
Grade 5 LWSD Art Docent Project: Mexican Sugar Skulls

Element of Art: Color

Objective: to learn about traditional Mexican art associated with the Day of the Dead, to review introductory color theory, and to create a stylized and colorful portrait in the style of a sugar skull.

Artistic Influence: Calaveras de Alfeñique (sugar skulls) in Traditional Mexican Folklore



Materials:

- #90 white sulphite paper
- 9"x 12" black construction paper
- Black Sharpies
- Colored markers
- Scissors
- Glue

Optional Materials:

- Colored tissue paper, especially orange like marigolds

Instructions and notes:

1. Skulls may seem scary to some students, so it is helpful to keep a light tone and focus on how the skulls are made of sugar and are given to children as special, sweet treats on November 2.
2. If students ask if the Day of the Dead celebrations are sad, explain that they are not. On the contrary, it really is a party, and families have fun decorating, preparing food and eating together.
3. Note: there is more than one color theory model. This lesson teaches the traditional RYB color model.
4. The slides on color theory should be reviewed quickly, to allow students ample time to complete the project.
5. When presenting the PowerPoint slide deck, pause at slide 20 (Step 1). It may be helpful to have the students work with you slide by slide as you give a demonstration of the steps shown on each slide.
6. When you reach slide 23 (Step 4), have the students work at their own pace, leaving the slide up on the screen to serve as design inspiration. Before setting them loose to color, explain that they should glue their skull to a sheet of black construction paper when they have finished.
7. Once some students have completed their gluing, and with at least 10 minutes of work time left in the hour, call the class's attention to create tissue paper flowers. These flowers are optional, but they do add a nice dimensionality and pop of color to the artwork. **Note:** At this age, students will need to pay close attention to your demonstration to fold the tissue paper properly in order to get a full flower instead of two separate halves. In fact, you may want to practice folding and cutting the paper flowers ahead of time yourself.
8. **Important:** Make sure that all of the markers are tightly closed when the students finish. Did the cap **click**?
9. Invite students to share their art and talk about the process, if time allows.
10. Distribute parent information page for students to take home, and print an extra page to post on your bulletin board with the finished art. See following page.
11. Please complete the brief [LWSD Art Docent Program Feedback Survey](#) for this lesson.
12. Thank you for supporting our elementary students' visual arts education.

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The goal of this 5th grade lesson was to create a festive sugar skull, reviewing basic color theory on the way.



WA State Visual Arts Standard

Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery. (VA: Re7.2.5)

In this art lesson taught by volunteer art docents, students learned about traditional Mexican folklore as a means of reviewing color theory and practicing an alternative form of portraiture.

In Mexico and much of Latin America, November 2 is celebrated as Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead). Families remember deceased loved ones by coming together to create festive decorations and to take picnics in the cemeteries where their loved ones are buried. It is a festive and beautiful celebration. Cheerfully decorated calaveras de alfeñique (molded sugar skulls) are traditionally given as gifts to children on this day. Sugar skull designs have become so popular in the United States that you can find them anywhere from bakeries and candy stores to the fashion industry.