



Grade Level: 6th – 8th grade
Time Required: 4 45-min. class periods

Objective:

Students celebrate the meaning of Dia De Los Muertos by creating a unique mixed-media shadow box, or “*nicho*,” customary to the Mexican holiday.

National Core Arts Standards

Creating: #1, 2, 3
Presenting/Producing: #5, 6
Responding: #8, 9
Connecting: #11

<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

Vocabulary:

Mixed-media
 Folk Art
 Construct
 Embellish
 Scenerio
 Calacas
 Afterlife

Materials:

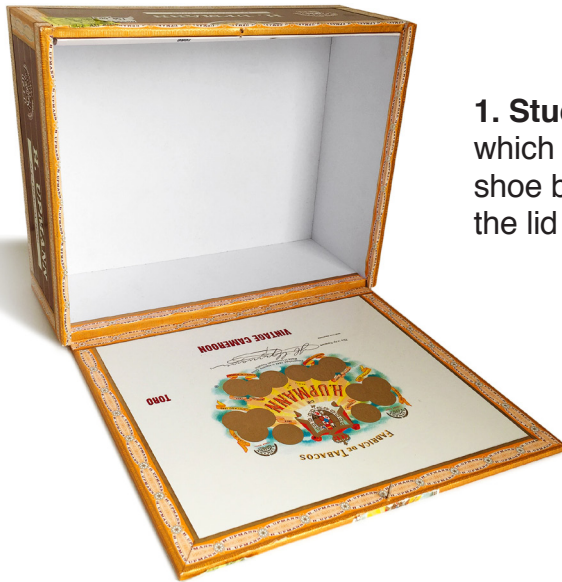
FC Clay, FC Tempera Paint
 Cardboard or Foamcore
 Cigar or shoe box
 Brushes – round and flat
 Pencils, scissors, Xacto knife,
 hot glue, regular glue
 Glitter Foam Sheet
 Decorative embellishments

www.greatartstartshere.com
www.fabercastell.com

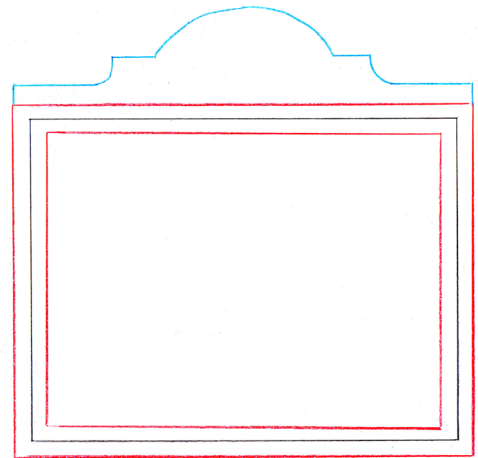
DIA DE LOS MUERTOS *October 31-November 2*

Dia de los Muertos, or “Day of the Dead,” is a happy, much anticipated Mexican holiday observed by people of Mexican ancestry everywhere. It is a time of celebration with food, music, fireworks and parades, focusing on the gathering of friends and family to pray for those members who have died, and to celebrate and remember them with joy, cheerfulness and color!

In this lesson plan, students make a Day of the Dead skeleton box, or “*nicho*.” Nichos are traditionally used to decorate alters which are constructed to honour the souls of the dead friends and relatives. These nichos are handmade wooden boxes containing cute little skeleton or “*calaca*” scenes relevant to El Dia de los Muertos celebrations. Nichos are unique works of folk art.



1. Students Begin ideally with a cigar box which is the perfect depth and sturdiness. A shoe box is also a good alternative. Slice off the lid of a cigar box with an Xacto knife.



Apply a bead of hot glue to the edge of the box opening and attach your frame.

2. Constructing the frame:

Lay the box opening face down on a larger piece of foam core or cardboard and trace around it. Now, measure and draw a box 1/2 in. outside of that. Then draw a box 1/2 in. inside the first outline you traced. This shape will fit the box.

Design and draw a shape for the top. Using a straight edge and Xacto knife, cut out entire frame.



3. Paint: In this example, the cigar box has been painted with a coat of gesso, which is a product used to prepare a surface for a smooth, solid paint finish. The box is then painted in tempera or acrylic. Encourage students to paint the box any way they want. In this piece, the back interior wall is covered with an inexpensive piece of a Glitter Foam Sheet which comes in a variety of snazzy colors. Of course, the wall could also be simply painted, instead.

5. Decorate! Set out a variety of simple, easily attainable embellishments; buttons, bottle caps, sequins, trims, ribbon, jewels, beads, charms, tiles, dollies, glitter pens, etc... Consider asking for donations of a few dollars (for you to shop with), or ask for crafting/ sewing scraps and other found items from home to be sent in with students to share. The white valance here is a piece of doily, and gives the piece a folksy, stage-like flair. Other types of material like colorful pom-pom fringe could be fun to use, too. The sacred heart and skulls pictured here are Mexican folk art motifs, and are made of the modeling clay. Both hot glue and regular glue are used in this project.



3. Calacas is the Spanish name for skeletons, commonly used for decoration during the Day of the Dead festival. Demonstrate how to mold modeling clay into calacas and things that the students want for their scenario. The figures here are basically made with as few pieces as possible; pinch and pull arms, legs and tail out of one ball of clay. Keep figures simple, chunky and strong. Make heads separately and attach with a small length of thin wire or piece of toothpick. Reassure students that realistic proportions are not necessary; out of scale imperfections simply add charm and character to the overall folk art.



4. Scenarios can be of anything; a church, market-place, outdoors or any casual or festive setting. The idea is to depict calacas or “Skellys” having fun in their afterlife! Playing instruments, getting married, dancing, eating, or performing almost any kind of activity, works. Paint modeling clay minimally with tempera.



Celebrate Dia De Los Muertos!

Consider a classroom or even a school-wide cultural event! Make altars, or *ofrendas*, to exhibit nichos, have students decorate sugar skulls or "*calaveras*," make bouquets of colorful tissue paper marigolds, and bring in photos and mementos of passed loved ones and pets. Celebrate with customary foods, like "bread of the dead" or *pan de muertos*. Dress up in festive attire, play traditional Mexican music, and dance! Refer to the internet for many ideas.

You could also display nichos at a school art show or Fall festival, or maybe school or local library. Maybe this project is simply a wonderful social studies extra-credit choice and likely to be a very popular one!