

# Sugar Skull Prints

Three Lessons that integrate Symbolism, Day of the Dead, and Color Theory

**Symbol Design**



**Symbolic Sugar Skulls**



**Printing in Color!**

Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday that focuses on family and friends gathering together to pray for and remember deceased friends and relatives. One of the most distinctive traditions celebrated during this holiday is using calaveras, or sugar skulls, to honor the deceased. Sugar skulls are representations of the human skull made from either sugar or clay used to represent a departed soul and to honor the return of their spirit. In contrast with many other skull-related representations, sugar skulls are often depicted happy and cheerful with an intention of celebrating life. By focusing on the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead, students will get the chance to reflect on their own lives and determine what they value and deem worth recognizing and celebrating. In this unit students will first design their own life-celebrating symbols and use them to create sugar skull designs. They will then carve their decorated skull designs into printing blocks and use them make final sugar skull prints using specific color schemes. Using relief printmaking in conjunction with the exploration of Mexico's holiday Day of the Dead and sugar skulls will allow students to learn about traditions and customs of a different culture, gain new printmaking skills and understandings, as well as represent aspects of their own lives in a symbolic and celebratory way.

## **Symbol Design:**

In the first lesson, *Symbol Design*, students will learn about the importance and function of symbolism, as well as look at and interpret symbols used around the world. After students learn about different symbols, they will then create symbols of their own to represent aspects of their own lives. This lesson will help students work towards an understanding of the importance and function of symbols as well as their roles across different cultures. In addition, it will allow students to reflect on their own lives to determine what aspects are important to them.

## **Symbolic Sugar Skulls:**

In the second lesson, *Symbolic Sugar Skulls*, students will learn about the Mexican Holiday Day of the Dead and sugar skulls. Students will use their symbols that they designed in the first lesson to create their own sugar skull designs. Then, students will carve their designs into printing blocks. This lesson will help students understand the lives of people of different cultures and how art can preserve and celebrate aspects of life. It will also help students understand the properties and techniques of the printmaking medium.

## **Printing in Color!:**

In the third and final lesson, students will learn about color theory and how to make prints using their freshly carved blocks. The students will be instructed to make their prints using one color scheme.

# Symbol Design

**Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup>

**Project Description:** Students will learn about the importance and function of symbolism so they can then reflect on their own lives in order to design and draw symbols that represent important aspects of their lives.

## **Rationale:**

A symbol is an object that represents, stands for or suggests an idea, visual image, belief, action, or material entity. Symbols take the form of words, sounds, gestures or visual images and are used to convey ideas and beliefs. Our world is full of symbols of every kind, from numbers and writing to pictures, models, and maps. For this reason, it is a critical component of one's development to be able to recognize and reflect upon the symbols that appear in their culture. Symbols have a broad range of functions and roles. They can help to assist with the development of new vocabulary, provide a means of communication, and to help with conceptual understanding. It is also important to look at how symbols are created, often a simplified version of something that exists in real life.

In this lesson students will create their own symbols that represent important aspects of their lives. Using paper and pencil, students will fill out a design sheet that requires them to draw out their symbols, as well as explain what they means to them. This study of symbolism in conjunction with students' lives will help them work towards an understanding of the importance and functions of symbols as well as allow them to reflect on what is important to them.

**Enduring Understanding:** People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

## **Essential Questions:**

- Why are symbols important?
- How do we use symbols?
- What aspects of our own lives do we deem important and worth celebrating?

## **Goals:** *Students will:*

- Work towards an understanding of the importance and function of symbols as well as their roles across different cultures
- Reflect on their own lives to determine what aspects are important to them.
- Create symbols to represent significant aspects of their own lives.

## **Objectives:** *Students will:*

- Watch and participate in presentation about symbols in order to develop an understanding of the importance and function of symbols.

- Choose important aspects of their own life in order to create unique and personal symbols.
- Create symbols in order to represent significant aspects of their own lives.

**Procedure:**

1. Students will watch and participate in presentation about symbols.
2. Students will brainstorm aspects of their own lives that they deem important.
3. Students will fill out the symbol design sheet and depict four symbols and explain what they mean to them.

**Motivations:**

PowerPoint presentation on symbols  
Class discussion and collaboration on symbols  
Example of lesson

**Vocabulary:** Symbol, symbolism

**Materials:** Symbol design sheet, pencils, design sheet

**Assessment:**

**Formative:** *Observing and Interviewing:* Students will be observed and interviewed throughout their artistic processes in order to check for learning.

**Summative:** *Checklist:* Students will be assessed on whether or not they created four symbols and explained their significances.

**National Core Arts Standards:**

Responding: Perceive and analyze artistic work through identifying and interpreting works of art or design that reveal ways people live around the world and what they value.

Creating: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work through formulating an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

# Symbolic Sugar Skulls

**Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup>

**Project Description:** Students will carve designs of Mexican sugar skulls into printing blocks. Their designs will include the personalized symbols created in the previous lesson.



## **Rationale:**

Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday that focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember deceased friends and relatives. One of the most distinctive traditions celebrated for the holiday is using sugar skulls to honor the deceased. Sugar skulls are representations of the human skull made from either sugar or clay used to represent a departed soul and to honor the return of their spirit. In contrast with many other skull-related representations, sugar skulls are often depicted as happy and cheerful with an intention of celebrating life. It is important to reflect on and understand one's own life to recognize what we deem important and worth celebrating. Thus, this focus on the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead will allow students to reflect on their own lives and determine what they value and deem worth recognizing and celebrating.

In this project students will create life-celebrating sugar skull designs using symbolism and decoration, which they will carve into printing blocks. More than just a photographic reproduction of a painting, printmaking offers the opportunity for creativity and originality. Printmaking also allows students to try out many different techniques and to see cause and effect in action more dramatically than simply painting or drawing. Using relief printmaking in conjunction with exploration of Mexico's holiday Day of the Dead and sugar skulls will allow students to represent aspects of their own lives in a symbolic and celebratory way.

**Enduring Understanding:** People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

## **Essential Questions:**

- How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures?
- How does art celebrate aspects of life?

## **Goals:** *Students will:*

- Work towards an understanding of the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead and the cultural use of sugar skulls.
- Make connections between the symbolism on sugar skulls with elements from their own lives in order to celebrate life.
- Gain an understanding of the properties and techniques of printmaking.



**Objectives:** *Students will:*

- Watch and participate in the Day of the Dead and sugar skulls presentation in order to deepen understanding of Mexico's culture and art.
- Use at least two of their symbols from their symbol design sheets to create a sugar skull design that both uses celebratory elements from their own lives and demonstrate their understanding of traditional Mexican sugar skulls.
- Carve their sugar skull designs out of their printing blocks in order to demonstrate understanding of the printmaking media.

**Procedure:**

1. Students will watch and participate in the Day of the Dead and sugar skulls presentation.
2. Students will use at least two of their symbols from their symbol design sheets from the previous lesson to create sugar skull designs.
3. Students will create at least three organized and creative plans for their sugar skull designs.
4. Students will pick best design and draw onto their *Final Sugar Skull Design Sheet* in order to have a design to transfer onto their blocks.
5. Students will participate in mid-lesson critique on final designs in order to give and receive feedback from peers.
6. Students will watch demonstration that instructs how to properly transfer their designs onto their printing blocks and carve their blocks.
7. Students will participate in mini-lesson that allows students to practice carving before they start on their final block.
8. Students will transfer their designs onto their printing blocks in order to have an organized plan for where to carve.
9. Students will demonstrate how to properly and safely carve their blocks in order to deepen understanding of the printmaking media and to successfully complete the project.

**Motivations:**

- PowerPoint on Day of the Dead and sugar skulls
- Example of the project
- Demonstration on carving the printing blocks
- Mid-lesson critique

**Vocabulary:** Day of the Dead, Sugar Skull, Symbolism, Printmaking, relief, wood cutters, printing block

**Materials:** Printing blocks 6" x 6", six of each six different cutters, wooden handles, one pocket sharpening stone, design sheets

**Assessment:**

**Formative:** *Observing and Interviewing:* Students will be observed and interviewed throughout their artistic processes in order to check for learning.

**Summative:** *Mid-Unit Critique:* Students will critique each other's sugar skull designs in order to give and receive feedback from peers.

**National Core Arts Standards:**

Connecting: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding by analyzing how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

Creating: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work through demonstrating openness in trying new ideas, materials, and approaches in making works of art and design.

# Printing in Color!

**Grade Level:** 6<sup>th</sup>

**Project Description:** Students will learn about color theory and how to make prints using their carved printing blocks from the lesson plan *Symbolic Sugar Skulls*. The students will be instructed to make their prints using one color scheme.



## **Rationale:**

With colors you can make a statement, set a mood, or attract attention. By selecting the right color scheme, you can create an ambiance of warmth and tranquility or you can convey an illustration of energy and excitement. Color is a very powerful design element and it is important for students to learn the theories and properties behind it. During this final lesson, students will use their carved blocks to create final prints of their sugar skull designs in a color scheme of their choice. By requiring students to choose a specific color scheme, it allows them to contemplate and choose what kind of mood or statement they want their artwork to make.

**Enduring Understanding:** Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and art-making approaches.

## **Essential Questions:**

- How do different color schemes set certain moods or convey different emotions?
- How can learning the different color schemes benefit your artwork?

## **Goals:** *Students will:*

- Work towards an understanding of color theory
- Work towards an understanding of the printmaking medium

## **Objectives:** *Students will:*

- Create three final prints of their symbolic sugar skulls in a specific color scheme in order to demonstrate their understanding of color theory.
- Make several prints in order to demonstrate their understanding of the printmaking medium.

## **Procedure:**

1. Students will watch and participate in presentation on color theory.
2. Students will watch demonstration on how to make prints using their printing blocks.
3. Students will make several practice prints in order to prepare for their final work.
4. Students will print three final prints in one color scheme.
5. Students will fill out final assessment rubric and participate in final critique in order to reflect on artwork and artistic processes and to give and receive feedback from peers.

**Materials:** Different colors of Blick's water-based ink, 4" wide hard rubber brayers, 100 sheets of Masterprinter Paper, plastic spoons for burnishing

**Vocabulary:** Color Theory, the color wheel, primary colors, secondary colors, tertiary colors, warm colors, cool colors, complimentary colors, analogous colors, monochromatic colors, printmaking, brayers, burnishing,

**Motivation:**

- Presentation on color theory
- Example of the lesson
- Demonstration on printmaking

**Assessment:**

**Formative:** *Observing and Interviewing:* Students will be observed and interviewed throughout their artistic processes in order to check for learning.

**Summative:** *Final Critique:* Students will critique each other's finished sugar skull prints focusing on use of symbolism and color scheme as well as technique and creativity.

*Rubric:* Students will fill out an assessment rubric that checks for unit requirements (symbols, color scheme, etc) as well as checks for learning.

**National Core Arts Standards:**

Creating: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work through demonstrating openness in trying new ideas, materials, and approaches in making works of art and design.

## Unit Accommodations:

**Gifted Students:** *Accommodations include but are not limited to:*

- Escalating the objectives.
- The choice of incorporating as many symbols as the student(s) desires.
- The opportunity to create more than one block and set of prints.
- The opportunity to research The Day of the Dead and sugar skulls and present their new knowledge (in any form of their choosing) for extra credit.
- Providing any reasonable accommodation(s) that a student needs that does not fit under the existing options.

**Special Needs Students:** *Accommodations include but are not limited to:*

- Using open-ended questions.
- Presenting information visually.
- Allowing for "wait" time before thinking before they work or participate in discussion(s).
- Providing independent work in segments.
- Having student(s) do a few simple exercises such as pushing hands together, and squeezing and relaxing fists before drawing or cutting.
- Providing a space with minimal distractions.
- Extra time for student(s) to complete their work.
- Simplifying project expectations for student(s).
- Providing any reasonable accommodation(s) that a student needs that does not fit under the existing options.