



Lesson Plan Quick Look

Title of Lesson: Día de los Muertos: Make a Tapete!

Photo/Image: Tapete de Arena, unknown artist, Oaxaca, México, 2008. Photo courtesy of Paloma López.

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Content Area(s): Visual Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics

Grade/Age level: All ages

Duration: 2 class periods

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Although celebrated at the same time of year, Día de los Muertos is not Mexican Halloween; it is a time to remember lost loved ones and to honor Mexican history and culture.

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Materials Needed/Cost: paper, pencil, sand (in a sandbox or play sand), colored sand (see additional resources for instructions on how to make colored sand), water, molds (little hands work just as well)

Suggested materials: spray bottle, small fine mesh strainer for dusting, flowers, shells, seeds, beans etc. for decorating.

Handouts:

Standard Addressed:

Visual Arts: VA:Cr1.1.2a-7a, VA:Cr1.1.1a, VA:Cr1.2.4a, VA:Re.7.1.6a-VA:Re.7.1.11a, VA:Re.7.2.3a-VA:Re.7.2.11a, VA:Cn10.1.1a, VA:Cn10.1.11a, VA;CN11.1.Pka-VA;CN11.1.11a

Social Studies: History K-4 Benchmark I-C-World

Depth of Knowledge/Bloom's Taxonomy: create, understand

Background: *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) is celebrated every year on November 1st and 2nd throughout Latin America. There are many different visual traditions associated with the holiday that vary from country to country and region to region. One such tradition is the making of *tapetes de arena* (colorful artworks made out of sand) to welcome and celebrate the spirits of deceased loved ones. Tapetes de arena are most commonly found in Oaxaca, México. They are made of packed and sculpted sand and

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decorated with colored *polvo* (dust) and flower petals. The scenes depicted in tapetes are often brightly colored and festive and include playful imagery celebrating the dead. In different parts of the country tapetes are made of different materials such as colored *aserrín* (sawdust), seeds, beans, rice, flowers, feathers, and other organic materials. Tapete making is an art; every year for Día de los Muertos, tapetes de arena line the streets of Oaxaca welcoming home the spirits of the dead.

Skill(s): design, reflection, teamwork

Essential Question(s):

1. How did you choose your design? What or who were you thinking about when you designed your tapete?
2. What were some challenges you faced working in a group? How did you mediate those challenges?

Objectives: Students will...

- Learn about the tradition of tapete making in México for the Día de los Muertos celebration.
- Design and make a group tapete.
- Reflect on the Día de los Muertos celebration and think about their own traditions and experiences surrounding loss.

Academic Vocabulary/Word Wall: aserrín, día de los muertos, ephemeral, polvo, tapete de arena

[NHCC Glossary](#)

Brain Drain or Warm Up Activity: Discussion prompt: Ask students to think about a time they experienced loss (this can be the loss of a person, a pet, or even a treasured object). How do they feel when they think about their loss? What memories do they have of their lost loved one/pet/treasured object? How would they celebrate the memory/spirit of their lost loved one/pet/treasured object?

Basic Lesson Description and Procedure:

1. Divide students into equal groups (no more than four to a group)
2. Collaborate on a design for a group tapete (tapetes welcome and honor the spirits of deceased loved ones, ask students to think about how they would welcome a loved one. What images might they choose? Which colors?)
3. Go outside and section off plots of sand in a sandbox for each group to work in (if you are completing the activity indoors, lay down plastic on the floor to work on top of or fill a

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kiddie pool with play sand)

4. Spray or pour water onto your plot and pack and flatten the sand using tools or hands to form the base of your tapete.
5. Use a pencil or the tip of your finger to trace your design into the sand.
6. Use molds and/or hands to build up your design with wet sand. Be careful not to add too much water to your sand or you won't be able to pack it into the shapes you want. Sculpting a tapete de arena is reminiscent of making a sand castle, think back to any experiences you have of playing in the sand as you work on your design. How can you draw on your previous experiences to help you make your tapete?
7. Add color to your design by dusting colored sand on top of your tapete (for more precise dusting make a stencil from your design out of cardboard or thick paper).
8. Add flowers, shells, beads, stones, seeds, or any other decorative element you choose to your tapete.
9. Tapetes are ephemeral; they are not meant to last forever. Take a picture of your tapete to remember it by.

Assessment/Observation Activity: Written/oral response: Write a short paragraph or have a conversation with a teacher or peer reflecting on your tapete. What was the theme of your tapete? What images did you include and why? How did you feel creating something that celebrates someone or something that you have lost?

Lesson Conclusion/Potential Practice at Home: Students can make tapetes outside at home in their backyards or in a park or inside their homes using dried foodstuff (different colored beans, rice, seeds, etc.)

Accommodations & Modifications: In lieu of sand, you can use sawdust, different colored flower petals, or dried foodstuff (different colored beans, rice, seeds, etc.). If you are making a tapete outside and leaving it for animals to eat, make sure not to leave out any materials that may be harmful for animals to consume (ex. uncooked rice).

Safety measures:

- If working with small children in an outdoor area, check the sand ahead of time for potential hazards
- If working with sawdust, ensure the sawdust is safe for crafting activities
- Wear a mask when working with fine sawdust
- If coloring your own sand or sawdust ensure that the pigment/paint you use is safe for children

Culturally Responsive Instruction and Modifications: Día de los Muertos visual traditions are rich with imagery representing death including skulls and skeletons; be mindful of your students' beliefs regarding certain images. Encourage students who are not allowed to

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view images of skulls/skeletons or are uncomfortable with imagery about death to focus on depicting memories of lost loved ones/pets/treasured objects.

Relevance to families and communities: Ask students to think about their own cultures, communities, and experiences; are there any celebrations, traditions, or rituals surrounding death/loss they are comfortable sharing with the class?

Cross-Curricular Connections: art, social studies, world history

Additional Resources:

1. [5 Ways to Color Sand](#)
2. [Tapete Artist Fulgencio Lazo at UCDS](#)
3. [How to Make Sawdust Tapetes](#)
4. [A Celebration of Life: El Día de los Muertos](#)

Extension:

Mathematics: Geometry CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.G.A.1

- Ask students to draw a grid over their designs. Next have them calculate and draw a proportional grid over their sand plots. Instruct students to divide the sections of their grid evenly among their group. Each student should be responsible for transferring the portion(s) of the design in their grid section to the larger plot.

Feedback: [Take this survey to share your feedback on this lesson plan.](#)

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