

LESSON OVERVIEW/OBJECTIVES

These lessons introduce the giant kites of Guatemala, an element of Day of the Dead observances in two highland villages north of Antigua, Guatemala. Students will learn about the cultural significance of this Mayan tradition and can make a children's version of the kite (requires purchase of a kite kit). Additionally, students can learn about: visual arts elements and principles (shape, rhythm & color, radial balance); Spanish language vocabulary and grammar; interpreting explicit and implicit cultural messages.

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO VISUAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM:

Based on Utah State Visual Arts Core Curriculum Requirements (3rd Grade)

Standard 1 (Making): The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.

Objective 1: Explore a variety of art materials while learning new techniques and processes.

- a. Practice using skills for beginning drawings.
- b. Use simplified forms, such as cones, spheres, and cubes, to begin drawing more complex form.

Objective 2: Use a broad range of art materials in supporting the visual arts needs at school.

- b. Use new art materials and newly learned techniques and processes to celebrate important days and historical events.

Objective 3: Handle art materials in a safe and responsible manner.

- a. Ventilate the room to avoid inhaling fumes from art materials.
- b. Dispose and/or recycle waste art materials properly.
- c. Clean and put back to order art making areas after projects.
- d. Respect other students' artworks as well as one's own.

Standard 2 (Perceiving): The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.

Objective 1: Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles

- a. Determine how artists create dominance in their work; e.g., size, repetition, and contrast.

Objective 2: Create works of art using the elements and principles.

- a. Identify dominant elements

Standard 3 (Expressing): The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.

Objective 1: Explore possible content and purposes in significant works of art

- a. Explain possible meanings or interpretations of some significant works of art.
- b. Invent possible stories that may explain what is going on in these same works of art.

Objective 2: Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for their own artworks.

- a. Group significant works of art according to theme or subject matter.
- b. Judge which works of art most clearly communicate through the use of symbols.
- c. Create symbols in art that express individual or group interests.

Standard 4: Contextualizing: The student will interpret and apply visual arts in relation to cultures, history, and all learning.

Objective 1: Compare the arts of different cultures to explore their similarities and diversities.

- a. Describe why different cultures may have used different materials to create their arts and crafts.

Objective 2: Connect various kinds of art with particular cultures, times, or places.

- a. Predict how a work of art or a craft can be connected to an ancient culture.
- b. Describe why a local craft or art form looks like it was made in your area.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

Visual Arts

- Understand that the elements of art are the building blocks for creating works of art.
- Learn about the giant kites of Guatemala, an element of Day of the Dead observances in two highland villages north of Antigua, Guatemala.
- Understand that color can create an emotional response.
- Learn how colors and symbols are associated with holidays, traditions and cultures.
- Learn about the cultural significance of this Mayan tradition and can make a children's version of the kite (requires purchase of a kite kit).
- Learn about: visual arts elements and principles (shape, rhythm & color, radial balance).
- Learn some Spanish language vocabulary and grammar.
- Interpret explicit and implicit cultural messages.

ABOUT DAY OF THE DEAD

Throughout Latin America (and increasingly in Latino communities throughout the USA), Day of the Dead (*El Día de los Muertos*) is a time to honor and host the ancestors who have passed away. Their spirits visit for the day and must be appropriately welcomed, with freshened graves (marigolds are the typical flower decor) and a feast. Depending on the location, Day of the Dead may be celebrated for one or more days from October 31 through November 2.

ABOUT THE GIANT KITES OF GUATEMALA

In two Mayan highland villages of Guatemala - Santiago and Sumpango - the celebration of Day of the Dead also features the making and flying of giant kites, or *barriletes*. They can be as wide as 52 feet in diameter. The kites up to 18 feet in diameter can be flown if the wind cooperates; others are for display only.

Some believe that the kites transport souls to heaven; to others the kites symbolize an enduring connection between the physical and spiritual realms.

Most of the kite activity in Guatemala occurs in Sumpango in a *campo*, or field, adjacent to the cemetery. The *feria*, or festival, now celebrating over 35 years of kiteflying, attracts well over 20,000 people to this community of slightly more than 3000 people for the display and flight on November 1st. Community members work in teams for about six weeks before the event to create the tissue paper kite skins (or sails).

The process of creating a kite begins with a small-scale sketch of the entire design. Tradition has it that a new design must be created from each team every year. Although the theme is developed collaboratively, the designer, usually the team leader, does the drawing. Team leaders are usually young men, aged 25 - 30, who have many years of experience in making kites. The entire design is then drawn to size, then cut apart into sections so that team members can work more easily in small spaces. Team members trace, cut and past individual pieces of brilliantly colored tissue to fill in the design. For added strength, or to make the color darker or more intense, each piece may have two to four layers. Designs may be decorative patterns, using repeated motifs, a figurative image that may feature Mayan cultural, political or artistic activity. After the kite is assembled it is backed with bond paper to give it more strength. Amazing enough it is done with individual sheets versus a large sheet to allow for reflection or refraction when the sun shines through.

On the morning of November 1st, frames for the kites are assembled from bamboo poles, which were wired and tied together the night before. Team members carefully bring the rolled up kite skin to the *campo*. It is unrolled and the heavy frame is placed on top of it. For a large kite the frame can weigh more than sixty pounds. Each kite is raised for display.

By the middle of the day, crowds of people fill the *campo*. They have come to see the kites and enjoy special food and games. If the wind rises, teams will try to fly their kites.

Teens often apprentice before they join a kite team. They and children can make smaller kites such as the ones we are going to make.

SUPPLIES

- Kite kits from the Drachen Foundation (www.drachen.org)
- Glue
- Q-tips
- Paper plates or cups for glue

VOCABULARY

Day of the Dead: noun. an annual celebration to honor the spirits of the dead, observed in Mexico and other Latin American countries on November 1 and 2, concurrently with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Expand. Spanish Día de los Muertos.

Tradition: the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.

Culture: the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next.

Elements of art are color, line, shape, form, space, value, and texture. Artists use these tools to create visual art—representational, abstract, and non-representational.

Barriletes - Spanish for giant kites.

Campo - Spanish for field

Feria - Spanish for festival

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

Before beginning the lesson, show some pictures of the giant kites of Guatemala to students. From the information above, discuss the Day of the Dead and the kite making process and tradition in Guatemala in honor of this holiday. Give students a few minutes to respond to the images. Use any of the following prompts:

- Who knows about Day of the Dead and can describe it?
- These images remind me of _____.
- The colors make me think of _____.
- I would describe the mood of this picture as _____.

This lesson is unique in that we are using purchased kite kits handmade in Guatemala from the Drachen Foundation. These kits are copyrighted so instructions on how to make these kites remain with the kits.

Instructors can prepare kites for younger ages in advance.

When making the kites, you can highlight the following:

- Visual art elements involved in creating the kite
- Need for radial balance for it to fly. Demonstrate how the streamers balance the kite visually and functionally
- Discuss pattern, composition, focal point and subject matter (if applicable) to the making of the designs of the kites.
- Have students discuss their kites, images and patterns created etc.
- When finished, enjoy an experience of kite flying!

Resources

- For a vast array of resources on kites go to www.drachen.org
- For a vast array of resources about the giant kites of Guatemala, go to www.drachen.org > learn>kite cultures>Guatemala

The Giant Kites of Guatemala - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0Zxkk-rSSQ>

