

Exploring Mexico's Material Culture through Artistic Interpretations

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Subject Area: Art Education

Grade Levels: PK–5

Time Frame: This unit plan will last approximately eight weeks, assuming classes meet once a week for forty-five minutes.

Note to Educators: *All suggested learning activities listed in this unit plan can be modified to best serve your own teaching and learning objectives. Questions from the PowerPoints are also included at the conclusion of this unit as a resource.*

Objectives of Unit

Students will view, discuss, and creatively reflect on the material culture of ancient, indigenous, and contemporary Mexico and the people who live there. Students will learn how to incorporate material culture studies as a form of research to inform their own artistic interpretations of Mexico. Material culture studies encourage the exploration of a broad range of influences and contexts informing the everyday lives of people by seeking diversity of perspectives that affect how culture is understood, shaped, and always in a state of transformation.

Summary/ Overview of Unit

This unit is designed to introduce students to the idea of **material culture studies** as being a research tool to look at various social and cultural influences that inform the traditions, values, and beliefs of many people from a particular region, which in this unit will focus upon Mexico and its people. Material culture studies involve an in-depth analysis of human-made or modified objects that reflect the ideas of the people of any given society, but is in no way reflective of all people, at all times, in any given circumstance. A postmodern application of material culture studies is inclusive of a broad range of perspectives that are shared by learners, and does not seek to establish a singular meta-narrative of a culture. Any conclusions or observations made during material culture studies will always remain partial and incomplete, as people are continually changing and being affected by different influences simultaneously. The overarching goal of this unit is to give students the opportunity to discuss, explore, and relate similarities and influences of Mexican material culture with their own lives and in their own communities, and create their own artistic work that reflects their informed understandings in personally relevant ways.

(Note: Due to this unit's heavy reliance on the interpretation of items of Mexico's material culture, the five PowerPoints that accompany this unit plan are meant to extend the learning resources available to students to explore and discuss these items in their original context. The PowerPoints are all downloadable from this Web site:

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/outreach/fulbright10/>)

Overview of Lesson Plan Activities

Learning Activity # 1: Life in Mexico: Exploring the Past and Present

Objective: Students will visually and verbally re-construct their own associations with Mexican culture through an original artistic composition, based on reflective thinking.

Time: One 45-minute class period and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Art Activity: Sketching a memory or association with Mexico based on the theme, “When I think about Mexico, I think about...”

Materials: PowerPoint #1, paper (any kind), drawing materials (crayons, markers, or colored pencils).

Learning Activity #2: Building a City: Inspired by the Ancient Mexican Ruins

Objective: Students will invent their own architectural design by combining ideas from the ancient architecture of Mexico with their own artistic composition.

Time: One 45-minute class period and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Art Activity: Designing a building or structure inspired by geometric shapes in 2-D or 3-D.

Materials: PowerPoint #2, two sheets of construction paper per student, scissors, pencils, glue, crayons or markers.

Learning Activity #3: Artistic Interpretations of Mexican Images and Symbols

Objective: Students will transfer their understanding of the symbols and images of Mexico into their own interpretive art work.

Time: One or two 45-minute class periods and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Art Activity: (Option 1): Draw an example of a real object of material culture (such as piñatas, maracas, or other items created in Mexico) from direct observation. Create a new environment where these objects might be seen, such as at a party or fiesta.

(Option 2): Create a mask out of paper that exhibits a mood or expression. Talk about the relationship between a mask and masquerading.

Materials (Option 1): PowerPoint #3, paper, pencil, erasers, colored pencils, objects of material culture to look at while drawing. (If there are no real objects available, you can provide photographs of actual works of art as a substitution.)

(Option 2): PowerPoint #3, colored sheets of construction paper, scissors, glue, stapler.

Learning Activity #4: Arts and Crafts of Mexico: Exploring Examples of the Past and Present

Objective: Students will invent their own original sculptural form made out of clay based on their research of Mexican arts and crafts.

Time: Two 45-minute class periods.

Art Activity: Students will sculpt a figure inspired by the images of artists in Mexico out of clay. Students will paint their pieces when they are finished.

Materials: PowerPoint #4, clay (air-dry, modeling, or traditional clay), rags to clean hands, water to remove excess clay from hands, kiln (if using traditional clay).

Learning Activity #5: Recycling to Create Art in Mexico: Aesthetic and Environmental Concerns

Objective: Students will predict effective ways to re-combine raw materials to construct a piñata. They will problem solve alternate solutions and conclude which practices lead to more successful results.

Time: Three 45-minute class periods.

Art Activity: Students will create a piñata using recycled materials.

Materials: PowerPoint #5, used water bottles, individual-sized milk cartons, paper mache paste or substitute such as liquid starch, old construction paper or cardboard for armature, tape, strips of newspaper or newsprint, tissue paper.

Research Informing Material Culture Studies in Art Education

This study borrows from the research traditions found within the field of ethnographic studies, which studies the way people live and the range of contexts informing their lived experiences. Photographic images have been utilized successfully by researchers such as Collier (1967) and Collier and Collier (1986) as a starting point to engage people from local communities in conversations about their lives as understood within their own community. Visual ethnography utilizes photographs as a research tool that serves as an initiation point to explore further social, cultural, and historical issues and themes. This study uses photographic imagery in a similar ethnographic approach, attempting to spark conversations and associations that have relevance to the students' lives and the lives of others. Through the sharing of stories between the students, teachers, and others within our school community and beyond, we can broaden perspectives and understandings that extend learning opportunities beyond traditional textbooks' explorations of culture. Together, students and teachers are part of the conversations leading to using visual ethnography as our major learning tool (Stokrocki, 1984, 1985; LaChapelle, 1999).

What does material culture and material culture studies mean to research scholars? Schlereth (1985) recognizes material culture studies as a method of using artifacts as research data. He describes the methodology in this way: "material culture studies seek to develop the explanatory power of artifact knowledge in order that such knowledge might ultimately expand human understanding. The principal task of material culture studies is an epistemological one, which is to say, it is an attempt to know what can be known about and from the past and present creations of humankind" (Schlereth, 1985, p. 3). For Richardson (2000), the process of engaging in ethnographically-positioned conversations should contribute to our understandings of the social life being explored, invite interpretive

responses, allow participants in discussion to make judgments about points of view being shared, generate new questions, and offer a credible representation of others.

What does material culture studies mean to research scholars outside the field of ethnography? Within the field of art education, authors such as Desai (2002) believe that ethnographic concerns can be used as learning tools that open up doors to more critical thinking if we try to explore complex and problematic relationships that arise when trying to make meaning by interpreting and representing the ideas of others. Art educators Bolin and Blandy (2003) view material culture as “not only the objects that we view and engage, but it also encompasses the immense array of cultural expressions that transcend objects themselves, and applies as a descriptor of all human-generated expressions and activities of a culture” (p. 4). Art educator Duncum (2001) reaffirms that artifacts are always contextually bound historically, socially, and culturally, and it is our responsibility as educators to address these aspects during our conversations with students. Artifacts should not be viewed as being in isolation from society; rather, they are cultural reflections of it (Chalmers, 1978). A primary goal within art education is to encourage students to make meaning from the world around them and to “make use of images and ideas to re-imagine one’s own life experiences” (Gude, 2007, 2008, p. 101). This is exactly what this research study has sought to address.

References

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Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Content Standards Addressed

§117.Art

Four basic strands—perception, creative expression/performance, historical and cultural heritage, and critical evaluation—provide broad, unifying structures for organizing the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire.

Perception: Students rely on their perceptions of the environment, developed through increasing visual awareness and sensitivity to surroundings, memory, imagination, and life experiences, as a source for creating artworks.

Creative Expression: They express their thoughts and ideas creatively, while challenging their imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and problem-solving skills.

Historical/ Cultural Heritage: By analyzing artistic styles and historical periods students develop respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures.

Response/ Evaluation: Students respond to and analyze artworks, thus contributing to the development of lifelong skills of making informed judgments and evaluations.

Learning Activity #1: Life in Mexico: Exploring the Past and Present

Objective: Students will visually and verbally re-construct their own associations with Mexican culture through an original artistic composition.

Time: One 45-minute class period and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Materials: PowerPoint #1, paper (any kind), drawing materials (crayons, markers, or colored pencils).

Essential Questions for Learning Activity

- When you look at the photos and videos from the *Life in Mexico* PowerPoint, are there any images that seem familiar to you? If so, please explain your association with these images.
- What are some examples of Mexican culture and traditions that you have experienced here in Dallas or in Mexico? Please share your memories and stories with the class.
- Do you think life in Mexico is similar or different from our lives here in Dallas, Texas? Please explain your thoughts.
- When you think about Mexico, what do you think about? Please sketch out some of your strongest associations with Mexico in a drawing.

Vocabulary

“*Ancient*” or “*Pre-Hispanic*” Mexico refers to the time before 1521, the year in which when Hernan Cortes and his Spanish soldiers landed in Mexico, bringing their Spanish language, ideas, and religion to this region of the world.

Learning Activity

Students will view PowerPoint #1, including images from John Green’s book, *Life in Ancient Mexico*, and compare them to images collected with a camera by the teacher. Teachers and students will informally engage in discussions surrounding the images. Questions are provided with the slides to encourage dialogue during the viewing of images. Following the PowerPoint activity, students will engage in the art activity listed below.

(Copyright Note: John Green gives educators permission to use up to four images from his book without special permission for any publication or project.)

Art Activity

Students will be asked to think of some of their strongest memories or associations with Mexico’s culture, history, traditions, or material culture. They will be given a sheet of construction paper to draw and color their own interpretation of the theme, “When I think about Mexico, I think about...” Students can write a short statement to explain how the image has particular meaning to them.

(If students need more time to complete the assignment, they may take it home for completion.)

Assessment Criteria

- Students will participate in a class discussion on life in Mexico.
- Students will give their picture the following title, “When I think about Mexico, I think about...”
- Students will create a small sketch of a memorable association that they have with Mexico or anything Mexican (such as Mexican food, piñatas, fiestas, etc.).
- Students will begin their project using pencil, outline the drawing with black marker, pen, crayon, or colored pencil and then color in the rest of their image.
- Whatever students do not complete in class, they will take home to complete as a homework assignment
- Display finished works in hallway with their name and section number clearly labeled on their pictures.

Rubric for Grading Assignment

100 = Responding to and successfully completing four or more of the assessment criteria.

90 = Responding to and successfully completing three assessment criteria.

80 = Responding to and successfully completing two assessment criteria.

70 = Responding to and successfully completing one assessment criterion.

50 = Responding to less than one assessment criterion.

Learning Activity #2: Building a City: Inspired by the Ancient Mexican Ruins

Objective: Students will invent their own architectural design by combining ideas from the ancient architecture of Mexico with their own artistic composition. Students will incorporate geometric shapes such as trapezoids, rectangles, squares, etc. into their final product.

Time: One 45-minute class period and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Materials: PowerPoint #2, two sheets of construction paper per student, scissors, pencils, glue, crayons or markers.

Essential Questions for Learning Activity

- What are some of the major geometric shapes that are in common in the photographs of the ancient cities in Mexico?
- What might be some reasons why the original smooth surfaces of the building and the bright colors that they were painted are no longer visible?
- What kinds of geometric shapes are popular in modern architecture today? Are they similar or different from the type of structures seen in the ancient pyramids of Mexico?

Learning Activity

Very briefly show students PowerPoint #2 of the some ancient cities in Mexico, including Chichén Itzá, Edzná, Monte Albán, Palenque, Teotihuacan, just to give them a brief introduction in to what the ancient cities looked like, with their heavy use of geometric forms and shapes, and their use of math and science (including astronomy) to design the layout of their cities.

Art Activity

Students will use two sheets of construction paper to design their own buildings or city made out of geometric shapes. Students can draw and cut trapezoids, rectangles, squares, triangles, rhombuses, or create alternative designs to cut out and construct a new structure or set of structures. Just as the ancient ruins no longer have color on their surfaces, students can re-imagine how the ancient buildings might have looked in their own constructions. Students may either glue their shapes on a flat surface to make them two-dimensional or fold their paper and give them feet to make them pop up or become three-dimensional. Environmental elements such as mountains, water, grass, etc. can be also be added to the art product as either 2-D or 3-D additions.

Assessment Criteria

- Students will participate in discussion about ancient architecture of Mexico.
- Students will use cut out shapes of paper to construct their own geometric structure.
- Students will add their own custom colors to add their own personal touches to their paper composition.
- Students will glue their cut out shapes as either 2-D or 3-D interpretations.
- Students will do show and tell of their project with their classmates.

Rubric for Grading Assignment

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80 = Responding to and successfully completing two assessment criteria.

70 = Responding to and successfully completing one assessment criterion.

50 = Responding to less than one assessment criterion.

Learning Activity #3 Artistic Interpretations of Mexican Images and Symbols

Objective: Students will transfer their understanding of the symbols and images of Mexico into their own reflective artwork.

Time: One or two 45-minute class periods and complete assignment as homework if necessary.

Materials (Option 1): PowerPoint #3, paper, pencil, erasers, colored pencils, objects of material culture to look at while drawing. (If there are no real objects available, you can provide photographs of actual works of art as a substitution. Artifacts can also be borrowed free of charge from the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies Outreach Resource Lending Library, accessible at <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/insts/llilas/outreach/library.php>).

(Option 2): PowerPoint #3, colored sheets of construction paper, scissors, glue, stapler.

Essential Questions for Learning Activity

- Describe some of the aspects of Mexican images and symbols you find interesting and why.
- How can you re-imagine your own version of Mexican images and symbols in your own art?

Learning Activity

Briefly show students PowerPoint #3. Show students the work of Carmen Lomas Garza (<http://www.carmenlomasgarza.com/>) and how she borrows memories and scenes from her Mexican-American heritage growing up in South Texas with symbols and images of Mexican culture.

(Option 1) Have students draw an item from popular Mexican material culture such as a piñata, and use their imaginations to create a setting in which this item might be used or celebrated. Students can color in their images with the media of their choice (markers, crayons, watercolors, etc.)

(Option 2) Have students create a mask that shows expressive qualities, such as those worn by the Aztecs and Olmecs, who believed that when you wore a mask, you actually became someone else.

Art Activity

(Option 1): Draw an example of a real object of material culture created in Mexico from direct observation, such as a piñata, papel picado, maracas, or any other items you might have available from your local community. Students will observe real artifacts that are from Mexico to inspire their art product. Have students create a new environment where these objects might be seen, such as at a party.

(Option 2): Create a mask made out of cut shapes of paper that have been glued together. Role one sheet of construction paper together and staple the ends together to make a handle for the mask.

Note: For younger children in PreK and Kinder, I recommend them drawing a mask that shows an exaggerated expression. Then they can add a elaborate hat and large jewelry to add visual interest and patterns to their drawing. If space allows, have them create a pattern along the edges of their work—such as sun then moon, or heart and stars, etc. The little ones are learning patterns and shapes in their regular classrooms.

Assessment Criteria

- Students will participate in discussion about Mexican images and symbols.

Option 1

- Students will draw an example of Mexican material culture from direct observation.
- Students will add a new background to this drawing to show the context in which this item might be used.
- Students can color in their drawing with the media of their choice.
- Students can write one or two sentences describing their picture.

Option 2

- Students will draw and cut out the shape for their mask, such as an oval.
- Students will draw and cut out a variety of geometric and free-form shapes to add to a mask.
- Students will glue the cut out shapes onto their mask.
- Students can add a handle to their mask to hold it in front of their faces.

Rubric for Grading Assignment

100 = Responding to and successfully completing four or more of the assessment criteria.

90 = Responding to and successfully completing three assessment criteria.

80 = Responding to and successfully completing two assessment criteria.

70 = Responding to and successfully completing one assessment criterion.

50 = Responding to less than one assessment criterion.

Learning Activity #4: Arts and Crafts of Mexico: Exploring Examples of the Past and Present

Objective: Students will invent their own original sculptural form made out of clay based on their research of Mexican arts and crafts.

Time: Two 45-minute class periods.

Materials: PowerPoint #4, clay (air-dry, modeling, or traditional clay), rags to clean hands, water to remove excess clay from hands, kiln (if using traditional clay).

Vocabulary

Two-dimensional versus three-dimensional

Essential Questions for Learning Activity

- What similarities and differences do you see between the images used in pre-Hispanic art with regional arts and crafts being made today?
- What experiences with Mexican culture, traditions, and history have you experienced?

Learning Activity 1

Students will view PowerPoint #4 and see various examples of Pre-Hispanic art and artistic interpretations of their work. Students will sketch out a plan for their clay sculpture.

Art Activity

Students will sculpt out a small figure out of clay inspired by Mexican material culture and traditions. Encourage students to make pieces that are thicker than a finger so that they do not break. Easy to build pieces would include snakes, masks, or ancient architectural structures. If using air dry clay like “sculpey,” students can use markers to color in sculptures immediately. Otherwise, students will need to wait until their pieces have dried and been fired in the kiln to add color to them. They will paint their pieces when they are finished.

Assessment Criteria

- Participate in discussion.
- Create a sketch of your proposed three-dimensional sculpture.
- Create a clay figurine with texture.
- Color in the air-dry figurines with marker.
- Create a sketch of your finished figurines, if time allows.
- Write a reflection of how your sculpture is a reflection of the arts and crafts of Mexico.

Rubric for Grading Assignment

100 = Responding to and successfully completing four or more of the assessment criteria.

90 = Responding to and successfully completing three assessment criteria.

80 = Responding to and successfully completing two assessment criteria.

70 = Responding to and successfully completing one assessment criterion.

50 = Responding to less than one assessment criterion.

Learning Activity #5: Recycling to Create Art in Mexico: Aesthetic and Environmental Concerns

Objective: Students will predict effective ways to re-combine raw materials to construct a piñata. They will problem solve alternate solutions and conclude which practices lead to more successful results.

Time: Three 45-minute class periods.

Materials: PowerPoint #5, used water bottles, individual-sized milk cartons, paper mache paste or substitute such as liquid starch, old construction paper or cardboard for armature, tape, strips of newspaper or newsprint, tissue paper.

Essential Questions for Learning Activity

- Why do you think recycling is a global problem? Do you think we have the power to make a difference? If so, how?
- What efforts do you see being made by some artists and environmentalists in Mexico to try to address this problem?
- What kind of trash do we create at our school that can be recycled? How might we use recycled materials to create our own piñatas?
- How can you structurally assemble a piñata made of recycled parts to create an original work of art?
- What are some alternate recycled materials that we could also incorporate into our sculptures?
- How did you combine old materials with new materials to create your piñata?
- If you had to do this project again, what might you do differently and why?
- Write a story describing the evolution of your piñata from scrap materials to a new object.

Learning Activity

View and discuss PowerPoint #5. Students will discuss ways in which pollution is a common problem around the world and how each of us can do our part to help recycle everyday items and objects. Students will problem-solve ways in which we can recombine common items such as used milk cartons, cardboard roles, newspaper, etc. to create sculptural art.

Art Activity

Students will create a piñata using recycled materials.

Assessment Criteria

- Students will participate in the class discussion about recycling and how this project incorporates this theme through our materials.
- Students will construct the armature for their piñata out of recycled materials.

- Students will secure their pieces together with strips of paper dipped in a bonding agent, such as paper mache paste or liquid starch.
- Students will repeat adding layers of paper to strengthen their piñata.
- Students will customize their piñata by adding colored strips of tissue paper to the surface.
- Students will add final details like eyes, hair, etc. using paper or other decorative items of their choice.
- Students will display their piñatas for other students to view.

Rubric for Grading Assignment

100 = Responding to and successfully completing four or more of the assessment criteria.

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PowerPoints #1–5: Information & Questions Relating to Material Culture Unit

PowerPoint #1: *Life in Mexico*

Slide #1: Title Slide—Life in Mexico: Past and Present

Questions

- What do you see in this picture?
- Why do you think that?
- Do you think everyone in Mexico cooks like this? Why or why not?

[Note: One of the doctors we visited in Mexico said that many children suffer from burns because they touch the hot coals of the fires that often sit on the ground. Burns are also a problem due to fireworks being used often at celebrations, and there are not safety precautions in place to protect people from getting burned.]

Slide #2: Cooking “en la cocina”: Then and Now. **Click on image of women in kitchen to play video.**

Read or summarize text from John Green’s book, *Life in Ancient Mexico* (1991), to accompany the black and white drawings in this PowerPoint.

Aztec woman: food preparation. Then as now, the staff of life of the Mexican home was the tortilla. In this simple thatch-roofed peasant hut of reeds, wood and clay, the unventilated hearth rests on stones and supports the circular stone griddle (*comal*). The maize is ground on the concave stone *metate* with the aid of a stone roller. The tortillas are formed by patting and clapping with the hands. Besides maize and other vegetables, game and fish were important foodstuffs. Turkey stew was a favorite dish on festive occasions, and dogs were also raised for food. (Green, 1991, p. 29)

Questions

- What kind of food do you see the women preparing?
- Have you ever made or seen someone make tortillas? Describe what experiences you have had with making or preparing foods with tortillas.
- Can you give some examples of different types of tacos you can make using tortillas and other fillings?
- Are there other things you can use *masa* for besides tortillas?

Slide #3: Various Food Images.

Questions

- Are there any foods here that you recognize? If so, which ones?
- These photographs were all taken in Mexico, but do you think we can find these kinds of foods right here in Dallas? If so, where have you had some of these foods before?

- Why do you think so many of us had tasted many of these foods that originated in Mexico?
- Why do you think we have so many foods in common with Mexico?

[Note: Remind students that Texas was part of Mexico for a very long time, and this perhaps contributes to our strong cultural and social associations with Mexico.]

Slide #4: Traditional Market or Mercado

Traditional markets of Mexico today share many similarities to the markets of the Aztecs that were in existence long before the arrival of the Spanish in 1521.

Aztec market. Tenochtitlan was the center of a far-flung empire, and goods poured into the city as tribute from subject regions and as imported merchandise. The largest market in Mexico was that of Tlatelolco, a part of the capital that had once been a separate adjacent city. The first Spanish visitors were amazed at the extent and efficiency of the operation. Sixty thousand people might be assembled daily. Vendors were grouped in sections according to their wares. Inspectors patrolled. Apprehended thieves were summarily punished. The barter system was generally used, but certain commodities, such as cacao beans and quills filled with gold dust, were recognized as currency. Items were sold by measure or number, not by weight. (Green, 1991, pgs. 40–41)

Questions

- Do any of these images seem familiar to you? Please share what you notice in these images. What do you notice is similar or different from how we buy food here in Dallas?
- Have you ever had any experiences at a *mercado*? If so, please share with us some of your memories.

[Note: The chickens seemed to be much yellower in color than we are used to seeing them in the United States. Also, the images on the red baskets are insects like grasshoppers, which are sometimes eaten as a snack.]

Slide #5: Images of Celebrations and Parades. **Click on image of parade to play video.**

Questions

- What similarities or differences do you see between their parades and celebrations and our own?
- Have you ever experienced any of these types of celebrations? If so, please share your stories.

[Note: Most of the images are of parade participants in the city of Xico. The two men with feathers on their head who are dancing are “matachines” performing in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. Many of these people are only allowed to marry people who speak the same native language as them, or are from the same ancestral blood lines.]

Slide #6: Everyday Scenes.

Questions

- Are there any images that you see that are familiar from Dallas or somewhere else? Please share.
- Have any of you ever tasted roasted corn or *elotes*? If so, can you describe what you like to put on your corn? Do you prefer to have it served whole on the cob or do you prefer the kernels that are boiled and then served in a cup?
- What are some of your favorite Mexican treats that you can buy off a cart? (*Paletas*? *Elotes*? *Churros*?) Please have the students share some of their associations with Mexican treats.

[Note: It didn't seem to matter which town we were in, you could always find many churches, markets, and vendors selling corn, churros, and other snacks off carts.]

Slide #7: *Chinampas* or Floating Gardens at Xochimilco

Share information from John Green's book:

Aztec agriculture on a *chinampa* ("floating garden"). The Aztecs used *milpa* farming extensively, but their most fertile land, which did not need to lie fallow, was that reclaimed from their lakes and swamps by means of *chinampas*. These man-made islands were created by loading rich lake-bottom mud onto matted vegetation strengthened with posts and wickerwork. Tourists still enjoy seeing a trace of this farming practice on the canals of the Xochimilco district of Mexico City. Houses could be built on the larger *chinampas*. It was possible to raise several crops a year; vegetables, maize and flowers were grown. Aztec farmers prepared the soil with digging sticks; they had no plows. Irrigation was widely used. A dam separated the salty water of part of Tenochtitlan's lake from the useful spring-fed water of the other parts. Bees were also raised for their honey. (Green, 1991, p. 34)

Questions

- Have you ever experienced anything like the floating gardens before? If so, please describe.
- Why do you think so many people in this region close to Mexico City still like to go float around on the boats at Xochimilco today? Make a hypothesis.

[Note: In Texas, many of our students have traveled to San Antonio, Texas where there are numerous boats on the San Antonio River that were inspired by the boats on the Xochimilco.]

Slide #8: Weaving: Then and Now. **Click on image of women working with wool to play video.**

Share information from John Green's book:

Aztec women: weaving at home. Women made cloth at home from cotton, plant fibers or rabbit hair. The yarn was spun by hand, with the lower end of the spindle either passing through a clay disc (such spindle whorls were sometimes beautifully

ornamented) or, as in this picture, resting in a little ceramic holder. Girls were taught to spin at a very early age. Dyes for the yarn came from a variety of plant and animal substances, including a red made from cochineal insects. The woman at the left is weaving on a simple backstrap loom. After weaving, cloth might be additionally embroidered or ornamented with feathers. The rush mats on the floor (*petates*) are still typical of Mexican rural interiors. (Green, 1991, p. 28)

Questions

- Why do you think that weaving is still almost only done by women in Mexico? Make an educated guess.
- Why do you think most weavers still work in the old-fashioned way, such as making and coloring their own yarn from scratch, and weaving it on a loom rather than using big electric machines? Why do you think these traditions are important to these women?
- Would you prefer to buy something that is handmade or machine made? Explain your answer.

[Note: The women from this group shared their personal stories with our group. Being an active member of this women's cooperative was not always easy for them, because sometimes their husbands didn't want them to join. "Machismo" is still very dominant in Mexico. Consequently, many but not all of the women who were part of this group were widowed or not married.]

Slide #9: Mayan Medicine Techniques: Then and Now

Share information from John Green's book:

Aztec doctor healing with herbs. As among all New World native peoples, including the Indians of the United States, medical practice was a compound of religious beliefs and firm knowledge. Evil gods and witches were blamed for certain diseases, and doctors depended on rituals, and sometimes on hallucinations, for their diagnosis and treatment. But, on the other hand, bodily and dental hygiene were considered important; some very valid means, such as steam baths, were used in cures; and, above all, over a thousand different plants were used, both for medicine to be taken internally and for plasters to be applied. This type of folk herb medicine, whose effectiveness has frequently been confirmed by modern chemical analysis, is still current in rural parts of Mexico and in areas of the U.S. Southwest with a Mexican-American population. (Green, 1991, p. 36)

Questions

- Have you ever had any experience using Mayan medicine techniques to help you feel better when you were sick? If so, please describe.
- Have you ever seen other people besides Mayans use herbs to treat medical problems? Why do you think herbs are so important to many people to feel better?

[Note: Many of my students have had their family take a raw, whole egg and run it over their bodies when they are sick and break the egg into a glass to see if the sickness has passed or if

the children need further treatments. This was a practice still taking place in Mexico during our time there. Sometimes this can be followed by taking some tea with special herbs inside or other Mayan-inspired natural remedies.]

Slide #10: MEXICO When I think about Mexico, I think about...

Have students write this down onto their paper and complete the sentence. Students will illustrate any association that they have with Mexico. For older students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades, they may elaborate using a complete paragraph.

PowerPoint #2: Ancient Architecture in Southern Mexico

Slide #1: Title Page: The Ancient Architecture in Southern Mexico

Question

- The original pyramids in ancient Mexico were painted in very bright colors all over the surfaces. Why do you think they are not longer painted?

[Note: Many of the pyramids have been re-constructed as they fell into a state of disrepair after the cities were abandoned, and the jungles started growing on top of the structures. As a result, archeologists have done their best to restore the buildings. However, we still have to use our imagination regarding how the buildings were originally painted.]

Slide #2: Map of Various Ancient Ruins in Mexico

Question

- What do you think this map is trying to highlight?

[Note: This map only highlights some of the major ancient pyramid sites. There are many, many more sites throughout Mexico, Central America, and South America.]

Slide #3: Chichén Itzá (Various images of site)

Questions

- What do you notice about the architectural designs of this pyramid in Chichén Itzá?
- Why do you think they chose to build their buildings in the ancient cities so tall? Do we also have really tall buildings in our city? Why do some cities like to put their tallest buildings in the center of town?
- Who do you think would climb up these steps and why?

[Note: Chichén Itzá is a Mayan city but has Toltec influences.]

Slide # 4 : Edzná

Questions

- What geometric shapes can you identify in this building at Edzná?
- Why do you think these buildings were constructed like this?
- This building has more windows and doors than other ancient sites, why do you think this building was built this way? What do you think it might have been used for?

Slide #5: (Various images of Edzná)

[Note: There is one curved arch in this set of images, and there are combined geometric shapes, such as under the stairwell, of rectangles with triangles, etc.]

Slide #6: Monte Albán

[Note: Monte Albán is named after the white flower that grows in this part of Mexico. The tops of many of these buildings have been destroyed and what is left are the stairways.]

Slide #7 : (Various images of Monte Albán)

Slide #8: Palenque Ruins in Chiapas

[Note: Palenque is pure Mayan and is characterized by very decorative and ornate decorations. The stucco work is very ornate in Palenque and was made from crushed limestone, sea shells, tree sap, and bark, which was then cooked together. It is believed that the Mayans cut down and burned the trees around their cities, thus destroying their environment, to build the fires necessary to make the mortar.]

[Note: The flattened heads of the Mayans were only allowed for the noble classes. The process of flattening out the front skull of the head began by putting a piece of wood or stone on the skull's cartilage of a newborn, and was worn until the age of five or six years old. The average lifespan of a Mayan was 40 years.]

Slide #9: Ancient Toilet and Aqueduct in Palenque (and other various images)

[Note: Palenque had an underground sewer system and running water. They made aqueducts, and pipes that were wider at the bottom and progressively smaller as they moved up the buildings to give the water pressure to get water from the river on the ground level up to the tops of the buildings. The toilet, as seen above, is an example of their how they utilized their sewer system.]

Slide #10: Teotihuacan

Questions

- When you look at the people at the top of the building, what does that seem to indicate about the size of the building?
- Do you think that people who are trying to preserve ancient buildings in Mexico should try and re-paint them to look like they did in the past? Why or why not?

[Note: Located about 30 minutes outside of Mexico City].

Slide #11: Various Views of Teotihuacan

PowerPoint #3: Artistic Interpretation of Mexican Images and Symbols

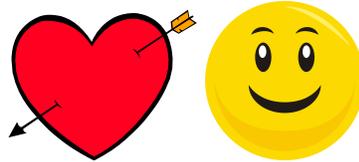
[Note: All artistic interpretations of Mexican images and symbols in this PowerPoint were created by Maria D. Leake, Ph.D.]

Slide #1: Artistic Interpretations of Mexican Images and Symbols

Two frogs-Mexico: state of Oaxaca, Teotitlan del Camino, Mixtec culture—Late Postclassic period, c. A.D. 1300–1500—Ceramic, stucco, and paint—Dallas Art Association purchase, 1969.

These two frogs were reportedly found with the head of Tlaloc, with which they probably formed a shrine. Frogs were often positioned around the deity to mark the cardinal directions. These amphibians were also worshiped throughout Mesoamerica and, like Tlaloc, were symbols of rain and fertility. The Olmecs were fascinated with the ability of certain frogs to shed their skin by consuming it, and so, like the frog, their kings transformed themselves metaphorically by shedding their skin to reveal a shaman identity within. The Maya used the image of a frog as the glyph for birthing and, even today, Maya boys make the sounds of chirping frogs as part of the rain rituals in Yucatan. (Information from the Dallas Museum of Art.)

Slide #2: Interpreting Symbols: What do these symbols mean to you?



What about this symbol?



[Note: The cross in Pre-Hispanic times had no association with the religious ideas that were brought to Mexico by the Spanish. Points of the cross are believed to reference heaven (north), earth (south), fire, and water. It also replicates the shape made by the human body when we stand with our feet together and our arms outstretched, with the heart in the middle. There are various interpretations as to the meaning of the Mayan crosses, but according to the guide for the Museo de la Medicina Maya (www.medicinamaya.org), the cross is considered a therapeutic resource used by indigenous doctors. “The symbol of the cross can be found throughout the museum. A wooden cross is the goddess that guards the home, the altars, the springs, and the ceremonial hills. Upon finding a cross, a person who is away from home and family is rid of the evil that he or she has accumulated due to being away

from his or her community. The cross is related to well being and the recuperation of health”
(*Guia del Museo de La Medicina Maya, versión Inglés, date unknown, p. 9.*)

Questions

- Why do you think symbols sometimes have more than one meaning?
- Can you stand in a position where you make a cross shape using your body?
- Are symbols still used in society today? Can you give some examples?

Slide #3: Artistic Interpretation of Tlaloc, The Rain God (Image of Tlaloc from the Dallas Museum of Art/ DMA collection)

Head of the rain god Tlaloc—Mexico: state of Oaxaca, Teotitlan del Camino—Mixtec culture—Late Postclassic period, c. A.D. 1300–1500—Ceramic, tufa, stucco, and paint—Gift to Dallas Museum of Art from Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Marcus in memory of Mary Freiberg, 1967.

This monumental ceramic sculpture was created by the Mixtec people of southern Mexican highlands shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521. Originally, it would have been placed in an urban setting, probably on the terrace of a pyramid. As a vessel, it was used to burn rubber and copal as food for the gods and would have sent billowing columns of scented black smoke into the sky. A masterpiece of late pre-Hispanic sculpture, it relates closely to an equally large head of Tlaloc in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

The god Tlaloc, known by many names, is one of the principal deities of Mesoamerica. Among the people of highland Mexico at the time of the Spanish Conquest, he was revered as a bringer of rain and a hurler of lightning. Among the lowland Maya of the Classic period, Tlaloc was a war god, companion of kings as they marched into battle. Blue discs encircle Tlaloc’s eyes, standing for water being rippled by rain, and his tubular teeth may represent flowing water. Serpents on his face and ear flanges embody the swift strike of lightning. (Information from the Dallas Museum of Art.)

Questions

- Do you think the ancient people’s traditions of sending smoke up to the sky worked to get the gods to send down rain? Why or why not?
- Are there still people today who try to do things to get it to rain and if so, how?

Slide # 4: Mask—Tlaloc-Mixtec-Aztec Culture—A.D. 1350–1521—Wood, turquoise, shell, lignite, and resin.

(The image of skull with mosaic is probably not Tlaloc, but created in similar manner.)

Aztec empire founded in 1325 by nomads who settled in Valley of Mexico, was the last great indigenous state of Mesoamerica. Aztecs controlled most of Mexico before Spanish arrived in 1519.

Turquoise mosaic involved grinding tiny tiles, predominantly turquoise, to a thin state, polishing them and applying them with resin to carved wood support. Tlaloc is the rain god who has concentric circles around his circular eyes.

For the Aztecs, turquoise symbolized the “preciousness of life, the blue of the daytime sky, and the blue of water, which was associated with Tlaloc.” This mask may have been worn by a god impersonator, or placed on the head of a wrapped body of a deceased ruler for his cremation. (Information from Dallas Museum of Art.)

Questions

- Have you ever worn a mask? What are occasions where we like to put on masks? Are there any social or cultural associations with the times that we wear masks? If so, please describe.
- Do you feel masks give people any sort of special powers? Why or why not?
- How can you manipulate your face to show different emotional expressions? How might you draw them?

[Note: Mask—Olmec Culture—900–500 B.C.—Jadeit— Mexico-State of Tabasco.The Mesoamerican people believed the mask always revealed the true inner being of an individual. (Information from Dallas Museum of Art.)]

Slide #5: Xipe Impersonator—Mexico—Aztec—1350–1521 A.D.—Volcanic stone, shell, paint.

[Note: Information about Xipe Impersonator is too scary to share with young children. This might only be appropriate for high school aged children.]

Gruesome character created by Aztecs. Xipe Totec is a living man, probably a cult priest, who wears on his head and torso the flayed skin of a sacrificed human.

Skin shows chest wound that resulted when the victim’s heart was ripped out in an act of ritual sacrifice. Xipe’s mouth speaks through the other’s mouth and his eyes (which are white) look through the sockets of the dead man.

Aztecs associated Xipe with Spring—the renewal of the world and the sprouting of green plants. The living Aztec performer wore the skin until it rotted. If the impersonation of life through death was successful, rain would come and the annual renewal of agricultural cycle would occur. (Information from Dallas Museum of Art.)

Standing Female Figure—Mexico—State of Tamaulipas, Huastec Culture—A.D.900–1250.

Standing Man drawn with only partial leg—Mexico—Teotihuacan—A.D. 200–750—Greenstone.

Larger drawing of man—Mexico, State of Guerrero-Maxela Area—100 B.C.–A.D. 600—Greenstone.

Questions

- Try to imitate the body positions of these sculptures. How might you describe them?
- Where would these sculptures have been placed or how would they have been used?

Slide #6: Montage of artistic interpretations inspired by the research of Corinna Rodrigo Enriquez.

Questions

- A montage is when a collection of related images are combined together. Do you think these pictures would look better if there were fewer or more images included in the work? Why do you think that?
- Which media do you prefer? Black and white pen and pencil, colored pencil, or the oil pastel with paint? Why?

Recommended Resource for Pre-Hispanic Images in coloring book form:

Aves del México Prehispánico by Corinna Rodrigo Enriquez (2002)

Insectos y Reptiles del México Prehispánico by Corinna Rodrigo Enriquez (2005)

Mamíferos del México Prehispánico by Corina Rodrigo Enriquez (2005)

Dioses Mexicas Para Niños by Elsa Becerril Miranda (2009)

Dioses Mayas Para Niños by Elsa Becerril Miranda (2009)

Life in Ancient Mexico: Coloring Book by John Green (1991)

Slide #7: Images from Mexican museum collections and an artistic interpretation.

Questions

- What kinds of materials do you think the headdresses were made out of originally and why?
- What else can you tell about these men and how they liked to dress?
- Do you think this is how all men used to dress in ancient Mexico or do you think these people were special members of society? Why do you think that?

[Note: Clothing in Ancient Mexican art was very geometric and symmetrical. Notice how men wear large rounded earrings, large necklaces, as well as ornamental head coverings.]

Slide #8: The Sun Stone, also known as the Aztec Calendar, in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City is a representation of the Pre-Hispanic cosmogonic and calendrical knowledge.

Questions

- What are some of the repeating geometric shapes that you notice?
- Why do you think the Aztec calendar is in the shape of a circle rather than the way we traditionally see calendars with twelve months in a year and numbers for each day of the month? Make a hypothesis.

Slide #9: What kind of artistic interpretation of Mexican art would you like to make?

(Option 1) Closely examine and draw an item that comes from Mexico and put it in an imaginary setting. (Option 2) Create a mask made out of paper.

PowerPoint #4: Arts and Crafts of Mexico

Slide #1: Arts and Crafts of Mexico: Exploring Examples of the Past and Present

Questions

- How would you describe these figurines?
- What are some things that you notice are similar and different between them? Please elaborate.

Slide #2: Pre-Hispanic Dogs

Questions

- Do you think that all of the figures in these pictures are dogs? Why or why not?
- How might you describe some of these dogs' actions?
- Which of the dogs do you like best and why?

Slide #3:Pre-Hispanic or Ancient Birds

Questions

- Are all of these figures birds? Why or why not?
- Do you think these living creatures actually existed or did the artists make them up? Explain your answer.

Slide #4: Pre-Hispanic Images with Fangs

Questions

- What are we looking at in these images? How would you describe them? How do you think these sculptures might have been used?
- Why do you think museums have decided that these items are important enough to be exhibited?
- Why are artifacts from the past important?

Slide #5: Various Ancient Mexican Figurines

Questions

- Which of these figures do you like the best and why?
- What do you think the objects that have openings in them might have been used for? Support your ideas.

Slide #6: Ancient Musical Flutes

Questions

- All of these flutes are very old. Why do you think the ancient Mexicans used flutes? Do you think their reasons are similar to the reasons people play flutes today? Why or why not?

Slide #7: Musical Flutes from 2010. **Click on the images of man playing three types of flutes at the Teotihuacan ruins outside of Mexico City to play video.**

Questions

- Which flute did you think made the most interesting sounds and why?
- Have you ever played a flute? What are some things that you can do with your hand and how you blow into the flute that can change the types of sounds that you can make?

Slide #8: Ceramic Figurines Made by Traditional Artists. **Click on woman making ceramic figurine in Mexico to play video.**

Questions

- This mother and daughter make ceramics for a living. Why do you think handmade arts and crafts traditions are still being passed down from mother to daughter even today, when machines can make similar items?
- What are some things that humans can add to clay sculptures that machines cannot imitate?

Slide #9: Traditional Clothing/ Contemporary Weavings of 2010

Questions

- It takes a long time to learn the skills to create original textiles. Besides doing the weaving, the people who made these pieces also made the yarn and colored it. They created these pieces completely from hand. Why do you think this tradition is still valued as an art form in Mexico?
- What would you prefer to have: a less expensive machine made textile or a handmade piece? Why?

[Note: The weaving in green and black was made by a male contemporary artist named Alberto Ruiz. Having a male doing this kind of craft does go against the paradigm of only women producing Mexican textiles. His innovative approach of leaving negative spaces in his work allows for cast shadows to be made on the wall behind the weaving. This work was on exhibition at the textile museum in Puebla, Mexico.]

Slide #10: Stamps

Questions

- Has your teacher ever given you a stamp on your hand or on your paper? How do stamps work?
- What do you think these stamps might have been used for?
- Why do you think some of the stamps are rounded while others are flat?
- Which of the designs do you like the best and why?

Slide # 11: What kind of sculpture would you like to make out of clay? Draw two of your ideas.

PowerPoint #5: Recycling to Create Art in Mexico

Slide #1: Title page: Recycling to Create Art in Mexico: A Response to Aesthetic and Environmental Concerns

Questions

- What is recycling and what is the point?
- Can you give some examples of how people recycle?

[Note: Recycling trash is a global concern. Recycling is one way humans try to lower our impact on environmental pollution. This PowerPoint tries to highlight efforts of different people in Mexico to address this concern in personally relevant ways.]

Slide #2: The Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico is the site of the Sumidero Canyon. Within this beautiful natural geographic beauty, there is a large pollution problem.

Questions

- What do you think about people throwing trash into rivers and streams?
- What kind of environmental effects do you think it can have in the long-term?

Slide #3:

Within this women's cooperative group, trash is collected, sorted and sold for profit. In addition to selling the raw materials, they also use some parts of the trash to create wearable art, such as purses fashioned out of tabs from metal cans.

Questions

- Why do you think these women go to so much work to recycle materials?
- Why do you think they have chosen to use recycled materials like bottle tabs to construct purses? Do you think this a good idea? Why or why not?

[Note: This purse is extremely similar to the original ones we saw the ladies selling, but I could not locate an authentic photo. This one was taken off the Internet.]

Slide #4: An example of giving new life to old containers by a group of Mexican environmentalists. What do students think the original containers were used for? What other types of recycled containers could be used to grow vegetation?

Questions

- Why do you think these environmentalists chose to use old containers to grow plants rather than buy new ones?
- What kind of message are they trying to promote?
- Have you or someone you know ever used or recycled a container? If so, how?

Slide #5: Recycling seeds to make jewelry. This Mayan artist uses locally collected seeds to make original creations.

Questions

- If you wanted to make jewelry out of seeds or a similar material, what would you use and why?
- Do you find these examples of jewelry attractive? Why or why not?

Slide #6: Recycling used paper and leaves to make paper for printmaking and other purposes. **Click on image of women to play video.**

Questions

- How much paper do you think we throw away each day?
- What are some examples of paper or paper products that we go through in a normal day at school?
- What do you think happens to all of that paper?
- Are there ways that you can think of that we can do to recycle this paper?

Slide#7: Artist Alberto Ruiz’s installation of recycled and re-constructed bottle tops at the Museo Textil de Oaxaca

Questions

- The idea of sewing non-traditional items, such as metal bottle caps, and installing them hanging from the ceiling and running down the stairs, is the challenge that Alberto Ruiz addresses in this art. What do you think about using non-traditional items for sewing?
- If you were to suggest another way to sew and install non-traditional items into a museum, what might you do? Please describe your thoughts.

Slide #8:

Question

- How could we use recycled paper and materials to create paper mache sculptures like these made in Mexico? What are your thoughts and ideas?

Slide # 9: Creating our own example of recycled art.

Questions

- How do you think we can build our own custom designed piñatas using old milk cartons and used paper scraps that we have collected from our school cafeteria and classrooms? Share your ideas.
- Are there other recyclable items that we might also consider using?