

Illuminated Calaveras: Mexican El Día de los Muertos Lanterns **Residency plan**

John Stanford International School, Seattle, with teaching artist Nathan Kumar Scott

Arts Area: visual arts

Grade level: intermediate (grades 4-5, and age-appropriate Bilingual Orientation students)

Time frame: 4 sessions of 60 minutes (50 minutes of arts instruction; 10 minutes of transition): includes 1 session introducing cultural traditions and 3 sessions of arts instruction. At JSIS, this project culminates on a separate day in a neighborhood parade, with students carrying lanterns suspended on poles.

Project focus: In this residency, students will make lanterns based on Mexican “sugar skulls” for El Día de los Muertos. Students will create lanterns from tissue paper and glue, will decorate them in the colorful Mexican style, and illuminate them with tea lights (votive candles) and/or “glow sticks.”

Resources and Materials Needed:*

Slide projector & screen for introduction

Large balloons

1 per student, plus extras for breakage

2” x 2” cardboard square

1 per student, to anchor balloon

Oil

enough to coat each balloon thoroughly
all colors

Tissue paper*

*Students will use 3 layers of white tissue to cover balloon, plus colors for decoration. Colorfast tissue is recommended for this project. Buy the “rainbow pack” at Packaging Supplies in south Seattle.

Acrylic emulsion (better choice; more expensive)

1-2 gal (mixture of ½ glue, ½ water)

OR White glue (less expensive; not waterproof)

1-2 gal (as above)

Sumi brushes (“4-5 shaft,” about 2 inches wide)*

1 per student

*softness essential for applying glue to balloon

Tea lights/votive candles

1 per lantern

Split bamboo, or pipe cleaners

approximately 18”-24” per student

Poles / sticks (2-3 feet: bamboo garden stakes)

1 per student

Masking tape

several rolls

Scissors

1 per student

Tarps/ table covering

several

Salsa containers/ plastic cups

1-2 per student

Clothes line

several

Clothes pins

1 per lantern

*Amounts are estimated for the JSIS residency, which will serve 5 classes (approximately 140 students).

Learning Goals, keyed to Arts EALRs and Frameworks for grades 4/5:

Goal 1: Students will learn about traditions associated with El Día de los Muertos [4.4] and will apply techniques from Mexican folk arts [1.3].

A. Students will learn about the use in this tradition of warm, bright colors to evoke a festive mood [1.3].

B. Students will recognize how aesthetic choices and influenced by a cultural tradition [3.3]

Goal 2: Students will identify color attributes (hue, value, and intensity) and will learn how value is affected by source and variables of illumination [1.1.1]. Students will learn how to illuminate a lantern safely.

Goal 3: Students will apply a creative process [2.1] by making a 3D form [1.1.1].

- A. Students will use an additive process [1.2].
- B. Students will use a 3D art medium [1.2].
- C. Students will understand differences in texture [1.2].
- D. Students will control tools and processes to produce detailed imagery [1.2].
- E. Students will present work to others [2.1].

Residency plan:

Session 1: Teaching artist Nathan Kumar Scott will introduce students to the project through a slide presentation about lantern building and colorful Mexican Días de los Muertos folk art and aesthetics.

Session 2: Students will prep and add initial layers of tissue paper to their lanterns.

Session 3: Students will decorate their lanterns with detailed patterns on final layers.

Session 4: Students will complete lanterns. Students will rig and hang lanterns on poles for display and/or parading.

Assessment Strategies:

- Completion of Visual Art Product/Creative Process: classroom teachers will record attendance and participation in residency sessions.
- Instructor assessment: teaching artist will use a simple checklist/rubric to assess students' mastery of arts skills and techniques (layering; use of tools; detailed imagery), understanding of Mexican folk arts traditions (color, motifs), and carefulness/safety.
- Self-Evaluation: students will use simple checklists/rubrics to assess their own mastery of skills and techniques.

Key Vocabulary:

Vocabulary from SRA visual arts curriculum resource to review with students: color, color intensity, color scheme, warm color, value, shade, tint, additive sculpture, texture.

calacas: synonym for *calaveras* and/or the entire skeletons

calaveras: skulls. During Días de los Muertos, also takes on various meanings: skeleton characters; small gifts of money requested by children; pseudo obituaries that poke fun at the living

calaveras de azúcar: sugar skulls

Días de los muertos: Days of the Dead, celebrated in most parts of Mexico between October 31 and November 2, and/or on various additional days, depending on regional traditions

fiesta: more than just a party—a festival, a feast day, a ritual observance

ofrenda: offering to the souls returning during Days of the Dead

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