

Taking a Stand for Social Justice: Exploring the Chicano Movement and Dia de los Muertos through the Arts

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Placement

I teach at Dickinson High School in Wilmington, DE in a one-year-old International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program. The program is located in a wing of Dickinson High School and was created as an extension to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, exclusively for grades eleven and twelve, which has existed in the school for over five years. To encourage more students to attend the Diploma Program, the Middle Years Program was created to serve as an entry point for students across New Castle County. Last year the MYP included grades six, seven, and eight and is expanding to include ninth grade this upcoming school year and finally, tenth grade will be added the following school year. This will create a continuous sixth through twelfth grade IB program at Dickinson. Due to the success of the program, not only are we adding an additional grade level but we are doubling in size this year too! We will be transitioning from approximately 90 students to our maximum of 300 sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth graders.

To become enrolled in the program, the students apply and a few stipulations apply. To be eligible the students must be motivated, read on grade level, and have a teacher recommendation. Last year, the first year of the program, I taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade Individuals and Societies, an integrated social studies course. The curriculum is based on the Delaware Recommended Curriculum for social studies with enhancements made to the units to have more of an international basis and universal application. This year, with the expansion, I will be teaching four fifty-minute sections of seventh and one section of sixth grade Individuals and Societies. My new counterpart will be teaching the entire eighth grade and the remaining sixth grade sections.

An important part of the IB program is understanding other cultures. Even though the school is diverse and students live in a diverse region, the students usually have only a surface-level understanding of different cultures within the United States and around the world. They need experiences to encourage cultural study, they need to see the ways in which humans are very similar even though on the outside they seem to be very different. I'm hoping to use dramatic play and theater to offer the students opportunities to play the role of people with different life experiences. In researching the use of theater in public schools, I learned that theater helps students to "learn to become a human being," it challenges them to play out scenarios related to our humanity. It helps them to work

through difficulties and explore the possibilities in social interactions- it helps them to imagine themselves differently than they would normally.¹ Exploring culture using drama and theater will help the students to experience the similarities of all humans throughout time and help them to better appreciate why people say and do the things they do.

The students in the MYP are hard-working and highly engaged, they go above and beyond the expectations when completing assignments and in interactions with their peers. This sets the bar high for the development of highly-engaging lessons and learning experiences, the students are hungry for knowledge and continuously push themselves and me! Some students, though, are afraid to take risks. They need to be encouraged to push themselves in trying something unknown or taking a more challenging path to learn in a new way, one that may not be as easily accessed or as apparent to them. This is where my role as an educator becomes the most important. I want to teach the students to take alternative methods and to be creative in learning.

Rationale

I have two main goals for writing this unit and attending the seminar. First, for my students to gain more cultural understanding and appreciation of a tradition many of the students in our community and school celebrate. Through this unit the goal is for the students to understand how cultures change and are influenced by religion, demographics and historical events. I hope they will appreciate diversity and promote tolerance among themselves for themselves, not just because adults told them to respect others.

Second, I want to encourage the students to expand their approaches to learning and take risks. I'm hoping that the arts will help the students to experience the concepts and allow them to delve into the topic deeply, allowing them to make deep connections. To encourage creativity and imaginative thinking, the students will be challenged to engage their whole body: physically and mentally. They will use the power of words as well as the motions and expressions of their bodies. The use of dramatic play and theater can help students see their strengths in the arts where they may not see much success in other academic endeavors. It can also be an outlet for creativity and help the students to think about historical and social issues in a different way.² Theater and drama will be a way to encourage healthy risk-taking and creativity.

Unit Overview

This unit encourages students to use the arts to express knowledge of the ways people use creative expression to take a stand against injustices. The students will analyze photos, songs, poems, and drama relating to the Chicano Movement and Dia de los Muertos. Through this historical example, they will develop skills in analyzing different art forms to appreciate the layers of complexity involved in the creation of them. To make a

personal connection to the content unit, the students will decide on a social justice issue that is most important to them and create photos, songs, poems, and dramatic performances to promote their cause and take a stand against an injustice that they have faced, are facing, or an issue they want to help others in facing.

Objectives and Goals

This unit is based on an IB MYP objective strand, two Delaware Social Studies Content Standards, and three National Core Arts Standards. For the IB objective, the students learn to communicate in multiple forms with clarity, structure their work appropriately, and use a method for citing their sources of information. The Delaware Social Studies Content Standards are based on the analysis of historical materials in terms of purpose and perspective to gain an understanding of historical phenomenon. The National Core Arts Standards are related to developing criteria for analyzing and creating works of art, generating artistic ideas and work, and choosing artistic pieces appropriate for a specific purpose or context.

Additionally, to meet the arts standards, cognitive, affective, and artistic goals will be infused into the lessons and activities. The cognitive goals are based on Bloom's Taxonomy and express what the students will be doing conceptually through the lesson. For this unit, the cognitive goals will explain how the students will gain content knowledge. The affective goals refer to the feeling or emotional aspects of the learning. We will focus on affective goals for recognizing the perspectives of others, responding correctly to feedback, and working collaboratively. Finally, the artistic goals express the National Core Arts Standards that will be addressed in each activity.

Enduring Understandings

Content

- People take a stand against injustices that they face.
- What we celebrate is dependent on environmental, societal, and cultural norms.
- Celebrations can be used as a means for cultural change.

Process

- Artists work to discover different ways of communicating meaning.
- Artists refine their work and practice their craft through rehearsal.
- Artists make strong choices to effectively convey meaning.

Background

Social Justice and the Arts

The use of the arts in the content areas may sound a little strange but recently ideas of literacy in an academic setting have been changing, beginning to allow for multiple modes to express understanding of course content. Allowing more modalities for expressing and developing literacy, allows for students who struggled in the past to feel literate in a way that may be more natural for them. The use of dramatic play, poetry, and music will help students to feel literate in narrating and understanding their world.³ The arts also give students a voice for change and to take a stand against the injustices they face. We, as a society, have been trained from a young age to be compliant. Many times we are afraid to or lack the skills in challenging injustices that we see around us. The arts can be used to help students who have experienced a loss, violence, or trauma to work through their issues and possibly open a dialogue that may not have been possible before.⁴

Amitai Etzioni defines the characteristics of a society of justice in *The Fair Society, Uniting America*, “We must work together for a fair society: a society in which everyone is treated with full respect, recognizing that we are all God’s children. A society in which no one—adult or child—is left behind. A place in which such moral commitments are truly honored rather than served up as hollow promises. A society in which one’s race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, gender, and sexual preference matter not. A society in which every person is treated with the dignity they are entitled to by merely being human.”⁵ Children as young as four can begin expressing concepts of social justice based on their experiences with their parents and siblings. As children grow their concepts of social justice and fairness become more complex and extend to include more members of society. Schools offer an excellent opportunity for children to develop and explore the concepts of social justice and fairness that will help them to become socially conscious citizens that participate in our democracy. Social justice issues can be introduced to young students on a variety of topics as they develop empathy through their own personal experiences and by getting to know others in the community.⁶

The civic responsibilities and practices involved in an effective democracy can be fostered and practiced starting at young age. Civic responsibility should extend beyond just voting and political discourse to include ideas of civic responsibility and civic justice. Literacy is connected to democracy, without a knowledgeable and literate society, democracy is not possible. Literacy skills allow students to analyze documents and speech to draw their own conclusions and formulate opinions. Literacy skills are essential for democratic discourse.⁷

Educators can’t just talk about issues of social justice and civic responsibility; the students need to be personally connected for true learning to occur. According to

Kathleen Gallaher and Burcu Yaman Ntelioglou in "Which New Literacies? Dialogue and Performance in Youth Writing," in many instances, basing classroom activities on the personal experiences of students can be "risky but worthwhile." The process of having students open up about their personal experiences is one that takes time and scaffolding. It must be done in a sensitive and understanding way, where the teacher facilitates discussions and provides feedback in an atmosphere free of judgement and negative influences. Over time, with the proper scaffolding, modeling, and direct instruction, the students will be able to provide each other with meaningful feedback that can enhance and develop the experience further.⁸

In this unit the students will use multiple forms of the arts to study and develop social justice practices. We will begin with photography, then explore music, followed by poetry, and finally work with drama. Each art form will begin with a case study on the Chicano Movement and the Dia de los Muertos. Then the students will create their own pieces of art based on a social justice issues of their choice.

Teaching Strategies for the Arts

Photography

Students get excited when looking at photographs. They are growing up in a time where photographs make up a big part of their identity and social life. The students I work with enjoy taking photographs and having conversations about them. They have a critical eye and an ability to pull deep meaning and understanding from what they see. Many of my students use social media platforms like Instagram and SnapChat that are image and photography based. Even though the students have experience with photos, they will need to be taught how to read a photo before they begin taking their own photos to encourage more planning and thinking about artistic elements such as content, mood, and composition when taking their photographs. Elements of photography that should be discussed include meaning, context, mood, and composition.⁹

To get the most out of photographic analysis, the students should be directed to analyze the following elements. First, the students should look closely at each photo and discuss their initial reactions, with encouragement to think about the message the photo was created to convey. Next, they should think about the photographer's "vision" in terms of what he or she was hoping to achieve with the photo. The students may need to be prompted to think about the idea of photos having literal and connotative meanings. Literal meanings are right there and more straightforward, they are what can be easily seen and assessed. Connotative meanings, on the other hand, are drawn by the observer based on the conclusions they draw and connections they make founded on associations of experiences and emotions. Third, the context can give clues to the intent of the photo this helps us to understand what we are seeing and how it fits into life in a broader sense. Fourth, the overall feel of an image, or mood, is created using particular icons, color

schemes, or subject matter. The students should be encouraged to think about the mood or emotion of the photo and the artistic elements that contributed to creating the scene. Fifth, the composition of the photo includes the physical representation of the people or objects as well as what is left out or cropped from the image. Sometimes what is omitted is just as, or even more, important than what is shown.¹⁰ Finally, reflection in the process is important because it allows for deep analysis of the photo. Ideas from the analysis would not take place unless the time for reflection is given and deep, probing questions are asked.

Music

“The experience of listening to music can potentially shape an individual’s values, actions, and worldview. It can also be a powerful tool in the classroom.”¹¹ Music is one of the most powerful ways to share information with others, it has been a vehicle for social change throughout history. Students today spend numerous hours listening to and sometimes even creating music each day.

According to Daniel Byrd and Denise Levy in the article, "Exploring Social Justice Through Music," there are a few things teachers should be aware of when teaching with music. First, the songs should be selected based on the content and relevance to the current unit of study, this will allow the students to get the most out of the experience. Second, if music is frequently used, it is beneficial to use a variety of genres of music to ensure that the students will have opportunities to analyze songs within their personal musical tastes. Third, if possible, a discussion of the song’s background and historical context can help the students to understand the music at a deeper level. Fourth, the students should be provided lyrics to the song so they can focus on the content of the song without having to guess what the singer is saying. Fifth, the classroom environment can help to make the process even more beneficial. Some teachers dim the lights so the students can focus on the music without visual distractions. Playing the song towards the end of the class period as a nice way to close the lesson and send the students to their next class feeling more upbeat and happy as music tends to lift people’s spirits. Finally, a format for examining the social justice aspects of the songs are full class discussions centered on open-ended questions. This allows the students to gain an understanding from multiple perspectives that can help them to form their own opinion and extend their thinking.¹²

Poetry

Poetry helps students to understand the lives of others because it taps into their emotional side. Reading and writing poetry can help students to see different perspectives and provide a different medium for expressing their own opinions. According to Vincent Ciardiello in his argument for social justice poetry in literacy education, "Poetry of social justice is not politically neutral. It is biased toward democracy. For the oppressed and

marginalized, this poetry represents power as the voice of the dispossessed." Poetry gives people power! It can be used to evoke an emotional response and a call to action of people. Poetry helps to humanize individuals and groups. It helps us to understand the experiences of others. Ciardiello explains, "Reading and writing age-appropriate social justice poetry can provide students with a compelling voice that starts them on the path to democratic citizenship." When students are given opportunities to analyze and internalize powerful words, they will begin to construct and develop their own powerful words.¹³

The Learning Centre at Vanier College suggests seven steps to analyzing a poem. First, the poem should be read closely several times, each time ideas and reactions about the piece should be recorded. Second, to dig into the literal meaning of the poem, the vocabulary and proper nouns should be studied carefully. Unknown words, people, and places should be explored using the Internet. Third, the title should be analyzed for connections to the overall piece. Fourth, the reader should consider the tone and feel of the poem. They should think about who is "speaking" in the poem and how they feel about what they have to say. Fifth, the structure of the poem should be analyzed for organization. Sixth, the sound of the poem should be analyzed. Students look at how the words flow and the rhythm of the lines. Finally, the language and imagery can be analyzed to find symbolism, patterns, and/or analogies.¹⁴

When introducing social justice poetry, poems surrounding themes that the students are familiar with will allow for deeper connections and more understanding. To get students writing, topics centered on the student's personal experiences will allow for the most success.¹⁵ In this unit, the students will work with poems centered on the theme of taking a stand. They will look at the ways in which people took a stand against injustices through the Chicano Movement and funny poems called Calaveras that are characteristic of Dia de los Muertos.

Drama

First, the performing arts should be introduced using a lighthearted approach, especially for students new to the medium. Start with fun but challenging performance-based games embedded with "unexpected elements" to encourage humor and spontaneity. Unexpected elements should be fun challenge items added to a performance. For example, groups may have to include a certain word or item in their performance. The more irrelevant, the better! This will help the performers to get out of their comfort zone and to have fun with it. Second, in the beginning, talk and reflection time between performances should be reduced to avoid the inner critiques of individuals that might stifle creativity. Third, an environment that is comfortable and people are willing to take risks, a space where "mistakes are invited" gives room for true experimentation to take place. The students should be encouraged to play with ideas, enjoy the process, and have fun. The students don't have to have experience to enjoy drama, these skills are not out of reach for most people. There is always room for improvement though! Finally, the activities should be

given room to naturally unfold and develop. The teacher should resist the urge to move the next activity too quickly.¹⁶

For the students to become engaged and gain the most from a learning activity, there must be connections to the students' personal and cultural identities. When students are personally connected to a topic, they are able to feel a greater motivation to work harder and invest themselves in the task. Role play and drama allows the students to step back in a situation or reconsider what they would have done in a particular situation or during a particular historical time period. They can embody the feelings and emotions of people they know as well as historical figures. This role play allows the students to experience the lives of others instead of just reading about them. They can use drama as a means to raise issues and develop empathy for the struggles of others.¹⁷ To make a meaningful connection, the students will be challenged to express a way in which they've taken a stand in their lives.

Case Study: The Chicano Movement and El dia de los Muertos

Background on the Chicano Movement

The name "Chicano" gained popularity in the 1960s as a term to describe Mexicans living in the United States. Mike Leyba, in his Huffington Post piece, defines it as, "I am an American with roots in Mexico and the southwestern US. Others call me Latino or Hispanic. I call myself Chicano because I believe you do not get to decide what I am based on what I look like. Race is a social construct, and the words Latino and Hispanic refer more to how I look/talk/act more than where I am from. I assert my right of self-identification, and I am a Chicano because I say I am. This makes the term Chicano an inherently political term. The Chicano identity was created by people that felt too Mexican to be American, and too American to be Mexican. We were misfits."¹⁸

The Chicano Movement, or El Movimiento, started gaining traction in the 1960s to empower Mexican Americans in the areas of farm workers' rights, Native American land rights, improving schools, voting rights, and political rights.¹⁹ The movement was focused on human and civil rights as well as for political liberation and goals changed as the movement progressed. Issues in the beginning were centered on improving conditions of farm workers and combating segregation in education, politics and society. Later, social justice issues such as gender equality, enrollment in colleges and universities, and rights of immigrants became central to the movement. Further, the movement served as a means to recreate the cultural identity of Chicanos through art, music, and theater.²⁰ Which makes this movement a perfect case study for this unit detailing the connection between the arts and social justice.

Different sources mark the beginning of the Chicano movement along different events in Mexico's history. For some, it's as early as the 1490s when the early explorers set foot

in the Americas. Others believe it began as the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan fought the Spanish invaders in the 1520s. Other sources use the Mexican-American War in 1848 as a starting point. Finally, and more prevalent, are the sources that claim the Chicano movement began in the 1960s and paralleled the Civil Rights Movement of African Americans. To keep this unit concise, we will begin our study of the movement in the 1960s.

Roberto Rodriguez explains the movement in his book as, "This was brown power. And it was also the building of Aztlan. For some, building Aztlan (the U.S. Southwest — or the lands stolen from Mexico during the Mexican-American War) literally meant fighting for a sovereign nation, while for others, it was the spiritual building of a people."²¹ The groups promoting the idea of Aztlan stressed that they were not immigrants but indigenous people descending from the Aztecs. The Chicanos for this cause were working to reclaim their rights and their homeland, no longer feeling as though they were outsiders to this place but more the true owners of the land. The "Plan Espiritual de Aztlan" created by the poet Alurista and "Corky" Gonzales served as a document outlining their intentions.²²

Other work to improve the lives of Mexican-Americans occurred in the areas of working conditions and wages as well as education. Mexican immigrants were treated a cheap labor, paid low wages for skilled and unskilled jobs. According to Mario T. García and Sal Castro in *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, "Cheap labor and cheap wages made the southwestern labor market an attractive one for industries, businesses, and investors. Employers justified Mexican jobs and Mexican wages by arguing that Mexicans were not capable of performing more skilled labor and thus not deserving of higher wages – of course, a self-serving argument." The school system contributed to the wage problem as areas with high Chicano populations didn't have schools that offered classes above the sixth grade level. This allowed the cycle of low skilled jobs being the only ones available to Chicanos seeking employment.²³

Many Chicanos participated in organizations that worked to reestablish cultural traditions as a means to "offer a marginalized population resources with which to counter decades of discrimination from the dominant society (in the form of segregated and underfunded schools, substandard housing, exploitative employment practices, police brutality, unfair treatment in the judiciary system, and near invisibility within mainstream cultural institutions and politics)." Chicanos took advantage of the popularity of Dia de los Muertos and used it as a means to raise awareness of issues in their community. They crafted alters dedicated to social issues and to "criticize dominant U.S. power structures." Issues included the rights of farm workers, immigration and abuses along the United States/Mexico border, gangs and drugs, and educational issues.²⁴

The differing intentions made unification around the movement difficult. Barriers included the political divisions amongst a varied people as well as discrimination and

hatred among the people themselves. The government also made for barriers in the success of the movement.²⁵ Many conclude that the movement is still necessary today as evident in Leyba's piece, "We are still denied housing, visas, healthcare, and the right to vote. For every dollar of wealth a white person has in the US, a Latino person has less than a dime. We are still grossly underrepresented in elected positions, corporate and nonprofit leadership, academia, entertainment, and media... It's time for us brown people to step up. Let's begin reclaiming our history and our movement, and stand with others also fighting for liberation. We don't need a savior to come rescue us; we need to claim that which is rightfully ours - our history, our culture, our right to self-identify, and our united voice."²⁶

Background on Dia de los Muertos

An important part of life for the early cultures of the Americas was balancing the worlds of the living and the dead. This is why many of the rituals surrounding Dia de los Muertos evolved, they came from a need to honor the past, live in the present, and look to the future. In Latin America el Dia de los Muertos was defined more as a folk culture, a type of celebration that arose to be used by the community for the betterment of the community itself. It was not designed with widespread appeal in mind, it wasn't designed to become commercialized as it is today. Folk traditions such as Dia de los Muertos exist to help sustain a community and to build cultural identities. These traditions should not be seen as mere distractions but agents of social change. Rituals and symbols of the festivities can offer comfort to some and bring about social change and advancement in the culture as a whole. Dia de los Muertos is a celebration that has changed over time. It has been celebrated for over 3,000 years by many different groups in a wide range of regions throughout the world.²⁷

These rituals became so much a part of their culture that even colonization and the introduction and development of European religious beliefs and ways of life could not change them. As the European missionaries and pre-Columbian peoples interacted, a tolerance for Dia de los Muertos developed and the celebration was moved to November first and second to occur at the same time as the Roman Catholic All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Over time the Catholic celebrations and Dia de los Muertos became intertwined and the rituals and practices began to take on a similar role and structure. Even though not all Latinos celebrate Dia de los Muertos, many still view November first and second as a time to devote to appreciating and remembering those who have passed. In Latin America, Dia de los Muertos varies greatly depending on the country and region of the festivities. There are some general practices that can be found in almost all celebrations of this type including gravesite clean-up of ancestor's burial sites, decorating graves with flowers and candles, creating memorial shrines, preparing special foods, praying to the deceased, and attending Catholic mass.²⁸

Christians were fearful of death and their religious beliefs included ideas of hell, representations of the grim reaper, and negative viewpoints about the end of the world. In contrast, the pre-Columbian cultures saw death as a means to move to the next world and connect with loved ones who had already passed. Contrary to what many may believe, the pre-Columbian celebrations and rituals surrounding Dia de los Muertos represent a positive experience where the living are happily reconnected with their loved ones who had passed.²⁹

The celebration of Dia de los Muertos in the United States is an example of transculturalism, this is a term to describe the combining of cultures and the changes that take place as cultural groups interact. Dia de los Muertos as it is celebrated in the United States is not a replica of the Latin American celebrations, they have taken on their own unique characteristics reflecting the concept of hybridity. According to Ragina Marchi, in *Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations*, "The term "hybridity," a process of selectively combining elements of cultural practices and beliefs to make meaning, has been the subject of intense academic debate. From colonial times until the present, related terms such as miscegenation, mestizaje, and creolization have been used to describe processes of racial, linguistic, and cultural mixing, tending to emphasize the assimilation of autochthonous cultures into colonizing cultures."³⁰ Hybridization involves the cultural exchange between two groups resulting in something that is no longer the same as the original. This process can be fast and violent as in war and occupation or slow and peaceful as groups influence one another and cultural exchanges in everyday life take place.³¹

The Chicano Movement and Dia de los Muertos

The Chicano celebrations were not replicas of the Dia de los Muertos celebrations in Mexico. They added and deleted aspects of the celebration to make it more relevant to their lives. As a move to reclaim the pre-Columbian attributes of Dia de los Muertos, the rituals and practices more characteristic of pre-Columbian Dia de los Muertos traditions were emphasized while the Catholic influenced practices were diminished. Evidence of this can be seen in the use of the rosary, creation of alters, and prayer rituals. For example, the rosary was not widely practiced since it was seen as more of a Catholic symbol while the building of shrines was characteristic of pre-Columbian celebrations. They also changed who the alters were made for by including pop culture icons and leaders, not just limiting it to ancestors and loved ones directly known as had been done in the past. Prayer rituals were given a modern twist by morphing into poetry performances and spoken word events. The change was a movement from prayers to honor the dead to a means for promoting a cause and/or work toward promoting their cultural identity.³²

Although some may argue that adaptation to the celebration by Latinos in America render the holiday no longer authentic, many Chicanos saw it as a means to celebrate in a

way that was meaningful and important, not just a replication or performance of what was supposed to be done. As the 1970s progressed, Dia de los Muertos became more accepted in popular culture through art, festivals, and celebrations. This led to a sense of cultural acceptance and well-being. Ragina Marchi explains, "For the predominantly college-educated Chicanos who popularized Day of the Dead celebrations in the United States, mixing elements of US and Mexican popular culture within Day of the Dead altar exhibitions was liberating. It allowed them to express both Mexican and US aspects of their lived experiences, promoting a unique Chicano identity distinct from European and US Anglo identities they associated with colonialism and imperialism."³³

Teacher & Student Resources

Chicano Movement Images
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/mecha_photos.htm • http://www.library.ucsb.edu/special-collections/cema/digitalChicanoArt • http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-oscar-castillo-chicano-life-photographer-20151120-story.html • http://www.mexicanmuseum.org/permanent-collection/contemporary-latino-art
Chicano Movement Music
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.folkways.si.edu/rolas-de-aztlan-songs-of-the-chicano-movement/american-folk-latin/music/album/smithsonian
Dia de los Muertos Images
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-calaveras-of-jose-guadalupe-posada/
Dia de los Muertos Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://latino.si.edu/dayofthedead/ • http://www.mexicansugarskull.com/support/dodhistory.html
Dia de los Muertos Books for Kids
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Day of the Dead Folk Art</i> by Kitty Williams • <i>Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh

Activity 1: Case Study- The Chicano Movement and El Dia de los Muertos

In this series of lessons, the students will use the arts as a means to understand the way in which the Chicanos used the arts to take a stand against injustices in America. The students will analyze photographs, music, poems, and drama from the Chicano Movement to gain an understanding of the time period and the artistic techniques that can

be employed to generate interest in a mass movement. The carefully selected pieces will serve as a means to deliver the content knowledge about the topic, conceptual understanding will be supplemented through videos and articles about Dia De Los Muertos and the Chicano Movement as needed.

Photography

The first of the arts will be photography, the students will analyze images to gain an understanding of the Chicano Movement and its connection to Dia De Los Muertos, the cognitive goal of the lesson. The artistic goal is that the students will learn a process for analyzing a photo, this skill will help them to develop their own pictures at the end of this unit. The affective skill is for the students to communicate ideas appropriate to the task as they work in small groups.

For the lesson opener, the students will look at “No Mas Muertes,” a photograph showing an alter designed for Dia De Los Muertos that expresses the issue of farm worker’s rights as a full class. I will first prompt the students to “read” the photograph by slowly looking at everything in the image. I will ask them, “What do you see?” Next, the students will be asked the following questions to help illicit deeper meaning from the image:

- Describe exactly what you see in the photo. What people and objects are shown? How are they arranged? What is the physical setting?
- What is the historical timeframe of the photo?
- What is unusual or significant about the photo?
- What do you think was the artist’s vision?
- What are the literal and connotative meanings?
- Can you feel or see any emotion conveyed by the people or subject of this photo?
- What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

After walking the students through the analysis of the photograph, the students will be divided into small groups to analyze a photograph related to an aspect of the Chicano Movement. They will be given time to prepare a brief presentation to share what they learned about the Chicano Movement through the analysis of the photograph.

Image Name	Photographer	Content
Image for Teacher Modeling		
“No Mas Muertes” Alter	Unknown	Die De Los Muertos Alter
Images for Group Analysis		
“Roosevelt High School Walkouts” 1970	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Education Reform
“Crowd at September 16 th Parade in East Los Angeles” 1970	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Protest for Representation

“Down with Brutality” 1968	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Student Protest
“Chicano Huelga in Austin, TX”	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Worker’s Rights
“Street Meeting in Crystal City, TX”	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Worker’s Rights
“A Free School, Not a Jail” 1968	Oscar Castillo	Chicano Movement- Education Reform

To ensure the students grasp the conceptual understanding they will respond to the following prompt, “Are there any connections between the issues of the Chicano Movement and the first image? Identify any connections using evidence from the images.” Hopefully the students will explain that farm worker’s rights were a large part of the Chicano Movement and evidence of this can be seen in the Dia De Los Muertos alter image. The idea of Chicanos using Dia De Los Muertos as a means to promote social justice issues will be emphasized as the lesson closure.

Music

For the next part of this lesson, the students will analyze songs related to Dia de los Muertos and the Chicano Movement to gain an understanding of how music is a means of social justice. The cognitive goal of this lesson is music serves as a vehicle for social justice issues, it is a window into an issue. The first song, “El Dia De Los Muertos,” will be used for teacher modeling of the process. To meet the affective goal of listening attentively to a song and working to understand the perspective of others when discussing the analysis of song lyrics, the students will listen to the song three times. The first time they listen will be for entertainment, the students will not be told to listen for anything in particular. After listening to the song the students will be asked to record their first impressions of the song on a piece of paper or on the SMARTboard. The students will listen to the song a second time, this time they will be prompted to think about the structure and feel of the song. They will be asked the following questions:

- How is this song organized?
- Are you able to detect any patterns?
- How does the music feel?
- What is the mood?

On the last listen of the song, the students will be given a copy of the lyrics and will be encouraged to analyze the words of the song. Some guiding questions will include:

- What is this song about?
- What is the main idea of this song?
- What are the literal and connotative meanings?
- What is the overall theme?

- How do the lyrics fit in with the music?

After the students have analyzed a song with the guidance of a teacher, they will be ready to analyze a song in a small group. Each group will be assigned a folk song related to the Chicano Movement and select criteria from the list of questions above to analyze the piece, this is the artistic goal of this lesson. The groups of students will analyze the song and prepare a brief presentation for sharing their analysis with the rest of the class, keeping an open mind for alternative interpretations of the song from their classmates.

Song Name	Artist	Content
Song for Teacher Modeling		
“El Dia De Los Muertos” 1988	Siouxsie and the Banshees	Dia De Los Muertos Celebrations
Songs for Group Analysis		
“Yo Soy Chicano” 1973	Los Alverados	Chicano Movement- Revolution
“Yo No Le Tengo Miedo a Nada” 1966	El Teatro Campesino	Chicano Movement- Worker’s Rights
“El Picket Sign” 1967	Luis Valdez	Chicano Movement- Worker’s Rights
“Yo Soy Tu Hermano, Yo Soy Chicano” 1999	Conjunto Aztlan	Chicano Movement- Vietnam, Worker’s Rights, Poverty
“El Tilingo Lingo” 1978	Los Lobos Este De Los Angeles	Chicano Movement- Worker’s Rights
“Soy Del Pueblo” 1977	Flor Del Pueblo	Chicano Movement- Uniting the People

To extend the conceptual understanding from the lesson, the students will respond to the following, “Are there any connections between the issues of the Chicano movement and the first song? Identify any connections using evidence from the lyrics.” The students may be able to explain using the lyrics describing Dia De Los Muertos as a time to honor the unadorned and the lost ones.

Poetry

The students will gain a broader understanding of the Chicano Movement and Dia De Los Muertos by analyzing poetry, the cognitive goal for this lesson. The students will read “El Otro Mexico” by Gloria Anzaldua as a model for the process of analyzing a poem and expressing how a text presents information, our artistic goal. This poem serves as an excellent culmination of the themes discussed throughout this unit. As a class we will discuss the following questions:

- List the proper nouns listed in this piece. How do they help in conveying meaning?
- Are there any words you don’t know? If so, look them up!
- What is the theme of this poem?
- What is the mood?
- How is the poem structured?
- What does the poem sound like? Are any rhythms present?
- What are the social justice issues presented in this piece?

Similar to the last two lessons, the students will work in small groups to analyze the content and structure of Calaveras poems by Duncan Tonatiuh. The affective goal for group work is to use intercultural understanding to interpret the poem. They should think about the cultural characteristics of Mexican-Americans in their interpretations to gain a deeper understanding of the poem. The students will briefly share their interpretation of the poem with the rest of the class.

Poem Name	Author	Content
Poem for Teacher Modeling		
“El Otro Mexico”	Gloria Anzaldua	USA/Mexico Border
Poems for Group Analysis		
“El Valiente” p. 13	Duncan Tonatiuh	Bravery in pursuing enemy
“Unnamed” p. 16	Duncan Tonatiuh	Feeling bad
“Unnamed” p. 16	Duncan Tonatiuh	The carpenter’s hat
“Calavera Love” p. 17	Duncan Tonatiuh	Love
“Unnamed” p. 30	Duncan Tonatiuh	Dancing

To ensure the lesson goals have been met, the students will respond to the following, “Are there any connections between the issues of the Chicano movement and the first poem? Identify any connections using evidence from the prose.” The students should identify the last lines in English where Gloria Anzaldua expresses that the land belonged to Mexico and before that, it belonged to the Native Americans. This was a view held by the Chicanos as they worked to reestablish the indigenous aspects of their culture as evident in the modern aspects of Dia De Los Muertos.

Drama and Dance

To warm up to drama and dance, our next art form, the students will participate in a few games and activities to become acquainted with the medium. As a model we will use “El Otro Mexico” by Gloria Anzaldua that was covered in an earlier activity.

First, the students will explore “image theater” using the first six lines of the poem. This portion of the poem will allow cognitive understanding of the Chicano’s perception of land in the Southwest United States and the influence of culture and history in shaping this view. We will review the lines and discuss what we infer the narrator must be feeling. In small groups the students will be challenged to use their bodies to sculpt what emotions they believe the narrator is expressing without using any words. After having some time to determine what their body positioning will be, the students will be asked to pose for their group members. After posing for a moment, the other group members will guess what emotions the student was expressing. The activity will continue until each group member has a chance to share.

Next, the students will plan and perform a story dance based on the poem in its entirety. The artistic goal of this lesson is for students to develop effective physical traits of people and concepts in a poem. We will complete the chart below to help the students develop a knowledge of dramatic movement concepts, the first character was completed as a model.

Movement Concepts	Chicano Narrator	The Sea (Ocean)	Chain-link Fence with Barbed Wire	Mexican Kids	White People
Space: place, levels, directions, pathways	general space high level				
Time: slow, medium, and fast	medium				
Force/dynamics: energy, weight, flow, qualities	sharp, strong, free to bound				
Body movement: locomotor, nonlocomotor, shapes	swaying, shaking, angry shapes				

Finally, the students will perform the story dance several times allowing time between performances for constructive feedback and reflection. The students will be encouraged to demonstrate mutual respect for themselves and others in working through the dramatic piece, this is our affective goal for the lesson.

Activity 2: Taking a Stand- Using the Arts to Propel a Social Justice Issue

In this next activity things get personal as the students revisit the lessons of Activity 1 using the “lense” of taking a stand. We will discuss the following questions to develop the theme of “taking a stand”, a concept that serves as the basis for the final two activities of this unit.

- What does it mean to take a stand?
- How did the Chicanos take a stand during the Chicano Movement?
- What role did the arts play in the Chicano Movement?
- How did people in the past take a stand?
- How have you taken a stand?
- What did you stand up for?
- What do you want to stand up for?

Next, the students will explore the arts, this time with their own agenda in mind. They will be challenged to create forms of art centered on an issue in which they’ve taken a stand for or an issue they want to stand up for. They will be given class time and guidance to create a photograph, write a poem, select and analyze a song, and /or create a dramatic performance based on their “stand”. The students will be encouraged to look back at their notes and examples from each of the mediums we covered in this unit as they create their own original pieces of art work.

The students will be required to select at least two of the forms of art listed below to develop and create an “exhibit” around their social justice issue. Issues may include, but aren’t limited to, poverty, racism, animal rights, environmental protections, access to education, LGBT+ rights, and rights for people with disabilities. The students will be encouraged to learn more about their social justice issue by spending a couple of class periods reading articles and watching videos on their topic to serve as inspiration. This is the heart of the cognitive goal for this lesson, to gain an understanding of the role of art in promoting social justice issues.

Option 1: Photography

The artistic goal of the photography option is for the students to develop criteria to guide making a work of art to meet an identified goal. To work toward this goal, the students will be exposed to the photovoice technique to provide a framework for their

photographs. Using this method, the students will explore a place or theme and take photographs that express the social justice issue they are taking a stand for. The students will be encouraged to take numerous pictures related to the theme and later, upon extensive critical analysis based on their self-developed criteria, narrow it down to five to ten photographs that tell the story of the issue. For each photograph the students will be required to give it a title and a brief one to two sentence description that will help the viewer have a deeper understanding of the meaning of each photograph.

Option 2: Music

The artistic goal of the music option is for the students to choose music that is appropriate for a specific purpose or context. With this goal in mind, the students will be challenged to select a song that relates to their social justice issue and analyze it to express its connection to the theme of taking a stand for it. They will write a short essay of eight to ten sentences explaining the feeling of the music as well as the literal and connotative meanings that connect it to their social justice issue.

Option 3: Poetry

For the poetry option, the students will create three Calavera poems on their social justice issue. They will work to produce clear and coherent writing in which the style and content is appropriate to the task, our artistic goal for the poetry option. The poems should adhere to the tradition of poking fun at people, generally the people seen as the root of social problems. This may require research of the social justice issue for students to be able to make accurate and relevant poems on the issue.

Option 4: Drama and Dance

The students will develop the artistic goal of generating and conceptualizing artistic ideas and work through this option. The students will select a poem or lyrics from a song to create a dramatic performance to further enhance the piece of work. The students have the option to create an image theater or story dance to convey the message of the song, poem, or other artistic piece that was selected. The students will express their ideas for the performance using the movement concepts planner covered in the last lesson.

Closure

Upon completing of two or more of the artistic pieces above, the students will reflect on their work. Our artistic goal for this lesson is to reflect on whether personal artwork conveys intended meaning and revise accordingly. The students, with teacher supervision, will work through the following questions:

- Describe what you were asked to do for this task and did you meet the task requirements?
- What do you find successful about your art?
- Describe specifically what you can do to improve your art.

Activity 3: Communicating through the Arts- Taking a Stand for Social Justice Social

The seventh graders will share their work from the last lesson at a celebration of learning called the “Taking a Stand for Social Justice Social”. The title implies that the art pieces will prompt a conversation between the artists and audience. The students will be encouraged to have a dialogue not only about the art, but also the issues presented through the works of art. The audience for the social will include the sixth and eighth graders, teachers, administrators, and high school IB students.

In preparation, the students will be given time to revise their work based on the reflection conducted at the end of the last lesson. The students will be encouraged to consider the input of classmates and their families in making the final edits to their work that will be presented at the social.

At the social the student artists will be given space to display or perform their work. The audience will be free to wander around in the space to interact with the art work and the artists. The student artists will be encouraged to stay in the space where their work is displayed to be available to provide explanations and engage in conversations about the work they created.

The social will also serve as a medium for assessment of the artistic work of the students. The students will be observed as they share their work with the audience. Specifically, I will consider the degree to which they meet the affective goal of listening attentively to understand the perspective of others when discussing art. For the art pieces themselves, I will be assessing the degree to which the students met the artistic goals, expressed in Activity 2, for each of the pieces they created.

Appendix 1: Implementing District Standards

DE Social Studies Standards

This unit is based on two DE Social Studies Standards in the area of history. The first is history anchor standard two states, “Students will gather, examine, and analyze historical data” Specifically, at the middle school level, “Students will examine historical documents, artifacts, and other materials, and analyze them in terms of credibility, as well as the purpose, perspective, or point of view for which they were constructed.” As the

students analyze photos, poems, and songs to gain an understanding of the Chicano Movement, they will also inquire about the purpose, perspective, and point of view of each piece to understand the role of art in historic events. The second standard is history anchor standard four, “Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history.”³⁴ The content of the unit, the Chicano Movement, is an important part of the broader Civil Rights Movement and deserves the time and attention in the social studies curriculum.

National Core Arts Standards

This unit is based on three National Core Arts Standards, one for each form of art that is developed. For photography the activities emphasize VA:Cr1.2.7, “Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.” In analysis of photographs, the students will be challenged to determine the appropriate framework for analysis. In creating photography, the students will have to self-edit based on criteria they develop that must be appropriate for the task. For the music portion, the activities are centered on MU:Re7.1.6, “Select or choose music to listen to and explain the connections to specific interests or experiences for a specific purpose.” The students will choose a song related to their social justice issue and explain why the lyrics and style of the song exemplify the issue they are expressing. Finally, for the drama and dance activities, DA:Cr2.1.7, “Use a variety of choreographic devices and dance structures to develop a dance study with a clear artistic intent.”³⁵ is the anchor standard we will focus on. This will require the students to take an existing art piece and develop a dramatic performance to express the social justice issue it showcases.

CCSS

The poetry portion of the unit is based on CCSS Literacy in History/Social Studies CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4, “Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.”³⁶ The students will be writing poems with a specific purpose in mind: promoting a social justice issue. Their poems must be appropriate in content and style for the social in which they will be sharing their work with their peers and the larger school community.

IB Objective Strands

The students will be exploring Criterion C: Communicating strand i, “At the end of year 3, students should be able to communicate information and ideas in a way that is appropriate for the audience and purpose.”³⁷ This objective strand is critical in developing an art piece that is compelling and interesting for the art show social at the end of the unit. The students will continuously reflect on the creative process and results to ensure that their message is clear and will be interpreted in the way they intend by their peers and the school community.

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² Hanley, *Culturally Relevant Arts Education*, 29

³ Kathleen Gallagher and Burcu Yaman Ntelioglou, "Which New Literacies? Dialogue and Performance in Youth Writing," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54, no. 5 (2011): , doi:10.1598/jaal.54.5.2.

⁴ Hanley, *Culturally Relevant Arts Education*, 27

⁵ Norton Garfinkle and Daniel Yankelovich, *Uniting America: Restoring the Vital Center to American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), <https://www2.gwu.edu/~ccps/etzioni/documents/A348-TheFairSociety.pdf>, 211.

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¹³ Ciardiello, "'Talking Walls'", 466-468.

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¹⁵ Ciardiello, "'Talking Walls'", 466-468.

¹⁶ Hanley, *Culturally Relevant Arts Education*, 27-32.

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- ²⁷ Marchi, "Hybridity and Authenticity", 1-3.
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