapes Van Gogh used a very high horizon, with the result that the wheat field takes up almost all of the canvas. In the background, we see a few hills and the sky dotted with the odd cloud, and just below the houses of Auvers with their thatched and tiled roofs.
What was perhaps the most radical break ever made in the history of art took place in the first decade of the 20th century, a proposal that introduced a whole new dimension to art: Cubism.

The Renaissance tradition that had presented us with the picture as a window opening on to a perfectly structured visual reality of ideal proportions now underwent a profound transformation. The world suddenly began to be viewed in different ways – fragmented, in motion, abstract, in vibrant colours or laden with matter.

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were the creators of this new language with which painting ventured down an uncharted path. Colours were gradually reduced to shades of green, grey and brown. Shapes became increasingly geometric, and background and figure often blended into one. Objects were broken down into multiple geometric planes for the observer to mentally reconstruct.

*Man with a Clarinette* was painted in the autumn of 1911 or winter of 1912, after Picasso had spent the summer painting with Braque. Despite the heavy abstraction, there are several discernible elements that facilitate interpretation, such as the outline of the face, a few parts where we can recognise the clarinet, curved lines that could be fingers, and a few scrolls in the background that might belong to an armchair.
Kandinsky was one of the pioneering artists of non-objective painting, painting that is purely abstract.

In *Painting with Three Spots*, we see three splotches of red, blue and green, which centre the composition and lend it its title. Meanwhile, the concentric spots around these central elements remind us of the creation of the cosmos.

There is a preliminary ink drawing for this picture in which it is still possible to discern various figurative elements such as a boat, the odd person and a circular shape on which the painter has written “Kr” (*Krasnoe*, red in Russian), which may be a depiction of the sun that he later omitted in the canvas.
In the second half of the 20th century, art shuffled back and forth between abstraction and figuration. Meanwhile, New York displaced Paris as the capital of the avant-garde, establishing a new direction for the paths along which new plastic proposals unfolded.

The American painter Jackson Pollock gave up the paintbrush as a mediator between his thoughts and the canvas and instead decided to pour the paint directly from the tin, using what is known as the drip technique. The painting was no longer mounted in a frame but rested directly on the floor, providing the artist access to every last space on the surface and allowing him to walk round and even over it.

For this reason, when we look at a work by Pollock we also need to think about the process involved, about how it was painted and what gestures the artist used to create the work. This technique is known as action painting because of the fundamental importance of the physical aspect, the gesture and the very act of painting.

Pollock used the drip technique but he also availed himself of other instruments, such as sticks and basting syringes, to distribute the paint on the canvas.
Richard Estes
*Nedick’s*, 1970

Acrylic on Masonite. 122 x 175.3 cm
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, on permanent loan to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

*Richard Estes is a leading representative of the style known as American photorealism. New York City is probably his favourite theme, although many other cities have been featured in his paintings.*

His methodology consists of taking different photographs of a place and then using these images to compose the work in his studio. Reflective windows and mirrors frequently appear in his paintings, creating real and illusory spaces.

In *Nedick’s*, the painter simultaneously depicts an exterior urban landscape and an interior space in the burger bar which is the subject of this work. The landscape disappears to the left of the picture. In the foreground, we see the buildings and the asphalt of the road, but as our eyes travel up the picture we begin to see the buildings through the glass windows of the bar. The interior is a maze of windows and mirrors, of transparencies and reflections that confuse the observer.