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## **Context Clues: The Appropriation of Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe**

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### **Rationale**

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I teach visual art at a magnet high school in New Haven. Our student population is extremely diverse - two-thirds of the students come from New Haven, and one-third come from the surrounding suburbs. My students are geographically, socio-economically, and racially diverse. This diversity means that they walk into my art room with a variety of different skills and prior art knowledge. I must find new and exciting ways to teach content and skills that may be review for some students, while making them accessible to students who have not yet learned them. An astonishing percentage of my students arrive at High School in the Community reading and writing below grade level, many of them far below grade level. Both this statistic and the new CAPT mandates are forcing me to find new ways to incorporate reading and writing across the disciplines within my art curriculum. I have decided to do this through art analysis, followed later by art creation. Students will be looking at icons, analyzing them, placing them in context, determining how context changes the analysis, and then creating their own icon within a specific context. This unit will be included in my Introduction to Art course comprised of ninth and tenth graders, because that is where I first teach art analysis. It will be their final project, so they will have mastered a variety of different media and will now be focusing on the concepts behind art pieces. I may also adapt this unit for my Advanced Placement course because we have to have a dialogue at the beginning of the course about copyright laws, and this would be a much more interesting way to facilitate that discussion.

Many of my students lack critical thinking and problem solving skills. They are very egocentric and feel that simply because they think something, it should be so. They support their ideas solely with their own experiences and not with facts. My students look at artwork with blinders on - How does this piece of artwork affect *me*? They are wonderful at making art-to-self connections; and for many pieces of artwork this type of analysis can be extremely successful. However, oftentimes students will look at a piece of artwork and not know how to start a dialogue; or their interpretation may be incorrect or incomplete because they are unaware of the context in which the artwork was created. I strive to teach my students that understanding context is extremely important when interpreting an image. In order to put artwork in context students need to begin internalizing a process for artistic analysis: first to look at the artwork and simply describe it, second to begin asking questions to lead to a better understanding, third to gain contextual information to answer the questions they have posed, and finally, to successfully interpret the artwork in context. Many different

contexts can affect the analysis of an artwork including: current events, time period, personal experience, existing artwork, etc. I would like students to be aware of these different factors when looking at *any* piece of artwork. I would also like them to begin to internalize this process of looking at artwork in context.

Besides not understanding how to look at artwork in context, my students have difficulty supporting their ideas with evidence. A student may produce a very strong, well-grounded conclusion about a piece of artwork, but will not be able to articulate how s/he reached that conclusion. It has been proven that this critical thinking skill supporting evidence - helps improve student writing and problem solving drastically. It is a strategy we are focusing on in my school in order to improve student writing. Most of my students practice this skill in English class; I would like to translate this skill into art the art room. Just as students must support their conclusions in papers by providing evidence from texts, they must support their ideas about artwork using evidence they view in the artwork.

First I will show students a set of images of the Virgin of Guadalupe focusing on analysis, supporting their interpretation with information from the artwork. The second set of images we view will be of Malinche and we will focus on the importance of understanding context. I will use these two different Mexican icons whom artists have represented in a variety of different ways, to teach students these skills. I have chosen these two icons because I feel as an educator that it is extremely important to expose my students to artists of a variety of different backgrounds. My student population is one-third Latino, one-third African American, and one-third white, and I would like to ensure that my students see examples of artwork by each of these different groups. These two examples are ideal for comparison because the original icons emerged at around the same time - the early 1500s. I encourage my students to reshape their definition of art to include art made by a variety of cultures and by artist of all different levels of education.

## The Virgin of Guadalupe

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The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico during the 16th century. The work appears to be a painted image of her, but in the creation story is said to have appeared on the cloak through divine intervention. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the cloak is a woman, with her hands at her waist folded in prayer. She has an olive complexion with straight, dark hair and a downward gaze. She is dressed in a patterned pink dress that covers her entire body - you can only see her face, neck and hands, even her feet are covered up. At the bottom of her dress an angel holds up the bottom of her skirt. The angel is cropped and you can only see its torso. Its wings are a blue stripe, a red stripe, and a white stripe. It too wears pink, and the face of the angel appears old. The woman is wearing a blue cloak that covers her head. It has gold stars and gold trim on it. Triangular shapes that create the appearance that she is radiating surround the woman. By her feet are two horn-like shapes.

I will have a large color reproduction of this image hung at the front of the room, and I will hand out a small black and white copy of it to students. I will first ask students if they have encountered this image anywhere before. Many of them may have seen it on cars, jewelry or even as a tattoo. I will ask them if they have seen any other artwork that has qualities similar to this piece. I will ask where they think this image might normally be on display. Many of my students attend church and even if they have not seen this particular image, they should at least be able to recognize that it is a religious representation of Mary. Once students have determined that the image has religious roots, I will take the opportunity to discuss the fact that for many

people this image *is not* a piece of artwork, but a miracle of God. I would like to stress to them that I am aware of this belief, as they should be, and that we will be looking at this image solely as a piece of artwork. We will be looking at some representations of it that could be offensive to some. I will ask them to please be respectful to the culture of others, and to also consider it in our context as an art image, instead of a religious icon. If I do encounter students for whom this is a very religious icon I will take the opportunity to have them teach the rest of the class about its importance by sharing the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. One way or another, this will lead us into a discussion about the historical era in which the Virgin Mary was said to appear before Juan Diego in 16th century Mexico.

I will read *The Lady of Guadalupe* by Tomie de Paulo to students, keeping our reproduction of the original on display as I read. I will show students the illustrations as I read. De Paulo's book tells the story with a very Spanish slant, but it provides the students with the basic information of the story. The information here paraphrases the story and provides some extra background information about the history of the myth. The story is about an Indian man named Juan Diego who lived in Tepeyac near modern-day Mexico City. He was walking one day in 1531 to run errands and on his way a beautiful apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared to him. She asked him to go to the Bishop and request that a temple be built in that very spot in her honor. So Juan Diego went before Father Juan de Zumarraga, the Bishop in Mexico. He waited a long time to be seen, and finally relayed his story to the Bishop. The Bishop did not believe him and sent him away. Juan Diego returned to the spot he had seen the apparition and again she was there waiting for him. He explained that the Bishop had not believed him. The Virgin told him not to be discouraged, and told him to return to the Bishop and ask again. So Juan Diego went back to the Bishop and made his request a second time. The Bishop again did not believe him and asked for proof. The Bishop also had some of his servants follow Juan Diego to see if he was lying. The servants were unable to keep up with Juan Diego. Juan Diego again saw the Virgin and explained to her that the Bishop requested some sort of proof. So the Virgin told Juan Diego to go to the top of the hill. On top of the hill Juan Diego found roses de Castilla blooming, completely out of season. He picked many of them, collected them in his cloak, and then went back to see the Bishop. The servants ignored him and did not want to let him see the Bishop because they did not want to be blamed for doing a bad job and losing track of him. However, his persistence earned him an audience with the Bishop. When Juan Diego went in front of the Bishop and pulled out the flowers, an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared on his cloak. The Bishop was convinced that a miracle had occurred and agreed to erect a temple in the spot requested. The cloak is still housed in that temple in Guadalupe, with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on it. The original myth of the Virgin of Guadalupe was recorded by Antonio Valeriano in 1648, over one hundred years after Juan Diego claimed to see the Virgin. (<http://www.sancta.org/nican.html>)

My students' first task in this unit will be to describe this image, the first step in what is called Feldman's method. When I teach students how to analyze artwork I use Feldman's method as a framework for our discussions. It is a process that entails four steps: describing, analyzing interpreting and deciding. When students are first presented with this model they are eager to interpret the artwork first and foremost. I encourage them to record these initial feelings towards the artwork they are viewing, however I also model for them a new more in depth way of viewing a piece of artwork. First, I ask students to describe the artwork. In order to try to teach the students *not* to interpret I encourage them to describe *only* things that are obvious in the artwork. I stress this by having them only list objects, if they cannot recognize and objects, then they should begin to describe shapes and colors instead of assuming what subject they artist was trying to express. For example, in the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe a student might say, "She is squishing an angel," as a part of his or her description. I would explain to the student that s/he is assuming the Virgin is squishing the angel, and should say instead, "There is an angel below the Virgin with his arms raised." This offers a more accurate description and does not begin to interpret the work. I often start the discussion using this question:

If you wanted your friend to go to the art museum and find this specific piece of artwork, how would you describe it for him/her? Initially, we complete this process as a class. I am at the front of the class recording all of the students' suggestions on the white board, or sometimes I will choose a student recorder. If students do not compile a detailed enough description I will read them the description they have recorded so far, and explain to them another piece of artwork that could fit that description. This prompts them to continue describing. If a work is very large and detailed I may also break it down into four quarters, which we will discuss one at a time, so that the students have a more specific area to focus on to be sure they create a complete description. It is important for students to create a detailed description because they pick up on details that they might have missed upon first glance. The first few times we participate in this analysis it is difficult for students to refrain from interpreting the artwork, but as I model the process and they become familiar with it they become very adept at describing the artwork.

Next, students analyze the artwork using the elements and principles of design. Students discuss composition, use of color, and which particular techniques the artist has used in the artwork. Because students come to me with a very limited vocabulary, they become exponentially better at this process as the class continues, because they begin to learn more about the elements and principles of design. They have a better understanding of identifying and applying these principles. For this unit, however, I would have students skip the analysis portion in order to focus on using supporting evidence and placing the work context.

The third step asks students to interpret the artwork. After describing the artwork in detail they have a full arsenal of details to use to formulate an interpretation. I will ask students to hypothesize what the artist was thinking about when s/he created the piece of art, and why they think this - this is where supporting evidence becomes important. The first few times we use Feldman's method we do it out loud as a class so that students gain an understanding of how the process works. I will have students look at their black and white copy of the image and prompt them to highlight or circle symbols in the artwork that tell them something about the Virgin of Guadalupe. This way they can easily reference the supporting evidence in the artwork. I will ask students to list ten different things they can interpret about this woman from the symbols they have highlighted. For instance, a student might circle the glowing mandala shape behind her and say that she has super-powers because she appears to be radiating light. This is a perfectly acceptable answer because the student has used evidence from the image to explain why s/he feels the Virgin has super-powers. Once students have completed their own individual lists of ten traits about this woman, students will be given a chance to share their interpretations. I will record their answers on the board using a two-column grid. One column will have the heading "Interpretation," the second column will have the heading "Evidence." It is important for students to understand that as long as they can support their claim using evidence, there are no incorrect interpretations. I may briefly introduce the concept of context here by asking how listening to the myth first helped the students to determine traits of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Once students have created a class interpretation we will begin to brainstorm questions that students have about this image, in order to make a more informed interpretation. I hope that they will begin to ask what certain symbols mean, or perhaps why the angel on the bottom looks so old, what the shape around the virgin comes from, and so forth.

I will give students a little bit of information about the symbols in the Virgin of Guadalupe. The imagery of the Virgin is most likely taken from the Bible, Revelations 12:1 "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." (Peterson 40) In Catholic tradition Mary is often symbolized by the moon because "she, like the moon, does not generate any light on her own, but instead reflects the light of the sun, Christ" (Keller 82). It is also possible that the image

of the moon in the Guadalupe painting reflected Mexican indigenous traditions. In the Aztec culture the moon also provides protection to those out at night by providing light to those in the darkness. (Keller 82) Also in Aztec tradition the sun god is the most important and the Virgin is now standing in front of the sun. The angel is often present as a helper to the Virgin, lending support. This is the first time that the Virgin has appeared in indigenous form, and the sash she is wearing represents the fact that she is pregnant. This portrayal of the Virgin is also in keeping with the other religious iconography of the time.

The last step of Feldman's method is for students to decide whether or not they like the piece of artwork and to defend their decision. Again, I will skip this step during this particular unit.

Next, I will show students three different appropriations of the original Virgin of Guadalupe. Appropriation is the act of taking ownership of someone else's work, and it is an extremely important topic for me to introduce to my students. In visual art specifically it refers to using an image of someone else's in one's own artwork - sometimes altering the original artwork, or sometimes just reclaiming it as one's own for the sake of art. This concept can be difficult for students to grasp. I will use this opportunity to explain briefly the ethics surrounding copying the work of others, since many of my students see nothing wrong with copying cartoon characters and other drawings that appeal to them. While copying drawings of others is a good learning tool to practice different techniques, it is unlawful to copy someone else's artwork entirely. I will explain that copying artwork is in fact only legal if you are creating a parody of the original, or if you alter the work enough that it becomes a new piece of artwork. I will share with my students that there have been many lawsuits against artists for appropriating images. Some famous examples of image appropriation include Andy Warhol's *Campbell Soup* or *Marilyn Monroe*, Roy Lichtenstein's *Look Mickey*. Sherrie Levine is another artist who appropriates images, almost exactly, for the sake of questioning the nature of original art. Showing students a few of these examples, of the appropriation of icons that are familiar to them, will help them understand the concept of appropriation. I will show them many more at the end of this unit.

Students will now be broken into three groups (possibly more if necessary) to compare the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to a more recent piece of artwork where her image has been appropriated. Students will need to determine similarities between the two images - what elements stay the same? They will also need to determine the differences between the two pieces. Before students begin their comparisons I would like to review with them the fact that this image is revered in many cultures, and we are looking at it as an image, not as a divine act of God. I will also need to preface their comparisons with a warning about nudity in artwork. Alma López's appropriation depicts the artist scantily clad, and a friend of hers is shown naked from the waist up. I will lead students in a discussion about the use of the nude figure in artwork, explaining that the nude figure has been represented in art since the beginning of time, usually representing beauty. I will stress that the artist places the naked figure in the artwork for a *purpose*. It is not included simply for shock value, but plays an important role in the symbolism of pieces we will be looking at. I will ask students to be respectful, and if they cannot they will be asked to do the assignment individually using one of the images which does not contain nudity. Usually my students are very respectful of artwork containing nudity - they are curious about it, and because of this curiosity are very respectfully receptive to it.

We will also need to discuss symbolism. Artists use symbols all the time - they use one thing to represent something else. Students will need to decode the symbols in these pieces in order to determine who the Virgin of Guadalupe is, and what characteristics she possesses. I often give students simple, concrete examples such as - How could you represent intelligence? They usually answer things such as: a book, a diploma, a brain, a graduation cap and gown, etc. Next I will ask them for symbols for a more abstract characteristic, such as joyful. Students have a more difficult time representing abstract concepts, so we discuss how you might use



something like a huge smile, or colors that bring joyful feelings, etc. They will need to be looking for symbols in the appropriated images of the Virgin.

Below I have described each of the different appropriations of the Virgin of Guadalupe. I have also included some interpretations of each of these works of art in order to provide some insight into the artist's intent. Much of this information about how the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe has been appropriated for teacher use; I would not provide the students with this information, but I would offer it if specific questions arose about the icon.

The Virgin of Guadalupe started out as a religious icon to the indigenous people of Mexico, but the Spanish could also easily identify with her because they, too, had a Virgin of Guadalupe in Spain, though she looked very different with black skin, holding the baby Jesus. "The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe was one such fusion of an imported European Mother of God with native mother goddess" (Peterson 40). The Catholic version of the virgin represents fertility, and power over both disease and natural disasters. (Peterson 40) She also represents piety and purity. The Virgin of Guadalupe gained popularity in both European and Mexican circles. In European circles artwork and statues were constructed depicting the virgin helping the white man. (Peterson 40) In 1648 the first account of the story of the apparition was published, and her popularity among Mexicans grew because her native tongue was Aztec. (Peterson 42) Because the Virgin of Guadalupe "spontaneously welded together all of the strata of New Spain . . . [she] served as a symbol of freedom for the native populations" (Peterson 39). Then in 1660 she was named the patron saint, or defender of Mexico. The meaning of the icon changed and she began to represent liberation and control. Her image was used during the Mexican Revolution to rally for freedom, and then her image was used again in farm workers' strikes in the United States beginning in the 1960s. (Anzaldúa 51) "The separation of church and state marked an end to her role as an institutional insignia and she passed into the realm of popular culture," according to one scholar (Peterson 46). Today, as an icon, the Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes dichotomies: conqueror/conquered and Spanish/Indian. For many she is a symbol of hope and survival. (Anzaldúa 52)

Each group of students will receive one of the following images to compare with the original: Esther Hernández's *The Virgin of Guadalupe Fighting for the Rights of Chicanos* (1975), Yolanda López's *Self Portrait as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1978), and Alma López's *Our Lady* (1999).

### **Esther Hernández**

Esther Hernández's representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe is not a self-portrait. Her virgin is in a karate uniform kicking an invisible enemy. She is wearing a traditional white karate uniform - pants and a long sleeved shirt with a black belt at the waist. A cloak, with stars all over it, covers the top of her head but does not constrict her movement. She is surrounded by a white shape with points radiating off of it; however, she breaks the composition of the frame created by it. She is standing on a half circle, which is being held up by an angel. The angel has outstretched arms and a very angry expression. This artwork is a block print, and therefore has flat black shapes and relies on negative space to create the image.

Esther Hernández was born in 1944 in California. Much of her work focuses on the migrant culture in California. She often creates prints because it is a quick, inexpensive way to reach as many people as possible with her images. ([www.testlae.greenwood.com](http://www.testlae.greenwood.com)) Hernández's Virgin is very aggressive, opposing the stature of the original Virgin of Guadalupe. This image could be a literal translation of the Virgin as the defender of Mexico. It may also be symbolizing the strength that the Virgin of Guadalupe provides the people. "Hernández subverts, recontextualizes, and thus transforms culturally traditional images into a series of feminist icons" (Mesa-Bains 136). Ester Hernández states, "As a Chicana artist, I believe it is important to produce and

disseminate positive images of our varied lives: my work counteracts the stereotypes of Latina women as either passive victims or demonized creatures." In this piece of artwork Hernández symbolizes this aesthetically by the Virgin breaking out of the frame created by the mandala, showing female power and strength.

### **Yolanda López**

Yolanda López's representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a self-portrait. She is running, with a cloak in one hand and a snake in the other. She is holding the snake by the neck and the expression on her face is one of joy and triumph. She is wearing a pink dress which is short sleeved, has a black belt at the waist, and the skirt of the dress comes up exposing her thigh. She is holding onto the cloak in one hand, but it appears more like a cape and does not cover her head. She is stepping on the back of an angel with blue, white and red striped wings who is lying face down. Yellow lines radiate from behind her, giving her the appearance that she is glowing. The drawing is done using oil pastels and in some place the texture and line quality is apparent.

Yolanda López was born in 1942 and her work focuses on women, Mexican culture and honoring the working class. ([www.testlae.greenwood.com](http://www.testlae.greenwood.com)) This self-portrait is actually the third in a triptych of women taking the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The first image is of López's grandmother holding a snake seated on the mantle of blue with gold stars. The second is of her mother behind a sewing machine, sewing the mantle. All of these women are depicted as hard working and strong. She is paying homage to these working women by creating a new icon as a model Chicana. In the self-portrait the Virgin has obviously removed the mantle, holding it in her hand. She is barely covered by her dress, showing her skin. She is running, no longer passive and is actively stepping on the angel who is helping the original Virgin of Guadalupe. " This repositioning becomes both satire and provocation, while retaining the transfigurative liberation of the icon" (Mesa-Bains 137). She is holding a snake, which represents indigenous religion, and the power of divine knowledge. (Arrizon 39) The work also shows the influence the icon has on these women and how they define themselves based on her image. "It attests to the critique of traditional Mexican women's roles and religious oppression in a self-fashioning of new identities" (Mesa-Bains 137).

### **Alma López**

Alma López's representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a self-portrait. She is glaring at the viewer, with her hands on her hips and her weight slightly shifted to her right. The only clothing the artist is wearing is a "bikini" of flowers, and a blue cloak with gold trim, which has a pattern of pre-Columbian art on it. She is standing on a black moon shape which is being held up by another image of a friend from the waist up, breasts exposed. This second image of herself is much smaller and has butterfly wings. She has a yellow border around her, and along the bottom half of the image surrounding her are different colored roses. Along the top half surrounding her is a red fabric with a pattern on it. This image is produced digitally by combining a variety of photographs and may employ some Photoshop filters.

Alma López uses the viceroy butterfly in her work because it mimics the monarch butterfly whose migration pattern goes from the United States to Mexico. (Alvarado 77) The flowers represent the roses that Juan Diego used to prove to the Bishop that the Virgin had in fact appeared at Tlatelolco. The pre-Columbian art represents another aspect of Mexican history from long before the Virgin of Guadalupe. Instead of an angel below her she has a friend lifting her up, a friend who has bared all to her. Perhaps this figure is representative of a true friend who will be there to help, uncovered by anything. López says, "It's not about knocking La Virgen's image as a mother but about showing alternative identities that illustrate more the lived realities of Chicanas." (Warren) The image is a self-portrait and portrays her reaction to dealing with this icon

as a model of a woman throughout her life. It is also important to know that Alma López is a lesbian, so her symbolism of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a representation of all women also has roots in representing lesbians. This may change the feminist slant of her artwork slightly.

I would like each group to give a presentation of their comparison to the rest of the class. This will either be done through a poster board presentation, or through a PowerPoint presentation. I would like each group to highlight the similarities and differences between their two images. I would also like them to include their description of the original Virgin of Guadalupe, and then create a description for the appropriation of the Virgin of Guadalupe. I would like them to use a similar method for each - listing traits they think this woman would have based on supporting symbols from the image. I would like them to hypothesize how they think the representation of the virgin has changed, and why it might have changed. How has the icon changed over time? How has each artist changed different thing about her? What have all three artists changed?

The Virgin of Guadalupe is an icon. It is important for students to understand that in order for them to understand why an artist might want to redefine an icon. I will ask students what they think an icon is, and how does an icon come to be? I will also ask them to brainstorm current icons. We will discuss why artists might redefine or appropriate an icon in order to redefine what it represents, just as these artists have with the Virgin of Guadalupe.

## Malinche

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Next we will look at appropriations of Malinche, another Mexican and Chicana icon. She was alive around the same time that the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, but she has been represented very differently by artists. Now that students have had practice citing evidence in images we will focus on how context becomes important in understanding a work of art. This portion of the unit will focus on reading the artwork first out of context and then in context to show that context can drastically change the interpretation of the artwork. Students knew the context of the Virgin of Guadalupe before they interpreted the artwork, because we had read the story about her. The images students compared of the Virgin of Guadalupe all contained some portions of the original icon. The representations of Malinche are very different, and a common thread through them is not obvious at all. While the description of her (given later on) is extremely graphic, the images we will be looking at are much more symbolic and less explicit. I am very interested to see the characteristics that students assign to this woman, since the portrayals of her are so drastically different. I will not tell them ANY of the story of Malinche before they look at and compare these three images and I am assuming that she is not an icon which many students will recognize easily. I will also be sure NOT to share the titles of the pieces with students, because they may influence their initial reactions or give away extra contextual information. The first image students will look at is the *Hernán Cortés and La Malinche in a Tlaxcala city* from the Tlaxcala codex created fifty years after the conquest. We will juxtapose this with and José Clemente Orozco's *Painting of Cortes and Malinche as Adam and Eve* (1926) and Jimmie Durham's sculpture *Doña Marina, Cortes' Translator* (1991).

### Malinche In Tlaxcala

In the codex Malinche is a figure in the center of the image. She is standing next to Cortez and is pointing her left hand at a group of people, along with her right hand. She has long hair, is looking where she is pointing



and appears to have a content expression. She is larger than anyone else in the image and is wearing a dress or shawl that is long sleeved and stops at mid calf. She is also wearing a long skirt underneath that which reaches down to her ankles and she is wearing simple shoes. Her dress is not very elaborate, with just a small amount of detailing along the bottom of the shawl and skirt. The artwork is a simple line drawing.

Malinche is shown here next to Cortez, like his "right hand man", and is pointing to whoever she is talking to. She is shown next to him because she is his line of communication. She is larger than the other people in the image, possibly accentuating her importance. She is wearing shoes, which is a sign of status. She looks as though she belongs in the scene and like she is providing a necessary assistance. She appears to be providing help to Cortez, but she also looks like she could be a threat to the men because of her scale in the image.

### **José Orozco Clemente**

José Orozco Clemente's Malinche is very graphic. The woman is seated with her left arm by her side, and her right hand holding the hand of Cortez, who is seated next to her. Both figures are naked. Her skin is brown and blends in with the background. Her eyes appear to be closed, or almost closed and she is naked. Cortez is seated to the left of her, and he is reaching across her. His gaze is off in the distance, not focused on her. Cortez is stepping on a figure who is face down on the ground below them, who has brown skin like Malinche's. The artwork is a fresco in a preparatory school in Mexico. It is large scale and has very limited color - black and white and brown with some values of each.

José Clemente Orozco was a Mexican muralist working at the turn of the century. He was considered one of the three great Mexican mural artists along with Rivera and Sisquerios. He was born in Mexico and came to the US to do commissioned work in the early 1930s. His work is very political in nature. The title of this artwork states the obvious comparison to Adam and Eve where the woman signifies the downfall of the culture, just as Eve did when she bit the apple. The two figures are holding hands, representing a union. However, the union appears to be contingent upon a variety of factors, including the restraint of the indigenous man underneath Cortez's foot. It also appears as though Cortez is either restraining Malinche, or protecting her - the way his arm is thrown across her body it is difficult to tell. It looks as though he is trying to keep her in place. Her expression shows that she is disinterested, almost apathetic, while Cortez is very aware of his surroundings. "The image of Cortez and Malinche symbolizes sythesis, subjugation and the ambivalence of her position in the story of the nation's history of colonial intervention," (Rochfort 44).

### **Jimmie Durham**

Jimmie Durham's Malinche is seated, looking directly at the viewer. She has a very sad expression on her face, and has bright earrings and a necklace. Her spine is a tree branch, and her torso is only a few small pieces of wood - it looks hollow, almost non-existent. She is wearing a thin, cloth bra and there is white cloth draped over her legs. Her arms are made out of wood and her legs are made out of cloth and batting. Her feet are very small and misshapen, as are her hands. One side of her face is made out of snakeskin. She is sitting on a crate. This is a sculpture made mostly out of found objects.

Jimmie Durham is a Cherokee artist who is constantly looking at the world around him to formulate ideas for his artwork. His artwork often represents the colonizing of the US and its ongoing effects today. (Lippard 1) He "is fascinated by historical figures who, like himself, have been voluntary and involuntary translators." (Lippard 5). Malinche's face is indigenous, except for the half that is made out of snakeskin, probably representing the indigenous female serpent goddesses who were thought to be very dangerous. It may also represent her being half Indian half Spanish, or snakelike. Her torso is completely missing, devoid of a heart or

anything to keep her living. This may represent her being spineless or lacking feeling, missing the very part that makes her human. Her arms and legs appear as though they could not support her body. Durham does add a few modern touches - bright jewelry and a thin bra - which stress the idea that Malinche is an icon which women feel the pressure of.

I will have large exemplars of these three images, and I will make a copy for students with all three images in black and white on a piece of paper. I will challenge students to find similarities between the three women in these images. This will be a difficult task, as there are not a multitude of similarities. The women are female, indigenous, seated (in two), have good posture as though they are royal, are next to a man (in two) who seems relevant, and have very stern expressions. Beyond that there are not very many obvious similarities. In order to grasp the rest of the similarities you must know the context of the images.

Once they have written down this first comparison, I would like to ask them what they would like to know about the woman depicted, or how putting this image "into context" might help them analyze it. I would urge them to discuss what "in context" means. There are a variety of different contexts you can use to gain information about something. I would like to ask students if they can think of an example when they overheard a part of a conversation and became upset because of what they heard, however once the information was put into context, they were no longer upset. For instance, I might tell a story where I overhear my mother on the phone saying Lori (my cousin) looks like she is gaining weight. As an outsider to the conversation this information about my cousin sounds offensive. In what "context" might gaining weight actually be a compliment? Maybe my cousin is pregnant and starting to show, maybe she has been sick and is finally getting healthy, or maybe she has an eating disorder she is finally starting to overcome. Because I do not know the *context* my mother is speaking in, I cannot yet discern if she is saying negative things about my cousin. I would like to find a better example of this for the students - perhaps showing them one of the cut up montages of President Bush, or a celebrity on YouTube where the celebrity's words are minced and taken out of context to create a clip where they mean something else entirely. The teacher can find an example that involves current events fairly easily by searching YouTube. Once students recognize that they put conversations in context all the time, I would like them to brainstorm why knowing the context around a piece of artwork might be helpful in analyzing the artwork.

There are a variety of different contexts in which you can view an artwork: the artist's life or personal experience, the environment the artwork was produced in, the function of the artwork, the "style" the artwork is done in (does it belong to a particular movement), and what cultural beliefs it is based upon. (Keller 157) Some of these contexts are extremely important when looking at the three images of Malinche. The personal experience of the artist and the cultural beliefs the artwork is based on are extremely important in interpreting these pieces of artwork. What "historical" events happened which help put this artwork in context? What cultural beliefs put this artwork into context? What other stories or images do these artworks reference (specifically José Orozco's reference to Adam and Eve)? What was each artist trying to show about this woman? Why might the artist have wanted to show that?

In order to give the students a little more context about these images I will share with them the titles of each work: *Malinche in Tlaxcala*, *Doña Marina (Cortes' Translator)*, and *Malinche and Cortes (Adam and Eve)*. I would like students again to determine similarities between these women now that they know the titles of the artwork. They should be able to glean that the woman's name is Malinche or Doña Marina, and she has some sort of relationship with Cortez (possibly as his translator). I will then ask students to begin putting this art into context themselves in a class discussion. Who was Cortez? I will use a map to aid our discussion to give students a visual representation of Mexico. Why would Cortez have needed a translator? Where was he

coming from? What happened as a result of him arriving in Mexico? If Malinche were his translator how did she play a part in that? What feelings might this bring about toward her? How would *you* feel about this woman? Once students went through this discovery through a class discussion I would fill in any details we missed. Following is some information about Malinche for the use of the teacher.

Malinche was an historical figure in 16th century Mexico, a Native woman who lived along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and became the twentieth slave given to Cortez when he arrived there in 1519. As the twentieth she was thought to be lucky, however she was also an extremely talented linguist, and she quickly became Cortez's translator. She was able to speak Aztec and Mayan dialects, and she quickly learned Spanish, becoming an integral part of the conquest of Mexico. She also became Cortez's mate and had a son with him. Though she played a huge part in this historical event often only one line is devoted to her in entire books about Cortez. (Mirandé 25)

Because she played a role in the bloody conquest of the Aztec empire, Malinche has been a very controversial figure over time. According to one author she has at times been seen as ". . . a whore, the mother of a bastard race of mestizos, and a traitress to her country," (Mirandé 24). Although she was extremely intelligent and had an amazing talent for languages, many came to see her as a symbol of everything not to be. "Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards," (Anzaldúa 44). She has become known as "*la Chinganda* - the fucked one. . . the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos," (Anzaldúa 44). Other interpreters of Malinche have sympathized with her as a victim of Spanish rape, as the first "mother" of Mexican mestizos, or as a translator who, like many subsequent women, worked to represent her own interests and not just the interests of men.

Once the students know the story of Malinche they will need to compare the traditional view of Malinche in the codex to either appropriation of her. Each student will need to explain how the view of Malinche has changed, using supporting evidence from each piece of artwork, as well as from history, to explain their conclusions.

## Putting Your own Icon into Context

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Artists in the twenty-first century have used the appropriation of icons to make political and personal statements. By changing parts of an icon they put it into a personal context (like Alma López's artwork) or a social or political context (like Esther Hernández's artwork). I will show students a variety of different artists who have done this with icons which are familiar to my students. For instance, both Esther Hernández and Lalo Alcaraz have appropriated the Statue of Liberty in her work *Libertad* (1977) and his work *Statue of Information* (2001). *Libertad* shows a woman carving the Statue of Liberty and exposing a pre-Columbian sculpture within her form. *Statue of Information* is a commentary about homeland security where the Statue is now shown holding up a huge microphone in the air, with a tape recorder and headphones. I will also review with students Beyte Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* which will be an image that the students have discussed before, earlier in the year.

As a culminating activity I would like students to choose an icon which is interesting to them, and then choose a context in which they would like to appropriate that icon. They will need to determine how they would like the viewer to see that icon differently, and what symbols they are going to use to express that idea. We will review our definition of an icon, and will create a list of current icons which would be possible to use. Students

will begin to design their own painting, line drawing, or print appropriating an icon and putting it into a new context.

I will use Alcaraz's *Statue of Information* as an example of this process for students. First we will brainstorm things that the icon of Statue of Liberty represents to people in the United States. Students should come up with words such as: liberty, freedom, immigration, "the American Dream" and so forth. Alcaraz has chosen to use this symbol of the United States to make a commentary on homeland security's reaction to terrorism. This is the new, historical context Alcaraz is placing on this icon. We will then brainstorm a list of symbols about homeland security; possible examples might be racial profiling, heightened airport security, taping phone conversations and so forth. Alcaraz has decided to use the taping of phone conversations as a symbol, and by juxtaposing it with the icon of the Statue of Liberty it becomes much more ubiquitous. No longer is the government listening to a single phone conversation, but now any conversation, which is had in public in New York City, will be recorded by the Statue of Liberty's oversized microphone. The icon that once represented freedom is now depicted jeopardizing our right to freedom of speech. This is a very powerful image and is one that students will certainly be able to connect with.

I will assist students in going through this process of appropriation for their own artwork. They will choose an icon from the list we brainstormed before, and they will write a short paragraph stating what their icon symbolizes to them, and why. Then they will tell me how they think the meaning of the icon has changed in a certain context - is there a current event going on which changes the meaning of the icon, or did something happen in their personal life that has caused them to see this icon differently? Next students will need to brainstorm images to symbolize that change in the icon. The last step is for students to determine how to juxtapose the old icon and the new symbols together in an interesting composition. How are they going to change or alter the icon? What traits will remain so that the icon is recognizable? I look forward to seeing students' responses to this challenge.

While students are working I use a variety of strategies to monitor their progress. I am constantly walking around the room looking at what students are doing and asking them questions about what they are working on. If they have a question about how to do something my first response is always, "What do you think you should do?" I find that my students are programmed to immediately ask for the answers instead of trying to solve problems for themselves. Therefore, when they have questions I try to have them answer their own questions, or look to their peers for help.

Their final pieces of artwork will be displayed throughout the school, including their written explanation of their artwork.

## Assessment

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I assess my students in a variety of different ways and think that using rubrics is extremely important, especially since art is such an objective subject to grade. In order to assess students and hold them accountable for attending class each student is given a daily participation grade. This grade will be extremely important on the days in which the students are doing group work. Students will also receive a group grade for their presentations.

Throughout the process students will be asked to complete peer critiques. While I think that it is important for me to track the students progress, I also think it is important for them to see each other's progress. I find that the students are each other's best critics. If part of a drawing does not look correct they will be quick to offer a suggestion. I try to train them to be specific and to also offer suggestions if they are going to comment on a peer's artwork. Towards the end of each project I also have students fill out a peer critique form. This allows a new set of eyes, besides mine, to look at their artwork and respond.

Their final piece of artwork will be graded using a rubric. The criteria on the rubric will be given to students at the beginning of the assignment. The rubric will include the following criteria: choosing an icon, creating a new context for the icon, choosing a style or technique that compliments the new image, the icon is changed enough that the image is successfully appropriated but enough remains to recognize the original icon, there is a written explanation of the image and the craftsmanship is of good quality. Students will be given a self-evaluation containing this rubric to fill out before they hand in their artwork. The teacher will then fill out the same rubric to determine the grade.

## Student Resources

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Clemente Orozco, José. *Painting of Cortes And Malinche as Adam and Eve*. 1926. A mural in Mexico depicting Cortez and Malinche as Adam and Eve. This image does contain nudity.

Durham, Jimmie. *Doña Marina, Cortes' Translator*. 1991. A found sculpture version of Malinche.

Hernández, Esther. *The Virgin of Guadalupe Fighting for the Rights of Chicanos*. 1975. A block print appropriating the Virgin of Guadalupe doing karate.

Johnson, Kaytie. "Ester Hernández." *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture and Education. Volume 2*. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2002. 24-25. A book with reproductions of images by Chicano artists along with blurbs about each of the artists, including their influences. This is a very helpful resource.

López, Alma. *Our Lady*. 1999. A digital self-portrait appropriating the Virgin of Guadalupe. This image contains nudity.

López, Yolanda. *Self-Portrait as the Virgin of Guadalupe*. 1978. Part of a triptych where the artist's family members become the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Mirandé, Alfredo, and Evangelina Enriquez. "La Chicana: the Mexican-American Woman." (1979): 25-31. A very helpful resource with information about Malinche, both the story, and how she is represented now in Chicana culture.

*Virgin of Guadalupe*. 1513. Guadalupe, Mexico. The original Virgin of Guadalupe which appeared on Juan Diego's cloak.



## Teacher Resources

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Aldama, Arturo J. "Yolanda M. López." *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture and Education. Volume 2.* Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2002. 90-91. see above

Alvarado, Joaquín. "Alma López." *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture and Education. Volume 2.* Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2002. 76-77.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: the New Mestiza.* 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. 44-61. An amazing book about Chicana feminism including very bold viewpoints about both the Virgin of Guadalupe and Malinche. Great for teacher information.

Arrizón, Alicia. "Mythical Performativity: Relocating Aztlan N Chicana Feminist Cultural Productions." *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 23-49. A great article with wonderful images about how women have represented their Chicana roots in both visual art and theater.

Keller, Gary D., Mary Erikson, and Pat Villeeneuve. *Chicano Art for Our Millenium.* Tempe, AZ: Bilingual P, 2004. A book containing reproductions of a variety of Chicano art. This book has an educators guide at the end of it which is a tremendous resource giving wonderful questions for the teacher to facilitate discussions about artwork in a variety of different contexts.

Lippard, Lucy R. "Jimmie Durham: Postmodern "Savage." - Native American Artist." *Art in America* Feb (1993). A wonderful article about the symbolism in Jimmie Durham's work, and his process as an artist.

Mesa-Bains, Amalia. "El Mundo Femenino: Chicana Artists of the Movement: a Commentary on Development and Prodcution." *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985.* Los Angeles, CA: Wight Art Gallery, 1991. 131-154. An interesting article with information about Ester Hernández and Yolanda López.

Perry, Leslie. "The "Dual"-Ing Images of La Malinche and La Virgen De Guadalupe in Ciserno's the House on Mango Street - Critical Essay." *MELUS* Summ (2002): 1-8. This is an interesting article about the dichotomy between these two images, and how they effect Chicana women today.

Peterson, Jeanette F. "Creating the Virgin of Guadalupe: the Cloth, the Artist, and Sources in Sixteenth-Century New Spain." *The Americas* 61 (2005): 571-610. An in depth look at the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and whether or not the cloak painting could actually be real.

Peterson, Jeanette F. "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?" *Art Journal* (1992): 39-47. A very helpful article about the symbolism of the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Rochfort, Desmond. *Mexian Muralists: Orozco, Rivera and Squeiros.* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1993. 44-45. Information about Diego Rivera's "Malinche and Cortez" mural.

Warren, Nancy. "Some Like A Virgin, Some Don't: Alma Lopez generates controversy in New Mexico." *San Francisco Gate.* April 27, 2001.

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