

Paper Molas

(art + history; art + social studies)

Molas are the brightly colored applique panels made only in the San Blas region of Panama by the Kuna tribe. The Kunas have resided in the Panama/Colombia area for centuries and are known worldwide for their *molas*, a colorful textile art form made with the techniques of applique and reverse appliqué. *Mola* panels are used to make the blouses of the Kuna women's national dress, which is worn daily by many Kuna women. *Mola* means "clothing" in the Kuna language. "

Girls learn to make *Molas* at a young age. A woman might spend up to 100 hours completing a *Mola*. The traditional designs are inspired by nature, including native animals (iguanas, lizards, parrots, fish), local vegetation (palm trees, coconut crops, sea grasses), and the shapes of the coral reefs around the San Blas islands.

In this lesson plan, students make their own *Mola* designs out of construction paper. Although the finished piece is not wearable, students should create their *Molas* in the Kuna tradition; by looking to the natural world around them for designs.

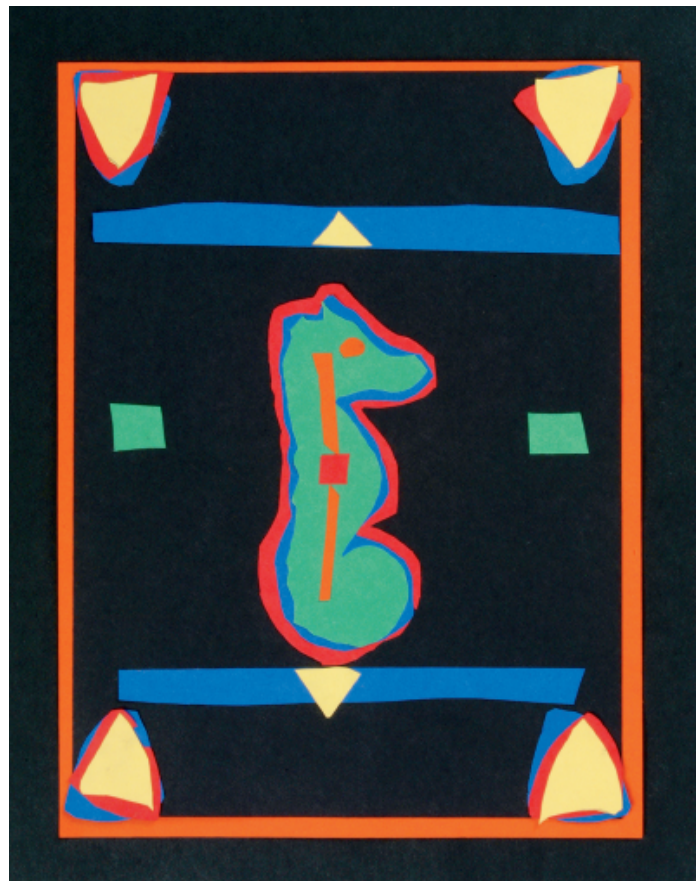
Grade Levels 4-6

Preparation

1. View examples of Molas and discuss their importance to the Kuna women and their culture. Have children imagine making Molas using the traditional appliqué - the patience required to spend 100 hours completing just one design.

Process

1. Students choose four colors of paper. From the first sheet, students cut out a design to use as the top piece (the example above chose a sea horse). Students may choose a traditional Kuna Indian design or a shape of their choice based on the natural world around them.
2. Students lay the first shape over the second color of paper and very lightly trace it a little larger, so that a thin border will be formed by the second color. Cut it out and glue the top to the second layer. Paper clips are helpful to hold the paper together when cutting the shapes.
3. Repeat step 2 to create another layer of color beneath the first two. Have students glue the 3-layer shape in the center of the black sheet of construction paper.
4. From the scraps of paper left, cut out and glue details for eyes, mouths, or other ornamental traditional designs. Create a border and designs around the center design.



Materials

Blick Premium Construction Paper, 80-lb (11409-1003) 50-sheet package of assorted colors, 9" x 12", share three packages across classroom

Blick Premium Construction Paper, 80-lb Black (11409-2003), 50-sheet package of 9" x 12" sheets, need one sheet per student

Tonic Studios® Kids' Scissors, (57150-4005), need one per student

Blick Glue Sticks, white, (23872-1020), .74-oz, need one per student

Blick Economy Graphite Pencils (20302-2009), box of 12 pencils, need one per student

Paper Clips

Process , continued

5. Have students explain why they selected their Mola design.

**Lesson Plan and Artwork submitted by
submitted by Dianne Turner, D.Ed.
California State University, Bakersfield, CA**

Copyright © 2004 Dick Blick Art Materials. All rights reserved.

National Standards

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

K-4 Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories

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

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

K-4 Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

5-8 Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks

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

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures

5-8 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures