

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

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M-34

B/I

CATEGORY: MEXICO: NOW

CONCEPTS: FINE ARTS, flora and fauna, natural resources

ACTIVITY: INSTANT "BARK" PAINTING FROM OAXACA

OBJECTIVES: Students will create their own paintings and will be able to a) analyze the technique used in relation to Latin American art and universal art forms, b) identify some of the flora and fauna of Mexico, and c) discuss the raw materials of art and the artists' environment.

MATERIALS: Brown grocery bag
India ink
Paint brushes (sm. & lg.)
Bright fluorescent paint

Pencil
Iron
Newspaper

PROCEDURE: Open a grocery bag at the seams, tear or cut sheets at least 12"X14" from the bag. Wet the sheets and squeeze each piece into a wad. Smooth the wad out on several layers of newspaper. Before it dries, brush on a wash of 1/8 India ink and 7/8 water. Let dry. If it is too light, repeat. Ink will collect in the wrinkles and folds. Iron the sheet to make it smooth and so that it dries faster. Use a pencil to outline a design using curving parallel lines, dotted lines and dots. Paint over the design with a fine brush and bright paint, being sure the colors do not touch and mix.

**RELATED ACTIVITIES:**

1. The Indians in the Oaxaca ("Wahaca") region of Mexico use as designs for their bark paintings, luxurious flowers and birds with elaborate tails and wings. Using the encyclopedia, a textbook or other sources the students should identify and make a list of the

flora and fauna of Mexico and decide which of these elements to include in their paintings. Students can also discuss what flora and fauna of their own region they would choose for the paintings and why.

2. Through a slide presentation and/or with a book on the history of art, you can trace the technique used through many historical periods and geographical locations, for example cave art, bushman art of Australia, ancient pottery of Greece, cathedral art of the Middle Ages, Baroque architecture, Picasso, Matisse, Latin American folk art such as masks, embroidery, etc., etc. While the parallel, rhythmic use of curved lines and dots is usually identified with "folk" or "decorative" art (rosemaling is another example), it can easily be seen to enter into the "fine arts" of different artists and epochs. Finally, students can explore magazines, newspapers, commercially packaged goods and the like for graphic art (the most common use of art in 20th century U.S.A.) which uses the same basic technique. Throughout this exercise students should gain an understanding of the universal dimension of art and be able to view their own creation within this framework i.e. their creativity makes them part of an international, timeless sharing of pleasing forms.

3. Few people stop to think about the relation of art to the raw materials available to the artist. The following questions will stimulate thought on this matter. They are not intended to bring forth set answers in most cases, but only to awaken awareness of this tie.

- a) Why do you think the Indians of Oaxaca use bark as a background for their art work? What role do the following play in this choice: a) availability, b) adaptability, c) cost?
- b) What other types of art can you mention in which the material used tells us about the life, environment and/or resources of people? Examples: Navajo sandpainting, wood carvings from Germany, painted Easter eggs from Poland, llama blankets from Peru, etc.
- c) What examples of art can you think of that use materials not readily available to people in the culture that created the art? Examples: jewelry made with precious stones, gold statues from the Aztecs, oriental jade carvings, silk weavings in Europe during the Renaissance, etc.
- d) What might be the differences between the art in b) and c) in terms of number of artists, number of consumers, purpose, and value assigned to the work of art by society?

- e) Where do we in the U.S. get our raw materials for art? Could we paint on bark? Why do you think we don't? How are the bark used in the Oaxacan paintings and the paper bags we used similar? How are they different? Does this say anything about the similarities and differences of the two cultures?



RESOURCES: Frances Toor, Mexican Popular Arts, Detroit: Blaine Ethridge, 1973. Gerd Dorner, Folk Art of Mexico, New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1962. Daniel F. Rubin de la Borbolla, Arte popular de México, Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1963.