

DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

CURRICULUM PACKET



Oakland Museum *of* California

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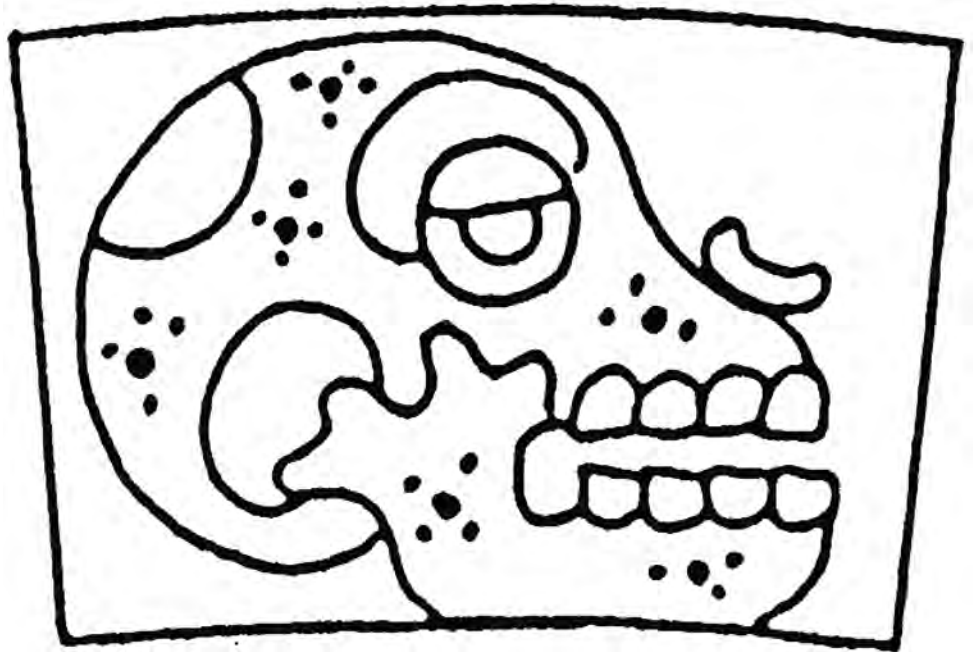
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Pre-Hispanic Aztec symbol of the feathered serpent,
Quetzalcóatl, god of learning and patron of culture

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION



Aztec glyph for death



PREFACE

The Oakland Museum's *Los Días de los Muertos* exhibition and related programs were initiated in 1994 through the collaborative efforts of the museum's staff and Latino Advisory Committee. Members of the committee saw the reclamation of *Los Días de los Muertos* as a means for bringing family and community together for purposes of healing. The exhibition has become an annual event in large part because of the tremendous response we have received from teachers of all grade levels.

Each year the exhibition presents examples of traditional *ofrendas* (offerings for Days of the Dead) and contemporary interpretations created by artists, students, and community groups. The Days of the Dead exhibition and curriculum have been useful resources for teachers, students, educators, and cultural workers from all over the state.

Here are some of the comments these educators have shared with us:

"The museum is fabulous for California social studies. Days of the Dead is part of that."

"It brought the connection of indigenous/colonial home in a way that reading about it didn't."

"Seeing their traditions in a museum was powerful for my students."

In conjunction with the exhibition, a community celebration is held in the museum's gardens. Today the planning and execution of this annual festival is conducted by the museum's *Los Días de los Muertos* Committee (DMC) established in 1998. The Committee's mission is to ensure that the museum's Days of the Dead programs maintain the integrity and spirituality of the tradition. A useful resource on the amazing range of *Días de los Muertos ofrendas* and celebration traditions featured at the museum is the book, *El Corazón de la Muerte: Altars and Offerings for Days of the Dead* (2005), published in collaboration with Heyday Books.

The Oakland Museum of California has developed these Days of the Dead curriculum materials in support of our annual exhibition that offers teachers and students an opportunity to experience a living and evolving cultural tradition. The teaching materials provide resources for integrating lessons related to history, culture, and art. These lessons can extend learning at home as students and parents apply them to learning about their own family history and the legacies they have inherited.



INTRODUCTION

Death is the common meeting ground of all humanity. We share in the fear of our ultimate end, the pain of loss, and in our search for a way of coping with this experience we call “death.” The annual *Los Días de los Muertos*, or The Days of the Dead, rituals of Mexico and Central America acknowledge death as a part of life in an open and joyous way, recognizing the continuance of human life in a spirit world, and promote the idea that all of one’s ancestors and descendants make up a vital part of one’s family.

Recognizing the importance of these cultural values, Mexican Americans have adopted the custom of celebrating *Los Días de los Muertos*. Changes have been made to adapt it to U.S. urban lifestyles. Rituals have been reinterpreted to include practices that strengthen the family and community, acknowledge ancestors, and empower the Latino community. Days of the Dead has developed a California identity and has become a tradition that is embraced by Californians from all different cultural backgrounds.

An essential part of appreciating cultural diversity is to understand the history, the traditions and belief systems that identify and set apart one group of people from another. In the process of learning about other cultural groups, we begin to become aware of the social and cultural contexts of the family, social group, or culture that we claim as our own. Ultimately, we will come to understand that although people throughout the world practice different cultural expressions, all originate in the needs and life experiences shared by all peoples.

The celebration of *Los Días de los Muertos* can serve as a unique teaching tool, providing a broader understanding of Mexican and Central American culture as linkages to Mesoamerica’s ancient past. More importantly, this cultural event can be used to emphasize the life experiences we have in common, such as death, family, and the recognition of individuals who have contributed to the betterment of our lives.

RATIONALE

The understanding of the customs and traditions that mark life events within a community can serve as a cultural bridge for students' acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity. *Los Días de los Muertos* handbook provides materials to inform students of the history, art, and practices that give richness and definition to this traditional Mexican and Mesoamerican festival. Because many Latin American countries have similar death rituals, these curriculum materials also provide insight into other Latin American cultures. This curriculum has been developed with connections to the Content Standards for California Public Schools in history and social studies and visual arts.

The curriculum strives to promote the following objectives:

To develop an understanding of this major Mexican, Central American, Mexican American, and Californian cultural tradition

To develop student vocabulary and communication skills

To build student self esteem and cross-cultural understanding in our multicultural classrooms and communities

To promote student understanding of their legacy and their role in carrying out cultural traditions

To prepare students for visits to local Days of the Dead exhibitions and celebrations



SECTION II

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT OF DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

This section provides background information that can be used as a guide for the teacher or may be read by older students to augment their understanding of this festival.



15th century Aztec stone carving of skull with fire, water, and Venus symbols



THE RITUAL OF LOS DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

PRE-HISPANIC ORIGINS

Archeological excavations of pre-Hispanic grave-sites and cities show evidence that since remote times the Mexican people have honored their dead with ritual, burying them with offerings of pottery, food, toys, and household objects. Although not many written records exist, many examples of death rites have been portrayed in pre-Hispanic Mexican art such as murals, painted pottery, and carvings on walls, monuments, and artifacts. Archeological findings such as these demonstrate ancient cultural beliefs that emphasize death as an important part of the cycle of life. In contrast, American culture generally tends to define death as the absence of life. The concept of the unity of life and death has continued in Mexico and is the dominant theme of the art and customs of the festival of *Los Días de los Muertos*, or The Days of the Dead.

INTRODUCTION OF CATHOLIC RITUAL

The traditions of *Los Días de los Muertos* are rooted in pre-Hispanic Mexico and Catholic ritual. In the 9th century, Pope Gregory IV established the feast of All Hallows, or All Saints' Day, to be celebrated on November 1st. The evening of October 31st, which to the ancients had been a time for the gathering of dead souls, and which was sacred to the Celtic god of the dead, came to be known as All Hallows' Eve—later Halloween. By the 13th century, November 2nd was firmly established in the Roman Catholic calendar as the feast of All Souls, a day to remember the dead with prayer. When the Spanish conquered Mexico in 1521, they sent their priests to Mexico to destroy or incorporate as many of the early native rituals into Catholicism as possible. The Catholic feast of All Souls' Day merged with the Indian rituals of death and became the rich and unique festival of *Los Días de los Muertos*.

LIVING TRADITIONS

Although many of the Mexican Indian communities have abandoned the original traditions of this festival, there are various cultural groups that



Photo: Mary Andrade

continue to believe that the spirits of their dead relatives will return to their homes on the evenings of November 1st and 2nd. To welcome the spirits as honored guests, family altars are cleaned and freshened or new altars known as *ofrendas* are erected as early as October 30th. *Zempasúchil* (marigolds), candles, toys, religious pictures, cut tissue paper designs (*papel picado*), and the personal mementos and photographs of the deceased decorate the altar. Incense, beverages, cigarettes, and food such as tamales, fruit, nuts, candies, sugar skulls, and *pan de muertos* (bread of the dead) serve as offerings.

The spirits of children are expected to arrive before those of the adults (October 31st or early on November 1st). The food on the altar for the *angelitos* (little angels) is less seasoned, simpler, and is often placed in miniature crockery while toys serve as the dominant altar decoration. Adult souls arrive on November 1st and the offerings on the altars are changed to suit the tastes of those adults being remembered.

On November 2nd families take part of the food offerings to the cemetery to place upon tombs. Graves are cleaned and beautifully decorated with *zempasúchil*, coxcomb flowers, white gladioli, candles, folk art objects, and incense burners in preparation for an all-night vigil. By the light of hundreds of candles, the living and the dead are reunited in spirit. At dawn all will depart to their separate worlds but there is comfort in the knowledge that each one of them will move through this circle of remembering and being remembered.

These customs vary from region to region but the pre-Hispanic philosophy that death is part of life serves as the framework that unifies and gives form and purpose to the celebration of *Los Días de los Muertos* throughout Mexico.

PRE-HISPANIC ORIGINS OF DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

The pre-Conquest inhabitants of Mesoamerica believed in an afterlife where the dead played the role of mediators between humans and the deities that represented and ruled over the forces of nature. The Mesoamericans honored their dead and assisted them in their journey to the beyond so they could fulfill their mission as mediators. The living believed they had to keep in contact with the souls so as not to alter the balance of cosmic forces.

After the conquest, Spanish friars in 16th-century colonial Mexico, with the aid of native informants, recorded two indigenous important feasts of the dead:

“At the beginning of the eighth month of our calendar these people celebrated with great rejoicing the feast called Micailhuintontli (Feast of the Little Dead). According to my information, it was the commemoration of innocent dead children. In the solemn ceremonies of this day offerings and sacrifices were made to honor and venerate these children. This feast was in anticipation of the coming festivity, the Great Feast of the Dead, when adults were to be remembered. Thus these natives prepared their offerings, oblations and sacrifices for this feast for that of the following month.”

Fray Diego Duran

In a post-conquest codex is found the following description of the Feast of Miccailhuitl (Feast of the Adult Dead).

“During this feast they made offerings to the dead, placing food and drink on the tombs; this they did for four years because they believed that in all that time the souls did not reach their place of rest. Thus the dead were buried with all their clothing, because they believed that by the end of the four years, the souls would have suffered much toil, cold and fatigue and passed through places where there was much snow and thorns.”



THE CODICES PORTRAY LIFE AFTER DEATH

Various indigenous cultures of pre-Hispanic Mexico recorded their histories and beliefs with pictures, symbols, and hieroglyphs on long bark paper sheets. Some of these manuscripts have survived to this day and we call them codices. Codex Vaticanus records the Nahuas' beliefs in a life after death. The Nahuas continue to live in the central highlands of Mexico.

According to ancient Mexican belief, the nature of one's death and not the quality of one's life determined where the souls might dwell in the afterlife. The paradise of the sun god was reserved only for the souls of warriors who died in combat or on the sacrificial stone and for women who died in childbirth. Those who died by drowning, by lightning, from leprosy, or any illness believed to be related to the water gods went to the paradise of the rain god, Tlaloc. But those who died by other means went to Mictlán, the dark and silent region of the dead. These souls underwent a series of magical trials as they passed through eight regions before reaching Mictlán. The drawings below from a codex portray the trials.

THE NINE REGIONS OF THE UNDERWORLD, CODEX VATICANUS A, NAHUA

1. The souls must cross a river and thus a dog was buried with the dead so that it could help its master across.



2. The soul must pass between two clashing mountains.



3. The souls must climb over a mountain made of sharp obsidian blades (glass-like volcanic stone).



4. The soul is subjected to an icy wind that cuts like obsidian knives.



5. Next the dead must pass through a place where souls float like flags.



6. The soul is pierced by arrows.



7. The souls must pass through the region where wild beasts devour human hearts.



8. Next the dead must pass through the place of the blinding dark fog.



9. Those souls that did not lose their way found their rest in the final realm of Mictlán.

The practice of placing food and drink for the dead on *ofrendas* is rooted in the Mesoamerican concept that a soul has the ability to journey from place to place. In ancient times the living provided the life-maintaining essentials for four years after the death of an individual as it journeyed to its final resting place. During the observances of *Los Días de los Muertos*, the soul is believed to travel from its spiritual realm to its earthly home.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RITUAL?

DEFINITION OF RITUAL: A FORM OR SYSTEM OF SOLEMN CEREMONIES.

Most of us have been involved in some kind of ritual either as a participant in an actual ceremony or as a spectator. We might have observed a graduation or wedding ceremony and wondered why we go through so much expense and fuss to put on these ceremonies.

How did ritual start and why has it continued to be part of our lives?

There exists in a cave in France a prehistoric drawing of a man, disguised as a reindeer, taking part in a hunting ritual. Prehistoric people suffered many hardships because their existence depended solely on what nature provided. Drought, floods, earthquakes, and savage animals were their enemies. In time, prehistoric people began to believe that by performing certain acts or ceremonies, they could somehow gain some control over these destructive forces of nature. We can assume that this was the original purpose of ritual. Why has ritual persisted to this day?

Ritual serves several purposes in our lives:

- It is a way people can attempt to control the uncontrollable.
Example: It is believed by certain cultural groups that rain dances and ceremonies can bring forth much-needed rain.
- It provides a way of outwardly demonstrating our emotions.
Example: Flag ceremonies, speeches, and gun salutes are public ceremonies that allow us to show our pride and love for our country.
- It allows us to set group standards.
Example: Our funeral rituals demonstrate that the dead must be given respect and their contributions in life to family and the community must be acknowledged.
- It provides an outward demonstration of group approval.
Example: When we attend a wedding ceremony, we are indicating by our presence that we approve of the union of that particular man and woman as husband and wife. Graduation ceremonies acknowledge and commend students for their successful completion of academic work.





Sorcerer, Trois-Frères
C. 15,000-10,000 B.C.
Ariege, France

Teacher's Note:

The preceding introduction, “What Is the Purpose of Ritual?”, should be read by the teacher or a student out loud to the class, or the teacher should photocopy the page and assign it for individual reading in class or at home. The reading should be followed with a class discussion or written assignment on the following topic:

Name ceremonies that you have observed or that are practiced in your community related to family, school, club, religious institution, city, etc. Do these ceremonies serve any of the purposes listed in the reading?

THE MEXICAN CELEBRATION OF LOS DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

Photo: Mary Andrade



In Mexico, *Los Días de los Muertos*, the Days of the Dead, is a family-centered celebration rooted in the belief that, beginning on October 31st and continuing through November 2nd, the spirits of the dead visit the living. Families, primarily those of the rural Indian communities, spend these days in communion with departed friends and relatives sharing food, music, and companionship.

At the center of *Los Días de los Muertos* observances are the *ofrendas* that families erect in the home and/or over graves. Offerings of food, drink, candles, flowers, and the personal mementos of the dead are placed on the altars for the returning souls to enjoy. One day, October 31st or November 1st, is set aside to honor the *angelitos* (souls of children); and November 2nd is dedicated to adult souls. Urban *mestizos* (those of mixed race) generally do not participate in the traditional rural indigenous observances, but often attend mass and bring flowers to family gravesites during these days.

When the evangelizing Spanish friars arrived in Mesoamerica (middle America) in the 16th century, they found the native peoples participating in a complex cycle of rituals that included long-term festivals honoring the dead. The Spanish introduced their own Christian feasts of the dead: All Saints' Day of November 1st, which recognizes canonized and unknown saints, and All Souls' Days of November 2nd, a day of prayer for departed Christians believed to be in purgatory. Realizing the importance the ancient feasts held for Mesoamericans and that conversion would not eradicate these traditions, the friars allowed the native death rituals and beliefs to be expanded and perpetuated through the annual feasts of All Saints' and All Souls' Days. To this day the celebration demonstrates Christian-European and indigenous influences.

The communal celebration of *Los Días de los Muertos* became part of U.S. barrio existence in the early 1970s as a product of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, which spurred Chicanos to acknowledge their Mexican ancestry and to express the vitality of their bicultural communities.

RITUAL CARPETS FOR THE DEAD

In some Oaxacan homes, carpets are created from sand, pigments, and flowers after the death of a family member. The designs are usually of a religious nature. For nine consecutive days, family and friends gather to say prayers on behalf of the deceased. On the ninth day the carpet is created in a ceremonial atmosphere of prayer, candlelight, and burning *copal* (incense). At dawn, the carpet is divided in four parts and given to the *padrinos* (sponsors), carried to church and then to the cemetery where it is spread over the grave of the deceased. Flower petals, pine needles, sand, and vividly dyed sawdust carpets are also created during The Days of the Dead in cemeteries and town plazas in various regions of Mexico. It is possible that this tradition was inspired by the Guatemalan flower processional carpets created during Holy Week in commemoration of Christ's crucifixion and death, a practice that originated in the 16th century.

Teacher's Note:

See Transparency #7.

GUATEMALAN KITES FOR THE DEAD

On November 1st, the flight of the giant *barriletes* (kites) is one of the principal features unifying the celebration of Days of the Dead in the towns of Santiago Sacatepéquez and Sumpango, Guatemala.

The townspeople construct enormous circular kites, averaging 15 feet in diameter, from colored tissue paper and bamboo. These are transported to the cemeteries. When the breeze is strong enough, the kites become airborne. Some barely rise above the tombs while others soar heavenward. The kites carry prayers and messages of the townspeople to their deceased loved ones, a gesture of tribute equal to covering gravesites with the petals of the yellow marigold. In other Guatemalan villages, the youth fly small-scale kites following the traditional belief that kites reaching to the sky help people communicate with their dead.



Photo: Denise Richards



UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF THE ALTAR

An altar is a raised structure that serves as the focal point of religious worship. The word “altar” comes from the Latin *altare* (high altar) derived from *altus*, meaning “high.” Early worshippers sought “holy” or sacred places such as high mountains or secret caves to set themselves apart from the ordinary world in order to achieve communication with the supernatural or spiritual world.

Since these special places were often far away from people’s homes, worshippers began to create symbolic holy places or structures that would help make this connection between humans and the divine. Linked to this idea, the altar became the “table” on which images, symbols, and objects representing deities were placed to make the invisible gods visible. The altar became the place where worshippers could achieve some measure of intimacy with their gods. Today the altar is the focus of religious worship and the symbolic meeting ground between heaven and earth in many of the world’s religions.

Photo: Annie Soo



Tibetan Buddhist altar by Jamong Singye
Lunar New Year Celebration
Oakland Museum of California, 2003

Teacher's Note:

Subject for discussion:

Although our homes may not have altars, we might have a cabinet, a wall, a shelf, or a window sill where our family keeps special mementos, heirlooms, photographs, trophies, or awards that honor the memory of past family members or that represent important achievements or events of the family. Does your family have a special place for keepsakes of this type?

Think of a historical figure you admire, then list five objects you would select to symbolize his or her life.

THE OFRENDA



Ofrenda is the Spanish word for “offering” and also refers to a Days of the Dead altar. The *ofrenda* can be a home altar, used all year long for daily prayer and to honor Christian saints and redecorated for this festival of the dead; or a new altar erected for this occasion. The purpose of the *ofrenda* is to honor and please the returning souls. One does this by placing on the altar food, drink, and other items that pleased the honored souls in their earthly existence. Each soul has his or her portion of food and drink laid out on the table and the families believe that the souls partake of the essence of the food. The living are fed by the actual substance of the food. Souls without living relatives are believed to wander about looking for their place of honor. In some regions of Mexico people leave small portions of food outside their doorsteps for these wandering souls.

Ofrenda to Two Grandmothers

Bea Carrillo Hocker and family
Mexican Museum, San Francisco, 1984



RITUAL OBJECTS OF THE OFRENDA

CANDLES

In religious ceremonies, the lighting of candles can symbolize enlightenment, new spiritual life, or that the participants have started the process of worship. In Mexico, candles are placed on the *ofrenda* to light and guide the way of the souls to the altar. The Days of the Dead clay candleholders range from the very plain to ornate candelabra.



SUGAR SKULLS

The Days of the Dead sugar skulls are created in a variety of sizes from sugar paste pressed into ceramic molds. The *calaveras* (skulls) are decorated with flowers and scrolls of colored icing and metallic colored foils. Some bear popular Mexican names written on the forehead and are for the *ofrendas* but also for living children as a treat. Friends and sweethearts also exchange skulls with their names. The living consume the skulls and associate pleasant sensations with their symbolic deaths and understand that in the end, death will feed on the living.

ZEMPASÚCHIL

The yellow marigold, *zempasúchil*, was the symbolic flower of death of the Aztecs of pre-Hispanic Mexico. The color of this flower that blooms in November is closely identified with this particular holiday since, according to Aztec mythology, yellow is associated with the kingdom of the dead. Flowers on the *ofrenda*, along with other organic elements, refer to the earth and regenerative forces of nature. In some regions, marigold petals are strewn to create a symbolic pathway leading souls to the *ofrenda*.

A GLASS OF WATER

Water is placed on the *ofrenda* to quench the thirst of the souls after their long journey and also to emphasize that water is essential to life.

INCENSE

Each region that keeps the traditions of *Los Días de los Muertos* creates its own distinct style of ceramic incense burners for use at gravesites and on the *ofrendas*. The burners hold resin from the copal tree and the perfumed smoke surrounds the altar and grave, providing an atmosphere of mystery. The burning of incense has been associated with ritual since early history by civilizations throughout the world. The almost magical transformation of earth matter (tree resin) into something ethereal (smoke) has motivated people to associate incense with the symbolic transformation of the physical to the supernatural. The rising movement of smoke toward the heavens has also inspired humanity to use incense as an offering to the gods.

PAN DE MUERTOS

Pan de muertos, or bread of the dead, is specially made to be placed on *ofrendas* and graves. It is sweet bread favored with anise, orange peel, and orange glaze. The bread is baked in a wide variety of forms and decoration. There are round loaves with a central raised knob of dough, representing the skull, and crossed bone-shaped decorations radiating from the central knob. Some loaves are very sculptural, representing human shapes, some with “baker’s clay” (bread and water) heads of Christ or angels stuck into protruding knobs of dough; others are in the shapes of angels, animals, rings, or

Christ upon the cross. The bread is baked for both the living and the dead. It is not surprising that *pan de muertos* is the dominant food of this feast, for since antiquity bread has symbolized the mainstay of human life.



PAPEL PICADO

During *Los Días de los Muertos*, tissue paper banners with cutout designs of animated skeleton figures adorn altars, homes, and storefronts everywhere. They are made in pads of 25 or 50 sheets with the design drawn on the top and then cut out with small metal chisels and a hammer. The process is similar to leather tooling. Each chisel has a sharp tip of a different shape that the artisan hammers through the layers of paper to punch out a design.



Teacher's Note:

The objective of the explanations given in “Ritual Objects of the Ofrenda” is to acquaint students with the symbolism of each item. However, it is also the intent of this information and an ensuing class discussion to broaden the students’ perception of the similarity between some U.S. practices and The Days of the Dead traditions. Use the following questions to stimulate discussion after the reading.

CANDLES

Have you ever participated in a ceremony in which lighted candles were used? What was their significance? What do you think the blowing out of candles on a birthday cake signifies?

SUGAR SKULLS

Can you think of a holiday in which candy serves as a symbol for the theme of the celebration? Candy hearts symbolize love on Valentine’s Day. Easter candy eggs associate the birth of a new baby chick with Christ’s Resurrection from the tomb and with new life or regeneration.

ZEMPASÚCHIL

Why do you think flowers are an important part of our funeral ceremonies? In what other ceremonies do flowers play an important role? Flowers help us express our feelings towards people and about important events. On what types of occasions do we give or receive flowers? What feelings are we expressing on these occasions?

A GLASS OF WATER

Have you ever gone to a christening? Water is usually a part of this ceremony. How is it used and what does it symbolize?



THE CELEBRATION OF LOS DÍAS DE LOS MUERTOS

BY MEXICAN AMERICANS

In the United States during the 1960s, Chicanos (Mexican Americans) organized a national political movement to secure economic and social change to benefit Mexican Americans. Chicano artists realized their work could play an important role in furthering the goals of the movement. For inspiration they looked to images produced by Mexican artists prior to and after the Mexican revolution of 1910. Mexican artists of this period had used their art to convey political messages to the people, especially through murals and posters. Following their example, Chicano artists also popularized the mural and the poster as a political art form and a way to explore Mexican art styles and themes.

This rediscovery and association with Mexican art influenced Mexican Americans to further explore and establish ties with their Mexican heritage. Chicanos adapted Mexican music, art, and customs as expressions of Mexican American life. The celebration of *Los Días de los Muertos* was of special attraction to Mexican Americans as the customs associated with this festival acknowledged their Mexican ancestors.

In the early 1970s, artistic and cultural groups within the Mexican American community began to invite artists and community members to install *ofrendas* in galleries, neighborhood centers, and other public places. The creators of the *ofrendas* took this opportunity to pay homage to Mexican personages of historical and social significance and to community members whose contributions deserved recognition. In succeeding years, *ofrendas* were augmented with theatrical productions and outdoor processions.

The Days of the Dead practices in the United States enable Mexican Americans to establish bonds with their historical and cultural roots and to generate an understanding and appreciation of Mexican culture in the general community. These practices also inspire public interest in other ethnic traditions in the United States. Days of the Dead celebrations are open to and enjoyed by all members of the community. Since death and the loss of loved ones is a common human experience, these rituals promote feelings of kinship among all participants.



Las Mañanitas Portal
Ofrenda by Jeffrey Ferns
In honor of his brother
Days of the Dead Exhibition, 2004
Oakland Museum of California

Photos by Michael Temperio

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HALLOWEEN AND THE DAYS OF THE DEAD

CELTIC ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN

Halloween had its beginnings in Samhein, a pre-Christian festival of the dead celebrated by the Celtic people of England, Ireland, and Scotland. It took place around the time of their calendar new year, November 1st, a date that also marked the beginning of winter. They believed that during Samhein the barriers between the natural and the supernatural were temporarily removed and all divine beings and the spirits of the dead moved freely among humans and interfered, sometimes violently, in human affairs. People gathered to sacrifice animals, make offerings of fruits and vegetables, and light bonfires to honor the dead, aid them on their journey, and keep them away from the living.

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES ON HALLOWEEN

As part of Christian missionary efforts to wipe out “pagan” observances such as Samhein, Catholic holy days were purposely set to coincide with pagan holidays. Christmas, for example, was assigned the arbitrary date of December 25th because it corresponded to the midwinter celebration of many peoples. The Christian feast of All Saints, or All Hallows, was assigned to November 1st. This feast day honoring every Christian saint was meant to substitute for Samhein and finally to replace it forever. This did not happen. People continued to celebrate All Hallows Eve (Oct. 31st) as the time of the wandering dead. Although the church branded the earlier Celtic supernatural deities as evil and associated them with the Devil, the people proceeded to offer gifts of food to the spirits. As the centuries wore on, people began dressing as the now dreaded creatures and performing antics in exchange for food and drink. This practice, called mumming, evolved into our present practice of challenging neighbors with a choice of “trick or treat.” Consequently, All Hallows Eve—alias Hallow Even, alias Halloween—may be traced to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhein.

PRE-HISPANIC AND CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE ON MEXICAN THE DAYS OF THE DEAD

The Mexican festival of The Days of the Dead has its origins in both pre-Hispanic death rituals and in Roman Catholic elements introduced during the Colonial period. Spanish historians of the 16th century recorded that the Indian populations celebrated their festivals of the dead over many weeks during our calendar months of August and September. Their purpose was to honor ancestors and the spirits of children with ceremony and offerings of incense, flowers, food, and drink to sustain them during their journey in the afterworld. Knowing that conversion to the Christian faith could not eradicate the native death rituals, Spanish missionaries allowed the festivals to be transferred to the Christian feasts of the dead of All Saints Day of November 1st and All Souls Day of November 2nd.

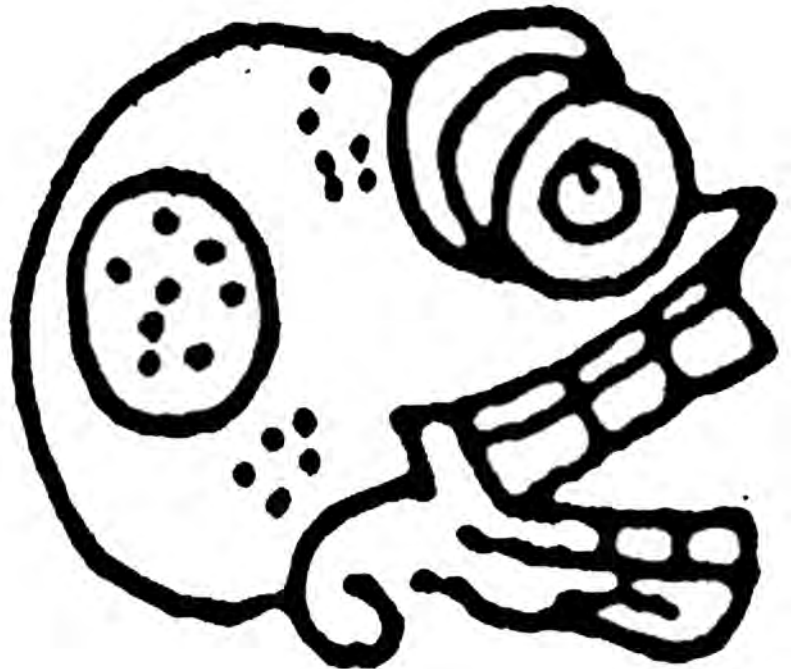
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HALLOWEEN AND THE DAYS OF THE DEAD

Today on November 1st and 2nd many inhabitants of Mexico, primarily those of rural Indian communities, make offerings to the dead, either in their homes or in the cemeteries, in the belief that the dead return to visit their living families. Unlike the pre-Christian Celtic festival of the dead, the spirits are not seen as threatening presences who need to be placated with food and drink lest they do harm, but rather as the benign spirits of their beloved dead.

SECTION III

DEATH THEMES IN MEXICAN ART

The art of Mexico has continually portrayed death as central to life. This section provides examples of death images from Mexico's pre-Hispanic era, the colonial period, and contemporary times. Since the mid-1960s, the art of these periods has served as an inexhaustible resource of symbols, images, and signs that form the visual vocabulary of Chicano/Mexican American art.



Day symbol in Aztec calendar



DEATH THEMES IN THE PRE-HISPANIC PERIOD

The ancient cultures of Mexico represented death repeatedly in their art. Their drawings and sculptures clearly express their ideas and feelings about death. The cultures of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica perceived death as one stage in an eternal cycle of life, death, and regeneration. Life and death were indivisible in pre-Hispanic thought and therefore death was represented as dynamic and fecund.

This head is divided in two halves. One side represents a human face and the other the fleshless face of death. In the pre-Hispanic mind, life and death were perceived not as opposites but as two complementary elements that formed the complete cycle of life.



Sculpture of Life and Death

Zapotec Culture

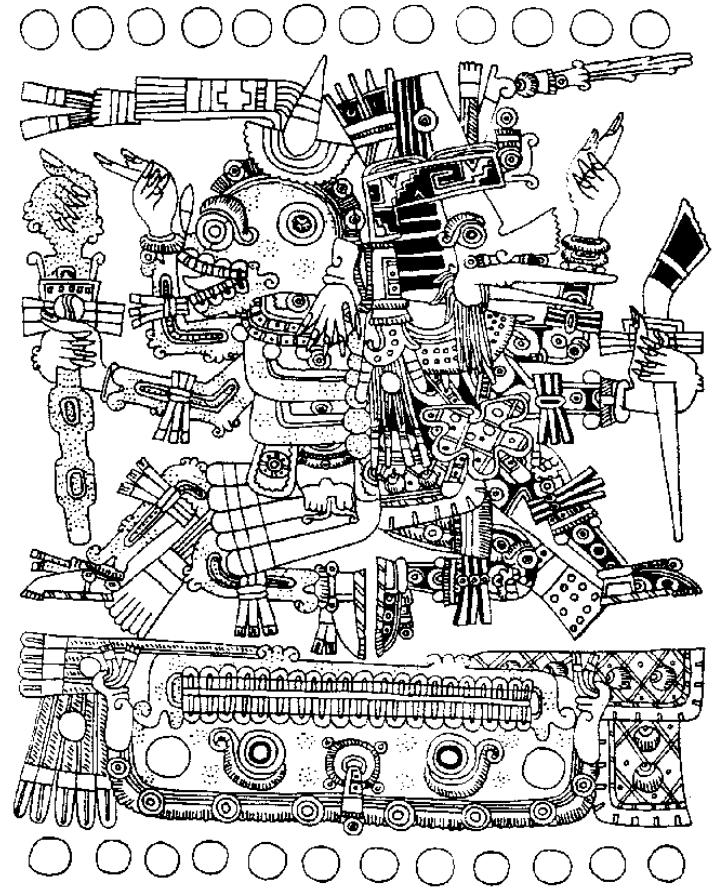
A.D. 600-900

Oaxaca, Mexico

The drawing at the top-right of the next page illustrates the gods of life and death joined back to back. Life nourishes death and death in turn generates new life. Life and death are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other.

The drawing at the bottom-right of the next page portrays Mictlantecuhtli with a skull mask and costume of painted bones. His black hair is curled and studded with star-like eyes, since he dwells in a region of utter darkness. He is adorned with paper rosettes, cones, and a banner. This portrayal is in great contrast to our image of death, which we clothe in a sinister black hooded cloak. The Mexican death figure wears the joyous trappings of life and positions himself in an attitude of dance.

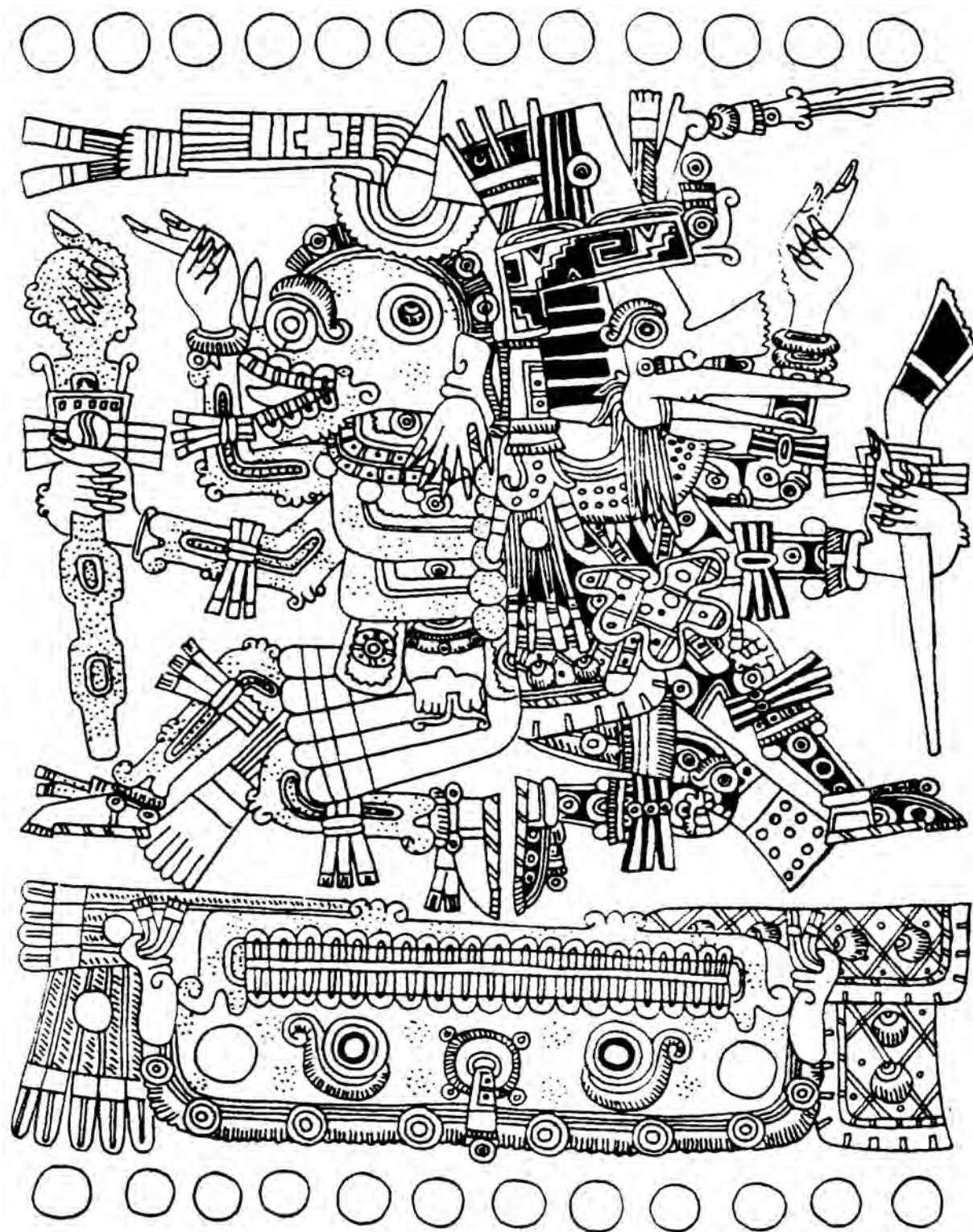
Mictlantecuhtli, God of Death and
Quetzalcoatl, God of Life,
 Codex* Borgia, Aztec



**Codex-painted picture manuscripts created in Mexico during the pre-Hispanic period or shortly after the Spanish conquest*



Mictlantecuhtli, God of Death
 Ruler of Mictlán, region of the dead
 Codex* Borbonicus, Aztec



Teacher's Note: **Suggested art project**

Place this image and the following two images on the bulletin board after you have discussed their meaning to the class. Everyone should have the opportunity to look closely at the drawings. Have your students create a drawing or a design with their own symbols of life and death. These symbols do not necessarily need to relate only to nature but should also connect to their own experiences.





DEATH IMAGES IN MEXICO'S ART COLONIAL PERIOD (1525-1810)

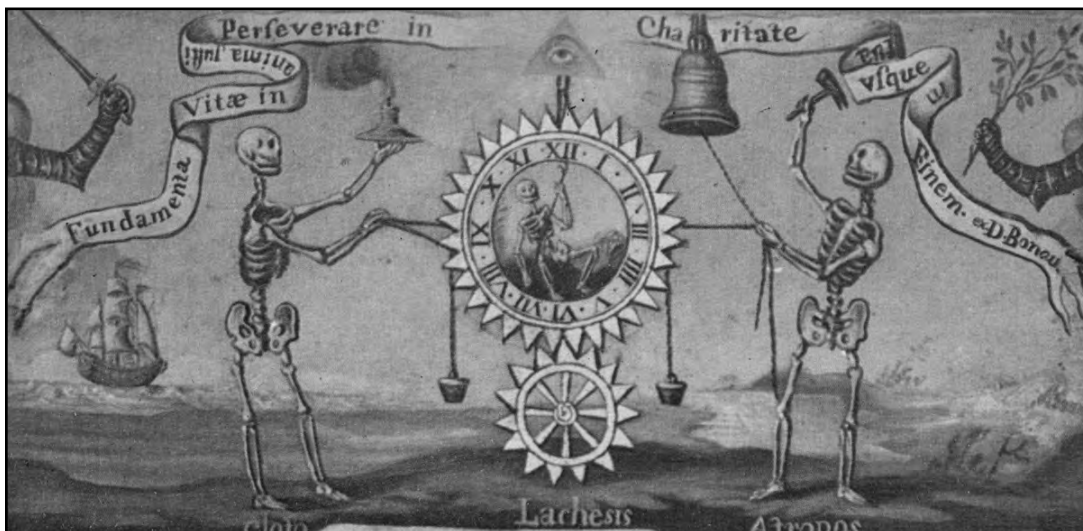
Death imagery and a preoccupation with death continued to be as important in Mexico during the colonial period as they had been during the time before the Spanish conquest. Both the Spanish and Indians were religious people, so they did not find it difficult to understand one another within a mystical context.

The European concept of death was promoted in Mexico through religious instruction. Dread of hellfire, and consequently a fear of death, was the popular theme of religious sermons, drama, poetry, and the graphic arts between the 14th and 16th centuries. But the visual representation of death as a skeleton occurs most frequently through the 17th and 18th centuries. Images of skeletons with a sickle in hand portrayed death as the “reaper” of souls, reminding those individuals dedicated to a carefree pursuit of earthly passions that death could come unexpectedly, at any moment, and that they should give thought to their salvation. Skeletons were portrayed carrying symbols, such as candles and clocks, referring to the brevity of life and the proximity of the Final Judgment.



Figure from an 18th century painting referred to as the **Funeral Pyre**, Museum of Toluca

“Human life is but a clock (Mortal man),
and it warns you that its main wheel turns quickly
And upon ringing the Bell: The sickle shows the time of death.”



Verse and image taken from an 18th century painting referred to as **The Polyptych of Death**, National Viceroyalty Museum, Tepotzotlán, State of Mexico

DEATH THEMES IN MODERN TIMES

CALAVERAS IN THE ART OF JOSÉ GUADALUPE POSADA

Death continues to be a popular theme in the art of the Mexican people. Much of this tradition is due to José Guadalupe Posada's *calaveras* (skulls and skeletons).

Posada was born on February 2, 1852 in the city of Aguascalientes. As a young man he worked in the lithography and print shop of Trinidad Pedroza, where he began to draw. In 1873 he went to Leon, Guanajuato with his family, where he studied engraving. There he worked until 1887 when he came to live in Mexico City. He immediately was employed by various print shops as an illustrator and designer of vignettes and print types and soon landed in the editorial house of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo. Arroyo produced written and illustrated histories, news events, games, stories, *zarzuelas* (Spanish musical drama), ballads, comedies, songs, love letters, and prayers popular with the common people of Mexico. Posada created thousands of engraved illustrations for these publications and eventually for the newspapers he founded.



José Guadalupe and son

Posada breathed new life into the Mexican tradition in which life is concurrent with death. Inspired by the death imagery of pre-Hispanic Mexico and the *calaveras* of Santiago Hernandez and Manuel Manilla, Posada surpassed all previous efforts and firmly established the custom of representing real life with figures associated with death. With his *calaveras* (skeleton caricatures), Posada recorded every aspect of the Mexican social scene and attacked corruption, crime, and political and social injustice. Posada possessed the unique ability to express in engraving and etching his native understanding of Mexico and its people, and his work traveled over the entire country in the hands of Mexico's citizens.

Although Posada proved to be the most popular printmaker of his time and one of the most influential Mexican artists of the 20th century, he died in January, 1913 a poor man. Over the years Posada was virtually forgotten until a young Frenchman, Jean Charlot, arrived in Mexico City in 1922 and discovered the hundreds of plates that Antonio Vanegas Arroyo had saved. Charlot later wrote in the first essay published about Posada in 1925, "Posada is the bottleneck through which all Mexican artists must go to get from the nineteenth to the twentieth century."

José Guadalupe Posada
Gran fandango y francachela de todas las calaveras (Happy dance and wild party of all skeletons)
 Broadside



José Guadalupe Posada
Calavera de un revolucionario Zapatista
 (Calavera of a revolutionary follower of Zapata)
 Broadside, 1910-12

FOLK ART FOR DAYS OF THE DEAD

The tradition popularized by José Guadalupe Posada of representing death as an animated, humorous, costumed *calavera* (skeleton) continues in Mexico's *Los Días de los Muertos* folk art. Wood, wire, and clay skeletons, arranged on wood, clay stands, or within miniature boxes, reflect Posada's satirical commentaries on the mundane occupations of life.



Mexican skeleton toys and mask

Death has become a carouser who fights. . .cries and dances.
A friendly death, a death which becomes a thing of articulated
cardboard to be moved by pulling a string.

Death as a sugar candy skull,
a death to feed the sweet tooth of children.

A revealing death which takes part in dances and visits the cemetery to eat mole and drink pulque among the graves.

By artist/engraver José Guadalupe Posada

A wide variety of toys appears for sale in the public market as preparations begin for this holiday. Painted clay skeleton figures portray the deceased resuming their normal activities such as getting married, driving, and so on. These are placed on the *ofrendas*. There are also pull toys, pop-up toys, and crank boxes with similar death imagery that are given to children. These toys poke fun at death and remind everyone that whether rich or poor, famous or unknown, beautiful or homely, all will become a skull in the end. These toys also introduce children to the idea of death in an atmosphere of joyous celebration.

THE LINARES FAMILY

Inspired by Posada, the papier-mâché images made today, some life-size, by the Linares family of Mexico City, depict skeletons engaged in a number of human activities and occupations. The art of the Linares family is internationally acclaimed and has become a decorative accessory in urban *Los Días de los Muertos* celebrations.

La Catrina (The Elegant One)

Print by José Guadalupe Posada



Catrin and Catrina Calavera
Couple by Leonardo Linares
inspired by Posada's imagery

DIEGO RIVERA (1886-1957)

Diego Rivera was one of the great Mexican artists of the 20th century, and had a profound influence on the development of muralism in Mexico and the United States. His artistic schooling spanned some 19 years both in Mexico and Europe. In Italy he studied fresco painting and became inspired by the murals of the Italian masters. Rivera returned to Mexico in 1921 eager to create art that would speak to the people. With his mural and easel art, Rivera espoused the value of work, examined Mexican history, and glorified pre-Columbian and contemporary indigenous cultures.

Diego Rivera

Sueño de una Tarde Dominical en la Alameda Central

(Dream of a Sunday Afternoon at Alameda Park), 1948

Central detail from Diego Rivera's mural in the Hotel del Prado in Mexico City

Mexican artist, José Guadalupe Posada, an acquaintance of Rivera, is depicted arm in arm with his own skeleton figure. The skeleton's right hand is held by Rivera as a boy. Directly behind him is his wife, the painter Frida Kahlo.



FRIDA KAHLO (1907-1954)

Frida Kahlo is recognized as one of Mexico's greatest female artists and as the wife of Diego Rivera. At the age of 18 she suffered multiple fractures to her right leg, pelvis, and spinal column in a bus accident and was subjected to much suffering and immobility during her lifetime. In her small-format paintings, Kahlo bared her soul, directly or symbolically, painting her emotional and physical pain. Her love of Mexican culture and popular arts was expressed in her personal dress, home, and art.

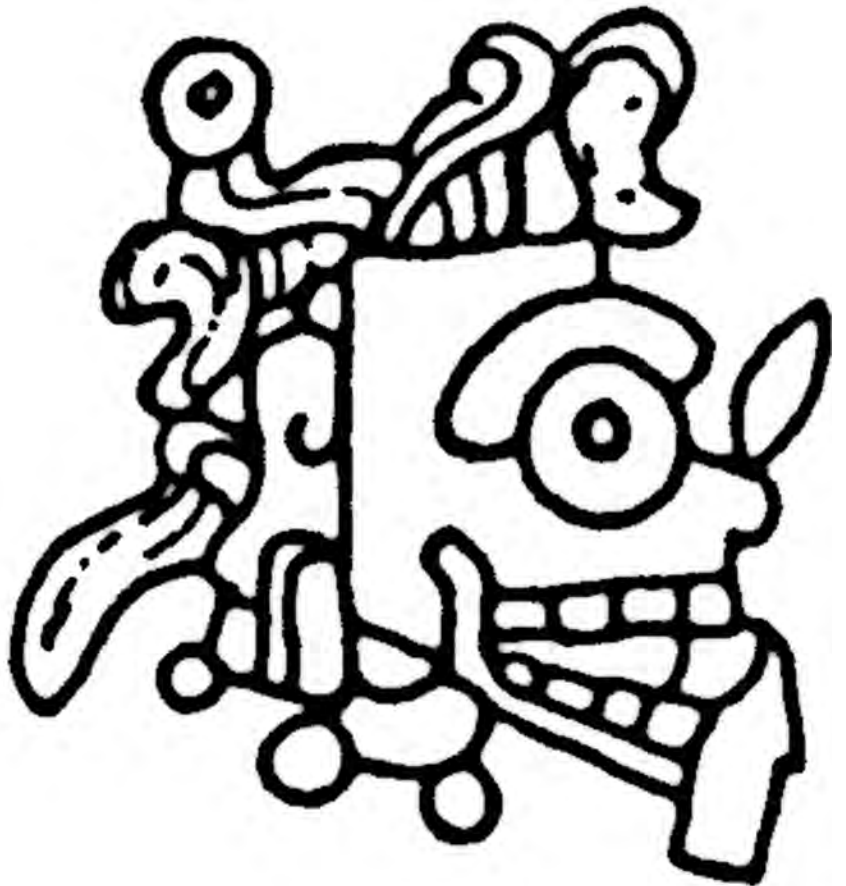
Frida Kahlo
The Dream, 1940

Like Posada and Rivera, Frida Kahlo used Mexican popular art forms of skeleton imagery to express thoughts and ideas. The papier-mâché skeleton, which she actually did keep on top of her bed's canopy, is a reminder of her own mortality.



SECTION IV

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES LINKED TO CULTURAL CONTENT



Aztec glyph for death with headdress of smoke



AROMAS AND SWEETS FOR OUR DEAD

BY FERNANDO HORCASITAS*

The old wise man tells this story to the children of the village of Milpa Alta.

"The dead surround us like little children; they look for us, they need us," he said as he told this story:

"Son," said the mother to her unbelieving boy. "Why don't you go to the forest to cut wood? Why don't you earn a few cents to buy the bread, the tamales and the *aguardiente* (an alcoholic drink) for the *ofrenda* (offering altar) of the dead? Don't you know that our beloved dead ones suffer with cold, hunger and thirst after journeying so far all day? We need to prepare the way for them with fires, flowers and candles. They only visit us once a year!"

The Days of the Dead arrived and the disobedient boy went to play in the forest and by evening he still had not returned home. The unhappy mother cried upon seeing that in the entire pueblo, in every home, on top of each embroidered tablecloth, there were sugared breads, *mole* (meat and gravy dish), fruits, chocolate, a glass of water, peanuts, cigarettes, sugar cane, the yellow *zempasúchil* (marigolds) and hundreds of sputtering candles—all these things to welcome the dead with dignity. The woman wandered through the streets calling out to her son but with no result.

The boy, finally tired from his games, was leaving the forest when he noticed that behind him came a large procession of the old ones. He saw his father, his grandparents, great-grandparents and his great-great-grandparents. They were hungry and thirsty, shivering with cold, and carried their empty food bags and rolled sleeping mats under their arms. The old ones looked forward to returning to their home where they knew they would be welcomed to warm themselves, eat and sleep for one night.

"What are you doing here?" the old ones scolded. "Why are you not waiting for us in your home?" The astonished boy could not answer. The dead ones tied the boy to a tree and left him there the entire night. At sunrise, when the perfumed smoke of the *copal* (incense) was disappearing, and when the candles on each *ofrenda* were being snuffed out, the old ones again slowly passed through the forest and untied the boy and continued their journey. The boy returned home crying, "*Mamacita* (dear little mother), now I believe that the dead do return. Next year we will buy them food and we will await all of them."

After a pause, the wise man finishes his story. "We love and respect our dead. That is why I light for them a fire and provide them with food and drink and my children and grandchildren will do the same for me once a year when I too return shivering with cold and suffering with thirst and hunger."

***Fernando Horcasitas** (1925-1980)

As teacher, scholar, editor, and researcher, Fernando Horcasitas became internationally prominent in his field, leaving a bibliography of over 100 published works including reviews, 13 of which were yet unpublished at the time of his death. He devoted many years to various aspects of Mexican ethno-history and linguistics, focusing principally on modern Nahuatl language and people. Born of Mexican parents living in the United States, Horcasitas received his early education in Los Angeles, after which he continued his higher education in Mexico.



ACTIVITY #1

LEARNING THROUGH STORYTELLING

Cultural groups sometimes use storytelling to teach lessons to the young. Author Fernando Horcasitas' story instructs Mexican children as to their responsibility in carrying out the traditions of *Los Días de los Muertos*. However, there is a second underlying theme or purpose to this story.

It also reveals to the reader the cultural values or standards that the traditions of *Los Días de los Muertos* encourage in Mexican society. Use this story as a basis for discussion. What are these ideals?

Students should deduce that this cultural festival emphasizes the importance of family ties—ties so strong they extend beyond death. The story also emphasizes obedience to parents and the importance of maintaining cultural traditions.

Assign students to write a sequel to this story reflecting the boy's attitude and behavior during the subsequent year's Days of the Dead celebration.

Involving parents:

Oral Histories

Assign students to interview a family member or friend of the family to learn more about a member of their family who has passed away. Who was that person? What were his or her favorite foods? Favorite activities? Ask the person you are interviewing to share a funny or interesting story about that person.

For suggestions on conducting oral histories, see *Collecting Community History: A Training Handbook for Educators* listed in the bibliography, or see www.museumca.org/LHP.

With the information gathered from the oral interview, write an essay or poem in honor of that person.

ACTIVITY #2

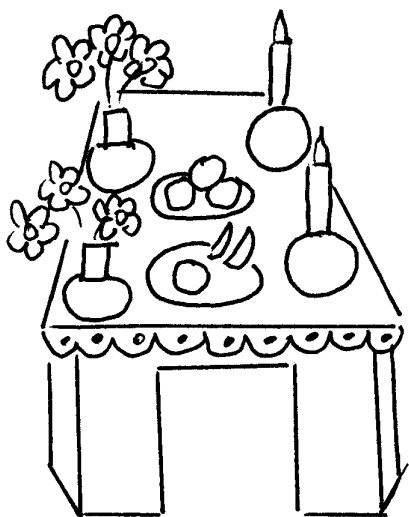
MAKING A MINIATURE OFRENDA

MATERIALS:

- table pattern, printed on colored cardstock
- scissors
- clear tape
- modeling clay in fruit colors
- buttons (to be used as dishes)
- small birthday candles
- small paper doilies (for use as tablecloths)
- miniature-sized dried, silk, or plastic flowers

STEP BY STEP DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut out the paper pattern.
2. Construct the table using the directions on the pattern.
3. Glue a doily "tablecloth" to the top of the table.
4. Use modeling clay to shape miniature fruits; glue to button dishes.
5. Shape candleholders and vases for flowers of modeling clay.
6. Add miniature flowers and any additional items you wish.



Cut off this section.

Cut on solid lines.
Score and fold on
dotted lines.

Cut off this section.

ACTIVITY #3

CREATING PAPER ZEMPUSÚCHIL (MARIGOLDS)

MATERIALS:

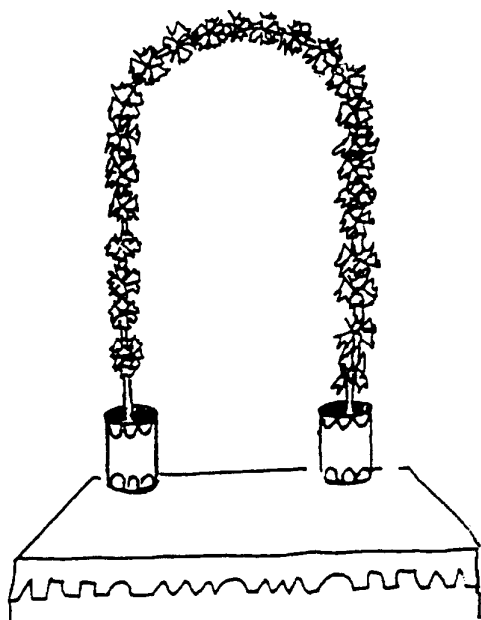
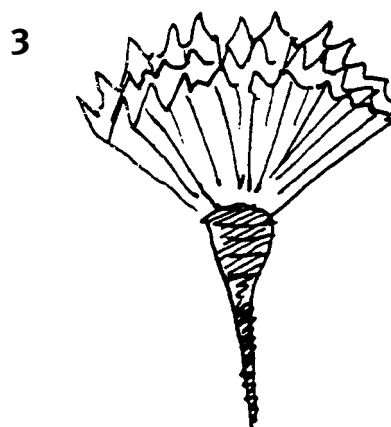
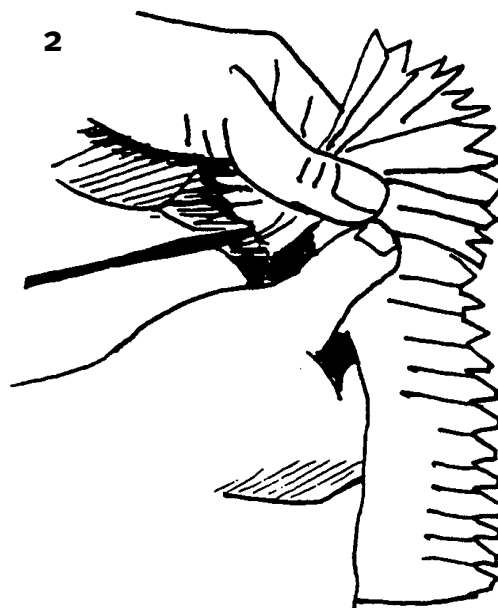
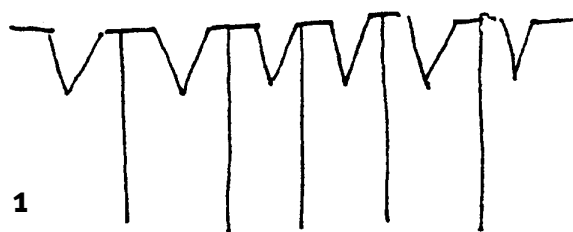
Orange, yellow or gold crepe paper, scissors, wire or green pipe cleaners for stems, and green florist tape

PREPARATION:

Cut crepe paper into 2 1/2" strips.

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS:

1. Across the cut edges of the paper strips, cut out a series of triangles and slits as shown in the drawing.
2. Pleat the uncut edge of the strip around one end of the wire or pipe cleaner stem. The wire should not protude beyond the top of the flower. Use about one half of the paper strip to create one flower.
3. Secure the paper to the wire by wrapping the florist tape several times around the base of the flower. If you are using wire rather than a pipe cleaner, cover the wire with the florist tape. Fluff out the layers of the flower.



OFRENDA FLOWER ARCH

You can create a flower arch for your *ofrenda* by tying pieces of thin bamboo plant stakes together and then sticking the arch into large decorated tin cans filled with wet plaster of Paris. Paper or real flowers can be used as decoration on the arch.

ACTIVITY #4

MAKING PAN DE MUERTOS

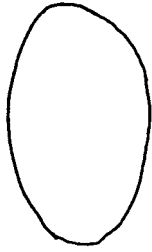
INGREDIENTS FOR BREAD AND GLAZE:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 2 packages of dry yeast | 1/2 cup milk |
| 1 cube (1/2 cup) margarine or butter | 1 cup sugar |
| 5-6 cups flour | 1/3 cup orange juice |
| 2 tablespoons orange peel | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1 tablespoon anise seed | 1/2 cup water |
| 4 eggs | |

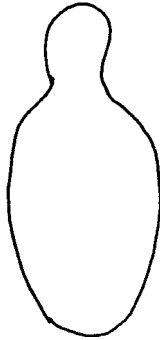
STEP BY STEP DIRECTIONS:

- 1.** In a large bowl, mix 1-1/2 cups flour, 1/2 cup sugar, salt, anise seed, and 2 packages of undissolved active dry yeast.
- 2.** Combine 1/2 cup milk, 1/2 cup water, and butter or margarine in a saucepan. Heat over low heat until the liquids are very warm (120-130 degrees). Margarine does not need to melt. Gradually add to the dry ingredients and beat 2 minutes at medium speed of an electric mixer, scraping the bowl occasionally.
- 3.** Add 4 eggs at room temperature and 1 cup flour. Beat at high speed for 2 minutes. Stir in enough additional flour (3-4 cups) to make a stiff dough.
- 4.** Turn onto a lightly floured board; knead until smooth and elastic, about 8-10 minutes.
- 5.** Place in a greased bowl, then turn the dough over once to grease the top. Cover; let rise in a warm place, free from drafts, until doubled in bulk (about 1 hour and 20 minutes).
- 6.** Punch the dough down.

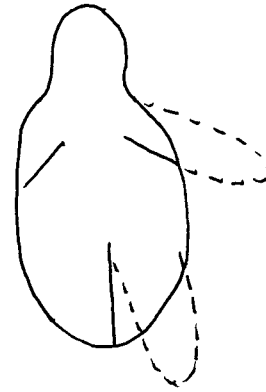
7. Shaping the dough figures:



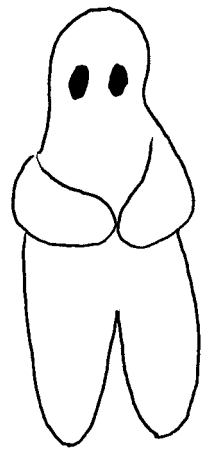
Create an oval form from a hand-sized lump of dough.



Pull and stretch a small knob on one end to form a head.



Cut slits into the dough as shown. Pull and stretch the dough into legs and arms.



- 8.** Cover the figures, let them rise in a warm place, free from drafts, until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.
- 9.** Bake at 350 degrees about 40 minutes, or until done. Brush with orange glaze and dust with colored sprinkles or granulated sugar. Cool on wire rack.

Orange glaze

Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup orange juice, and 2 tablespoons grated orange peel in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil; simmer 2 minutes until thickened.



MASKS



Painted wood mask used during the Days of the Dead in Oaxaca, Mexico by men going from house to house begging for food or money

Cultures throughout time and throughout the world have used masks in ritual and ceremony. When we study the masking traditions of a particular culture, we learn not about what or who is hidden behind the mask but about the true face or character of that culture.

FOUR CATEGORIES OF WORLD MASKS:

SPIRIT MASKS—masks serving as holy objects that transform the wearer into the spirit being portrayed by the mask, or that allow the wearer to communicate with the supernatural world.

MASKS THAT EXPRESS A COMMUNITY'S FEARS AND ANXIETIES—Masked dances and rituals have reflected the concerns of communities with the hope that through an open communal sharing of these concerns—such as environmental conditions, death, and fear of the unknown—bad fortune might be reversed and anxiety minimized.

MASKS THAT SERVE AS TEACHING TOOLS—masks that are used to teach a community its history, special legends, and proper behavior and attitudes.

MASKS USED AS OBJECTS FOR CELEBRATION AND ENTERTAINMENT—masks that are used by ordinary people as a disguise during carnivals, festivals, or parades or by performers to enhance their portrayal of a particular character.

Masks are worn in some of the Days of the Dead dances and by members of the community during processions to the cemetery.



Teacher's Note:

The mask-making activity on the following page can be preceded with this learning project.

Photocopy and enlarge four images of masks that fit into the categories described on this page and use them as visual aids in your presentation of this topic to your students.

Books on the theme of cultural masks can be found in the art and children's sections of major bookstores. (See references in the Bibliography.) Students may be assigned to research a mask image and complete a written report on its origin and use. A classroom exhibit can be organized by mounting the images and reports on colored poster board. The exhibit can be augmented with oral presentations.

ACTIVITY #5

CREATING A CALAVERA MASK

It is recommended that the teacher first make a skull mask so that the process is clear. An exercise in reading comprehension can be part of this art activity if the students are allowed to create their masks by following the written step-by-step instructions on their own.

MATERIALS:

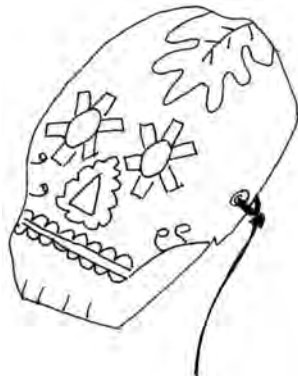
- copies of mask patterns and directions for each student
- 2 sheets of 8-1/2" x 11" white poster board or heavyweight construction paper for each student
- pencils, scissors, masking tape, staplers, hole punchers, string or yarn for ties
- glue sticks
- Crayons, felt pens, and collage can be used to decorate the mask. If collage is used, you will need a good assortment of paper: foil gift wrap, colored construction or art paper, or even colored printed magazines.
- glitter (optional)

PREPARATION:

Photocopy both pattern pieces for each student.

Collage decoration—With a paper cutter or scissors, cut colored papers into various sized squares, put them into containers, and place on the students' work area.

Mask ties—Cut 2 pieces of string or yarn into approximately 10" lengths for each student.



STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut out the pattern pieces, including eye and nose holes and slits.
2. Place the cut patterns on heavy paper. Trace around patterns, around eye and nose holes, and into slits.
3. Cut out traced pieces, including eye and nose holes and slits.
4. Decorate your *calavera* with whatever materials are available to you. Traditional *calavera* decorations are flowers, leaves, scrolls, birds, and written names or sayings. Do not glue the two pieces together.
5. **Construction:** With the inside of the mask facing you, slide and overlap one edge of each slit over the other. Tape overlapped edges to hold them in place and staple them.



Slit overlap

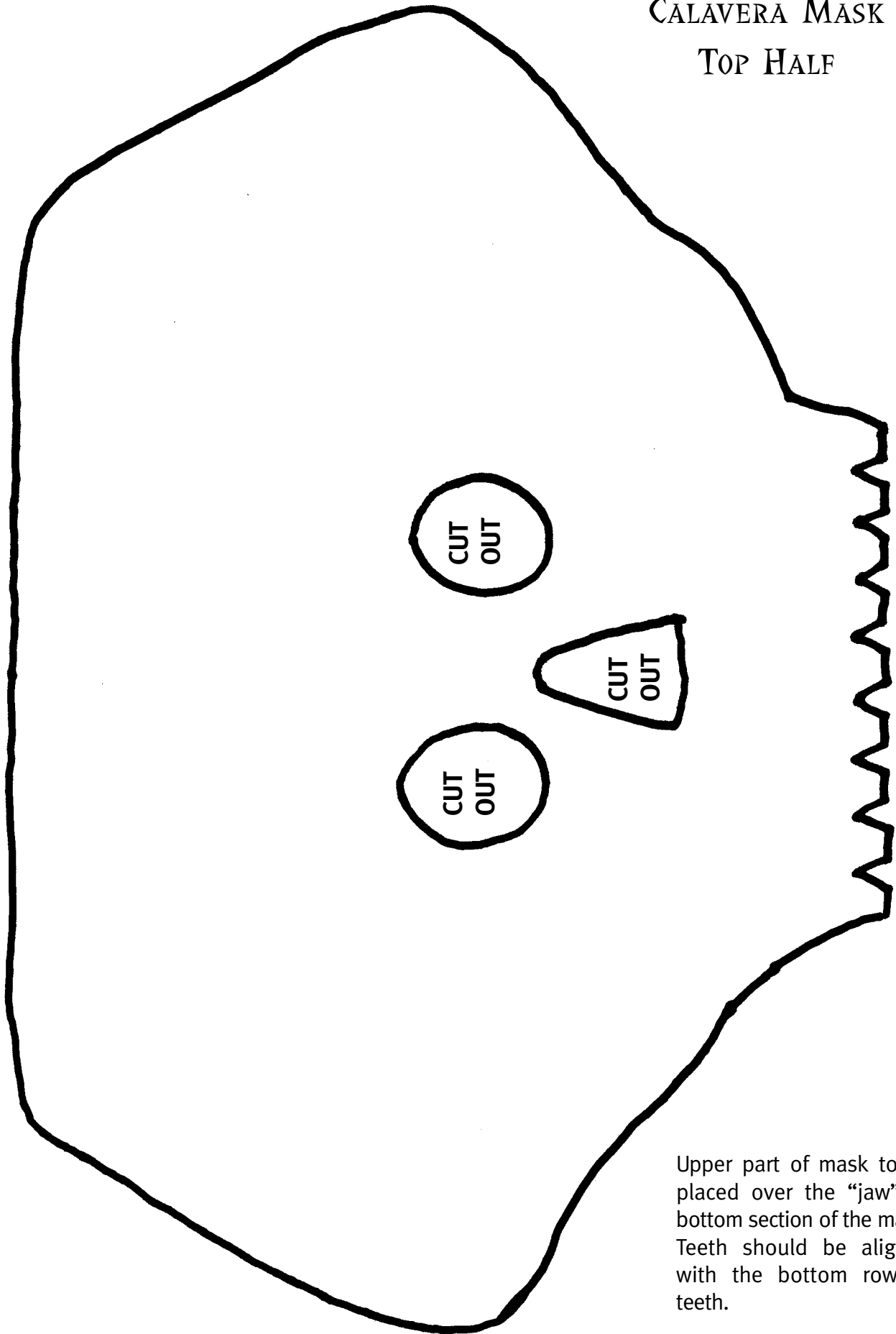
Inside view of mask showing slit overlaps fixed in place with staples



6. Place the bottom and top of teeth on top of one another with a slight opening between them and staple the top and bottom pieces together on each side of the mask.
7. Punch holes with a hole puncher on each side of the mask, opposite the eye holes, and tie yarn or string around each hole.

CALavera MASK

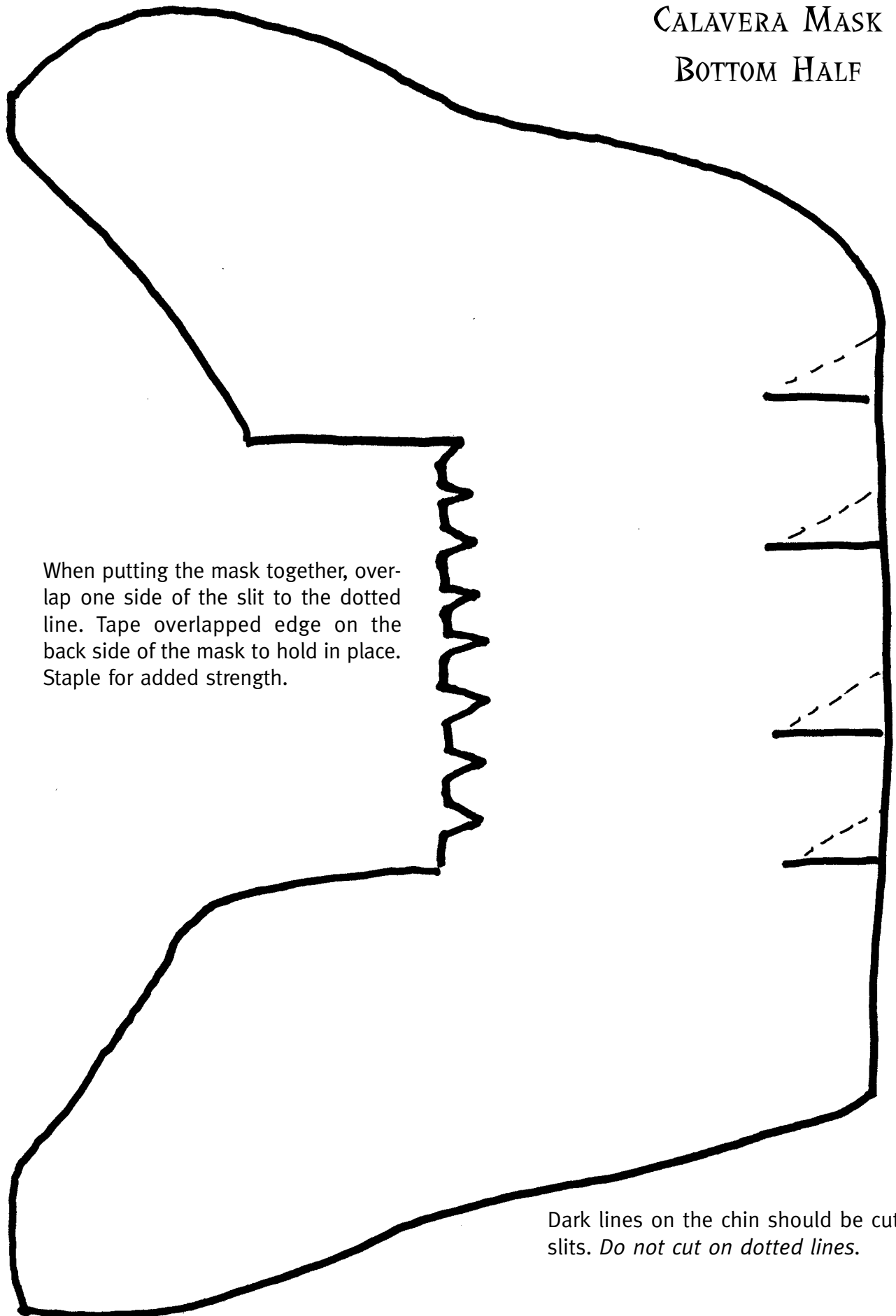
TOP HALF



Upper part of mask to be placed over the “jaw” or bottom section of the mask. Teeth should be aligned with the bottom row of teeth.

CALAVERA MASK

BOTTOM HALF



USING PAPEL PICADO AS AN INTRODUCTION TO CONCEPTS IN ART

LEARNING ABOUT POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPACE:

Mexico's paper cutouts graphically illustrate the concept of positive and negative space in a work of art. Positive space is composed of forms that are in the front or foreground, or are the "active" forms. In the case of *papel picado*, they are the areas with paper. Negative space is made up of forms that are in the back or background, or are the "passive" areas.

Teacher's Note

Buy a *papel picado* design or enlarge the image on this page on a copy machine using 11" x 17" paper. Use the image to illustrate the above-mentioned concept. Reinforce your lesson with the following project:

An exercise in positive and negative space:

Give each student 2 pieces of contrasting colored paper, one cut half the size of the other.

Have the students cut several shapes of different kinds along the edge of the smaller sized paper and save the pieces.

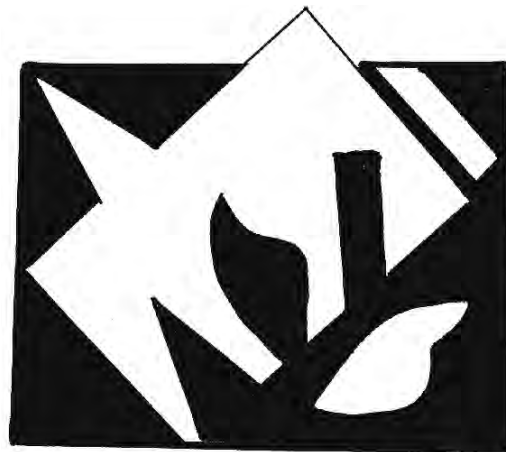
Take the paper with the cutout designs and place on half of the background paper.

Take the cutout shapes and place them along the cut edge opposite of where they were cut.

Determine through group discussion which forms are the most "active." Are the areas from which the paper forms have been cut out positive or negative spaces?

Move your shapes around and form a new composition of positive and negative spaces and place it on the larger background paper. Notice how the background, or large negative areas, contributes to the overall design of the work. When you find a composition where the positive and negative spaces are equally interesting, glue the pieces on the background paper.

Examine a painting, print, or drawing and determine its positive and negative spaces.



ACTIVITY #6

CREATING PAPEL PICADO (TISSUE PAPER CUTOUTS)

MATERIALS:

- tissue paper cut into rectangles 15" x 20"
- scissors
- string
- a stapler if you wish to hang the paper cutouts

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS:

1. If you plan to hang your *papel picado*, fold the top down one inch. This fold will serve as a casing for the string. Never cut along the string fold.

VERTICAL DESIGNS

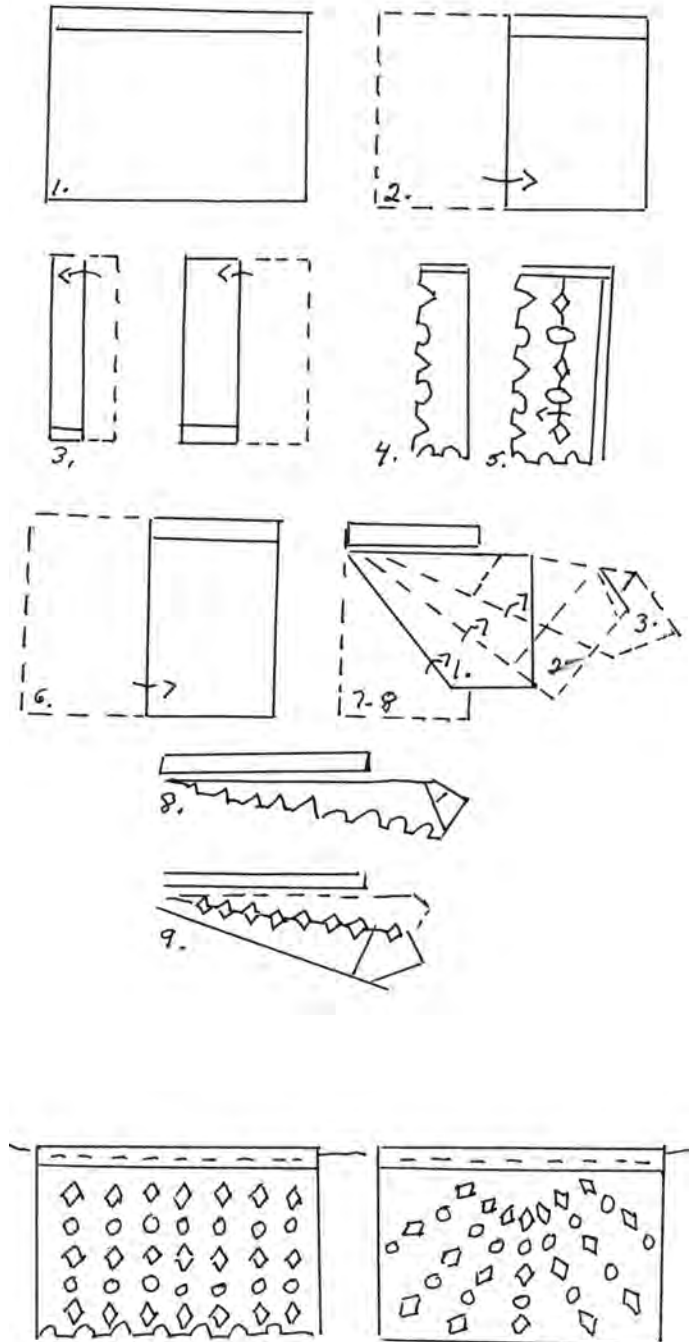
2. Fold paper in half like a book. Match the edges.
3. Fold in half two more times.
4. Cut out designs along the folded and bottom edges of the paper.
5. Unfold once. Flip the uncut fold to the other side, leaving two side edges on the opposite side. Cut designs on the remaining uncut folds. Never cut along the outer side edges.

You can refold your paper in the opposite direction if you wish to add horizontal cutouts.

DIAGONAL DESIGNS

6. Make your string fold. Fold paper in half like a book. Match the edges carefully.
7. Pick up the bottom-left corner and align the center fold along and below the string fold. Top papers will stick out beyond the outside edge of bottom papers.
8. Repeat the same procedure two more times. Cut designs on folded edges.

9. Unfold once and cut designs on the remaining fold. While cutting out your designs, you can carefully open up your paper and decide where you need additional cutouts. Sandwich string into the casing and staple or glue along the casing edge.



ACTIVITY #7

MAKING A SKELETON STRING PUPPET

MATERIALS:

- colored marking pens
- hole punchers
- scissors
- glue sticks
- masking tape
- 1/2" round head fasteners
- thick crochet thread
- colored paper for collage
- inexpensive wooden chopsticks
- copies of puppet pattern

Note: Each puppet will need six fasteners, four 10" strings, and one chopstick.

PREPARATION:

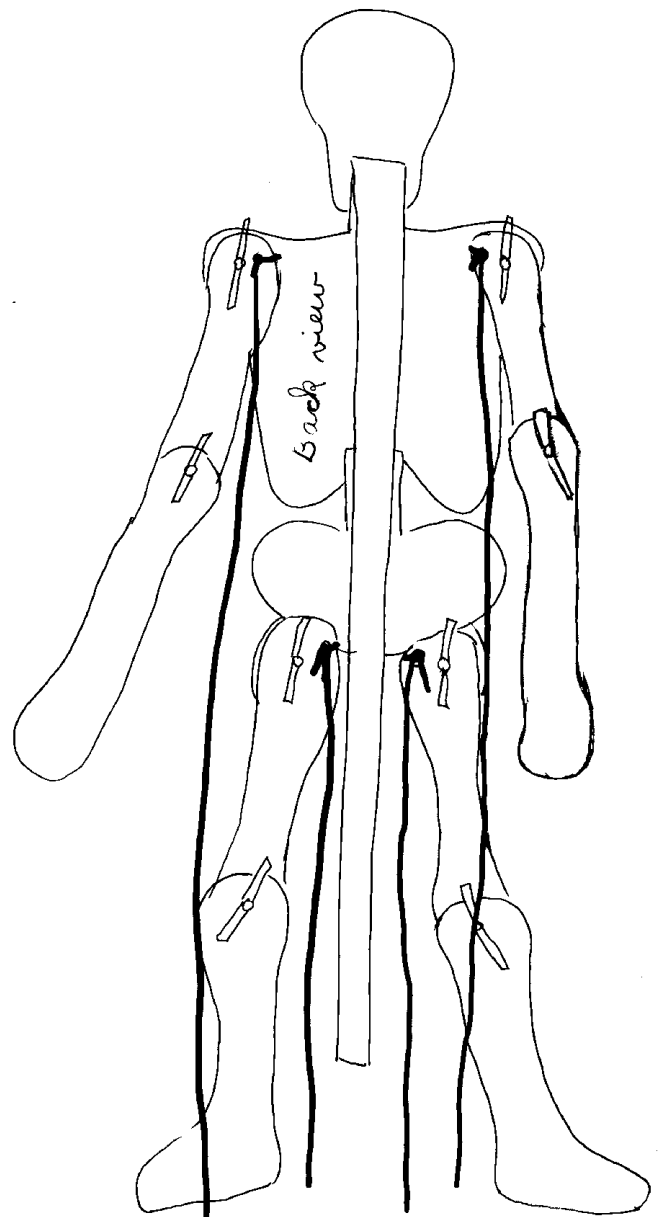
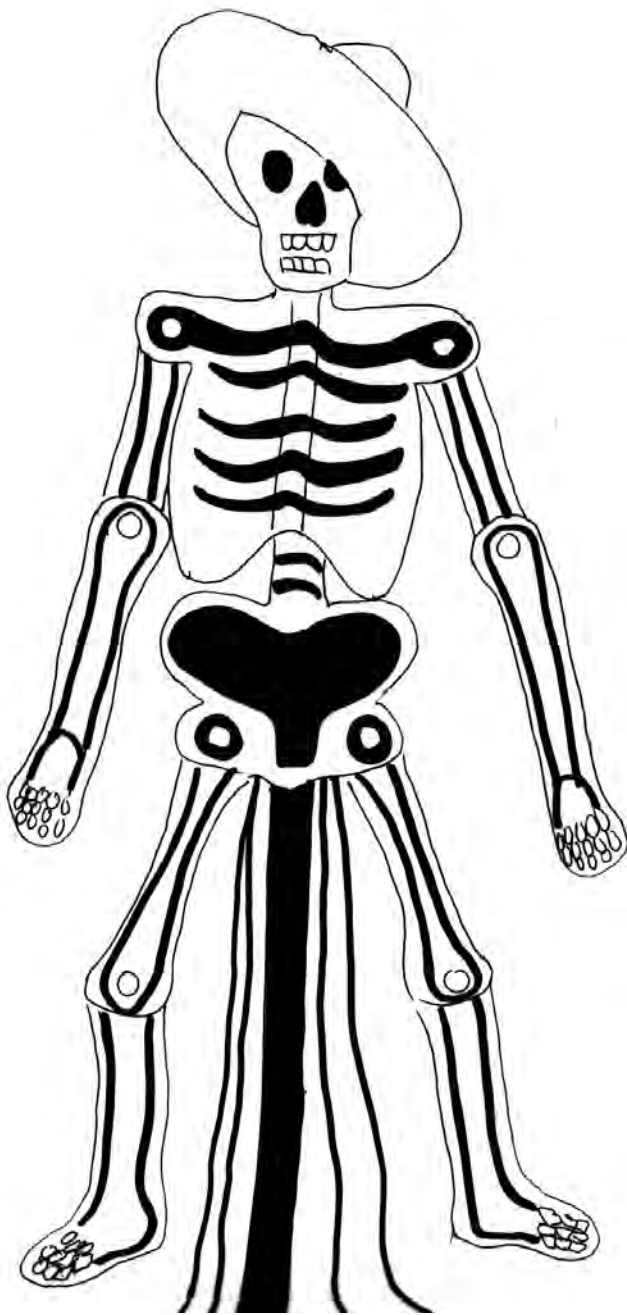
Photocopy the puppet pattern on white 8 1/2" x 11" index paper (10 lb. weight) or photocopy the pattern on white paper and mount it on lightweight cardboard with spray adhesive.

Cut crochet thread into 10" lengths.

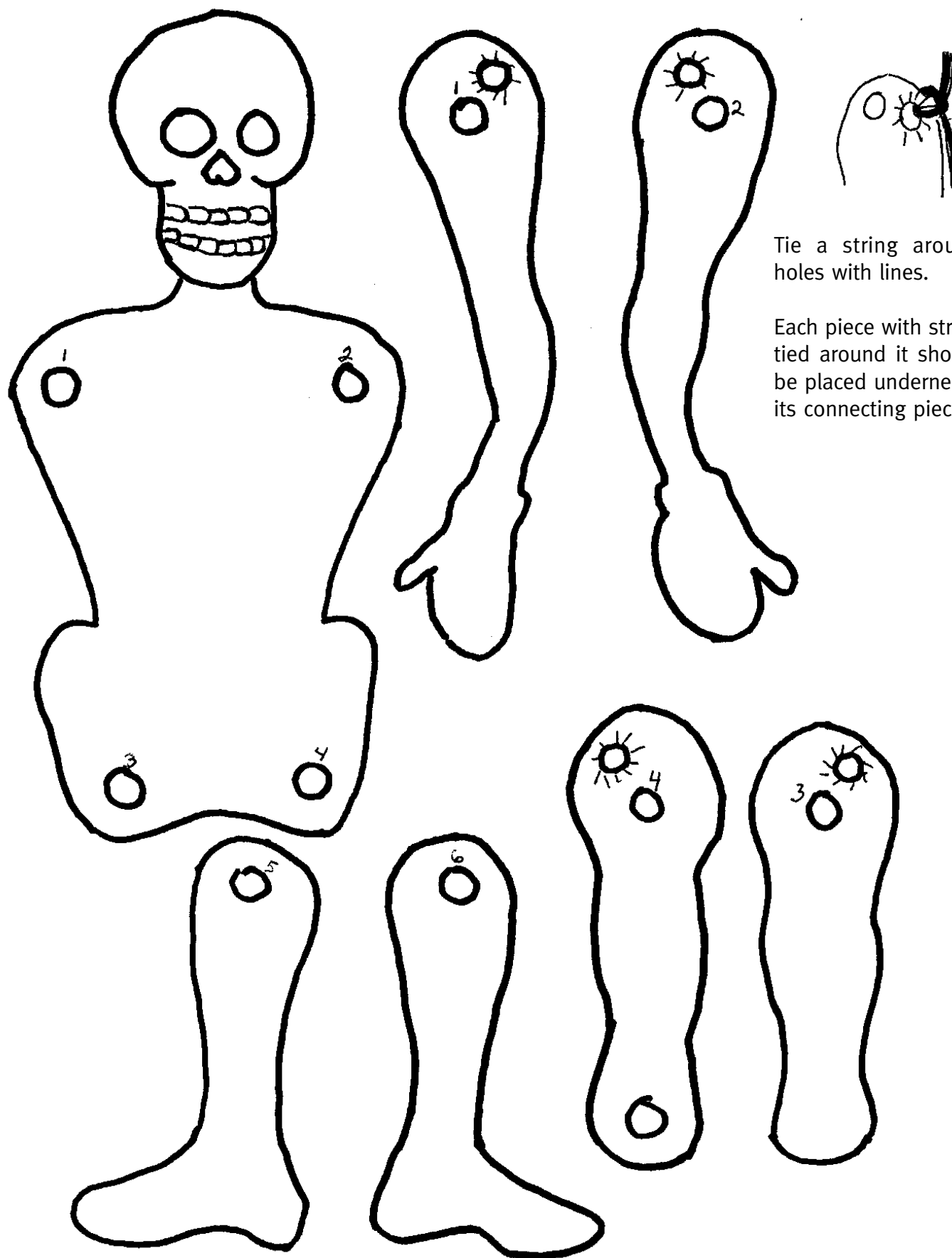
Cut colored paper into various size pieces to use for collage.

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS:

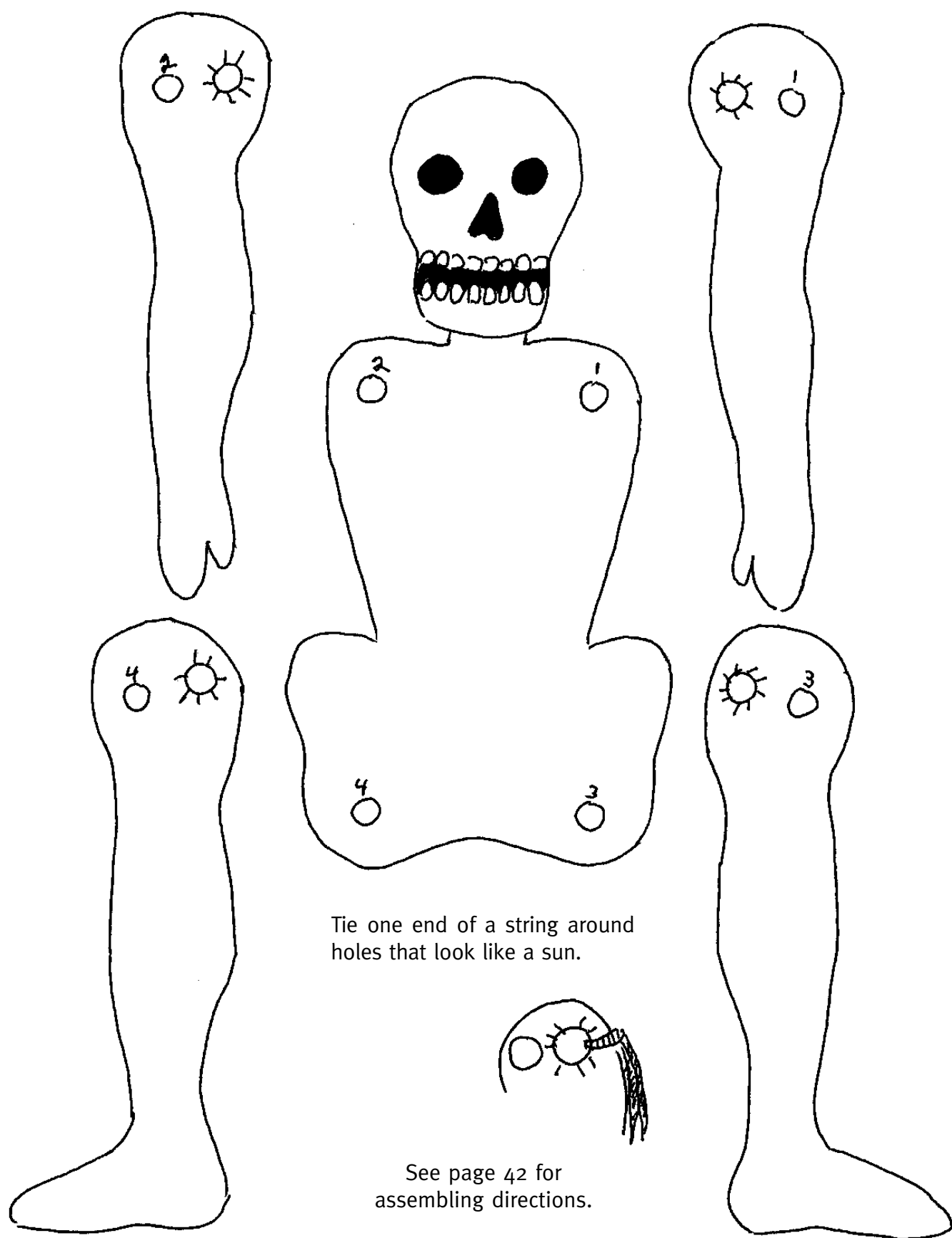
1. Cut out pattern pieces.
2. Punch circles with a hole puncher, including circles that look like suns.
3. Tie a string around each hole marked with radiating lines (4).
4. Arrange pieces on the table to form a figure by matching numbered holes.
5. Stick fasteners through matching holes. Do not stick fasteners through holes with strings. The button end of fasteners should be on the front side of the figure. Holes with string should be placed behind its matching piece.
6. Decorate figure: Draw or cut from paper and glue accessories such as clothing, hat, ties, shoes, etc. Be sure not to glue anything on top of the figure that will hinder movement.
7. Place the wood stick down the length of the figure (back side). Secure stick with tape.



SKELETON JUMPING JACK (VERSION 1)



SKELETON JUMPING JACK (VERSION 2)



Tie one end of a string around
holes that look like a sun.



See page 42 for
assembling directions.

ACTIVITY #8

CLASSROOM DAYS OF THE DEAD CELEBRATION

The following activity is designed to facilitate the creation of a classroom *ofrenda*. The activity includes some approaches to acquainting students with the formal properties and cultural content of the celebration of *Los Días de los Muertos*.

Your class can re-create a Days of the Dead celebration. Students will construct an *ofrenda* and make facsimiles of traditional *ofrenda* objects. Preparation will occur during the month of October and culminate with a gathering of family, friends, or classmates.

PREPARATION:

1. Decide upon the day and time of your celebration and invite family and friends or another class to come to your classroom at that time.
2. Make a list of all the tasks that need to be accomplished for your ceremony. Create a calendar to plan out those tasks leading up to the celebration.
3. Use one of the images in this book or one of your own to make a Days of the Dead invitation. You can invite your guests to bring their personal mementos or decoration for placement on the *ofrenda*.
4. During the month of October, make paper flowers, masks, paper sugar skulls, *papel picado* banners, skeleton puppets, and *pan de muertos* as decoration for your altar.
5. Decide to whom you will dedicate your *ofrenda*. It can be past family members, heroes of history or your community, or anyone who you feel contributed something special while they were alive.
6. Research the lives of these people and write a short paragraph about them. Copy their picture on a copy machine and glue the picture and paragraph on colored poster board, leaving a border around both which you can decorate to look like a frame.
7. You can use a table, desk, or countertop for your *ofrenda*. You can add height by using sturdy cardboard boxes as tiers. Cover the boxes with a pretty tablecloth or paper covering. A flower arch is a traditional element of Mexican *ofrendas*. Everyone will place their Days of the Dead projects on the *ofrenda*. (See “Ritual Objects of the *Ofrenda*” on p.14 for further information on altar decorations.)



THE CELEBRATION:

1. Welcome your guests with authentic taped Mexican music. You can wear your skeleton masks or use them as part of your *ofrenda* decoration.
2. Provide a presentation for your guests that will include: an explanation of The Days of the Dead in Mexico, of the symbolism of each of the altar objects, and why you chose the individual or individuals to be represented by the altar. Invite your guests to place their objects on the *ofrenda* and to speak briefly on the individual they are remembering. Invite someone who has experienced The Days of the Dead in Mexico to share his or her story. Ask everyone to name one object they would choose to place on the *ofrenda* that would best represent their interests and personality.
3. The celebration should be one of sharing, learning, and remembering. Conclude the festivities with food and drink!



Photo Mary Andrade

ACTIVITY #9

CREATING AN IMAGINARY OFRENDA

Use before and/or after visiting the special exhibition.

MANY ARTISTS BEGIN CREATING THEIR *OFRENDAS* TABLE BY FIRST ASKING THEMSELVES THESE QUESTIONS:

- To whom do I want to dedicate this *ofrenda*?
(It may be dedicated to one or more people.)
- Why is this person special to me?
- What do I want people to remember about him/her?
- What objects should be on the altar to tell people about the person I am honoring?

BEGIN CREATING YOUR IMAGINARY *OFRENDA* BY ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. To whom will I dedicate my *ofrenda*? _____

You can dedicate your *ofrenda* to:

- a person (family member, friend, or someone famous who has died)
- a group of people (policemen, teachers, soldiers, etc.)
- a special pet who has died

2. Why did I choose to honor this person(s) or pet?
What do I find special or important about who I am honoring?

3. What do I want people to remember about the person(s) or pet honored in my *ofrenda*? _____

4. What will I put on the *ofrenda* to tell people about the person(s) or special pet I am honoring?

CALIFORNIA CONTENT STANDARDS

GRADES KINDERGARTEN THROUGH FIVE

The following California Content Standards in History and Social Science and Visual Arts for grades K-5 have been identified for your convenience. The Days of the Dead curriculum can be adapted for any grade level including college level classes.

HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

KINDERGARTEN

K.5 Students put events in temporal order using a calendar, placing days, weeks, and months.

K.6 Students understand that history relates to events, people, and places of other times.

1. Identify the purposes of, and the people and events honored in, commemorative holidays, including the human struggles that were the basis for the events (e.g., Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Washington's and Lincoln's Birthdays, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day).
2. Know the triumphs in American legends and historical accounts through the stories of such people as Pocahontas, George Washington, Booker T. Washington, Daniel Boone, and Benjamin Franklin.

GRADE ONE

1.3 Students know and understand the symbols, icons, and traditions of the United States that provide continuity and a sense of community across time.

2. Understand the significance of our national holidays and the heroism and achievements of the people associated with them.

1.5 Students describe the human characteristics of familiar places and the varied backgrounds of American citizens and residents in those places.

1. Recognize the ways in which they are all part of the same community, sharing principles, goals, and traditions despite their varied ancestry; the forms of diversity in their school and community; and the benefits and challenges of a diverse population.
2. Understand the ways in which American Indians and immigrants have helped define Californian and American culture.
3. Compare the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, traditions, and social practices of the varied cultures, drawing from folklore.

GRADE TWO

- 2.1 Students differentiate between things that happened long ago and things that happened yesterday.**
1. Trace the history of a family through the use of primary and secondary sources, including artifacts, photographs, interviews, and documents.
 2. Compare and contrast their daily lives with those of their parents, grandparents, and/or guardians.
 3. Place important events in their lives in the order in which they occurred (e.g., on a time line or storyboard).
- 2.5 Students understand the importance of individual action and character and explain how heroes from long ago and the recent past have made a difference in others' lives (e.g., from biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Louis Pasteur, Sitting Bull, George Washington Carver, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, Jackie Robinson, Sally Ride).**

GRADE THREE

- 3.3 Students draw from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of local historical events and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.**
1. Research the explorers who visited here, the newcomers who settled here, and the people who continue to come to the region, including their cultural and religious traditions and contributions.

GRADE FOUR

- 4.2 Students describe the social, political, cultural, and economic life and interactions among people of California from the pre-Columbian societies to the Spanish mission and Mexican rancho periods.**
3. Describe the Spanish exploration and colonization of California, including the relationships among soldiers, missionaries, and Indians (e.g., Juan Crespi, Junipero Serra, Gaspar de Portola).
 7. Describe the effects of the Mexican War for Independence on Alta California, including its effects on the territorial boundaries of North America.
- 4.3 Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.**
4. Study the lives of women who helped build early California (e.g., Biddy Mason).



- 4.4 Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power, tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural development since the 1850s.**
- 9.** Analyze the impact of twentieth-century Californians on the nation’s artistic and cultural development, including the rise of the entertainment industry (e.g., Louis B. Mayer, Walt Disney, John Steinbeck, Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, John Wayne).

GRADE FIVE

- 5.2 Students trace the routes of early explorers and describe the early explorations of the Americas.**
- 2.** Explain the aims, obstacles, and accomplishments of the explorers, sponsors, and leaders of key European expeditions and the reasons Europeans chose to explore and colonize the world (e.g., the Spanish Reconquista, the Protestant Reformation, the Counter Reformation).
- 5.5 Students explain the causes of the American Revolution.**
- 4.** Describe the views, lives, and impact of key individuals during this period (e.g., King George III, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams).

VISUAL ART CONTENT STANDARDS

KINDERGARTEN

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Visual Arts

- 1.1 Recognize and describe simple patterns found in the environment and works of art.
- 1.2 Name art materials (e.g., clay, paint, and crayons) introduced in lessons.
- 1.3 Identify the elements of art (line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space) in the environment and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, and shape/form.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

- 2.1 Use lines, shapes/forms, and colors to make patterns.
- 2.2 Demonstrate beginning skill in the use of tools and processes, such as the use of scissors, glue, and paper in creating a three-dimensional construction.
- 2.4 Paint pictures expressing ideas about family and neighborhood.
- 2.5 Use lines in drawings and paintings to express feelings.
- 2.6 Use geometric shapes/forms (circle, triangle, square) in a work of art.
- 2.7 Create a three-dimensional form, such as a real or imaginary animal.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

- 3.1 Describe functional and nonutilitarian art seen in daily life; that is, works of art that are used versus those that are only viewed.
- 3.2 Identify and describe works of art that show people doing things together.
- 3.6 Look at and discuss works of art from a variety of times and places.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

- 4.1 Discuss their own works of art, using appropriate art vocabulary (e.g., color, shape/form, texture).
- 4.2 Describe what is seen (including both literal and expressive content) in selected works of art.
- 4.3 Discuss how and why they made a specific work of art.
- 4.4 Give reasons why they like a particular work of art they made, using appropriate art vocabulary.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying what is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

5.2 Look at and draw something used every day (e.g., scissors, toothbrush, fork) and describe how the object is used.

5.4 Discuss the various works of art (e.g., ceramics, paintings, sculpture) that artists create and the type of media used.

GRADE ONE

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts

1.2 Distinguish among various media when looking at works of art (e.g., clay, paints, drawing materials).

1.3 Identify elements of art in objects in nature, in the environment, and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, and texture.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

2.8 Create artwork based on observations of actual objects and everyday scenes.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

3.3 View and then describe art from various cultures.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

4.1 Discuss works of art created in the classroom, focusing on selected elements of art (e.g., shape/form, texture, line, color).

4.2 Identify and describe various reasons for making art.

4.3 Describe how and why they made a selected work of art, focusing on the media and technique.

4.4 Select something they like about their work of art and something they would change.

GRADE TWO

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts

1.1 Perceive and describe repetition and balance in nature, in the environment, and in works of art.

- 1.2 Perceive and discuss differences in mood created by warm and cool colors.
- 1.3 Identify the elements of art in nature, the environment, and works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, and space.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

- 2.4 Create a painting or drawing, using warm or cool colors expressively.
- 2.5 Use bilateral or radial symmetry to create visual balance.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

- 3.1 Explain how artists use their work to share experiences or communicate ideas.
- 3.2 Recognize and use the vocabulary of art to describe art objects from various cultures and time periods.
- 3.3 Identify and discuss how art is used in events and celebrations in various cultures, past and present, including the use in their own lives.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

- 4.1 Compare ideas expressed through their own works of art with ideas expressed in the work of others.
- 4.2 Compare different responses to the same work of art.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

- 5.2 Select and use expressive colors to create mood and show personality within a portrait of a hero from long ago or the recent past.
- 5.4 Discuss artists in the community who create different kinds of art (e.g., prints, ceramics, paintings, sculpture).

GRADE THREE

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts

- 1.1 Perceive and describe rhythm and movement in works of art and in the environment.
- 1.4 Compare and contrast two works of art made by the use of different art tools and media (e.g., watercolor, tempera, computer).

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

3.1 Compare and describe various works of art that have a similar theme and were created at different time periods.

3.2 Identify artists from his or her own community, county, or state and discuss local or regional art traditions.

3.4 Identify and describe objects of art from different parts of the world observed in visits to a museum or gallery (e.g., puppets, masks, containers).

3.5 Write about a work of art that reflects a student's own cultural background.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

4.1 Compare and contrast selected works of art and describe them, using appropriate vocabulary of art.

4.3 Select an artist's work and, using appropriate vocabulary of art, explain its successful compositional and communicative qualities.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying What is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

5.1 Describe how costumes contribute to the meaning of a dance.

5.2 Write a poem or story inspired by their own works of art.

GRADE FOUR

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts

1.1 Perceive and describe contrast and emphasis in works of art and in the environment.

1.2 Describe how negative shapes/forms and positive shapes/forms are used in a chosen work of art.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

2.5 Use accurate proportions to create an expressive portrait or a figure drawing or painting.

2.6 Use the interaction between positive and negative space expressively in a work of art.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

- 3.1** Describe how art plays a role in reflecting life (e.g., in photography, quilts, architecture).
- 3.2** Identify and discuss the content of works of art in the past and present, focusing on the different cultures that have contributed to California's history and art heritage.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

- 5.3** Construct diagrams, maps, graphs, timelines, and illustrations to communicate ideas or tell a story about a historical event.
- 5.4** Read biographies and stories about artists and summarize the readings in short reports, telling how the artists mirrored or affected their time period or culture.

GRADE FIVE

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts

- 2.4** Create an expressive abstract composition based on real objects.
- 2.7** Communicate values, opinions, or personal insights through an original work of art.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

- 3.2** Identify and describe various fine, traditional, and folk arts from historical periods worldwide.

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

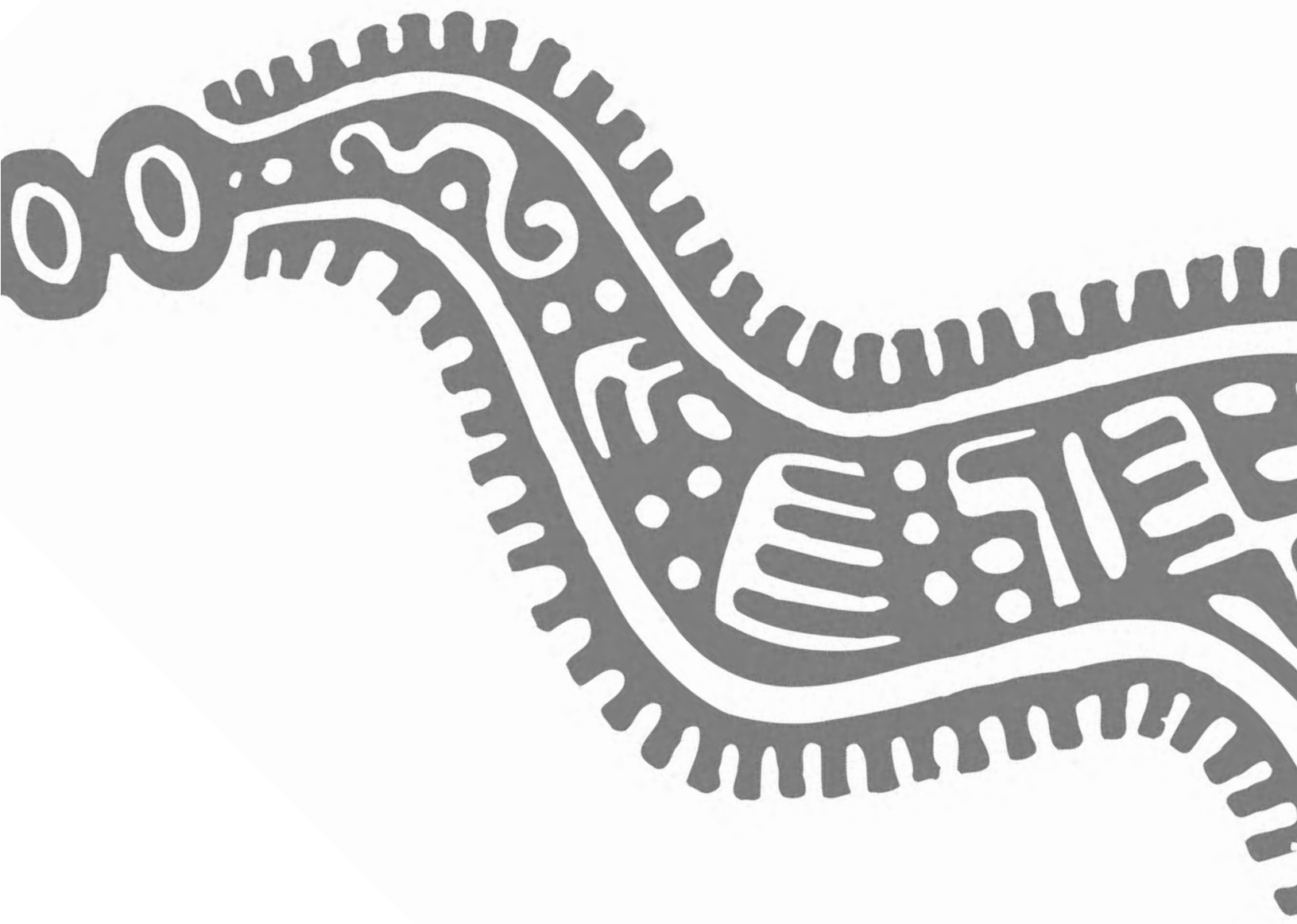
- 4.2** Compare the different purposes of a specific culture for creating art.

SECTION V

TRANSPARENCIES



Jose Guadalupe Posada
Calavera boticaria (Pharmacy calavera)



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE TRANSPARENCY PRESENTATION

These questions can be used for engaging students in active observation of the transparencies and can stimulate classroom discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR TRANSPARENCIES # 1, 3, 4, 5

- Why are objects put on the *ofrenda* (offering for Days of the Dead)?
- How many different kinds of objects can you find on the *ofrenda*?
- Is there anything on the *ofrenda* that you also have at home?
- Each object is placed on the *ofrenda* for a specific reason.
What do the objects tell you about the person, group, or cause that the altar is dedicated to?
- What three or four words would you use to describe this *ofrenda* to a friend? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR TRANSPARENCIES # 2, 6, 7, 8

- What is happening here?
- What do you see in the transparency that makes you say that?
- What colors has the artist used? Are they quiet or brilliant colors?
How do these colors make you feel about the work the artist has created?
- Think of a title for this artwork. Why did you choose this title?
(Compare the different titles that your classmates developed and discuss what qualities of the work inspired their titles.)

TRANSPARENCY SCRIPT AND DISCUSSION

Transparency #1 Altar in the home of a Mexican Family – *photo by Mary J. Andrade*

The Mexican people regard family as very important. They realize that those family members who have come and gone before them are responsible for many of the good things they are experiencing in their present lives. To remember and honor their loved ones, once a year families set up altars in their homes. This occurs on the days of October 31st through November 2nd. On these altars called *ofrendas* family members place flowers, favorite foods, drinks, candles, photographs, and mementos. It is a feast prepared with love and respect to share with loved ones who have died.

Discussion: In the United States there are many traditions that honor living family members. Can you think of some of these traditions? How is Thanksgiving similar to the Days of the Dead? How is it different? Can you think of any remembrance holidays that we observe nationally? Statewide? Does your family honor past family members in any way?

Teacher's note: Thanksgiving is similar in that families come together to share in a special feast. Tables are decorated in a special way. The importance of family unity is perpetuated through this U.S. holiday.

Transparency #2 Cemetery Scene, Mexico – *photo by Mary J. Andrade*

Throughout Mexico and Central America families travel to the cemetery during the day to clean and decorate the graves and to bring offerings of food. It is a time for families, friends, and neighbors to share stories and food, to pray, and to serenade their dead with music. Some families keep watch over the grave all night to show the strong bond between the living and the dead. The haze of candlelight and burning incense, the smell of flowers, and soft whispers of family members create a magical and spiritual setting. Many believe that the spirits are there moving around their beloved families.

Discussion: Look closely at this picture. What clues tell you whether this cemetery is in a city or village? Why are there so many candles? What might this young woman be thinking and feeling at the moment this picture was taken? Have you ever visited the gravesite of a family member? If so, did you place anything on the grave? What did you talk about while you were there? Are there photographs in your home of family members who have died? Do you know their life stories?

The following transparencies are reproductions of installations created for the Oakland Museum of California's Days of the Dead exhibitions.

Transparency #3 *Trinidad López* by Josefina, Albert, and Anthony López, 2001

This altar by Josefina López and her two sons, which was created to honor husband and father, Trini, is an excellent example of a traditional *ofrenda* with candles, flowers, religious images, sugar skulls, food, and drink. The dominant decoration on their altar is the *papel picado*, or cut out paper banners. If you look closely you will see skulls in the center of the wall banners. There are photographs, awards and personal items that tell the story of the wonderful work Mr. López did on behalf of the Oakland community.

Discussion: What elements make this a traditional altar? Are there personal belongings of Mr. López on the altar? What are they and what do they tell you about Mr. López?

Transparency #4 *Continuation of Life* by Grupo Maya Qusamej Junan, 2002

A Bay Area group that is of Mayan descent created this altar. The Maya are a native people of Southern Mexico and Central America who developed great civilizations in their country before the Spaniards arrived in the New World. Grupo Maya dedicated this work to the Mayan people who have died in the struggle to preserve their culture and their land. The altar was made to look like the pyramids their ancestors built.

Discussion: This is another example of a traditional altar. This one is dedicated to a group of people rather than an individual. How does this altar differ from the one made for Trinidad López? Are there objects on the altar that tell you anything about how the Maya live or what some of their customs are?

Transparency #5 *Spirit of Hope* by Northern Light School, Oakland, CA, 2002

The students of Northern Light School have learned much about nature and their environment. They chose to use their altar to educate museum visitors about endangered and extinct animal species. All of the objects on the altar were created from recycled materials. Pictures and cards explain which animals no longer exist and those that are in danger of being extinct. The altar served as a warning and as encouragement for us all to take responsibility for the preservation of the natural environment.

Discussion: The dark and light colors on the walls and the altar represent opposites in nature such as night and day. What are other opposites found in nature? Why is it important to take care of the planet and living creatures? Can you think of something you could do to protect the environment?

Transparency #6 *Entering the Tomb* by Carlos Loarca, 2002

Realizing that the Days of the Dead traditions bring the community together, promote family unity, and provide healing for those who grieve their dead, the staff of the Oakland Museum started their own tradition of an annual Days of the Dead exhibition, festival, and related programs. Artists, community groups, students, and teachers are invited to create their own interpretation of a Days of the Dead altar in the museum's galleries.

Carlos Loarca remembers his brother and his visits to the cemetery during the festival of Days of the Dead as a boy in Guatemala. With painted images he recreates his memories of the townspeople in their brightly colored costumes arriving at the cemetery in the early morning mist carrying armfuls of flowers. The bottles represent the many happy hours he spent chatting with his brother at the local bar.

Discussion: What kind of colors did Carlos Loarca use in his painting of a cemetery scene? Is this scene sad or happy, calm or active? What are the skeletons doing? Why are some of the skeletons upside down?

Teacher's note: The upside-down skeletons suggest that the dead are returning to the underworld, which in pre-Hispanic thought was believed to be the land of the dead.

Transparency #7 *Ritual Sand Painting from Oaxaca by Calixto Robles, 2002*

In Mexican and Central American cemeteries and plazas elaborate carpets made of flower petals and colored sand are created to honor the dead. Calixto Robles created a sand carpet in memory of his mother using symbols that are part of the history of ancient Mexico such as the skull in the center that represents the God of Death, Mictlantecuhtli. The marigold flower seen at the four corners and around the carpet has been a symbol of death in Mexico for hundreds of years.

Discussion: Find the handprints in the carpet. What might these possibly represent? What are some differences between this carpet and the Days of the Dead altar in the first slide? Think of a person you would like to honor with a flower or colored sand carpet. What kind of symbols would you portray in the carpet?

Teacher's note: Hands were often used in pre-Hispanic art as a symbol of the giving and taking of life. When children make a handprint on clay or on paper as a gift to parents or grandparents it is a statement of their giving a part of themselves to loved ones.

Transparency #8 *Immigrant Woman's Dress by Ester Hernandez, 1998*

Personal mementos of the dead are placed on *ofrendas* (altars) as symbols of their lives. Ester Hernandez chose to create an installation, rather than an altar. She used a dress to honor her grandmother's courageous trek from Mexico to the United States. With her husband and six-year-old daughter, Grandmother Hernandez fled from Mexico to escape the chaos and violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). She left her belongings at home but hid money in her clothing and carried a pouch of corn and one with powdered chili to throw at any attacker's face, if need be. In Ester's memorial dress there are U.S. and Mexican coins and printed images of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe and the ancient Mexican moon goddess as protective spirits and symbols of strength.

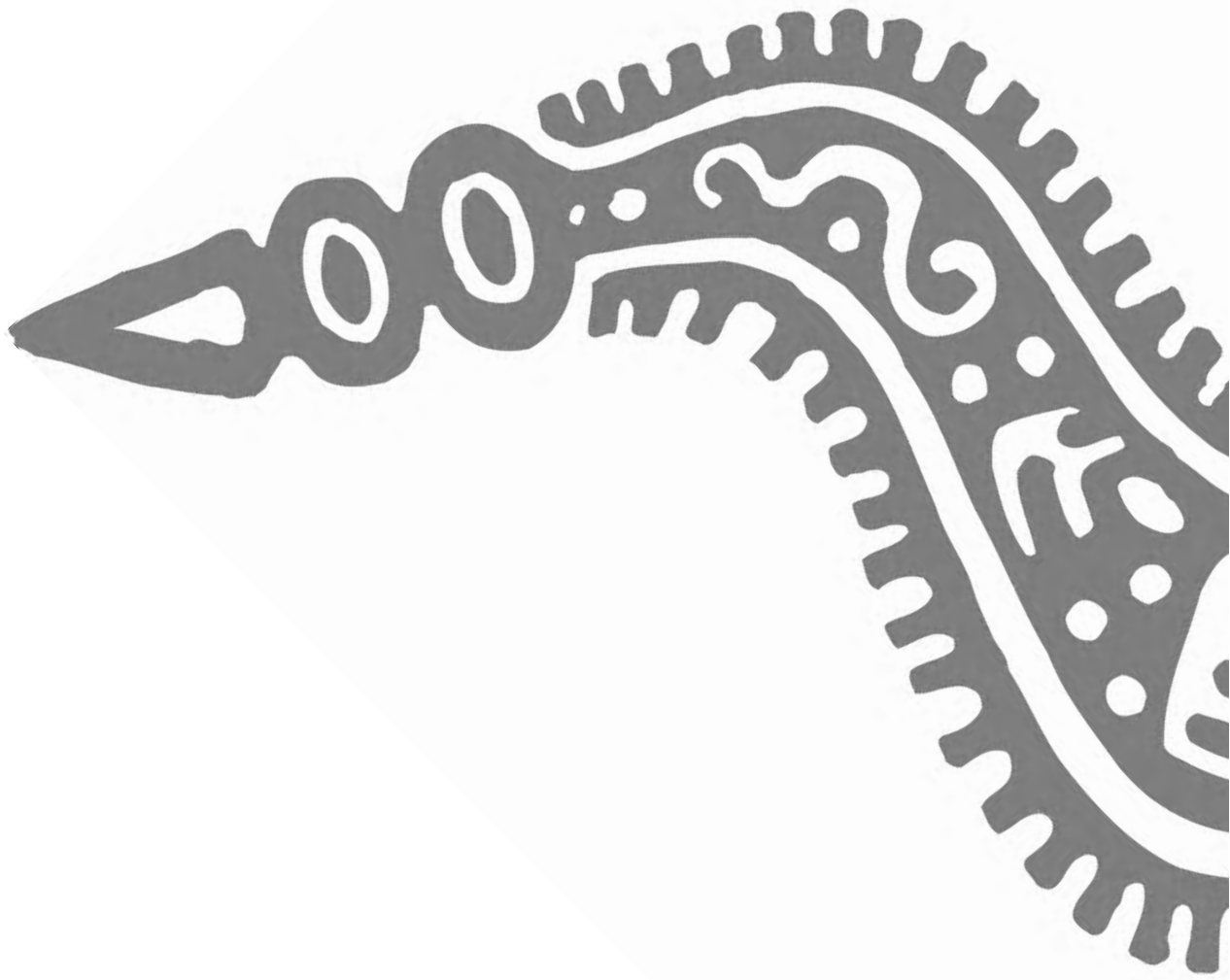
Discussion: Find the objects in this picture that represent grandmother Hernandez' journey. Is this kind of dress something a woman would wear on a long and difficult journey? What does the sand on the floor represent? Imagine if you had to quickly leave your home because of danger. What would you choose to carry away with you? What one object would best represent who you are at this time of your life?

SECTION VI

RESOURCES



Skull image from pre-Hispanic stamp



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VIDEOS

La Muerte Viva: Produced by Ma.Victoria Llamas y Asociados, Mexico D.F., 28 minutes.

La Ofrenda: Produced by Lourdes Portillo, San Francisco, CA, 52 minutes.

WEBSITES

<http://www.dayofthedead.com>

Great photographs by artist Mary Andrade of cemetery vigils, altars, tomb decorations, skulls, and skeletons.

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/muertos.html>

Interesting article by Ricardo J. Salvador, “What do Mexicans Celebrate on the Day of the Dead.”

http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/feature/daydeadindex.html

Great website, with articles by several authors and a variety of photographs capturing the tradition of Days of the Dead.

<http://www.twilightbridge.com/hobbies/festivals/losdias/>

This site offers craft ideas, recipes, and provides historical background on the Aztec and Mayan influence on Days of the Dead.

http://www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/news/vol_7/issue3/96falp10.htm

This site provides brief historical background, offers suggestions for teachers, and provides some useful resources.

<http://www.juniperlearning.com/skull.html>

This site has an informative article, “An Introduction to Mexican Art and Culture through the Day of the Dead.”

VOCABULARY LIST

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| OFRENDA (oh fren dah) | Offering altar for the dead |
| ZEMPASÚCHIL (cem pa zoo cheel) | The marigold flower associated with death |
| CALAVERAS (ka la beh ras) | Spanish word for skulls and skeletons |
| PAN DE MUERTO (pahn deh muer toe) | Bread offerings for the dead |
| PAPEL PICADO (pah pell pee ka doe) | Tissue paper banners with cutout designs |
| COPAL (ko pall) | Sacred incense of the Mesoamerican people since pre-Conquest times |
| MICTLANTECUHTLI (meek tlan teh kut lee) | Pre-Hispanic Aztec (Mexica) god of death |

