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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2005 Volume II: Art and Identity in Mexico, from Olmec Times to the Present

"Viva La Raza", Students inherit their Culture through Art research

Curriculum Unit 05.02.04, published September 2005

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Rationale

I have been teaching art and graphic design primarily to students of Latin American descent at a middle school here in Houston Texas for about 10 years now. It is to these students that I have dedicated my interest in participating in Yale's 2005 National Initiative Fellows Seminar. This is such a special opportunity for me, as any teacher would be so delighted to have time to work intensely with colleagues from different regions of the country and the Yale faculty.

In trying to decide what exactly my unit's objective should be, I tried to depict what it is that my students really need as well as what they would enjoy learning. My students often have caught me off guard when they speak vaguely of their ancestry or what they know about their ethnicity and culture. It occurred to me that they know very little of their heritage. When students say familiar idioms or discharge rhetoric such as when they declare "*Viva la Raza*," pertaining to their magnified pride, it usually has very little to do with backup knowledge or historical details; it's more about the latest soccer "futbol" game. They equate pride for their country by rooting for their favorite teams. This seminar has provided the time and chance to create a unit that supplied me with more of what I needed to know about Mesoamerican history so that I can, in turn, have an exciting set of lessons to impart.

Each year, I am called to become more and more involved in activities, contests and art shows all having to do with Hispanic themes such as: "*Day of the Dead*" or *Spanish Heritage month*. This is a huge topic to delve into without spending time researching it on your own! I've equipped myself with researched information, read substantially and from this, tried to present a noteworthy unit that I can relay to you with confidence.

These lessons have been prepared to generate enthusiasm. You can generate enthusiasm in the classroom when you are truly prepared, and have equipped yourself with quality information. That goes along with personally discovering the information yourself. These lessons are versatile and can be applied by other subject matter instructors for their use.

Teaching requires constant tweaking of your lessons and I believe that teachers can read this, get excited and be prepared to discuss this very subject with certainty. This is because you are receiving ideas from another colleague! Any information that one can relay with passion and excitement is always received better by the recipients. Students can tell that you know your stuff!

I would like to expose my Latin American boys and girls to the world of their ancestry. I'll also make sure that for those who do not share this ancestry, I've provided equally interesting twists in the lessons, with the expectation that they become more responsive, sensitive, and begin to compare and contrast their own ancestry and civilization. Through the investigation of these civilizations, Olmec, Maya and Aztec, my pupils will gather profound awareness of what a civilization is- learn about the initial needs of a society to survive, perhaps critique, reflect and analyze about these past cultures and include ours today for comparison. Finally, this unit will benefit all students to perceive how in our society, especially in Texas, the Mesoamerican influence is alive and well today.

Here in Texas, our students learn about Texas history. When they learn about the discovery of the Americas, Columbus is introduced... Cortez is mentioned... but what about the Americas prior to the Spanish or European invasion? What about the indigenous peoples? Do my students even realize that there ever was a history prior to the conquistadores? Here in Texas, we fail to mention that we were part of New Spain once, long before we were part of the United States.

What a great opportunity to visit a culture that most of my students have a natural curiosity for. Many have shown to me that they have a deep respect for the Aztec or Mayan heritage even though they know little or nothing of it. They are attracted to graphic drawings that depict Aztec symbolism. They have them scrawled all over their notebooks, they like to trace and draw these renderings of the classic Macho "Chulo" type with a sexy girl and their "lowrider" vehicles. In the background of these graphic drawings you may see included Aztec temples, the Lady of Guadalupe, Maya Warriors, the Mexican flag and other very recognizable icons from the Mesoamerican past. My students love these! They trade them and sell the stickers or drawings to each other! I am used to hearing in my art class a whispering voice saying, "Hey, Julio, draw me one of those and I'll pay you a dollar tomorrow." Of course they are not supposed to be creating an entrepreneurship or selling anything that is not a school fundraiser in class, but it happens! They wear tee-shirts that have Mesoamerican icons! They prefer to eat Mexican candies or eat traditional foods. They use words that are directly from this past civilization and don't realize it.

I anticipate that giving them a well thought-out unit of lessons about the ancient Olmec culture (and perhaps I will expand the time line to include other ancient Mesoamerican cultures), will give my students some authority and enhance their personal connections in being Mexican or of Latin American decent Now, they will get a chance to learn, read, discuss and spend time with their ancestors.

I believe I have imparted why it was so important to write this, but I know that you are interested mostly in what you can extract for your students and what you are going to find useful from my lessons. This unit revolves around three of the great civilizations of Mexico. It is about civilizations and how the human race shares so many characteristics. How we can get students to investigate and learn the reasons that Civilizations evolve and answer questions like; "What is needed to become a civilization?" or "Why do we create cities?" or "What is culture or what is it that we need to be considered a great civilization?" Students will work on questions like: "What do we mean when we say to become civilized?", and "How is specialization of crafts and skills necessary to stay alive?" and "What can we say about our current civilization?"

In order to have students get a good grasp of the topic, I need for them to formulate conclusive answers that delve into the past. "How does the Olmec, Maya and Aztec civilization compare to ours today?" I hope to facilitate a pupil's curiosity and make it grow incrementally over a 9-week period. I will be encouraging a research setting where students evaluate the information through a series of steps, building slowly a thorough understanding of the subject matter, not to mention the vocabulary involved, computer-related and exotic-

sounding words from Mesoamerica. Can they answer questions like: "Can you see evidence in this civilization that we live in that we are using some of their intelligence? Language? Cuisine? Art forms, architecture?" Tell me about it. Yes they can!

In the book, *Linking Through Diversity*, Walter Enloe, mentions points of what students gain from sequential projects that lead to the same intentional conclusion:

They will understand and define culture in a way that is relevant to them...They will understand what a cultural artifact is and why it is important to know what artifacts tell us about a culture as well as the limitations of what artifacts can convey...they will understand that culture changes over time...they will evaluate the ways in which cultures change, they will make decisions about individual cultures based on multicultural understanding...To avoid conflict on local and global levels, students must learn to take a multicultural approach to problem solving... (Enloe 9)

Why do they need to learn this?

Students need to learn about their heritage. It forms a person's sense of belonging to something from the past and helps develop beliefs and thoughts of themselves as individuals. Along with learning about their ancestors, they need to practice skills that are generally isolated in "core" classrooms like that of study skills. In learning about the older civilizations, they will need to hone some new skills in art and practice procedural of critical thinking. Our civilization needs people that are able to synthesize and become skilled in order to continue to progress our state of existence. This is one of the key messages that I hope to lead my students to formulate for themselves.

To create a more informed and cultured child... it's funny to think that my students need to be taught to get "cultured" through these lessons. Yes, they do. It will also allow the students to have time and opportunity to find new ways in which to seek new information and figure out, for themselves, what kind of life Mesoamericans had. They will discover the many influences that these Indians have passed on to us and that are alive and well in their culture today.

Positively, between the discussions, new exposure to the topic and the different paths that I'll take them along, students will generate points and ideas that will be most eventful. I imagine contrasting and comparing topics such as language, clothing, food specialties, adornment, fads of today and yesterday, what it means to be known a "babe," beautiful or considered famous in Aztec and Maya opinions as well as what is "cool" or "tight" today. Whether they are Hispanic or of another heritage, I hope to provide a huge opportunity to have my students think a bit more about themselves and provide the arena in which they can start carving out a better identity.

Identity is what the junior high years are all about. My students are no longer babies but they are far from becoming adults. They are at the stage of weaning themselves and/or rebelling from their family units, discovering themselves, as well as learning social skills in making friends, interacting with new people of other countries as well.

How are they going to learn this?

A classic learning choice is in using our senses...

In learning anything, there is a matter of what I call the "shock effect." At first a student has to get over being afraid to learn something new like drawing. In this unit, the student will have to get over the shock of thinking that this is one of the hardest art courses that they've ever taken. I not only have set them up for new art skills, but I am also setting the lessons to include research, using new computer software, taking notes, drawing plans, taking tests, writing in a journal, doing math problems of sorts, and combining this with a rather complex history lesson.

Art is the ideal medium in which to present a rather lengthy set of lessons like these. Art as an approach can handle much more rigorous procedures or steps towards a means. For this age group it is a very appealing format in which to learn new information or concepts. Basically my class will consist in developing and reinforcing what they do ordinarily in English and Math class and combine it all to do a grand performance! They will be practicing many of the skills that they need to master, including researching, reporting, writing, presenting, calculating, measuring and appraising. It is through the skill of giving my students a "spoonful of medicine" at a time that makes them unaware of the monumental work that the projects will entail.

Most students choosing art as an elective typically expect a lot of interactivity from their time spent, expecting a time to paint, build and draw in class. These students, in general, feel comfortable doing a drawing activity. Our "Core" Teachers often gripe about finding these very students doodling in their classes. Typically, these students are called the *visual learners*. Normally the visual learner will cringe at the thought of writing and taking notes in an art class. They need to be stronger readers but hesitate from doing more to improve. Then, there is the student that never looks up at the examples shown by a teacher and/or is always doing something else while there is a lecture and note taking going on. These are generally your *audio type learners*. Many may have good reading habits but lack the ability to learn through visual stimulus. They will love working on a computer because believe it or not they have been listening to you all along! They use their listening skills more often to decipher and are multi-taskers at heart. Unbelievable but true, there are still students out there that need the written word in order to understand and perceive.

Ah yes, then we have the "jumpers"- These students cannot sit still, they need to get up periodically to test a teacher's patience. A *kinesthetic learner* needs to move around to develop thought, process ideas and yes, even write or read while standing! In reviewing the senses, I sometimes observe a student or two who will use a sense of feel to process their comprehension and learning. Although not often, they are the ones that spend the most time at the display board especially if the display has texture and can be touched or stroked. They'll touch, sometimes smell, and use their hands seeming to perform a connection that is compulsory. When absorbing new concepts these students benefit from using manipulatives.

Last but not least, I am now left with senses that we all share and use in different increments while learning ... to use the sense of smell and to taste... I feel that there certainly are ways in which we all partake with this sensor in the business of experiencing and gathering expertise. Smelling and tasting are senses that enhance the manner in which we pull up memory, pulling it up on a second's notice and then filing it into long term memory. Sometimes these memories are so strong that they can create epiphanies in grasping a concept or procedure!

A human being learns through his or her senses. Not all our senses develop equally as an individual grows up...it has to do with exposure. For example: if a person doesn't exercise then that human can become kinesthetically challenged. If an individual hasn't spent time outside playing games, running, or pushing themselves to try something out of their comfort zone, that person can often be left with feeling totally uncoordinated, hesitating when expected to perform in a physical way. Similarly, individuals who have never

studied or practiced drawing can feel inept when confronted with having to draw. This is mainly a lack of experience, not talent. As we learn through our senses, we have to practice letting the eye tell the hand what to do as it takes a pencil and moves across the page. In this way sight is connected to touch and even sound.

We all can do anything but certainly not as well as someone who focuses and spends a great deal of time developing a particular skill which can later become identified as a talent. In preparing this unit, I plan to provide a lot of these learning vehicles. Through the many different activities that my students will get to perform they will find that some lessons will be easier than others because I have included their "learning comfort zone."

It is my intention to see to that my students perceive a feeling of success and see improvement in activities that they are not usually good at because they just had more time to practice it in a non-threatening "safe place"— because it's an art class!

What is the outcome I wish them to achieve?

Produce and show sophistication in the knowledge they have acquired. Through a portfolio, power-point presentation, tests, journal plans and notes, my students and I will be able to review and examine their personal growth.

I will require my students to work in groups and individually in a successful manner. My pupils will perform in different capacities, a presenter, an assessor, a reporter, assistant, designer, technician and artisan. Through the practice of these skills they will write a report from a fieldtrip experience, create a power-point presentation of Olmec, Maya or Aztec civilization, perform a critique, create a 2 dimensional construction of the planes/curves of their face, create a 3 dimensional Olmec head, design and plan the incorporation of the Olmec head into a Day of the Dead commemorative niche, design a game, participate in a discussion, study modern Mexican artist, up keep their journal, test successfully from all that they've learned and finally render a design from studying hubcaps of a car.

What is the intrinsic value I hope they'll get?

I would like for my students to feel a real connection with their heritage, to develop a place inside their heartstrings that will have a good sense of belonging and be knowledgeable of their history.

When they speak of their country, I want them to be empowered with words, places and information that truly connect with their identity. With this resource my Hispanic students can really build a much more in depth distinctiveness from knowing and tracing their civilization's foundation.

For the non-Hispanics in my class, I want them to become aware that their roots can also be discovered, through books, internet and documentaries. These students will observe and develop a routine manner in which to follow and research themselves.

Another goal would be that all the students in my class receiving this unit will have enough time to compare and contrast their work. They will do this through group projects, collective studies, and reflective activities in order to respond and show that growth has occurred in their positive reception and comprehension of multicultural themes. They will learn to handle a new awareness that may start challenging their previous judgmental techniques in deciphering their current world and surroundings through the studying of a much older civilizations. This key feature of my expectations, I believe, will rise from the approval and admiration

my students will obtain from shedding misconceptions and enjoying discourse! Junior high students love to have an opportunity to fight and argue an idea to death, ah um, discuss a topic to death!

The intercultural curriculum is one of which students are familiar and comfortable with being asked to think critically and to problem solve creatively. One of the most important questions is "How did it get this way?" because the history of every person and everything is essential to understanding fully that person or thing. To really "know" a frog is to know its ancestors, its evolutionary history (Enloe 9)

The preparation to the lessons and notes to take

Rationale/Objective: The lessons that the students will follow throughout require students to take several steps in sequence to complete a section. There will be two to three sections per lesson.

Students will need to process their experiences and information given through exploration and reflective classroom activities; they will take notes, plan and practice a new skill by themselves, and collaborate with others in gaining more insight, accomplishing tasks set to expand their perceptions, and completing each of the lessons in a satisfactory manner.

The information in my introductions of these indigenous Americans will be just enough for orienting my students to their studies. It is expected that in teams, they will do most of the research, so that their power-point presentations can be fully successful. In my presentations I will expect them to take notes in their project journals.

The Olmec

The Olmecs are considered the ancient ones for all of Mesoamerica. These people provide the earliest evidence of civilization in Mexico. To think that they existed between the years 1200 BC — 600 AD! Olmecs seem very imaginative people. They are often regarded as the *Mother Culture* of the later Mesoamerica civilizations. They are by far the most mysterious because their temples, tombs, artifacts and architecture have been found least preserved since they lived in a rainforest area. The humidity and rain did not preserve or keep evidence of their ordinary lives. Yet their famous carved colossal stone heads, pyramid, artifacts and other stone structures did survive. The regions of the Olmec culture are vast and have variety in terrain, from mountains, to rainforest to shore, yet the majority of the centers were located in the lowland, swampy rainforest areas. That is why their artifacts, temples and skeletal remains are scarce and usually found in much deteriorated conditions. Even though some of what archeologists think has only been speculation, nevertheless there has been progress in understanding where they originated, who these people were and what was their culture was like. Recently archeologists and other Mesoamerican specialists have made good progress in understanding what their daily lives were like.

When you are looking at the map of Mexico, look from the Tuxtla Mountains in the west...to the *Chontalpa* Lowlands in the east: that's where the ancient Olmec were. Olmec monuments have been found everywhere especially in the areas of two Olmec centers called *San Lorenzo/Tenochtitlan and La Venta*. In my introduction to the Olmec I will add one more city called *Tres Zapotes*. These centers conceivably show how civilizations are created as each city/state becomes a key of particular importance to each others economic survival. La

Venta, the eastern center, was rich in cacao, rubber, and salt, while *San Lorenzo*, a more central location, had the river-trading or boat transportation for resources between the centers. *Tres Zapotes* is a center and is considered one of the last outposts of Olmec culture. This center was developed through the need for its rich basalt, an important source for sculptures, and accordingly, *Tres Zapotes* is situated at the base of the mountains. Some good questions can be brought out from observing what commerce and exchange can provide and why it is a necessary factor in the evolution of a civilization.

The Tuxtla Mountains are often considered the Epi-Olmec homeland but in fact *Tres Zapotes* lies at the base of Cerro el Vigia overlooking the Papaloapan lowlands. Of course its realm probably encompassed much of the 4,500-sq.m (1,740-sp. mile) mountain massif..... Other notable resources include basalt and excellent clay for pottery (Diehl, 181.)

The Olmec staple was maize or corn, which had just entered Mesoamerican diet in a big way at this time. They supplemented their diets with the many plants, roots, fowl, insects and reptile population. Many of these foods were not known to Europe and other parts of the world until the Spanish conquest which came much later during Aztec times. Some of these foods are grown and enjoyed around the world today, such as chocolate, pumpkin, vanilla, chile pepper, sweet potato, tomato, jicama, avocado, tobacco, and agave. Not too much is known about the Olmec language, due to the preserved carved symbols in stone, but it is believed to be related to that of the *Mixe* and Maya peoples of southern Mexico today.

The great Olmec centers that soon developed at *La Venta*, *San Lorenzo*, and *Tres Zapotes* were not just used for religious specialists and their practice; they also became the ruler's residence. They were dynamic centers for trade and entrepreneurship. Artisans and farmers came to sell their goods including: cloth, corn, celts, jaguar pelts, feathers, and the like. As far as religion goes, we know very little. Prayer offerings of celts and figurines have been found in tombs and in rivers giving archeologists the impression that these were their ways in which to call to or thank their gods. One current thought is that these deities were associated with their needs like that of the Maize god or Rain god. Their form of currency was the cocoa bean (which by the way... was considered an excellent drink if you mixed it with chili, honey and water.)

- A. The Olmec architecture at *La Venta*, for example, includes ceremonial buildings, elite residences, dwelling for commoners, a tall pyramid mound and an acropolis. *La Venta* included a large plaza area and at the entrance 3 colossal sculptures of Olmec heads. Olmec public or ceremonial buildings were most typically made out of earthen platform mounds.
- B. The Olmec Heads are particularly important in my first lesson. The Olmec used basalt to make the colossal heads that they are so well known for. The size of these massive heads range from 5 feet to 11 feet tall. Archeologists are still not sure what these heads represented or what they were used for. Some have believed them to represent Olmec leaders, ancestors, ballplayers or warriors. A good amount of time in the Olmec lesson will be spent on these heads because of their ominous size and imposing facial features. This will bring in a chance for students to surmise what the reasons for these were. Another aspect for showing these sculptured busts will be to compare them to other cultures such as the Benin art work from Africa. Despite the lack of earlier sophisticated cultures in Mexico, the Olmec mastered their materials, achieving naturalistic features in the carvings of the heads and similar qualities in most of the smaller stone sculptures are very sensitive for an ancient culture, despite the sheer difficulty of working with these particular materials, especially basalt and jade. They show sophistication in their carvings from large stone works to the small jadeite figurines. This mastery of materials is one way that archeologists determine the complexity of the culture. This material based inquiry will provide an introduction to the comparison-discussion time and provide food for discourse.

- C. The Olmec used art to glorify their rulers by making statues depicting them as part creatures especially of jaguars, serpents, and harpy eagles perhaps to invoke powerful qualities that these animals possessed. It would be helpful to have students see that the types of animals found in the Olmec environment, at the top of their food chain, were in fact the ones that the Olmec observed to have the greatest strength. The Olmec tried to emulate them in action like that of crouch/sitting or stance (as a jaguar would on about to pounce) again in clothing of the day, like that of using their skins, or wearing feathers of an eagle. It would be here that students could discuss what they would be in this day and age if skins were still used to show greatness. A brief talk on today's clothing would also be noteworthy and pertinent towards contrasting our modern day culture.

The use of zero, the golden mean, symmetry, geometry and other methods of measurement show that these ancient people were sophisticated in many ways. The colossal heads have been studied for their 8 to 3 measurement a ratio also known as Pi (?.) Their architecture shows a high level of geometric measurement and logic. With the specialization of craft and trade, jobs that require elite information developed due to the Olmec becoming a large civilization. With the expansion of trade, availability of food, and exchange of technology these people began to have more leisure time. As people become more specialized in what their role in their society is... they find some time on their hands for rest and relaxation. The Olmec probably invented the Mesoamerican ball game, and they may also have created the first version of the *Parcheesi*-like game known as *Patolli*. With leisure time both positive and negative developments took place, from drama, sports, and beautification on the one hand to gambling, gossip, and corruption on the other. This is a perfect moment to discuss and compare our culture.

The Maya

The earliest Maya reveal Olmec origins, although scientists do not understand the process. The early Maya built ceremonial architecture beginning approximately 2500 years ago. They erected burial mounds, pyramids, monuments at large city-centers like Chichen itza, Palenque and Copán. In looking at a map of Mexico and Central America you can see how close they were to the centers of the Olmec nation. They developed city-centered small states with palaces for their rulers, a religious shrine for prayer and practice, and centers for goods and agricultural trade.

Like the Olmec the Maya staple was maize. This vital sustenance was more than a principal foodstuff; it became fundamentally spiritual nourishment supplied by their gods. The Maya diet became even more based in beans and maize than the Olmec along with the many plants, roots, fowl, insects and reptiles of their environment, which was similar to the Olmec environment. As time went by the cocoa bean became a favorite drink that seemed to be drunk by the aristocracy of the day and by their gods! It also became a standard of exchange in the marketplace.

The Maya developed hieroglyphs signs to reproduce the spoken language. Their symbols were phonetic having sounds for groupings of two or more symbols like; ca-ca-ua (which means chocolate or cacao). And they used this writing system for nearly 2,000 years. Years later, at the time of the Spanish invasion, they would write down in European letters a book known to us today as the Popol Vuh. Like the Christian Bible, this Quiche Maya book is a astonishing story of how the Maya world was created. It is still considered a remarkable piece of literature. It is astonishing that this information had survived due to events that occurred during the

Spanish conquest when many sacred texts were being destroyed and burned by the Spanish soldiers and missionaries. The *Popol Vuh* had been hidden and protected and from it modern humanity has been able to understand much about ancient Maya belief.

The Maya believed sacred spaces existed both above and below us. They connected underground caverns with their underworld gods and the sky with their heavenly gods. The sun, moon and stars had all connections with the gods. The Maya believed in prayer and human sacrifice. They believed that pouring blood back onto the ground revitalized and fed it. The ritual of beheading, bloodletting, and human heart sacrifices were the satisfying way to make offerings to their gods and to replicate practices found in nature, whether in the harvesting (beheading) of maize or in the bleeding of tree sap from a rubber tree. Replications of nature pleased their deities.

Certain social status was admired and honorable. The job of a scribe, for instance, was a very important position held in at least some cases by lords or sons of kings. Maya civilization produced the most skilled artisans and thinkers whose work in turn has left us numerous architecture structures including palaces, pyramids, monuments, large ball courts, temples and urban design. Specialist mastered the writing system, early astronomy and developed the use of math learned from the Olmec, including the concept of zero, geometry, and the mathematics of base 20. They were very interested in the passage of time, creating calendars to be followed by everyone; when to seed crops, harvest, when to marry and conceive! One of their calendars (again probably inherited by **from** the Olmec) consisted of 260 days- the average length of human conception. They studied the skies to record the movement of the heavens.

Students will enjoy learning about many of the ways of the Maya not only for their sports but also for their ingenuity. The pictorial writings, decorative ceramic images and stone carvings reveal both courtly life and noble practice to them. Although naturalistic looking, the drawings of the Maya can seem almost caricature or cartoon-like in style. The Maya style seems casual and calligraphic because they had years of practice preferring the technique of using a brush. Because they used a brush to draw... the writings and ceramic images can be understood as essentially graphic and in this, artists developed a fluid, distinctive style that emphasized their idea of beauty, particularly desirable among the Maya portraying slanted sloping foreheads, almost crossed eyes and elongated noses wearing giant ear and nose plugs! Here my students will have a lot to say; we'll discuss what beauty is and why we feel the need to change our appearance. We'll be sure to talk about makeup, hair, tattooing, and piercing.

The Aztec

The use of the word Aztec derives from the word *Aztlan*, the *Mexica* legendary place of origin thought to be somewhere in northern Mexico. In many instances the Aztec nation refers to themselves as *Mexica* instead. The term Aztec came into common use in the 19th century. The *Mexica* Indians or Aztec migrated to Central Mexico at the beginning of the twelfth century where they slowly established themselves claiming and gaining land. The Aztec began their time in Central Mexico as outsiders but eventually rose to be the supreme power in the region, though both their successful marriage alliances and outright warfare. The Aztecs were known as excellent warriors.

The great expansion of Aztec power began in 1458; When Moctezuma 1 and the Triple Alliance

sent military expeditions to acquire loot, to establish tributary relations with the subordinated populations, and to ensure the safety of Aztec merchants. The first expedition was launched against a Mixtec city-state in Oaxaca. After defeating it, the Aztec burned its temple, executed its ruler and negotiated a treaty with the Mixtec nobles who survived the battle. The treaty permitted the local ruling class to retain control...however its members were obliged to turn over specified quantities and kinds of goods to an Aztec collector.....This became a model for subsequent in the *Soconusco* of coastal Chiapas.....(Patterson, 318)

The Aztec/Mexica people moved to the area of *Tula*, home of the *Toltec*, and then for the western areas of the Basin of Mexico These people were also called, at times the "*Nahuas*," because although the Aztecs were of a combined culture with several languages, the common spoken language used is called *Nahuatl*. The Aztec first conquered the area known previously as the *Toltec*. The Toltec people were revered by the Aztec and in many cases, from the poetry that survived; we can find many references of their homage.

Benjamin Keen mentions in *The Aztec Image in Western Thought...* The Tlacuilo, the painter of the codices, enjoyed special respect not only because of the mystery that surrounded his work but also because of its importance is a vehicle for the transmission of tribal lore and religion.

The good painter is a Toltec, an artist; He creates with red and black ink, with black water... The good painter is wise, God is in his heart. He puts divinity into things; he converses with his won heart. He knows the colors; he applies them and shades them; he draws feet and faces, he puts in the shadows, he achieves perfection. He paints the colors of all the flowers, as if he were a Toltec (Keen, 23)

In their capital city of *Tenochtitlan* the Aztec people that lived there were skilled artisans, and trades people such as cloth dyers, jewelers, potters, scribes, stone or metal experts, and tool makers. Each town was divided into neighborhoods grouped by families called *calpultins*. Those who were born into a calpultin were united by a common ancestor, the *calpulteotl*. The ancestor had given the descendant a specialized profession. The families would pass down these skills to their children.

Each calpulli consisted of a group of families who supposedly were united by a common deified ancestor, the calpulteotl. The ancestor had given his descendants a specialized profession, which augmented the cohesion of the group's members in production. The calpulli tended toward endogamy and endeavored to live in a coterminous territory. Thus, in the city each calpulli occupied a ward or neighborhood. Considered the property of the group, the ward was divided up and distributed among the constituent families. (Carrasco, 68-69)

Their architecture was geometric in shape and each structure had a purpose. The palace of *Motecuhzoma*, (not Montezuma, as many in the US call him), had some unusual additions. It had lush gardens and a zoo! The great capital center of *Tenochtitlan* must have amazed and scared the Spanish all at one time, as they first entered this city. There were gardens and something called the wall of flowers as well as a rack or wall of skulls! Imagine monumental temples, architecture and walls brightly decorated with colors and repetitive snake line designs. They had ball courts, huge market places, temples for worship and for sacrifices. They constructed man-made canals and inside-type latrines.

- The Spanish conquerors called the Aztec capital another Venice and they should have known for many of them had actually been to that place....Tenochtitlan and its satellite Tlatelolco was laid out on a grid

running north and south were long canals thronged with canoe traffic and each bordered by a lane; larger canals cut these at angles. Between these watery streets were arranged in regular fashion plots of land with their houses.(Coe,190)

- The sacred precinct was on the higher ground at the center of Tenochtitlan, the focal point of all the main highways which led in from the mainland. It was dominated by the double temple of Huizilopochtli and Tlaloc (the great temple) its twin stairways reddened with the blood sacrificed captives. (Coe, 194)

The Aztec wrote books known today as codices (codex, singular) on deer skin, which would have been like European velum or parchment. There are very few original books, again due to the Spanish burning of their written works, but the ones that are in existence are quite different from Maya writing. Aztec codices look very stiff, small and un-natural. . Aztec books are more pictorial than their Maya counterparts; figures are more contrived and two dimensional, with shorter proportions (rather than a naturalistic Maya body length), and no foreshortening is used. Reading order even in a single book can vary from right to left, from top to bottom and from bottom to top. When read, they were as though a reference for someone to speak a memorized story. In class, this is a moment that one can speak about the need for the written language and why literacy and or illiteracy can help or hinder a society's growth and strength.

Each of these cultures preferred and valued particular materials to others. Some of the materials were cherished more than others. From the beginning the Olmec sought hard stones including basalt and jadeite. The Maya preferred jade and obsidian. The Aztec really thought a lot of feathers, not only were they particular about the ones that were exotic and hard to get, but they connected these with the Eagle or sky deities. They all seemed to love the cocoa bean, jaguar skins, animal pelts and other parts of predators. Gold was thought of, but not as revered as say, turquoise.. It is not clear why they valued these materials more than others. Was it the difficulty in obtaining it, or its scarcity, or spiritually because it was a natural material from the earth? However, gold is a product of the earth as is turquoise. What made turquoise more valuable than gold? This is a good opportunity to promote a discussion about the value of money and gold today and what makes a civilization decide what is valuable to them.

Lessons

Rationale/Objective: The lessons that follow will require several steps to complete a section. There will be two to three sections per lesson.

Students will need to process information for this unit; they will take notes, plan and practice new skills by themselves, and also collaborate with others in gaining more insight, thereby accomplishing tasks and completing each of the lessons in a satisfactory manner.

Pre-Lesson- A Power-Point Presentation of the Olmec, Maya or Aztec

Groups of 2 will spend 1-2 weeks to take from notes and conduct research from books and on the internet, in order to create a power point presentation that depicts one of these civilizations. They are to answer these questions:

1. Using the vocabulary they've learned, tell me about the lives and times of these indigenous culture. Tell me about their intelligence, language, architecture, art forms, cuisine, sports, and anything else you feel that is

important to know about this culture.

2. Show me evidence in our culture and civilization today that this particular culture you studied has influenced us. Give details. Make sure that your presentation is clear and read-able. Your group will be presenting it to the class for an assessment grade in material knowledge and use of computer technology.

Materials:

Teacher will benefit from previously obtaining pictures to present in a power-point that include Olmec, Maya, Aztec, Benin, and perhaps some contemporary pictures of people of our culture today (tattoos, hip, zoot-suited, motorcycle garb, etc.)

Students will benefit by going to a library or computer lab in order to complete their power-point presentations. Computer and projector combination required. If not available, it can be created in Poster-format. Students may also learn how to scan images in a computer lab and add to the computer presentations.

Lesson 1 - Mesoamerican Origins: The Olmec Head

Students will explore 2 dimensional compositions by shaping paper, cutting and pasting, an Olmec head, will be the subject matter. From observing the contours and planes of their own faces, the students will produce a 2 dimensional plan for an Olmec head using their own self portraits from digital photographs. They will review the idea of the Golden Ratio and/or known as the 8 to 3 measurement or as we know it now, as Pi and proceed to measure out the photograph in order to find the planes and contours. Once measured and marked on the photo, the student will cut and construct the Olmec features.

Student will mold, carve and develop a 3 dimensional sculpture of the Olmec head in clay, from the previous 2 dimensional composition. From the studied planes of their own faces, the student will produce a sculptured Olmec style head. A headdress will be optional or additional variation.

Materials: For each phase

1. Digital camera, printer, computer, photo processing software and copy paper
2. 2 Prints, pencil, eraser and ruler
3. Varied multi-cultural colored construction paper, scissors, glue, graphite paper, pencil, eraser and photo print of their face

Vocabulary:

Mesoamerica, ominous, glaring, somber, sober, Benin, symmetry, Pi or Golden Mean, civilization, culture, plane, contour, acropolis, colossal, celts, Benin sculptures

STEP 1: MAKES AN OLMEC OUT OF ME!

(image 05.02.04.01 available in print form)

1. Using a digital camera, take a picture of your classmate and have your classmate take a picture of you. Make sure that it is a real "zoom close-up" of each other's face. Try to look very serious, ominous or somber like an Olmec Sculptured head.

2. Download the pictures onto the computer, using the cable cord. (look for separate instructions from the teacher or a prepared instruction sheet about the digital camera's use)
3. Pull up your picture, save it into the class file. Save it with your complete name. Pull up your picture and start to adjust it through Microsoft photo editor or the computer's photographic options.
4. Once you are in Photo editor, or Adobe Photoshop or other available photo corrective software, practice with the tools available.
 - a. Change your picture from color to black and white.
 - b. Experiment with the tool bar to see how you can change your face to look more like rock or stone. Change as often as you like but remember not to save unless you are satisfied with the change.
5. Once you are looking like an Olmec Head, save it and print 2 copies. You have completed all of step #1. Put your name on the back of your printed copies and hand them in.

STEP #2: MAKES AN OLMEC OUT OF ME!

(image 05.02.04.02 available in print form)

The Golden Ratio of 8 to 3 or just call it Phi...Learning about proportions and symmetry

Let's learn about how the Olmec used measurement to proportion the colossal carved heads of the San Lorenzo region.

1. Explore the 3:8 ratio by determining a unit of measurement. You can use an inch, your thumbnail or your pencil. Take one of the prints of your face to start this project. Get your supplies, ruler, pencil, eraser, and marker.
2. Now make a rectangle that is eight such units on one side and three on the other. This is the ratio of phi! This is also the rectangle within which an Olmec head can be drawn. Try fitting YOUR head to this rectangle. Do you fit? Can you find an Olmec head that does fit? (See example: use a Olmec Head from San Lorenzo)

To see how else the proportion is used, tick (a tick is one unit of measurement) off eight units on one side and place the eyes at the level of 3 ticks down from the top.

For extra credit: To learn more about the Golden Ratio **of** Phi look up Fibonacci, the Golden Rectangle, Greek architecture or Luca Pacioli's "Divine Proportions" on the internet. Write notes in your journal about what you've learned..

(image 05.02.04.03 available in print form)

STEP #3: MAKES AN OLMEC OUT OF ME!

Learning about the contours, planes of your face

1. You are going to create from construction paper a copy of your face. It will be broken up into shapes. You are going to choose at least 4 colors of construction paper. Choose a variation from dark to light.
2. Measure and mark with pen, horizontally, your 2nd face print into 3rds. Mark your face in half vertically.
3. Look at your facial features. Think of your face as land. If you looked at the tip of your nose, that would be the highest plane or top of a mountain. If you looked around the edges of your face, I would see the lowest plane or the valley. You will also see contours, think of the dips and curves of your face as hills and valleys. Separate and draw the shapes you see in your face as high, medium and low shapes.

Number them on the paper.

4. Now, choose the darkest color to be the lowest plane and the next highest to be a lighter shade, the next highest away from the face to be another lighter shade and then using the lightest construction color to be your most highest from the face. The breakdown of your face into contours and planes will make this look much like a mask, but if you take your time...it can look a bit like you too!
5. Number your construction paper according to your plan from dark to light 1-4 and trace these shapes onto the construction paper using graphite tracing paper. Cut and glue your pieces onto a sheet of drawing paper. Note that each shape should be glued one on top of another or overlapped so that the face does not turn out to become too chopped up and have too much space in between shapes. It should end up looking unified, constructed to fit on top of each other and look balanced in the end product.

Lesson 2- Civilizations: Past and Present come together

Rationale/ Objective: Student will mold, carve and develop a 3 dimensional sculpture of the Olmec head in clay, from the previous 2 dimensional composition. From the studied planes of their own faces, the student will produce a sculptured Olmec style head. A headdress will be optional or additional variation.

Students will plan; consult with peers and teacher to resolve their idea for the Olmec head to become the honored subject in their niche for the Day of the Dead celebration. The idea must be agreed upon from a consensus of their peers and teacher.

Part I

Introduction to the "Day of the Dead" celebration -Carving an Olmec

Head from a clay block

Part II

Conversion of Ancient head into the idea of an ancestor honored —

Choosing a concept- what will the Homage to the head be? Designing and planning what the final product will look like

Part III

Putting it all together- Niche is created, the props are found and the Olmec head is placed in its altar.

A power-point presentation will be shown to introduce the "Day of the Dead" celebration, ritual and concept. The idea is to convert a modern celebration that has its roots in Maya, Aztec and colonial practice, update and transform it to have some new meaning in our times.

The word homage is reviewed at many stages of the lessons. Students will draw and plan in their journal, reviewed by classmates and teacher to make feasible plans that can be executed with good results. Emphasis in the honoring and remembering something or someone important, the portraying of their idea in their art piece /niche that can be somber or humorous as well will be critiqued during the planning stages. The student

must have the head become the ancestor gone, famous person, a dead idea or pet that is deceased. For example; "Disco Fever is Dead," "Ode to lost Hair," or in all seriousness, "Homage to a Jaguar Warrior." The student must be certain that the items needed for their niche can be obtained by them or accessible to the teacher.

In creating the niche a sturdy shoe box must be brought from home. The box will go through several steps in order to make the box sturdy and ready for hanging. First it should be covered in papier-mâché, and left to dry completely. A hook for hanging should be attached with strong tape to the back of the box. Plaster strips (like that of creating a cast for a broken bone) be applied carefully to the hook's tape. Let dry. Continue to cover (one layer at a time) the box with plaster strips, smoothing them out as it covers the box

Additional architectural features such as pillars, columns, roof or floor extensions can be done gradually letting each dry respectively. Once dry, the box may be ready for painting and decorating. Additional adornment, lace, beads, pictures, candles, miscellaneous items are attached with glue gun. The Olmec head converted can be then painted adorned and transformed during the last part of the lesson. Once placed inside the altar a title can be attached to the niche/box and then placed on a wall perfect for showing.

Materials:

Drawing paper, eraser, Ebony pencils, art journal, clay, modeling tools, water and containers (for smoothing out facial features)

Papier-mâché (wheat or cellulose paste), newspaper, Elmer's glue, hanging joints or some wall hanging hooks, plaster strips (found in most art stores), tempera or acrylic paint, a variety of miscellaneous beads, candles, lace, pictures, construction paper, scissors, glue sticks and glue gun.

Vocabulary:

Niche, column, icon, variety of size and shape, color, clutter, emphasis, repetition,

Homage, form, Olmec, ritual, ceremony, celebration, glyphs, shrine, recite, scribe

Variations of the Lesson:

Day of the Dead project may not be applicable depending on the time of the year. It is perfect to have for Spanish Heritage Month, but if that is not feasible, creating a ball park would be another way that students can develop other building skills like that of constructing with cardboard, using perimeter formulas, working with geometric shapes, or creating a trivia card game about the Olmec, Maya and Aztec....or creating their own board game, with perhaps, the Olmec heads as the moving playing pieces.

Lesson 3 -"Viva La Raza"

Rationale/Objective: After exposure to modern Mexican artist and seeing how one uses the past to make new art.... using the principles of design the student will render a hub cap drawing that has been altered to look reminiscent of any of the iconography that has been studied from previous lessons. Students will show reflection, knowledge, critical thinking, sophistication and skill in constructing and rendering this drawing.

Part I

Introduction to Modern Mexican Artist and how they have incorporated their past into their art expression.

Part II

Practice drawing a hubcap

Part III

Conversion of the hubcap to a personal design that reflects

Olmec, Maya or Aztec influence

A power-point or slide presentation will be shown to introduce modern and well known Mexican Artists. Artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Guadalupe Posada, Carlos Merida, and many contemporary graphic artists of today have utilized familiar icons from their ancestry. In showing pride, teaching others about Mexico or to utilize it for various political reasons, these artists took their ancestry, incorporated it into their style and identity.

From preparations, practice and success in executing the drawing of a hub cap, the student will design a composition that derives from the hubcap shape but becomes a unique design in itself. Students will do this by choosing, adding and using symbols from representations of Olmec, Maya, or Aztec gods, maybe something from their architecture or from their calendar, their drawing style or some other pertinent symbolic icon that they've enjoyed would like to combine. The students will be reminded that the objective is to design it to reflect ancient Mexican style while having symmetry, balance, and unity present in their work. Particular attention will be paid to round symbols including the calendar stone, carved snakes, ball game markers, and so forth. Many of these can be located on Mexican coinage.

Materials

Drawing paper, eraser, 2h, 2B, 4B 6B or Ebony pencils,

Ruler, triangle, t-square, compass, variety of chosen art researched samples

Vocabulary:

Composite predominant iconography vanishing point chiaroscuro contrast

Radial symmetry harmony balance variety emphasis repetition unity mural

Additional Forms: created by the teacher to assist in class discussions and critiques

Student Assessment - Power Point Presentation:

(table 05.02.04.01 available in print form)

(table 05.02.04.02 available in print form)

Cited Works: in order of reference

Enloe, Walter, Simon Ken Ed., *Linking through Diversity*, Tucson, Arizona: Zephyr Press.1993.

This is a practical classroom manual for teachers to learn how to handle a roomful of multicultural students and how to teach them about their different backgrounds.

Diehl, Richard A., *The Olmec, America's First Civilization*, London: Thames and Hudson 2004.

A bold announcement, since other archeologists do disagree, that the category of most ancient of all civilizations in America belongs to the Olmec. Based on the excavations of objects found at the sites, his study provides profound conclusions. If you like art and archeology, you will enjoy this book

Patterson, Thomas C. *Archaeology: The Historical Development of Civilizations*, New Jersey, Temple University/ Prentice Hall Inc., Second Edition,1993.

Unusual in objective, this book gives a global look at archaeology and links it with historical information gathered to show how archaeology has affected our world of knowledge. It contains great historical information of Mesoamerican and South American indigenous history.

Keen, Benjamin, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, U.S.: Rutgers, The State University, 1990.

After the conquest, the Aztec world is in slow ruin, myths, beliefs and its world shatters. This is a progressive detail about the understanding of their intellect, beauty and thought process of the indigenous. On the one hand showing the corruption and decay of their world through the eyes of Europeans, modern Mexican and American observers, on the other, the manipulation of Aztec history, art, and symbols by those same Europeans, modern Mexicans and Americans.

Carrasco, David, Editor in Chief, *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican cultures*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001

From a to z, excellent reference collection of encyclopedia expanding items of interest about the Mesoamerican culture.

Coe, Michael D., Rex Koontz, *Mexico*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.

This book gives extensive information of the foundation of various Mesoamerican complex societies, culture and daily life rituals from the Olmecs to the Aztecs with information from the archaic period up to the Spanish conquest.

Annotated Bibliography

Benson, Elizabeth P., *OlmecArt of Ancient Mexico*, New York: Harry Abrams Inc. 1999

A valuable collection of photographs, that concentrates on just the ancient beginnings of the indigenous art of the Olmec. It is a great resource for middle school students to be able to have a better understanding of how the Olmec lived.

Boughton, Doug and Rachel Mason Ed., *Beyond Multicultural Art Education: International Perspectives*, New York: Waxman Munster, 1999.

A collection and contribution of information from many regions of the world speaking on cultural diversity and how education through Art can bring many of the stereotypes barriers down along with new eyes to help resolve this problem. .

Coe, Michael D., *The Maya*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

Well versed in Mesoamerican civilization, Coe opens a reader's eyes and places us in a world of the Maya, showing the specific differences and accomplishments of their part of the Mesoamerican equation.

Marks, Richard Lee, *Cortes*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991

Insightful tale of what probably happened through the conquest of the New World by the Spanish through Cortes. The book is historical in content, written like a journal.

Miller, Mary and Simon Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*. New York: Thames and Hudson Inc. 2004.

Life at a Mayan court; its rituals, its practices, and pastimes... A book that is opulent, rich and full of pictures that have included descriptions of the daily lives of the upper class court of these indigenous people. Students can benefit greatly from the written as well as the photographic collection of this volume. The information written encompasses so much detail describing the life of the scribes, through the painting/writings, and all that revolved around the Mayan's universe.

Classroom/Student Resources

Ardaugh, Philip, *History Detectives, Aztecs*, New York: Peter Bederick 1999

Appealing in several ways; colorful, interesting information appropriate for children's interest, combines pictures, drawings and cartoons, an interesting Aztec stories to read discoveries and a game of detective, spy and test scores at the end of the game.

Armentrout, David and Patricia, *Treasures from Mexico*, Vero Beach:

The Rourke Book Company, Inc., 2001.

A purposeful book laid out for any elementary, middle or high school student to be able to pick up, read and use. The book is a step by step account of what an archeologist and historian does to uncover ancient civilizations. It speaks about the Mayan, the Aztec people and Mesoamerican past lifetimes.

Atkinson, Sonja G., *The Aztec Way to Healthy Eating*, New York: Paragon House, Inc. 1992

Revolving on the Aztec calendar, this book is fun, full of believable recipes and information that students could use for their reports.

Dawson, Imogen, *Clothes and Crafts in Aztec Times*, New Jersey: Dillon Press 1997

A book for any age student, this information explains about clothing, jewelry, festivals, crafts, markets and towns of the Aztec Indian.

Fisher, Leonard Everett, *Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Maya*, New York: Holiday House, 1999

God by God, a thru z, sampled with instructions on how to pronounce and know about each Mayan deity. Book created specifically for children.

Website Research list for Teachers

<http://www.famsi.org/>

<http://www.mesoweb.com/welcome.html>

Fun and Interactive Website Research Center for Students:

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/latinamerica/topics/games.html>

<http://www.ancientmexico.com>

<http://www.azteccalendar.com/calendar.html>

http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/M/Ma/Maya_civilization.htm

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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