

ALEBRIJE SCULPTURES

Recommended for Grades 6-8 (could be adapted for younger or older students)

Throughout their travels Isaiah and Julia Zagar collected Folk Art, art that reflects traditional values of a society and is passed from generation to generation in a family. Within the walls of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens there are many examples of work from other cultures. Much of this work comes from Mexico, especially Oaxaca (Wah-Ha-Kah), a city in Southern Mexico.

Oaxaca is a village that produces many types of handmade items, but Isaiah uses the town's small sculptures carved from wood. These wooden figurines are in the form of animals, both real and imagined, known as "Animalitos" or "Alebrijes."

In this lesson, students will learn about culture and Folk Art in Southern Mexico, specifically in Oaxaca. Students will then create Alebrije sculptures of their own and present them to their peers.



Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the city of Oaxaca and the Alebrije art form.
- Students will identify how Isaiah Zagar has collaborated with Oaxacan artists and what types of work he incorporates at PMG.
- Students will create a papier-mâché Alebrije sculpture.
- Students will think critically and imaginatively about their sculpture and present it to the class.
- Students will focus on folk art and its relationship to their own cultures and lives.

Materials

- Computers and Internet access
- Projector and screen
- Mexican Music (optional)
- Examples of Mexican folk art, specifically from Oaxaca
- Images of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens
- Sketchbooks or paper
- Recycled plastic bottles, cardboard (tubes), wire, and cartons.
- Papier-mâché Paste (white glue or flour and water solution)
- Newspaper
- Masking Tape
- Pencils, Pens, and Markers
- Acrylic or Tempera Paint
- Paint Brushes and Palettes
- Scissors
- Brown paper towels
- Water containers

Discussion Questions

- How is folk art different or similar to other art forms that we have studied?
- How does folk art reflect Mexican culture?
- What stories can be told from Alebrije sculptures?
- Why might Isaiah Zagar have chosen to include Alebrije figures at PMG?
- What are these figures similar to in your culture?
- What types of folk art (or other practices) represent your own cultures?

Key Vocabulary

Alebrije Brightly colored Mexican folk art sculptures of realistic or imagined creatures

Culture A way of life of a group of people—their behaviors, beliefs, values are generally all the same and passed on for generations.

Folk Art Genre of art that reflects traditional values of a society.

Oaxaca A state in southern Mexico

Papier-mâché A substance made from paper that can be molded when wet and painted when dry.

Activity

1. Present examples of Mexican Folk Art and define terms that students may not understand. Introduce Mexican culture and how Folk Art plays a role in the lives of families.
2. Present the work of Isaiah Zagar and/or reflect on the student's experience at Philadelphia's Magic Gardens. Show examples of Zagar's incorporation of Oaxacan Alebrije sculptures, as well as other Mexican influences, such as his use of sculptures from the Aguilar Family.
3. After showing examples of Alebrijes, allow students to sketch out ideas for their own sculptures, including the final design or pattern. Encourage students to attribute meaning to their designs and choice of animal. Ask them to write down any thoughts or stories that come to mind while designing.
4. Make sculpture armatures out of wire, cardboard (tubes), bottles, crumpled paper, and cartons. Bind the materials with tape.
5. Mix the papier-mâché paste out of white glue or flour and water. Use a $\frac{3}{4}$ white glue to $\frac{1}{4}$ water or 1 part flour to 1 part water. Distribute to students, or have students make their own paste.
6. Distribute newspaper to students and direct them to dip strips of newspaper in the paste solution and adhere it to their structures. Only complete up to four layers of newspaper before letting dry COMPLETELY. Repeat this process until sculpture is solid and stable.
7. Once the sculptures are completely formed, allow students to sketch out their designs on the body of their Alebrije. Once the sketches are complete they can begin painting.
8. After the paint has dried and students finish their Alebrije sculptures, ask them to present their animals to the class and give reasons for their design and choice of animal.

Adaptations

Younger students can create Alebrije sculptures out of Styrofoam or paper plates and cups. They can decorate these materials with markers and pens. Older students could make Alebrije figures with clay and learn how to fire and glaze them. All age groups can write stories or poems about their hand-made creatures. For Spanish Language classes, students can present their sculptures while speaking Spanish.

PA Core Academic Standards

Arts & Humanities: Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening

Visual Arts 9.1.8.A

Speaking and Listening 1.6.8.A

Visual Arts 9.1.8.B

History

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.A

World History 8.4.8.A

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.D

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.G

Resources

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alebrije>

<http://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/alebrijes.html>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA_U86G-yRQ

<http://mexicanalebrijes.com/>