



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1999 Volume II: Art and Identity in Mexico, from the Olmec to Modern Times

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## Popular Mexican Arts

Curriculum Unit 99.02.02  
by Val-Jean Belton

### Introduction

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As an Art teacher at James Hillhouse High School, I have designed this unit for visual art students who are enrolled in advance art courses. The students who are enrolled in these classes should have had some previous knowledge of Mexican arts and crafts from other art courses. This unit will take approximately thirty days to complete and the teaching objective of the unit will be three fold. First, through a brief historical investigation students will be introduced to the history of Mexican art, and how the arts of today link to that of the Pre-Columbian cultures of Mesoamerica. Secondly, as active problem solvers in art, students will complete their own research on the history of Pre-Columbian art and culture. This research will be done using the Internet and other Mexican art web links. One of the issues the students will address through their research is the art that existed during Pre-Columbian times. This art consists of various sculptures and architecture and includes three distinct cultures. The third and final issue that students will explore is the relationship of Pre-Columbian art to today's popular Mexican art. They will look at the relationship of themes in the PreColumbian cultures of the Olmec, Aztec and Maya and how the same themes exist in the Huichol, Otomi, and other cultures that are a part of the popular Mexican arts today.

Another teaching objective of this unit will be to allow students to develop their own portfolios by participating in various hands-on activities. Students will have the opportunity to experiment with different techniques and develop arts and crafts that are a part of Mexican cultures today. These crafts consist of yarn and bead paintings, amate paper cutouts and paintings, gourd making and paper mache.

Other teaching strategies for this unit include the use of various video and audio productions that will put students in the cultures directly and allow them to gather understanding and feeling. The Yale Art Gallery will also be utilized as a foundational resource where students will visit and learn to analyze and interpret Mesoamerican art in order to develop a one-page critique of the art collection located in the Yale Art Gallery.

This unit also addresses many of the art standards that are required in visual art classes in the New Haven Public School district.

Student Objectives:

Knowledge Objectives:

1. Students will describe how art reflects, records, and shapes history in every culture.
2. Students will develop basic vocabulary terms for thinking and writing and producing visual elements in Mexican art.
3. Students will become familiar with library and Internet resources on Mexican art.
4. Students will research Pre-Columbian art using the Internet and other library resources.

#### Skills Objectives:

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11. Students will be able to work with art media such as sculpture, ceramics, and computer based tools to demonstrate and express feelings and ideas about Mexican art.
2. Students will be able to make and justify judgments about aesthetic qualities in works of art from Mexico.
3. Students will develop open-ended problem solving skills.
4. Students will develop their expository writing skills.
5. Students will develop a portfolio of Mexican art.
6. Students will compare and contrast Pre-Columbian art.
7. Students will become familiar with Huichol yarn paintings, gourd designs, and amate paper cutouts.
8. Students will be encouraged to use the Yale Art Gallery and the Peabody Museums as resources for their study.
9. Students will give a ten-min. presentation about their own artwork.
10. Students will write a one-page critique about the Mesoamerican art collection at the Yale Art Gallery.
11. Students will participate in creative hands-on art activities.

#### Attitude Objectives:

1. Students will enjoy exploring their creative abilities.
2. Students will develop confidence in their ability to express creative ideas, and imagination through visual arts.
3. Students will value their own artistic heritage along with other cultures.

#### Process Objectives:

1. Students will view, discuss, and write about works of Mexican art, from a historical point of view.
2. Students will create artworks in a variety of media, including paper mache, paper, fibers (yarn), painting, etc.

3. Students will creatively express themselves in a work of art that they complete that involves the historical aspects of Mexican art.

Experience Objectives:

1. Students will encounter historical work of art in the Yale Art Gallery Mesoamerican art collection.
2. Students will discover information about Mexico and Mexican art through video.

## Mexican Art

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Mexico is a country rich in history, culture and a wide variety of arts and crafts. This country has been known for its diversity of art created by its people for centuries. Pre-Columbian art of the Maya, Toltec, Aztec and Olmec cultures contributed to the large stone temples, and sculptures which had lavish carved designs and painted decorations. The Pre-Columbian crafts of building and decorating temples and sculptures were an essential part of their everyday life during Mesoamerican time. They also created many other arts that were used for religious purposes.

Today because of the high quality and because of the way that modern viewers have come to appreciate both ancient and modern Mexican art, many types of modern day crafts, sculptures and paintings can be found in markets rather than art galleries in Mexico. Many people travel to Mexico to see and acquire the crafts that are available. These works then become a part of the global culture.

The ancient Pre-Columbian cultures of Mesoamerica included the Olmecs, Aztecs, and the Maya. All the people and cultures of Mesoamerica were farmers, and were isolated for thousand of years from other cultivating societies in Europe, Africa and Asia. What has set these cultures apart from the rest of the cultivating societies was the uniformity of shared customs that were consistent in the confined areas where they lived. The most distinctive of these Pre-Columbian customs was the calendar that was based upon the permutation of a 260-day sacred cycle with the solar year of 365-days for a total of 52 years.

The Maya and the Aztec culture perfected these systems and calendars. These calendars were painted folding books called codices; the Aztec also made note of the calendrical cataclysm then foresaw in their future, and they recorded this on the calendar stone. In the Maya, the two calendars they created were based on observations of the heavens and their own record of the solar year. The first calendar was a solar calendar, which marked the changes in the seasons and indicated the time to harvest crops. The second calendar was a ritual calendar that noted special feasts and celebrations.

In comparison the Aztec also kept track of the seasons virtually in the same manner of the Maya. They too had a two calendar system. Similar to the Maya calendars, there were certain days of the year and 52-year cycle

that the Aztec considered lucky and unlucky. During these periods the people would try to keep the gods happy by putting out fires, throwing away old clothing, and stopping any travel that was to take place. The famous Aztec calendar is not a predicting calendar but rather a sculpture that notes the cosmic motion of time. An example of this stone can be seen in Mary Miller's book (fig. 168, pg. 211), *The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec*. The stone is considered to be the most common single image of Mesoamerica and is usually found on liquor labels, ashtrays, keychains in and outside of Mexico today.

Other common customs shared by Mesoamerican cultures include hieroglyphic writing, the use and knowledge of astronomy, organized markets and favored ports of trade, chocolate beans for money, organized agriculture markets, pottery, and a ball game played with a rubber ball. The people of Mesoamerica also followed other customs which were widespread amongst the New World Indians at the time of the Conquest such as ceremonial tobacco smoking, and diet based on maize, beans, squash and chile peppers.

Mesoamerican cultures date back as early as 1200 BC. The Olmec culture was the first prominent culture in Mexico. Among the Olmec an elite lived in the small urban centers, the white people that resided in the rural areas. The elite carried out religious ceremonies centered in the towns and governed over the commercial trade in luxury and artistic items that were produced by skilled craftsmen. Common people devoted themselves to farming.

Most of the history known about the Olmec culture is presented through their art. The Olmec had no written language and used their art as a form of communication. Olmec art and sculpture was created mainly to give power to the Shaman and the Shaman ruler, who functioned as the channels for sacred powers. The Olmec believed that the Shaman ruler divided the world into three cosmic levels. The first level was the celestial or heavenly, the second was terrestrial and the last was the earth's surface and the watery underworld. Sacred works in the culture were infused with sacred powers and life. Usually it was believed that the artist who created these vessels through time and energy contributed a little of the sacred power to the work.

The Olmec civilization is the only one during Mesoamerican times that feature sculptures in the form of human infants. These ceramic works were usually constructed using the simplest form of clay work such as coils and slabs, finished with a highly burnished kaolin slip, and then fired in an open pit. The human baby sculptural pieces are a powerful introduction to the Olmec culture's thought and perception.

In other Olmec sculpture the preference for volume is outstanding and aesthetically pleasing. The first modern sculpture that was brought to modern attention and demonstrated the great Olmec art style for Mesoamerica was the Kunz Axe. This three thousand-year-old sculpture, is part human, and part beast. An example of this sculpture can be observed in Mary Miller's book *The Art of Mesoamerica, from Olmec to Aztec* (Fig. 3, pg. 18.). This sculpture was made from the blue-green translucent jade stone.

When this sculpture is examined closely, there is evidence of Elements and Principles of Design. First, in reference to the composition of the figure, certain images are dominant. These images that show dominance include the three-dimensional form of the sculpture and the Olmec preference for volume. The sculptural features emphasize a wide toothless mouth in the shape of a jaguar and slanted almond shaped eyes, makes the sculpture resemble that a howling infant. The facial features are drilled or carved and take up more than half of the sculpture. The body and extremities are smaller than the head. The hands are positioned directly under the head and hold a smaller representation of the figure. Other bodily parts such as the feet, toes, facial tattooing or scarring are indicated through carving or incision. If this sculpture was viewed from the side shows the bottom to be tapered to a point, like an axe blade. Yet the Kunz Axe was not an ordinary tool, but probably used for ceremonial purposes.

Secondly, the sculpture shows juxtaposition. This juxtaposition is demonstrated through the toothless jaguar styled mouth, and the relationship of the exaggerated head to the remainder of the body. These juxtapositions are not natural or realistic and satisfy the Olmec definition of volume and aesthetics.

The use of volume can be seen in the Colossal head sculptures that too were part of early Olmec art. The Colossal heads are free standing sculptures that usually represented the ruler of the region and were made of basalt stone. Many of the Colossal head features were drilled into the stone. The drilling gave emphasis to the eyes that were always deep set, and the mouth that was slightly asymmetrical in appearance.

In the Olmec culture there are two thematic categories for which their artwork is notable. For one they composed figures that include human features mixed with different animal species. They also made smaller sculptures and carvings that usually resembled the jaguar. Most Olmec art resembles human figures, but many also center around the jaguar. The jaguar appears in many pieces of Olmec art and sculpture. Olmec art is fundamentally homo-centric. It can be said that Olmec sculpture is divided between representations of supernatural beings and of the human figure.

Among the assortments of Olmec humanoid figures a common theme is the representation of a sitting man with his legs in a lotus position and whose head and extremities are not of human nature. The majority of the heads on these figures are reminiscent of animals. All the facial features are different from the sculpture of other cultures, but the Olmec mouth is distinct. The mouth is represented with thick lips, with an especially projected upper lip. The foreheads of the sculptures are sometimes narrow, and often covered with a wide band. The jaws always appear small and do not protrude outward.

The Maya were one of the most brilliant and powerful cultures that existed during the Mesoamerican time period that occupied the moist lowlands. Their culture grew in a period of 3,000 years, from around 2,000 BC to 1521 AD, but the first millennium AD was their time of greatest achievement. The Mayans had a written language, were skilled architects, adventurous traders and gifted artisans.

Like the Olmec the Maya were fine sculptors whose art was very colorful, and they shaped beautiful figurines of accurate proportions. Stone sculptures depicted human sacrifice, bloodletting ceremonies, and other purification rituals, as well as historical subjects. Pottery and ceramic making also developed into an art in the Maya civilization. All of the clay pots that they made were dried in the open air, painted with slip, and fired in pits, like the Olmec. Many of the ceremonial pieces of clay work were often painted with mythological figures.

Textile weaving and other handcrafts have weathered the test of time in the Maya culture. Traditionally the young Maya girls were taught to weave by their mother at the age of three years old. Currently that tradition varies, but the main tradition of weaving lives on and whole communities earn their living from this craft. According to an early myth it was said that the goddesses of the moon were the ones that taught women to weave, and revealed to them the sacred symbols to be used in their creations. Motifs of nature, the universe, and time were woven into garments. Examples of these motifs that can be used are a diamond to represent the universe, a toad can represent a musician of the cosmos, and a snake may represent the earth. A butterfly, duck and pineapple designs are unique to other regions of Mayas.

Other popular crafts of today that the Maya produce are hammocks. These hammocks come in all colors and sizes including the famous matrimonial version. Panama hats that are woven from the jipi palm that are found in the north, in Yucatan. Baskets, stone carvings and an array of hand-woven tunics, shirts, vests, dresses, wall hangings, toys, Christian saints, hand decorated gourds, pottery, jade and silver filigree jewelry are the many crafts that exist in Guatemala today.

In comparison the Aztec lived in the highlands in Mesoamerica. The Aztec migrated to this area from the north, approximately around the 13th century. They were a migratory culture in the beginning as they wandered around the region trying to survive. They were enslaved once by another tribe, but they gained their independence in 1325.

The Aztec maintained an existence by utilizing fishing, hunting, gardening and farming techniques. The valley and rivers that surrounded their region were rich in fish, insects, shrimp, and tadpoles. There were also crabs, oysters, fish and turtles for those who where inhabited closer to the ocean. The use of the water was a major resource for food in the Aztec culture.

Historians and others have learned a vast amount of information about the Aztec cultures through storytellers and ancient scriptures that existed. But nothing contributed more information about this culture than their art. When looking at Aztec arts, one can find a number of different materials, colors, backgrounds, and most of all a number of expressions. The vast sculptures, drawings, and decorative artifacts have continued to tell a story about this ancient civilization. The art of the Aztec also conveys their everyday life. Some drawings of the Aztec included scenes of great feasts or women who were pregnant. There were also many drawings of rituals and sacrifices on the top of pyramids. Human sacrifice lay at the heart of their belief system, and it need to be repeated generation after generation.

The main materials used in Aztec art include volcanic stone, basalt and other hard stones, feathers, paint, leather, human and animal bones, turquoise, jade, starfish, sea urchins, gold, colored shells, amethyst, agate, opal, jasper, and onyx. The traditional and common colors that the Aztec used in their art consist of blue, olive, green, crimson, pink, ocher, black, and white.

One of the greatest influences of Aztec art was the Toltec culture. From this particular culture, Aztec art received mythology, aesthetic ideas or preferences, master craftsmen, sculptors, painters, and goldsmiths. Themes that are consistent in Aztec art emphasize monstrous deities, death, jaguars, and serpents.

Aztec sculpture and ceramics have been notably frightening to outsiders who have viewed it for the first time. The subject or themes of these sculptures very often contains eagles, frogs, dogs, coyotes, jaguars, grasshoppers, and rabbits, and snakes coiled in a frightening manner. These particular subjects were, however, very prevalent in all forms of Aztec art. In order to gain precision and shine in these art works the sculptor often used basalt and other hard stones for burnishing. But, the most recognizable art works in Aztec art are the monumental statues of gods.

Aztec art reached its peak under the reign of its last rulers. Missionaries and conquerors that encountered the Aztec destroyed much of their artwork because it represented idolatry to them, and in consequence, went directly against their teachings and beliefs. Very little remains of what was once a vast collection of Aztec art. What has been recognized by the world, however, has taken its effect. Present day artists still mirror their own work after Aztec art.

Like the Aztec, Maya and Olmec art, popular Mexican arts of today are of such a variety that it is hard to focus on just one particular craft. These crafts are made with vibrant colors, exciting designs, and are from a variety of materials. These materials include wax, metals, tree bark, clay, wood, wool, and materials found in the environment.

The Huichol Indians are Indians who live in the high mountain ranges in Mexico. They continue to acknowledge native deities associated with nature. To this culture art is an extension of their religion, and therefore also an

extension of life. Through art the Huichols express everyday life existence and the myths that surround their culture. Yarn paintings are an important part of the religious quest of the Huichols. In yarn paintings there are two main purposes for their creation. The first is to form votive offerings in the form of religious tablets to the deities. These tablets are small and round or square with a small hole in the center and are covered on both sides with a mixture of beeswax and pine resin into which threads of yarn are pressed. These tablets are called *AñNierikañ* or small sacred magical offering. A *AñNierika* is called a mirror with two faces, because often both sides are covered with yarn designs. The mirror in the middle is thought to be the eye through which man and deity can see each other. The Huichols believe that if the deities see you through this mirror that it places an obligation on the gods to pay attention to you and your prayers and grant them to you.

The second is the use of yarn paintings for economic growth. Many yarn paintings are sold in the markets in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Today with the availability of various spectrum of commercial dyed and synthetic yarn, more finely spun yarn paintings have evolved into sophisticated and quality works of art. Realism that is based on mythology of the Huichol culture is the basis of yarn paintings.

Another popular art of Mexico that has links to the Huichol Indians are gourd designs that are represented in beaded bowls. Beadwork originated as an art form long before the Spanish Conquest. Prior to the Spanish Conquest bone, clay, coral, jade, shell, seeds, stone turquoise, pyrite were used for beads instead of the glass or seed beads utilized today.

The colors that were used on the beaded gourds defined the deity for whom they were made. For example, the color blue signifies *AñRapawiyeneñ* (Rapa is the tree of rain); black represents the Pacific Ocean, the place of the dead, and the great serpent of rain. The color red indicates the birthplace of the peyote, deer and eagles. Today with the smaller beads that are available, more detail can be seen not only on the intricate gourd designs but also on wooden jaguars. Utilizing most of the same sacred designs and patterns of ancient Mesoamerica, the Huichol create anklets, belts, bags, earrings, bracelets, and rings with various seed beads.

Papermaking is also an ancient craft that exist in Mexico today. During Pre-Columbian times tree bark, deerskin and agave or maguey fibers were made into forms of paper. This paper was used for painting codices, pictorial manuscripts, for historical and religious purposes.

Many of these papermaking techniques have survived today and are seen in popular Mexican arts. Paper called *AñAmateñ* comes from the bark of fig trees. The paper that is produced is white in appearance and is peeled from the bark of the tree from the men in the village, but the women of the village actually make the paper. The tree bark is washed and boiled in a large pot for several hours. After the boiling the bark with ashes and lime for several hours the bark is rinsed and laid on a wooden board. The bark is then beaten with a stone until they fuse together as paper and dried by the sun. The demand for this art has left many of the trees in Mexico stripped.

Most of the amate paper that is made in Mexico today is used by artists who once decorated pottery and sculpture, but now paint fanciful scenes and pictures on the paper. Many of the designs painted by these artists depict the everyday life that exists in Mexico today.

Amate paper cutouts are also a popular craft that exists in Mexico today. Sometimes, this technique is used by the Shaman, and the cutouts usually depict spirit beings of the sky, the earth, the underworld, and water for curing fertility ceremonies. According to the beliefs of the culture, the Shaman will bring the spirits to life by breathing in their mouths, holding them near incense, or by putting alcohol on them. Amate cutout figures come in dark or light shades of paper and are mostly sold to tourists and collectors. Sometimes these cutouts

are made into accordion type books that are used in teaching this art to help explain the mystical ceremonies. Ordinary tissue paper cutouts are also popular and can be used in rituals and books in order to provide an accent of color.

In conclusion, the arts of Mexico are enchanting. Mexican artists are well known to use vibrant colors to illustrate the myths, legends, patriotism, and heritage of their culture. As arts and crafts remain the forefront of Mexican culture through its combination of Old and New World materials, how do students respond to these customs and techniques? What will their responses be to the various humanoid figures of the Olmec, the stone calendars of the Maya and Aztec, and or the yarn paintings and crafts of the today=ōs Huichol?

Whatever student responses might reveal, the qualities of crafts indicate that Mexico is a flourishing country that has a proud craft heritage because it has continued to hold on to its ancient traditions in the arts.

## **Unit Art Activities:**

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### **Visual Arts Standards Addressed In All Hands on Activities:**

Content Standard 4.0 Historical and Cultural Relationships and Influences to Art Works. (Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures, identify specific works, describe their function, explain how history and cultural influenced these art works and express the contribution they make to art and culture in the United States.)

#### Performance Standard 4.2

Students will be able to describe the functions of works of art in relation to history and cultures.

a. Students will become familiar, using photographs or actual objects, with several items from a culture, describe the material they are constructed from, their use (i.e. personal, utilitarian or religious) and their relative importance to the peoples of that culture.

#### Performance Standard 4.3

Students will explain verbally and in writing how history and culture influenced art works.

a. Students will analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics and culture, stating conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to incorporate elements in their own art making.

#### Performance Standard 4.4

Students will express the contribution historical and cultural art works make to art and culture in the United States.

a. Students will collect and analyze art work by famous artists (e.g. Frida Khalo, Diego Rivera), describe how



the culture is reflected in their work and give examples of objects and places in the culture that have used visual elements of these artists.

## **Lesson Plan One: Symbols in Mexican Art (Yale Art Gallery)**

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Objectives:

1. Students will search for visual clues within various Mexican art pieces that give them information about the time period and culture at the Yale Art Gallery.
2. Students will identify symbols that are visible in the artworks.
3. Students will come to realize that through the use of a broad range of visual symbols, a piece of art can convey a message about the culture.
4. Attempt to analyze and interpret the ideas expressed within each artwork.

Resources: Yale Art Gallery/ Mesoamerican Art Collection

Additional Standards Addressed:

Content Standard 7.0

Students will use museums, galleries, the art community, libraries, architectural tours, and multi-media to expand their visual knowledge beyond the classroom and to experience activities for life-long learning and career options.

Performance Standards 7.1

Students will use museums, galleries, the art community, libraries, architectural tours, and multi-media to expand their visual knowledge beyond the classroom.

a. Students will select one work of art in a museum or gallery and write a short evaluation of the work using aesthetic criteria and principles.

Vocabulary:

Interpretation, symbol, analysis, juxtaposition.

Materials:

Various objects from the Mesoamerican culture exhibition, writing paper, pencil or pens.

Instruction:

1. Briefly review and discuss the Mesoamerican art exhibition collection at the Yale Art Gallery.
2. Focus the students' attention on the art from the Olmec, Aztec, and Maya cultures.  
Have students break up into small groups. Student will now study and observe the various symbols and determine the meaning of the symbols. (Explain to each group that they will receive a group grade for their responses.)  
Using the information that each group has gathered have students attempt to interpret the
4. meanings and use of some of the artworks. Have each group report its findings orally. (The teacher should keep track of the responses.)
5. Students will write a one-page critique about the Mesoamerican art pieces.

#### Evaluation:

- Note the information gathered by each group to assess their levels of understanding of
1. Mesoamerican art. Denote whether students were able to analyze and interpret the meaning of each art piece.
  2. Observe the level of participation of each student for this activity.

## **Lesson Plan Two: Amate (Ah-Mah-tay) Paper Cutouts**

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#### Resources:

\*Videos: The Sources of Art. Rufino Tamayo, (VHS) 28 mins.

\* When assisting students in planning designs, refer to Designs Motifs of Ancient Mexico by Jorge Encisco.

\* \*Another resource includes Art from Many Hands by Jo Miles Schuman.

#### Additional Standards Addressed:

##### Performance Standards 1.2

Students will select and analyze what makes media, technique and process effective in creating works of art that successfully communicate their own feeling and ideas.

- a. Students will understand and use all art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner.
- b. Students will test and experiment with media techniques on a planning paper to explore the range of possible effects.

##### Performance Standard 5.2

Students will through analysis, gain insight and understanding of the meaning, and purpose, content and process of the art works.

a. Students will identify the intentions of those creating artwork, explore the implications of various purposes in particular works.

Vocabulary:

Amate, motif, technique.

Materials for Activity:

Brown roll paper (Craft or Wrapping paper)

(Brown paper bags can also be used very successfully)

Scissors

Glue

Pencils

Iron

Wax paper

Newspaper

Design Motifs of Mexico

Procedure:

Students will select a design that will be used for their cutout. (The designs that are frequently used use human forms (that sometimes represent spirits and also reflect elements

1. of nature, agricultural plants, domestic and wild animals, and birds. These designs can be taken from Jorge Encisco=’s Design and Motif of Ancient Mexico.) The emphasis should be on decorative designs rather than realism.

Brown paper should be cut to approximately 9x12 and folded in half. Using the center of the

2. paper students will use their pencils and draw in half the form of a bird, animal, person or any other shape that relates to Mexico.

After design is drawn out on folded paper, the design should be cutout while the paper is still

3. folded in half. Design should be opened up once it is cut out and crumpled carefully and thoroughly to form irregular patterns on the paper.
4. Carefully open design again, place the design between two 9x12 sheets of wax paper, and iron the design.
5. A second application of wax paper may be needed to deepen the colors of the paper and bring out the design.
6. Apply white glue very sparingly to one side of the cutout and mount it on white cardboard or paper.

(cardboard or white mounting paper size should be 12x16)

## Lesson Plan Three: Carved Gourd Designs

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### Background Information:

Gourds have a long history in Mexico. In Mexico gourds are used mainly as containers and utensils. The ancient Maya made a variety of hand painted containers that were made from gourds. Most gourds are often highly decorated with carved designs, and are also sold in many places as sculptures. The traditional designs on gourds are of village scenes and are very complex in the design sense. The designs are usually of people, animals, houses or geometric shapes. Gourds are usually painted with oil base paints and are embellished with gold leaf.

Gourds are usually available in supermarkets, or you can plant your own seeds in the springtime and harvest your gourds in the fall. A fresh gourd, whether it is purchased from a supermarket or grown in your yard, must be dried. Gourd drying can be a problem in a damp environment because a gourd can easily turn rotten. Gourds that are dried too quickly using artificial heat can split. Gourd drying takes approximately six to eight weeks for the process to be done completely.

If gourds are not available, to you for your classroom, substitute one made of papier-mache for a real gourd.

### Resources:

Art from Many Hands by Jo Miles Schuman.

Arts and Crafts of Mexico by Chloe Sayer.

Video: Frida Kahlo (VHS) 62 mins. For cultural history of Mexico.

### Additional Standards Addressed:

Performance Standard 5.1

Students will reflect upon and assess the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

- a. Students will compare the same subject matter in various media (i.e painting, video, sculpture, photography, weaving) and describe how the medium and process influences how an object is lighted formed and symbolically represented.

### Materials for Activity:

Dried Gourds

Black Crayon

Nail or Flat Linoleum tool

### Procedure:

1. Once gourds are dried completely, cover the gourd with black crayon.
2. Polish or smooth the crayon with the thumb or fore finger to form a black glossy surface.
3. The gourd must now be studied to decide what design it will have. Different gourds will suggest different things.
4. Using a nail or the flat linoleum cutting tool, scrape through the crayon layer to expose the gourd underneath.
5. Outline your general design and add as many details as possible. (These details can consist of geometric patterns, fish scales, etc.)
6. Use the cutting tool to outline your design.

#### Alternative Gourd Making:

If gourds are not available, you can make an acceptable substitute using paper mache.

#### Materials:

- \_ ð Balloons (oval shape)
- \_ ð Wheat Paste
- \_ ð Newspaper (torn into strips)
- \_ ð Fine sand paper
- \_ ð Acrylic paints
- \_ ð Brushes
- \_ ð Shellac
- \_ ð Pencils
- \_ ð Scrap paper to practice designs
- \_ ð Safety Pins (large)

#### Procedure:

1. Blow up balloons to desired size (oval shaped)
2. Cover the balloons with five layers of paper dipped in wheat paste.
3. Carefully smooth down each layer of papers and make sure that the surface has no bumps.
4. When paper mache is dry, break the balloon inside using a safety pin.
5. Sand the paper mache covered balloons with medium and then fine sandpaper.
6. When the surface is smooth, paint the entire surface with white acrylic paint. (two coats)
7. Draw a Mexican design on the gourd then paint using acrylic paint.
8. Shellac.

\*Recipe for Papier Mache: (If wheat Paste is not available.)

Water

Flour

\* Mix the water, flour and wheat paste together until you have a pasty substance. Throw away any remaining paste that is not used.

## **Lesson Plan Four: Huichol Yarn Paintings/ Bead Paintings**

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Resources:

Art from many Hands by Jo Miles Shuman

Arts and Crafts of Mexico by Chloe Sayer

Design motifs of Ancient Mexico by Jorge Encisco

Additional Standards Addressed:

Performance Standards 4.2

Students will be able to describe the functions of works of art in relation to history and culture.

Vocabulary:

Huichol, deities, symbols

Materials for Activity:

Bees wax / White Glue

Heavy cardboard

Yarn (assorted colors) or Beads( assorted colors)

Drawing paper

Pencils

Tracing Paper

Procedure:

1. Designs that reflect ideas about Mexican culture are drawn on white paper.

2. Bees wax is melted and then spread in the board: or the board is covered with glue.
3. The border of the design using different colors of yarn is completed first. Try not to make the corners of the boarder round. Make sharp edges with the yarn.
4. Once the border is complete, outline the previously drawn design with one or two colors of yarn.
5. Then fill in the areas of the design with bright contrasting colors of yarn.

#### Criteria for Student Assessment:

1. Completion of an artwork in each of the AñHands on Activities.ñ
2. Completed artwork will be displayed in art room along with a one-page critique explaining the process and technique used.
3. Students and teacher will evaluate the completed art work on the following:
  - a. Do the completed artwork and written explanation.
  - b. The technical skill in the production of the artwork.
  - c. The use of the design principles. Concept of balance, contrast, unity, and rhythm.

#### Glossary:

1. Mesoamerica- defined as a cultural area that includes civilizations from Pre- Columbian cultures such as the Olmecs, Mayans and the Aztec Indians.
2. Pre-Columbian art- defined as the art that existed in Mexico prior to the invasion of Cortés and the Spanish.
3. Conquistadors- term is applied to the Spanish conquerors that were led by Hernan Cortés.
4. Papier Mache- material consisting of paper pulp or sheets of paper pasted together.
5. Amate Paper- paper that is used to create Amate paper designs. This paper comes from the Amate tree that is grown in Mexico.
6. Motif- a single or repeated designs or colors.
7. Gourd- various hard rinded inedible fruits often used for ornament or for vessels and utensils in cultures.
8. Geometric shape/designs- types of art that uses lines and shapes that are geometric to design.
9. Embellished- to make beautiful with ornamentation.
10. Shellac- to coat or otherwise treat or varnish.
11. Contrasting colors- principle of design that refers to the difference in colors, values, etc. in artworks.
12. Symbols- a simple picture that represents a concept or thing.
13. Interpretation- an instance of artistic interpretation in performance or adaptation.
14. Analysis- an examination of an artwork, its elements, and their relation.

- 15.Folk art- traditional art in a specific culture.
- 16.Juxtaposition- the act or an instance of placing two or more things together in a piece of artwork.
- 17.Aesthetics- pertaining to a sense of what is beautiful and visually pleasing.
- 18.Technique- any method of working with materials.
- 19.Culture- the elements that add to the aesthetic aspect in our lives, enriching them with beauty and enjoyment.
- 20.Critique- the act of critical estimate or discussion.

## Unit Bibliography

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### Book Resources

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- Moctezuma, Matos. Treasures of the Great Temple. Alti Publishing, California. Collection of ancient Mexican art certain to delight serious art students.
- Schele, Linda. Hidden Faces of the Maya. Alti Publishing, California. A book of Mayan figurines with simple text interpretations.
- Faulker, Ray; Edwin Ziegfeld. Art Today: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Inc. New York. A textbook that can be used to introduce students to art history of Mexico.
- Reid, William, 100 Crafts Projects From Around the World. J. Weston Walsh, Publisher. A collection of various art projects that include The Mexican Tree of Life, to the Mexican God's Eyes.
- Encisco, Jorge; Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico: N.Y. Dover Publications. Inc., 1953. Helpful black and white illustrations of ancient designs arranged by subject matter.
- Harvey, Marian: Crafts of Mexico N. Y. Macmillan Publishing. Inc., 1973. Chapters on weaving, reed work, metals, clay, wood, and paper, describing these arts and giving directions on making some items of wood and paper.



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— ð paintings, clay figures and pots of many kinds, tin sculpture, and many other arts.

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— ð Mass. 1981. Resource for helping children discovers the arts and crafts of many cultures. This book  
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— ð Diaz Del Casitllo, Bernal. The True History of the Conquest of the New Spain, trans. A.P. Maudslay. London  
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— ð Somonte, Carlos. We live in Mexico. The Bookwright Press. 1984.

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## Video Suggestions

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tc \15 "Video Suggestions

- \_δ Rufino Tamayo: The Sources of Art. (VHS) 28 mins. A combination of modern European and Mexican artistic works in the Aztec and Mayan ruins.
- \_δ Frida Kahlo: (VHS) 62 mins. Video a good source of cultural history of Mexico.
- \_δ The Frescoes of Diego Rivera: (VHS) 35 mins. A video about the turbulent era that he lived and his view on artistic expression during the Mexican renaissance.

## Web-Links:

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Early Mexican Civilizations (<http://www.worldbook.com/fun/cinco/html/early-civ.htm>)

Mexican Art (<http://www.worldbook.com/fun/cinco/html/mexicanart.htm>)

Mexican Population (<http://www.worldbook.com/fun/cinco/html/population.htm>)

Aztec Art (<http://crcmac.unl.edu/rthye143/aztec.html>)

Huichol Art (<http://www.huchoart.com/index2.html>)

Mexican Art (<http://www.hypeerweb.com/MexArt/>)

Mesoamerica Art (<http://www.famsi.org> - [www.mesoweb.org](http://www.mesoweb.org))

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