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:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Maze of Paths</td>
<td>Travels and Travellers</td>
<td>Trailblazing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
2

Travels and Travellers
Activity 1

There are other things, such as culture, art and religion, which also travelled the length and breadth of the Silk Road. Find out about these things, look for examples and share them with your classmates.

Fransz Post
The Church of St Cosmas and St Damian and The Franciscan Monastery at Igaraçu, Brazil, c. 1660-1680
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, on permanent loan to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
**Activity 2**

At Samarkand, the Silk Road forked into two paths: a maritime route across the Caspian, Black and Adriatic Seas to Rome, and an overland route across Iran and Iraq to Alexandria. Find an old map of the Silk Road, trace these two routes and locate the names of the countries through which the road passed. Now look for a modern map, trace the same route and locate the countries through which it would pass today. Have the borders changed?

**Activity 3**

During the second half of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century, it became fashionable for young people of the British upper and upper-middle classes to take what we might call a journey of initiation, because it marked the end of student life and the beginning of adult life. This journey was known as the *Grand Tour* and it could last anywhere from a few months to several years, depending on the financial standing of the young person in question.

Find out more about this work at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum and how it is related to the *Grand Tour*. Which countries did these travellers visit? You can also investigate other painters whose work is related to this journey of initiation. You can find more examples in our collections.
There are other routes and journeys that we think you should know about and that are reflected in art history. These are the scientific routes, the journeys that scientists and draughtsmen made in search of new flora and wildlife. In the 18th century, the outdoor study of nature became very popular and scientific societies were founded. Major expeditions were organised to explore new territories and record unknown species. Here you have an example in the work of Martin Johnson Heade, who was fascinated by the hummingbirds of the Tropics and studied and painted them time and time again.

Investigate these scientific routes and which animals and plants were discovered at that time. Bind together a few A4 sheets of card to create your own travel sketchbook, and then use different types of paint to draw flowers, plants and landscapes, as if you were a scientist or explorer.

Martin Johnson Heade
Sunrise in Nicaragua, 1869
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, on permanent loan to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
Organised by:

educa thyssen

OQO editora

O Bichinho de Conto editora

In association with:

XACOBEO 2010 Galicia
“They have a city upon the sea, which is called Layas, at which there is a
great trade. For you must know that all the spicery, and the cloths of silk
and gold, and the other valuable wares that come from the interior, are
brought to that city. And the merchants of Venice and Genoa, and other
countries, come thither to sell their goods, and to buy what they lack.”

*The Travels of Marco Polo*

In Antiquity, travelling gave rise to trade and cultural exchanges.
Permanent routes were established for trading all kinds of
products, and one of the most famous routes was undoubtedly the
Silk Road.

The Silk Road originated in the 2nd century BC, initially in
response to the need to forge alliances with the kingdoms of the
west and north-west, and to hold back the Huns. The founder of
this route across Asia was Emperor Wu Di of the Han dynasty.

The route’s main purpose was to facilitate the silk trade, and the
most important clients were located in the ports of Rome and
Alexandria. Silk first arrived in Rome sometime in the mid-1st
century BC. Gradually, a vast network of trade and cultural routes
was established between Asia and Europe. Although there were
interruptions, this network survived until the 17th century.

Silk was the most highly prized commodity, but a number of other
products were traded as well: different fabrics such as linen, cotton
and Indian muslin, pearls, precious stones and woods, spices,
mother-of-pearl and even ferocious animals.
Luca di Tommé
*Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1360-1365
(detail)

Nicolas Maes
*The Naughty Drummer*, c. 1655
(detail)

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

Jan Jansz. van der Heyden
*Interior of a Study*, c. 1710-1712
(detail)

William Merritt Chase
*The Kimono*, c. 1895
(detail)

Renato Guttuso
*Caffè Green*, 1976
(detail)
Spices have been highly prized since Antiquity and were traded all along the Silk Road. The word “spice” comes from the Latin species, meaning essential. Spices and aromatic resins have always held great importance for humanity, and certain kinds were used in religious ceremonies. These products reached Europe in caravans that crossed Asia by land and were then distributed to the rest of the continent by Italian merchants.

This scene depicts two spices being offered as gifts: frankincense and myrrh. The Bible mentions many spices; given their great value, they were often exchanged as gifts between kings, and the victors of a war would often demand that the defeated pay tribute in spices.

This panel by Luca di Tommé, entitled *Adoration of the Magi*, was once part of a predella on an altar. It shows the Virgin Mary seated on a cushion and holding out the Infant Jesus, who raises his hand in blessing over Melchior. This king has placed his crown on the floor as a sign of respect, while the other kings wait to offer their gifts. St Joseph is shown at the entrance to a cave, examining one of the offerings. The gifts have symbolic meaning: gold represents the infant’s kingship, frankincense his holiness and myrrh his mortality.
When the Turkish Empire seized Constantinople in 1453, the overland routes monopolised by Genoese and Venetian merchants were disrupted, forcing European traders to look for new ways to reach the east. The aim was to find a maritime route to Asia, avoiding the Mediterranean Sea now under Turkish control, and maintain the oriental spice trade.

Thus it was that Portugal and Spain, great seafaring nations at the forefront of navigation, replaced the Italians and gained supremacy in the spice trade. The new routes made the products cheaper and therefore more affordable for the population. Another consequence of the creation of these routes was the discovery of new lands and a dramatic shift in the general conception of the world.

The Naughty Drummer by Nicolas Maes was painted around 1655. By that time, the Dutch East India and West India Companies had allowed the Netherlands to gain control of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, displacing the Portuguese and Spanish. Now the most important commercial power in the world, the Dutch traded with spices such as cinnamon, saffron, pepper and clove.

In the room in which this scene unfolds, we see a map hanging on the rear wall. This was common in bourgeois homes as maps were regarded as luxury items and, consequently, status symbols.
Thanks to the Silk Road, the west began to discover hitherto unknown materials. One example is Chinese porcelain, which was imported into Europe in the Middle Ages by Italian merchants who travelled between Europe and Asia.

The first person to describe a method for making porcelain to Europeans was Marco Polo. His book *The Travels of Marco Polo* contains the following description: “They excavate a certain kind of earth, as it were from a mine, and this they heap into great piles, and then leave it undisturbed and exposed to wind, rain and sun for 30 or 40 years. In this space of time, the earth becomes sufficiently refined for the manufacture of porcelain; they then colour it at their discretion, and bake it in a furnace.”

In this still life, an oriental porcelain aquamanile is a prominent element of the composition. Willem Kalf’s still lifes, which are characterised by his use of a few carefully chosen objects, were a kind of presentation card for the people who owned these exclusive and highly valuable pieces. This taste for collecting presupposes a certain financial standing, which is somehow captured in the pictorial work.

Willem Kalf
*Still Life with a Chinese Porcelain Ewer, Dish and other Objects, c. 1660*

Oil on canvas. 111 x 84 cm
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid
The new overseas discoveries triggered a boom in the field of cartography, as European traders and seafarers required a more detailed knowledge of both geography and the art of navigation. All of this knowledge would gradually find its way into books, maps and globes. During the first half of the 17th century, the most important cartographic centre was the city of Antwerp.

Interior of a Study is an extraordinarily accurate rendering of a richly decorated bourgeois room. The objects included in the composition reveal the importance of cartography in the Netherlands, given its association with the country’s commercial interests. In the room, we see a work area with a globe, a celestial sphere and an armillary sphere. In the background, several rolled-up maps and an oriental spear lean against the side of a bookcase. The globe, spheres and an open atlas are arranged on a table covered by a Chinese tablecloth.
In the mid-19th century, Japan began to trade with the west, specifically with Europe and America. Japanese prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige began to arrive, fascinating the Impressionist painters. Japonisme became the height of fashion, leading to a proliferation of collections of oriental objects.

When the American painter William Merritt Chase travelled to Europe, he came into contact with this taste for oriental culture and began to collect exotic objects himself.

*The Kimono* is an example of the Japanese influence on Chase's work and is one in a series of portraits of members of his family in kimonos. Although her features are barely discernible, the young woman is clearly western. She is wearing a Japanese kimono made out of shiny rich silk and a green silk sash called an *obi* around her waist, and her hair is gathered into a Japanese bun. The whole scene is conceived as a stage set, complete with folding screen, prints and a bamboo chair.
Nowadays, people tend to travel for pleasure, relaxation or cultural tourism, but in the past most travellers were motivated by very different reasons, such as war, migration or trade. A new concept of travel has emerged: today, tourists have become globetrotters, people from the east travel to the west, and cities have become points of convergence for the most diverse cultures.

Some places have become “musts” for tourists and spaces where history is gradually leaving its mark. The cafe featured in this painting opened on the famous Via Condotti in Rome in 1760. Writers and artists such as Keats, Goethe, Stendhal and Baudelaire visited it on their journeys to the city, and musicians such as Liszt, Bizet and Wagner composed works at its tables.

Renato Guttuso produced this preparatory acrylic on cardboard for a canvas currently held at a museum in Cologne. It shows the sala rossa – thus called because of the red fabric on the walls – crowded with mirrors, pictures and sculptures. In the midst of this décor, people are chatting, sipping coffee or simply observing their surroundings.

The figure seated on the left is the painter Giorgio de Chirico, to whom Guttuso’s Caffè Greco is a tribute. The other historical figure appearing in the picture is Colonel William Cody, aka Buffalo Bill, who visited Rome with his Wild West show. Female Swedish tourists, camera-toting Japanese tourists, young people chatting and the odd solitary customer occupy the remaining tables.
Canaletto

View of Piazza San Marco, Venice, 1723

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid