



ARTE PARA TODOS

PAPER MACHE SKULL MASKS



TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

THIS LESSON HAS BEEN WRITTEN FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS WITH TEKS ALIGNED TO GRADES K-5. SUGGESTIONS ARE INCLUDED FOR SCAFFOLDING CONTENT TO ACCOMMODATE STUDENT NEEDS. TEACHERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ADAPT LESSONS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND TO FIT THEIR TEACHING OBJECTIVES.

Primary

Art: 117.102 - 117.303

- (1A)(1B)
- (2A) (2B) (2C)
- (3A)(3B)(3C)(3D)
- (4A)(4B)(4C)

Secondary

Art: 117.102 - 117.303

- (1A)(1B)
- (2A) (2B) (2C)
- (3A)(3B)(3C)(3D)
- (4A)(4B)(4C)



HISTORY OF MASKS

In pre-Columbian Mexico, masks followed an ancient tradition. Masks were constructed in a variety of ways and used for many purposes such as ornaments, part of a ritual, or created as death masks.

They represented gods or functioned to express the inner, spiritual identity of the wearer. The symbolic purpose of a funerary mask was the belief that the wearer retained their identity after death, while also "becoming a god" who can be called upon by his successors for guidance.

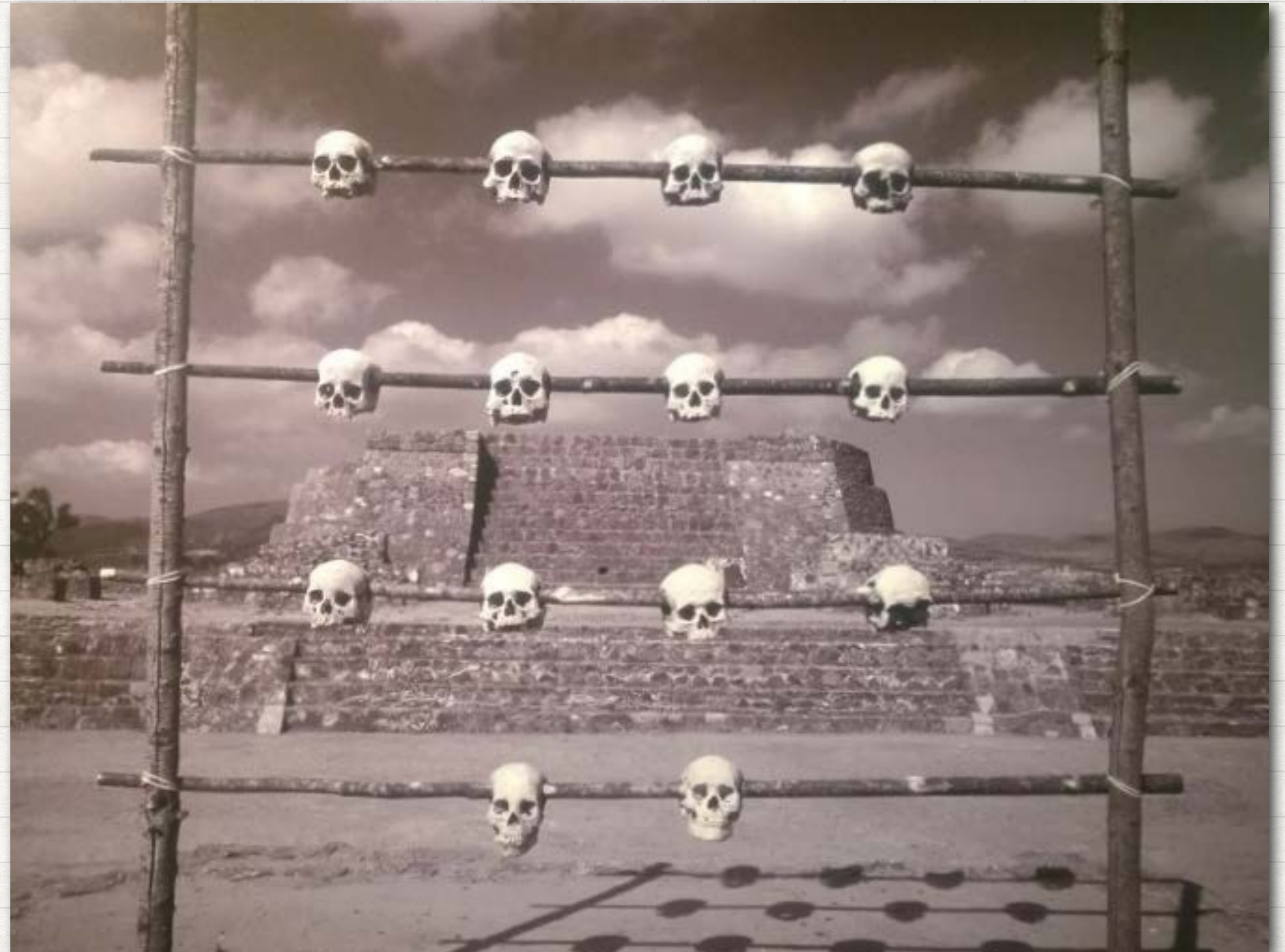


Aztec Turquoise and Lignite mosaic mask of Tezcatlipoca, 15th - 16th century.

ORIGINS OF SKULL SYMBOLISM

A tzompantli is a wooden rack or palisade documented in several Mesoamerican civilizations which was used for the public display of human skulls typically those of war captives or sacrificial victims. It was believed that the sacrifice would feed the gods and ensure the continued existence of the world.

After months or years in the sun and rain, a skull would begin to fall to pieces, losing teeth and jaw bones. The priests would remove it to be fashioned into a mask and placed in an offering, or use mortar to add it to towers of skulls that flanked the tzompantli. For the Aztecs those skulls were the seeds that would ensure the continued existence of humanity. They were a sign of life and regeneration, like the first flowers of spring.



ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF CALAVERAS

A calaca is a figure of a skull or skeleton (usually human) commonly used for decoration during the Mexican Day of the Dead festival, although they are made all year round.

Tracing their origins from pre-Colombian imagery, calacas are frequently shown with flowers and foliage. As with other aspects of the Day of the Dead festival, calacas are generally depicted as joyous rather than mournful figures. They are often shown wearing festive clothing, dancing, and playing musical instruments to indicate a happy afterlife. Drawing on the Mexican belief that death is a part of life, which should be celebrated.



Calaveras are a representation of a human skull. The term is often applied to edible or decorative skulls (usually made by hand) from either sugar, clay, or paper mache, that are used in the celebration of the Day of the Dead. A calavera can also refer to any artistic representation of skulls, such as the lithographs of Jose Guadalupe Posada.



Calavera Catrina is one of Posada's most famous works, commonly associated with Dia de los Muertos. "Catrina" was a nickname in the early twentieth century for an elegant, upper-class woman. Posada depicted La Catrina as a skeleton in order to critique the Mexican elite who dressed in European clothing.

ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF CALAVERAS

Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central or **Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda Central** is a mural created by Diego Rivera between the years 1946 and 1947 in Mexico City.

The mural depicts characters from 400 years of Mexican history all gathered in Mexico City's largest park. The central grouping features Rivera as a child, painter Frida Kahlo, printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, all surrounding **La Catrina**. Rivera reproduced Catrina and added an elaborate boa—reminiscent of the feathered Mesoamerican serpent god Quetzalcóatl—around her neck.

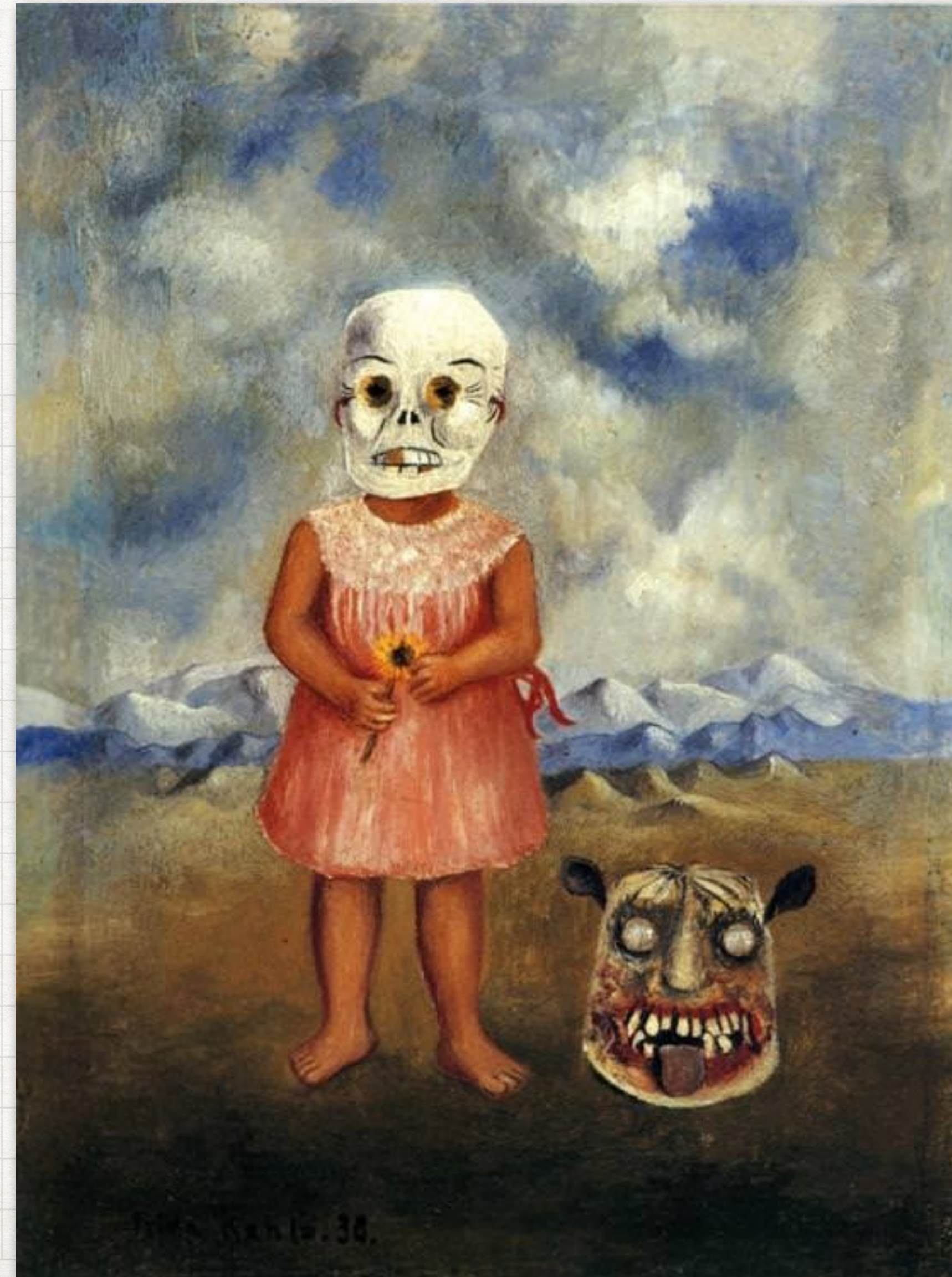
Though Posada died in obscurity in 1913, artists like Diego Rivera brought attention to his work which remains a significant cultural influence to this day.



ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF CALAVERAS

This painting, **Girl with Death Mask** by famous Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, depicts a little girl wearing a skull mask. Death was a common theme for Frida Kahlo and it reflects a traditional Mexican idea of death. The tiger mask on the ground is a symbolic talisman to protect the girl from evil.

The death mask depicted is traditionally worn for Day of the Dead. The girl is holding a yellow blossom in her hands which resembles a marigold, offerings that are placed on ofrendas or graves during Dia de los Muertos to guide the spirits of the dead.



ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF CALAVERAS

Representations of skulls continue to be an iconic visual staple of Mexican, Chicanx culture and contemporary art.

The iconic skull tag **Señor Suerte** by Chaz Bojorquez was created in 1969 from composites of imagery represented during the times and social struggles of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

Inspired by the Black Panther movement, and films of the time, Chaz began drawing Señor Suerte. The skeleton was given a hat and fur-collared coat, a smiling face similar to Day of the Dead imagery representative of his heritage, and bony fingers twisted into a "Good Luck" symbol. The adoption of the iconic skull became an image of protection from death.



Chaz Bojorquez
Señor Suerte, 2020
monoprint serigraph,
and ink made from the
ash of the 2018
California fires

FORMS OF PAPER MACHE ART

Cartonería is the name for fanciful, props that brighten the fiesta or celebration. They are constructed of paper, cardboard, and paper mache, which is when paper is layered and hardened with flour paste. Paper mache was introduced to Mexico around the 17th century as a way to make objects for churches. The dried surface is painted with festive colors and highly decorated.

Cartoneria, or Paper Mache pieces are frequently used for celebrations throughout the year. Birthday piñatas, skulls or skeletal figures for Day of the Dead, effigies meant to be "burned" on Holy Saturday, and much more.



ALEBRIJES

Artisan Pedro Linares began his career making piñatas, masks, and religious figures out of paper mache that were sold throughout Mexico City. He shifted to crafting large, fantastical and vividly colored paper mache creatures he called alebrijes. Alebrijes were celebrated throughout Mexico and Linares took a common folk art tradition in a new direction.

Fantasy Devil
Paper mache alebrije by Pedro Linares



Paper Mache Mojigangas:

La Catrina by Patricia Greene and *Sugar Skull* by Sergio and Monica Lejarazu



A mojiganga is a giant puppet also used as a sculpture or a grand scale design element for a large event. The head and bust are made of paper mache which is then mounted on a tall supporting structure.

This is a paper mache project that uses mostly recycled materials or materials easily found at home. Creating a paper mache skull mask might take you a few days to make, **so plan ahead to create one in time for Day of the Dead!**



MATERIALS

- Paper plate or thick yardstick alternative
- 1 part flour 2 parts water mixture
- Newspaper, newsprint, or recycled paper
- Scissors
- Masking tape
- Mask template



STEP 1

Use the half skull template provided to make a complete skull image on the paper plate or cardstock alternative.



STEP 2

Fold your paper plate or cardstock in half and tape the template on top.



STEP 3

Cut out eyes, nose, and mouth and the slits.



STEP 4

Fold over and tape the slits to make the mask 3-dimensional. The sturdier the cardstock or plate, the more structural support your mask will have, however young children may need assistance with cutting and folding.



Make sure each slit is folded over and taped.



STEP 5

Make paper mache mixture out of 2 parts water and 1 part flour in a bowl.



STEP 6

Mix the ingredients until consistency is thick and gooey. Rip strips of about 1" thick from the newspaper/newsprint.



STEP 7

Place individual strips coated in flour/water mixture over your paper plate making sure to leave the holes you cut earlier. Alternate placing layers of strips in horizontal/ vertical patterns.



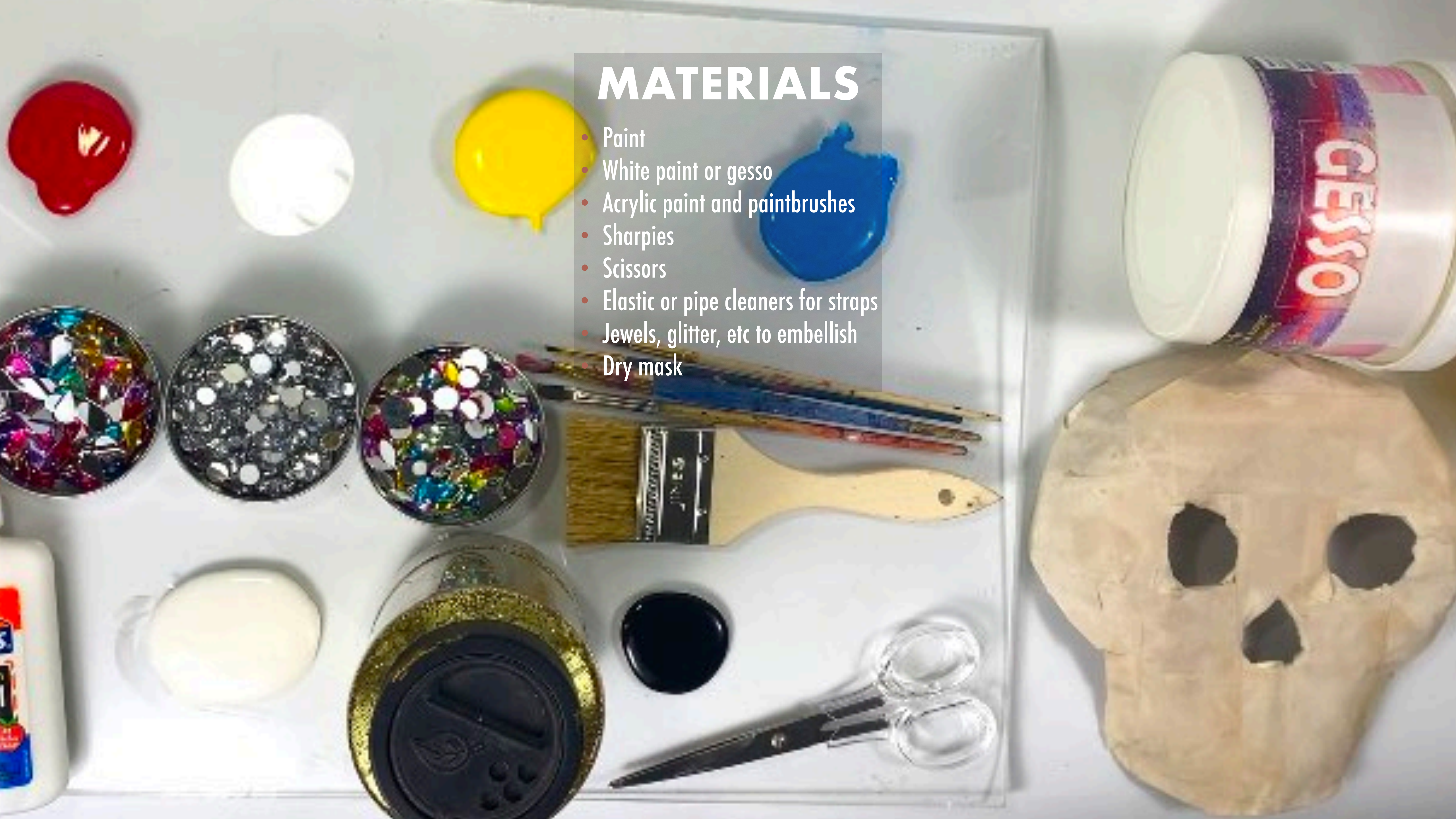
STEP 8

Let your mask dry overnight.



MATERIALS

- Paint
- White paint or gesso
- Acrylic paint and paintbrushes
- Sharpies
- Scissors
- Elastic or pipe cleaners for straps
- Jewels, glitter, etc to embellish
- Dry mask



STEP 9

When mask is completely dry and hardened, use scissors or a box cutter to shape the mask.



STEP 10

Paint a base coat over dried mask, with gesso or white paint.



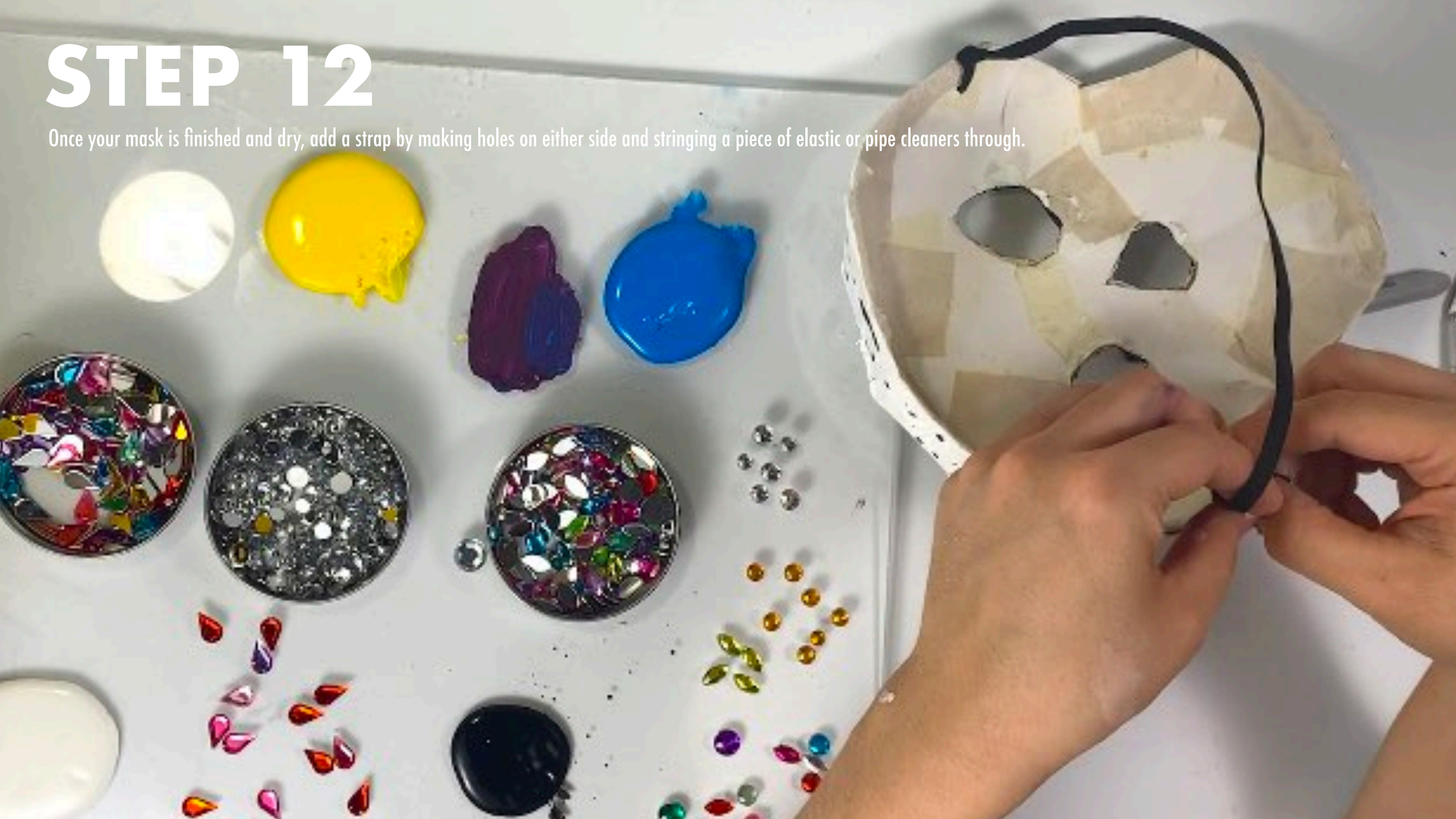
STEP 11

Decorate your mask with paint and designs, looking to nature and festivals for inspiration. Embellish your mask with glitter, flowers, etc.



STEP 12

Once your mask is finished and dry, add a strap by making holes on either side and stringing a piece of elastic or pipe cleaners through.



Wear your mask to celebrate Dia de los Muertos!

