

Many Metals "Day of the Dead" Triptych

A Happy and Colorful Mexican Tradition!

(art + social studies)

More than 500 years ago, when Spanish Conquistadors landed in what is now Mexico, they encountered natives practicing a ritual that seemed to mock death. It was a ritual the indigenous people had been practicing for at least 3,000 years, and one the Spaniards would try unsuccessfully to eradicate. The ritual is known today as Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. Unlike the Spaniards, who viewed death as the end of life, the natives viewed death as a continuation of life — something not to be feared but celebrated.

In this project, students will make a triptych using a common symbol associated with Day of the Dead celebrations — the skull. A triptych is simply a work of art that is divided into three sections, or three panels, which are hinged together and can be folded shut or displayed open.

This is truly a multimedia project. Metal foil (aluminum, brass, or copper) is wrapped around canvas panels and embossed with various tools. Then, skulls are modeled out of instant papier mâché and glued to the surface. Finally, the piece is lavishly embellished with mica, paints, and permanent markers.

GRADES 5-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Show students images of Day of the Dead artwork and festivities. Recommended: [Art of Mexico: Volume 1: Ancient and Modern Traditions DVD](#), (70095-1001).
2. Supply each student with three 4" x 8" canvas panels.
3. Supply students with scissors, gloves, containers for mixing papier maché, and waxed paper for drying finished pieces.

Process

1. Begin by cutting three pieces of pure metal tooling foil about 6" x 10" each. Mix and match aluminum, brass, and copper if desired. Also cut three pieces of WonderFoam slightly smaller than the 4" x 8" canvas panels. (Six pieces can be cut from one 12" x 18" piece of foam.)
2. Place foam onto the back side of the foil and top it with a canvas panel. Using scissors, cut diagonally from the corner of the tooling foil to the corner of the canvas panel, then wrap all four sides of the foil up and around the panel. The foam will help cushion the foil and result in smoother embossing.



Materials

[Blick® Canvas Panels](#), 4" x 8", 1/8" (07008-0048); three per student

[Pure Metal Tooling Foil](#), 12" x 25-ft, (60503-); share two rolls among class

[Creativity Street® WonderFoam®](#), assorted color sheets, 12" x 18", package of 10 (60947-1000); share one sheet between two students

[Genuine Boxwood Tools](#), set of 3, (60502-1009)

[Blick's Mix® Instant Papier Maché](#), 1-lb, (33102-1006); share one bag among class

[Bic® Mark-It™ Permanent Markers](#), set of 36, (22165-1036); share one set among class

[Metallic Tape](#), 1/2" x 36-yd roll (23092-); share one among class

[Tonic Studios® Plus Scissors](#) (57079-1008); one per student

[Weldbond® Universal Adhesive](#), 4-oz (23819-1004); share 3-4 among class

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

[Pebeo® Vitrea 160](#), 45-ml (02950-), assorted colors

[Soft White Cotton Gloves](#), (04701-1004)

[Ten Seconds Studio™ Metal Tools](#), (60516-)

[Golden® Special Iridescent Acrylics](#) (00620-)

Process Continued...

3. Emboss imagery onto the panels using various tools such as a blunt pencil or embossing tools. If desired, a printed image or drawing can be placed over the foil and traced.
4. Model a skull or two out of instant papier mâché. Allow the skulls to dry on a piece of waxed paper, then glue them in place on the tooling foil.
5. Now, embellish the panels in any way desired! Use colorful permanent markers on the copper foil. Apply acrylic gel mediums containing mica or pearl to the metal or papier mâché areas. Try running pieces of tooling foil through a [Marvy® Uchida Corru-Gator Paper Crimper](#), (62951-0000) and cut out shapes to be applied with metallic tape or glue. Experiment with various paints. The possibilities are endless!
6. Finally, attach the panels together to form a triptych. Lay the finished panels face down and connect them using metallic tape. Allow the outer panels to angle in slightly so the finished triptych will stand on its own.



Step 1: After placing foam and a canvas panel on the back side of tooling foil, cut the corners and wrap.



Step 2: Emboss tooling foil with various tools.



Step 3: Apply gel medium with mica to papier maché skull.



Step 4: Add color with permanent markers or paint.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

- 5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.
- 9-12** Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

- 5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.
- 9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.



Step 5: Using metallic tape, attach panels to form a triptych.

