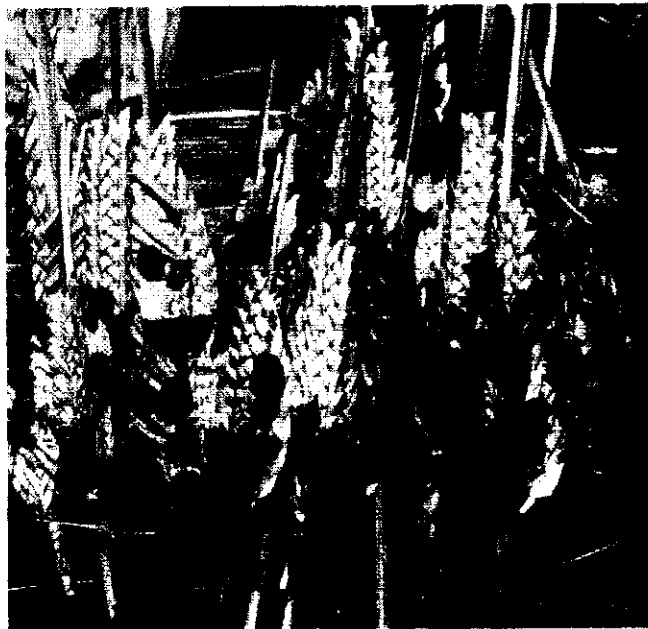




*Carnival and Semana Santa:
Allegory and Celebration*



**Outreach Office
Center for Latin American Studies
University of Arizona
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LESSON TOPIC- Carnival and Semana Santa: Allegory and Celebration

Materials:

- Handouts: handout#1: definition of allegory and Plato's allegory of the cave
handout#2: Semana Santa in Mexico
handout#3: Semana Santa in Taxco
handout#4: Carnival in Veracruz (packet)
handout #5: List of recommended Websites
- Slides (CD Rom)
- Colored pictures on Semana Santa

Levels: 9-12

Standards:

Language Arts: R-P1 (PO4, PO5), R-P4 (PO3), W-P1 (PO1, PO2, PO3, PO4, PO5), W-P2 (PO1, PO2, PO3), W-P4 (PO1, PO2, PO3), W-P6, Listening and Speaking (all), Viewing and Presenting (all).

Social Studies: 1SS-P1 (PO1, PO2), 1SS-P2 (PO1, PO4), 1SS-P3 (PO1, PO2, PO3), 1SS-P4 (PO7), 1SS-P10 (PO4, PO5), 3SS-P1 (PO1), 3SS-P2 (PO3, PO4), 3SS-P3 (PO2, PO5).

Recommended time : four one-hour periods or two block periods

Objectives

- Students learn about both celebrations from a cultural perspective. The ultimate objective is for students to place these events in their historical and social context and examine their own traditions from a similar perspective through compare and contrast activities.
- Students examine the concept of allegory through a closer look at both events.

Goals

Individually, students will:

- Identify and explain the main characteristics of both celebrations.
- Conduct cross-cultural research of these celebrations and draw conclusions.
- Apply the concept of allegory and element of political satire to these and their own celebrations.

In groups, students will:

- Discuss these celebrations in groups, specifically their cultural significance and allegorical content.
- Research and present any of these celebrations for a specific country.
- Reproduce the allegorical message of these celebrations through a visual project or performance.
- Create an allegorical carnival float that applies to their specific context.

Lesson Plan

1. Ask students to share their cultural and religious holidays. Do they think holidays are mainly religious or cultural? What holidays have become cultural and which are still perceived as mainly religious? Can you divide the two? Why or why not?
2. Have students read handout #1. As a class, answer the questions and discuss the allegorical elements in celebrations in the United States. Holidays are known as times when the social hierarchy is reversed, often times through political satire. Can students think of examples of this reversal? Prepare students for the study of Semana Santa and Carnival. Explain to them that these two celebrations are widely celebrated around the world, but that they will focus on Mexico and the United States.
3. Divide the class in six groups and have each present and research one specific day of Semana Santa. Students present their specific day through an oral narrative (handout #2). Ask them to focus on the presence of allegorical elements and political satire. Give students about half an hour. Ask them to include in their presentation a drawing or other visual that represents that day. Presentations should last between 3-5 minutes.
4. Students read handout #3 and, as a class, discuss how Taxco has interpreted Semana Santa in its own unique way. What do they think about the penitence people do in the streets? What is the point of such choice to suffer? What do you think people get out of this celebration? How can these events be read beyond the simple interpretation of religious events? At this level of deeper meaning, can students find similarities between traditions such as the Easter bunny and the rituals of Semana Santa? Discuss.
5. Introduce the celebration of Carnival. How is it different from Semana Santa? How is it similar? What are similar celebrations in the United States and/or in Arizona?
6. Students read handout #4 on Carnival in Veracruz. How could the Hapsburg governments use carnival as a tool for acculturating the indigenous (Native American) population? How do you think the Spanish settlers used Semana Santa for this same purpose of acculturation? Are there any celebrations in the United States that are or might once have been used to acculturate this country's diverse population?
6. Ask students to answer individually to the following questions and be prepared to share their answers in class discussion. Why did colonial officials finally ban the celebration of carnival in the 18th century? The text mentions that carnival was considered scandalous or subversive. Do you think the nature of carnival had changed since the previous century when it was encouraged, or was it just the official perception of the festival which changed? Why? Why was it then allowed to resume in the 19th century? Students may research Mexican history to answer this question thoroughly.
7. Students write a short essay comparing and contrasting Semana Santa and Carnival. They should include an explanation of allegory and political satire and explain how these elements help us go beyond the religious interpretation of celebrations. Students should also include some thought on the commonalities and differences of these two celebrations to their own cultural celebrations.

Activities

8. Have students investigate the Carnival and Semana Santa traditions in their own countries. What characteristics and traditions do these festivals have in common? How are they similar to or different from carnival in Veracruz and Semana Santa in Taxco? How do all of them attempt to maintain the original spirit

of mockery and social inversion associated with the ancient celebrations?

9. Have students discuss and write about the role of festivals in society. Why are celebrations such as the 4th of July, the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia, and the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena so important? Does your town, city or neighborhood have a specific and unique festival? How does it differ from the larger festivals already described? Ask students to describe some aspects of one or all of these festivals. What is the history of such festivals? How do the masses participate in each act? What role does the concept of tradition play in these festivals? National or local pride? Economic considerations such as commercialism? Students should be encouraged to interview older relatives, especially grandparents, about ways in which the festivals may have changed in recent times. Students might want to submit their essays for publication in the school newspaper or literary magazine around the time of the festival they choose to write about.

10. Have students write a 'diary entry' about a day at Semana Santa in Taxco, or a day at Carnival in Veracruz. They should include information regarding food, costumes, music, carnival merriment and tricks, description of parades, etc.

11. Dance and music are important parts of many festivals, and Semana Santa and Carnival are no exceptions. Instructor and students can research the musical elements of these celebrations. Are there any dances? Who are the musicians? How are they dressed? Does the style of dress indicate the music's geographic or climatic origin? Are women participants? How? Discuss the costumes worn by the performers. What might be the history of this style of dress? What elements have been added to that historical dress?

12. After looking at the slides on Carnival, students can make their own Carro Alegorico. This can be done in miniature using shoe boxes or life-size. It can be an individual activity, but it seems best done in groups. What does their Carro represent? What are its allegorical elements? What is its political satire like? How is it inverting the social structures in place?

13. For a more complex project, students could involve the entire school in putting together a Carnival celebration (easier than Semana Santa celebration due to religious connotations). Their celebrations should be adapted to fit the cultural and social realities of the school and these students' larger and smaller communities. Discuss together how this could be done.

Allegory

When the literal content of a work stands for abstract ideas, suggesting a parallel, deeper, symbolic sense. Allegories are disguised representations for meanings other than those indicated on the surface. The characters in an allegory often have no individual personality, but are embodiments of moral qualities and other abstractions. The allegory is closely related to the parable, fable, and metaphor, differing from them largely in intricacy and length. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity greed, or envy. Allegories have two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.

One of the most famous allegories is Plato's allegory of the cave. Read the text below and discuss in groups its allegorical elements. What is its literal meaning and what its symbolic meaning?

Plato's allegory of the Cave

This is the story of a people who have been held prisoner in a cave deep inside a mountain. They have been there for so long that the cave has gradually become the only world they know.

The prisoners are laid in chains in that prison, that are fastened behind a wall in the cave, facing the rear of the cavern. This rock encrusted world is the only world they know. The only light they can see is the light from a fire that is maintained on the other side of the wall, which is reflected off the rocks of the cavern in front of them, and above them. In this manner, their world has become a world of a faint glow of light and of huge shadows of objects that are passed in front of the fire. The shadows, which they all see with their senses can, thus become a reality to them that in part defines their world, that they react to.

Then someone manages to break away from the chains, and cautiously ventures to the other side of the wall, and with great amazement begins to observe the process that creates the shadows. The person who experiences this awakening becomes free in more than one sense. This self-freed prisoner sees the fire, and also sees the objects that obscure the light and thereby create magnified shadow images of the shape of these objects. The so freed prisoner begins to understand that the mythology of the world they had created for themselves was not real, but was merely a construct of their deduction from the limitations of their perception.

The freed prisoner also soon understands the fire to be the source of their light, contrary to the myths that the prisoners had come to believe to be real. Also, in the distance behind that fire the freed prisoner discovers that there exists an exit from this cave of shadows and delusions. Behind this exit, that he or she ventures beyond, the freed prisoner discovers a whole new world, a world of blinding sunlight that this person soon understands to be the glorious nature of the real universe. Also, that self-freed person discovers at this threshold, entering into the sunlight, that he or she is not a prisoner anymore.

More questions for discussion:

- Why is Plato's story of the cave an allegory? Explain.
- How does Plato illustrate with this allegory the paradoxes of human existence?
- How can we adopt this idea to cultural understanding? How can we come out of the cave of ethnocentrism and cultural blindness?

Sources: <http://www.inside-mexico.com/featuresemana.htm> http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_dppascua.html

In Mexico, Easter is the most widely celebrated and important religious holiday of the year. Rituals take place every day beginning on Domingo de Ramos (Palm Sunday) and ending on Domingo de Gloria (Easter Sunday). Although each and every community boasts unique traditions for celebrating Semana Santa, most follow this general course of events:

GROUP 1. Blessing of the Palms - domingo de ramos: The faithful may join in a special mass which includes the blessing of palm fronds or crosses and other figures that have been fashioned from palms. A large procession commemorating Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem often precedes the mass. Some of the blessed palms are later burned and the ashes reserved by the church for marking the sign on the foreheads of communicants during Ash Wednesday services the following year.

GROUP 2. Vespers of Darkness: On Wednesday of Holy Week, some churches celebrate a late-afternoon vespers service called "los matines de las tinieblas" in which the disciples' abandonment of Jesus is recalled. A candelabra set with 15 candles illuminates the altar. One candle is extinguished after the singing of each Psalm until, at the end of the service, only the center candle, representing the figure of Christ, remains lit.

GROUP 3. Maundy Thursday: The commemoration of Easter begins in earnest on this day, Jueves Santo. In cathedrals throughout the country, the bishops celebrate special masses during which the Chrism, a sacred oil used in the sacraments, is consecrated. In the evening many churches hold some type of re-enactment of the Last Supper. During Masses on this day the customary exchange of greetings of peace is omitted from the liturgy, a reminder of Judas' betrayal to Jesus. It is also customary to silence the church bells during the Triduo Pascual, the three key days of Easter holiday.

GROUP 4. Good Friday- La Pasion de Cristo: In many towns and villages the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is remembered through a Passion Play, or a recreation of the Via Crucis, (the way of the Cross) on Viernes Santo -Holy Friday. This may be an all-day event involving a cast of hundreds of amateur performers playing key roles in the Biblical story, that reaches its climax with a simulated crucifixion. In other places there may be some type of solemn procession in which most of the populace participates as penitents. In addition, the Virgin Mary's pain and suffering are recalled with the display of an Altar de Dolores -Altar of Sorrows.

GROUP 5. Holy Saturday -the solemn vigil: Includes a solemn evening mass during which each communicant lights a candle at the altar, holding it throughout the remainder of the ceremony. Following mass, participants may gather outside the church for some comic relief with the raucous burning of Los Judas. These large papier mache effigies, usually painted in eye-popping colors, represent Judas Iscariot and other forces of evil, including the devil and unpopular political personalities. Especially prepared by the local "cohetero" who creates fireworks for all festive occasions, the figures are hung up in the street or the central town plaza. Once the public has gathered, they are ignited in quick succession and, to the delight of all, are literally blown to bits, thereby symbolizing the triumph of good over evil, which the resurrection of Christ represents.

GROUP 6. Easter Sunday -Domingo de Gloria: Every celebration held in each of the thousands of churches throughout Mexico will be packed with celebrants on this day. It is a unique time for spiritual renewal, born of the hope promised by the Resurrection. The church bells will once again peal, now with especially joyous fervor. With church attendance at a high, you can also expect to see plenty of festive crowds bustling about every town plaza following the services including street vendors, ice cream, balloons and toys, and mechanical rides at times.

Semana Santa in Taxco

Triumphant Entry

In Taxco, the Semana Santa celebrations begin the Saturday before Palm Sunday. Palm vendors, most from the small, outlying village of Tlamacazapa, stake out every available space around the Santa Prisca, weaving palm leaves into complicated designs often representing Christ on the cross or sometimes decorated with delicate colorful blossoms.

Palm Sunday

On Palm Sunday, the excitement continues to build as you have one last chance to buy your palm weavings before Christ's triumphant entry to the city. The wooden carving of Christ on a donkey leaves at dawn from the outlying village of Tehuilotepec, almost 4 miles from Taxco, to march to Taxco for the grand entry.

The first sign that the procession is entering the city is a flood of kids on bicycles, each with a palm attached to the front, screeching their brakes on the hilly streets of Taxco. You hear the drums of the procession at about the same time that the twelve Apostles, dressed in their colorful tunics and headresses and walking barefoot, crest the hill. Then you spot the Christ figure, decorated with colorful flowers and palms arched over the top, followed by a huge crowd of people holding their palm weavings high to be blessed by the priests. This colorful and joyful procession to Santa Prisca is only a prelude of the many to come, each becoming more solemn, leading up to the crucifixion of Christ.

Virgins in the Street

The processions are a feast for all of your senses. Many of the processions during the week, which start in the evenings, are led by young children dressed as angels, complete with halo and wings, and carrying candles. If you are at the start of the procession, these kids will be walking, later in the evening they will be sleeping exhausted in their parents' arms.

The virgins are girls dressed all in white, with white veils, walking barefoot and swinging incense burners, the incensarios, which spread the potent white smoke of the copal incense amongst the crowd, purifying the air for the impending procession. Often there is a young boy or girl dressed as an angel, determinedly swinging a large bell to announce the approach of the spectacle.

In most of Mexico, the townspeople play the parts of the major Holy Week characters such as Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Taxco is unique in using the wooden sculptures from the churches of the town and surrounding villages to represent these holy figures. These religious icons are carried on wooden litters, shouldered and attended by the devotees from the churches, who often walk barefoot. For the nighttime processions, many of the statues are fixed with battery or generator driven lights that cast eerie shadows over the features of the carvings. Some statues are small, precious carvings that are carried easily by two people. Some are enormous figures carried on heavy wooden platforms that require eight people to carry and a support team to move overhead wires and support the front of the litter as they walk down the precipitous cobblestone streets.

With all the visual stimulation, you have to close your eyes to hear the haunting sounds of the accompanying drums, flutes, horns and violins with their rhythmic melodies -sounds that date from prehispanic times. To add to the mystery, underneath some of the mobile statues chains are shuffled rhythmically up and down and across the cobblestones by crouching devotees.

Suffering in the Streets

Then there are the penitent ones or penitentes -the men and women who show their faith and penitence by inflicting pain on themselves during this most holy week- an ancient tradition dating to the middle ages and introduced to Mexico from Spain almost 500 years ago. Since the prehispanic people were already accustomed to Aztec blood rituals and sacrifices, sacrifices to the new Spanish deities fit in nicely. At times the sacred and secular authorities have decided that it was not a good idea to continue this tradition, but it has always reemerged, often changed, but still intact.

Today, most Mexican towns, as well as those in Spain, have significantly toned down the level of self-inflicted suffering, at least as seen by the outsider. The people of Taxco made a very different decision. They embraced it and have adapted it in some very unique ways, making Semana Santa in Taxco like none other in the world.

Not all penitentes suffer equally. The faithful who carry the carved statues are penitentes, as are the women dressed in white who walk barefoot alongside the procession carrying candles. Although hauling statues on heavy wooden litters on step slippery cobblestone streets while barefoot is not to be taken lightly, the penitentes who belong to the sacred brotherhoods have a much harder week.

To be in a brotherhood of penitentes and to participate in the procession is not a decision these men and women undertake quickly or lightly. They prepare years in advance and involve friends and family as support. During the year before they participate, the penitente must take part in prescribed spiritual acts. Why do they do this? The answers to that question are probably equal to the number of penitentes, but is purportedly a product of profound faith. They manifest their faults, request health and well being for the Penitente and his/her community.

The three Brotherhoods are: the Animas or the Bent Ones, the Encruzados, and the Flagelantes. Their names give you a pretty good clue as to their rituals. All penitentes wear a long black dress cinched at the waist with horsehair belt. They walk the procession route barefooted with their head covered with a black fabric hood with only eyeholes. The penitente is never seen in public without the hood. This is a private penitence, no one needs to know who is behind the eyes.

The dress and anonymity, with only the hint of the eyes behind the mask gives these men and women a mystery and timelessness. They are transformed from the people of everyday life into a representation. You could just as well be watching a procession of hundreds of years ago.

The Spirits of Taxco

You may hear and sense the Animas or spirits before your mind really registers their presence. You hear the sound of chains, attached to their ankles, as they are dragged over the ancient cobblestone street. Since they walk bent over, almost ninety degrees, at the waist, you do not even have a glimpse of their eyes behind the mask to remind you that they are, in fact, humans. To complete their burden, in their hands they clutch either sacred relics, such as crosses, or carry large lighted candles.

Because of their stance these Animas are also referred to as "the Bent Ones". In fact, they are only supposed to rest by going down on hands and knees while the procession is stopped. This is the only brotherhood that will admit women, who drag individual chains in the procession. By contrast, the men are chained together in groups of about 20 with a much heavier chain. Because of their stance and their hoods, the only way these penitentes know where to go is by watching the hands of their attendants. These attendants also help to prevent them from tripping on the chains that tumble ahead of the penitentes on the steep slopes. The two remaining brotherhoods have accepted an even more severe penance.

Thorns in his Shoulder

The Encruzados are not nailed to a cross, but it is almost as if the cross is nailed to them. They walk the long processions burdened with a bundle of thorn-encrusted blackberry canes lashed to their bare back and outstretched arms. The penitente chooses how much he wants to suffer, so he decides how many canes to put in his bundle. A typical bundle would be about a foot in diameter and would weigh over 100 pounds. As you watch the penitente's body respond when the bundle is positioned on his back, you may wonder if he fully understands, until that moment, how cruel his punishment is to be.

The bundle is positioned so that the penitente's arms are wrapped over the cane and he carries a lighted candle in each hand. Given the weight and positioning, the penitente must walk with his shoulders and neck in an awkward bent position. To add to the suffering, since he is shirtless, the horsehair belt burns into his skin. The Encruzado must remain in this position, with the thorns digging into his flesh, for the hours of the procession, relieved only by his attendants who remove some of the weight by lifting the bundle of canes during the many long periods when the procession does not move.

Self-Flagellation

Finally, there are the Flagelantes, who are the hardest to watch. These men walk the procession bare-backed and carry a large wooden cross, which can weigh over 100 pounds, in the crook of their arms. In his hands, he carries a rosary and a whip with metal points affixed to the end. At prescribed times or places, he gives his cross to his attendants before he falls to his knees. He brings the whip forward then swings it back so that the metal points of the whip eat into his back. He alternates, first one side of his back, then the other. As the week progresses, these bloody wounds are reopened every night in what must be an agonizing procession. If it becomes too painful for a penitente, he is quietly taken out of the procession into a safe house along the way.

The Quiet of the Garden

All of these processions lead up to Thursday and the wonderful reenactment of the Garden of Gethsemane in the front courtyard of Santa Prisca. Early in the morning, the men are at work enclosing the courtyard with laurel branches to transform it into a cool, calm shelter. A little later the women of the town bring flowers and birds in cages to complete the garden atmosphere, before a statue of Christ is brought out from the church and placed in the position of honor. Throughout the day, the people come to visit Christ and spend some time in this wonderful garden creation.

The Capture

In the afternoon, this calm is broken as men dressed as Roman soldiers and referred to as "the Jews" move through the streets searching for Jesus. The proclamation is issued that Jesus is guilty and must die. The hated Judas also appears in the streets with his greasy hair and sickly grin, dressed in a bright yellow robe. He darts in and out of the crowd, all the time clinking together his ill-gotten gain of "30 pieces of silver" for betraying Christ.

Then Christ is captured. A statue of Christ, blindfolded with hands tied behind his back, is moved to a church "jail" where he is imprisoned. Throughout the night he is watched over by the Jews and the penitentes, who mark their presence by the continual rattling of chains. Late in the night, there is the marvelous, somber procession of the Christs, where over 40 representations of Christ on the cross are processed through the streets, accompanied by that haunting, rhythmic music, in an event that lasts into the next morning.

The Crucifixion

Friday is another day of continuous activity and high tension. As Christ is moved from his jail to be taken to the cross, there is the procession of the "three falls". This scene is enacted in front of Santa Prisca, complete with a mass, where the falls are shown by a dipping of the Christ statue. Statues of the Virgin also come out to witness this event and express their sorrow. Then Christ moves into the church where he will be crucified.

This is the most sorrowful of times and the penitentes are approaching their peak. During the "crucifixion" the penitentes move inside the church. It is one thing to see the flagellation in the streets- an quite another to see it in the church.

The crucifixion is followed by the very solemn procession of the "sacred interment" where the representations of the crucified Christ are carried through the streets accompanied by all of the penitentes who are now very actively fulfilling their vows to suffer. The day is completed when, at midnight, begins the silent procession with hundreds carrying candles walking through the streets. From a distance this looks like a river of flickering candles flowing through the crooked streets of this mountainous town.

The Resurrection and Recovery

Saturday is hauntingly quiet as people await the resurrection. The mass of the resurrection occurs late in the evening at Santa Prisca. The church is overflowing with people, but the most interesting activity occurs in the little plaza in front of the church. This is where the Jews -the Roman soldiers- receive word that Christ is risen and promptly fall to the ground en masse, now true believers.

In the United States, Sunday is the Easter day. For Taxco it is a day of recovery from the intense week where we have witnessed life, death and now the rebirth. Some joyfully singing youths walk through the streets accompanied by their Savior Shepard, but most people are preoccupied with a returning to normalcy.

Source: http://www.singularjourney.com/scmana_santa

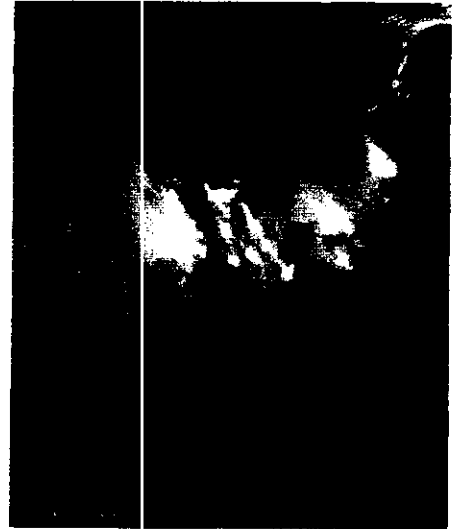
Pictures: Semana Santa en Taxco



1. Domingo de Ramos



2. Angel



3. Virgins

4. Animas





5. Encruzados

6. Flagelantes



7. Soldiers fall to the ground en masse, now true believers