



# Día de los Muertos Calacas

## 9th-12th Grade

### Duration

Pre-Visit: 30-40 minutes

Visit: 30 minutes

Post-Visit: 2 or 3 class periods

### Location

Special Exhibits Hall

### Supplies

- Twist-ties (several boxes)
- Fabric scraps (or felt)
- Glue (school glue or tacky glue)
- Scissors
- Sewing materials (needle/thread - OPTIONAL)
- Crayola Model Magic (or other modeling clay - WHITE)
- Permanent black markers (fine point if possible)

### Vocabulary

Myth / Mythological · Fantasy · Narrative · Origin · Armature · 3-D · Sculpture · Papier-mâché

## Concepts

- Death is a universal part of the cycle of life, and transcends cultures, times, and places.
- The lives of those who have died are honored and celebrated in a variety of ways through the arts.

## Objectives

- Students will examine and reflect on works of art depicting calacas as a representation of the universal theme of death.
- Students will select a person to represent in their own work who has passed away - either a character from a novel, an historical figure, or someone from the student's own life.
- Students will write a short narrative about their selected figure, including specific details from their lives. After, students will construct their own three-dimensional "twist-tie" calaca, complete with details specific to the person they selected.

## Outline

1. Before visiting the Museum, discuss various ways that the universal theme of death is (or has been) celebrated/honored by people from different places, times, or cultures.
2. During a trip to the Museum (or online), view and discuss selected works that feature the concept of death, either symbolically or literally (in the form of calacas).
3. After the Museum visit, students will select a person to represent in their own work who has passed away, write a short narrative about their selected figure, and construct their own three-dimensional "twist-tie" calaca, complete with details (clothing, accessories, etc.) specific to the person they selected.

## Standards

### Visual Art - California Standards

3.3—Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

5.2 —Create a work of art that communicates a cross-cultural or universal theme taken from literature or history.

### Visual Art - National Standards (2013)

VA:Cn11.1.1a—Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

### English Language Arts - CCSS

6-12<sup>th</sup> Writing Standards—Anchor Standard 3: narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

## Background

Death is a universal part of the cycle of life, and transcends cultures, times, and places. It is honored and celebrated in a variety of ways through the arts. Día de los Muertos, or “Day of the Dead”, is one such observance that has grown in popularity here in the United States. Many artists who explore death as a theme in their art incorporate the image of the calaca, or decorated skeleton, as a reminder of the joyful memories that encompass this commemorative holiday.

## References & Resources

- *Anacleto and his fortune-telling birds*, by Leonardo Linares Vargas, 2001, Wire and papier-mache, modeled and polychromed, from Mexico City, Federal District, Mexico
- *Panciano, the maker of Judas figures*, by Felipe Linares Mendoza, Wire and papier-mache, modeled and polychromed, from Mexico City, Federal District, Mexico
- *Doña Marina, the elegant skeleton*, by Felipe Linares Mendoza, Wire and papier-mache, modeled and polychromed, from Mexico City, Federal District, Mexico
- *Skulls*, by Leonardo Linares Vargas, 2001, Wire and papier-mache, modeled and polychromed, from Mexico City, Federal District, Mexico
- *Burial of Skeletons*, by Alfonso Soteno Fernandez, 2001, Modeled and polychromed clay, from Metepec, State of Mexico, Mexico
- *Group of Musicians*, by Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, 1995, Molded, modeled, incised and burnished black clay, from San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico
- *Family and Fireworks*, Carlomagno Pedro Martínez, 1995, Molded, modeled, incised and burnished black clay, from San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, Mexico
- “Words, Words, Words: Folk Art Terminology—Why It (Still) Matters,” Joan M. Benedetti. *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, Vol 19, No.1 (Spring 2000), pp. 14-21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27949051>
- <http://www.lacalaca.com/linares-family>
- <http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-calaveras-of-jose-guadalupe-posada/>
- [http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/dia-de-los-muertos/?ar\\_a=1](http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/dia-de-los-muertos/?ar_a=1)



- <http://archive.azcentral.com/ent/dead/>
- Original twist-tie lesson plan:
- [http://www.lagunaclay.com/clay-in-class/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/CA\\_HISTORY\\_TwistTie\\_LessonPlan.pdf](http://www.lagunaclay.com/clay-in-class/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/CA_HISTORY_TwistTie_LessonPlan.pdf)

### Pre-Visit

Ask students to brainstorm in small groups ways that the universal theme of death is (or has been) celebrated/honored by people from different places, times, or cultures. Chart ideas as a whole class. Introduce the term [folk art](#) and provide a brief overview of the various types of folk art that can be seen in the *Grandes Maestros* exhibit at NHM, specifically including works by Leonardo Linares Vargas, Felipe Linares Mendoza, Alfonso Soteno Fernandez, and Carlomagno Pedro Martínez.

Engage students in a discussion about the following questions:

- What is the importance or value of commemorative art?
- Has its significance changed or remained the same over time?
- How has the universal theme of death, as depicted in folk art, reimagined itself in popular culture today? (Where do we see cultural appropriations of día de los muertos imagery today?)
- What has influenced your own personal interpretations of/connections to the cross-cultural theme of death?

### Museum Visit

While viewing the selected works in the exhibit (or online), ask students to consider the context in which the artists made their work, as well as the methods utilized. Are the figures specific to an era, or are they timeless representations of this universal theme? How do we know? What, if any, specific characteristics or details do the figures possess that tell us about who they were? Ask students to consider how their own knowledge about death (as a universal theme in literature and art) influences their own personal understanding of or connections to these works.

### Post-Visit

Ask students to select a person to represent in their own work who has passed away - either a character from a novel, an historical figure, or someone from the student's own life. Have students write a short narrative about their selected figure, including specific details from their lives (characteristics, traits, accomplishments, etc.). After, students will construct their own three-dimensional "twist-tie" calaca, complete with details (clothing, accessories, etc.) specific to the person they selected (see full "Activity" section below).

### Variations & Extensions

The twist-tie calacas can be used as characters in an introductory lesson teaching stop-motion animation, as they are easily manipulated. More information on basic how-to can be found here:

<http://animation-tutorials.wonderhowto.com/how-to/make-your-own-stop-motion-animation-425584/>

## Activity

Ask students to select a person to represent in their own work who has passed away - either a character from a novel, an historical figure, or someone from the student's own life.

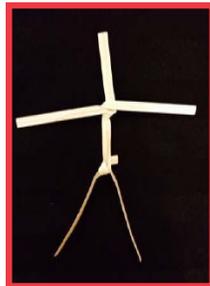
Have students will write a short narrative about their selected figure, including specific details from their lives (characteristics, traits, accomplishments, etc.)

Next, students will construct their own three-dimensional "twist-tie" calaca:

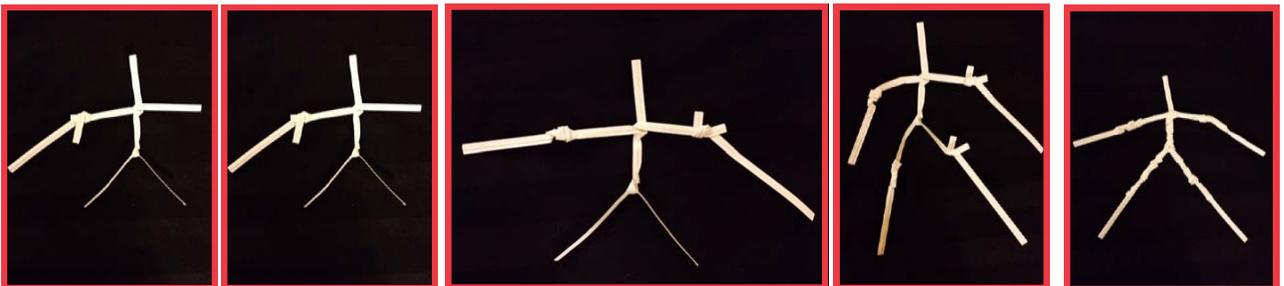
- Begin by twisting two ties securely together to form a "t", with one side (the top) a little shorter than the others (this shorter part will be the top of the spinal column where the head will be attached). The two horizontal stems will be the basis for the arms, and the longer vertical stem is part of the lower spine.



- Fold another twist-tie in half, and fold the bottom of the spine around the middle of it, connecting the new twist-tie (creating the pelvic area).



- Continue adding twist-ties to the arms and legs to lengthen them. They MUST be secure, though - be sure to connect them tightly so they don't slide down and fall off. Additional twist-ties can be added on top for strength (it will start to look a bit like a mummy). Make your figure as tall or as short as necessary, based on the person selected.



- When the correct size is achieved, fold the “hands” and “feet” into loops. The figure should be able to stand - press inward at the “ankles” for balance.



- Use Model Magic or clay to make a skeleton head (calavera). Push the head carefully onto the top of the spinal column (sticking up from the twist-tie calaca). Let it dry and then add facial details using a permanent marker.
- Cut fabric/felt clothing (or paper, if other options are not available) to fit the figure. It should be reflective of the person selected - perhaps a favorite outfit or something that denotes who they were or what they did (i.e. athlete, doctor, etc.) Clothing can be glued together or sewn, depending on materials available. Props and accessories may be made as well.

Have students set up a gallery or installation of all the figures (along with their narratives) and view/discuss everyone’s work.



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<p><b>Calaca</b></p> <p><b>3-D Figure</b></p>	3-D figure is constructed correctly, is able to stand, and contains many details (6+) that are clearly connected to the person selected for the project. Clothing and accessories are detailed and constructed carefully.	3-D figure is constructed correctly, is able to stand, and contains some details (4-5) that are connected to the person selected for the project. Clothing and accessories are mostly constructed carefully.	3-D figure is mostly constructed correctly, is able to stand, and contains a few details (2-3) that are connected to the person selected for the project. Clothing is mostly constructed carefully, though no accessories are added.	3-D figure is not constructed correctly, or is not able to stand. It contains only 1 detail that is connected to the person selected for the project. Clothing is not constructed carefully or is not finished.	3-D figure is not constructed correctly and does not represent the person selected at all. No clothes or accessories were added.
<p><b>Universal Themes</b></p>	Culture, traditions, and history are represented clearly in both the figure and the narrative through many details.	Culture, traditions, and history are mostly represented in both the figure and the narrative through some details.	Culture, traditions, or history are somewhat represented in both the figure and the narrative through few details.	Culture, traditions, or history are represented in either the figure OR the narrative through very few details.	Culture, traditions, or history are not represented in either the figure OR the narrative.
<p><b>Narrative</b></p>	Narrative contains many clear details describing the selected figure - traits, personality, life history, connections to the student, etc. Clear reason(s) are given why the student selected this person for this project. Sequences of events in the person's life are clear and detailed.	Narrative contains some details describing the selected figure - traits, personality, life history, connections to the student, etc. Reason(s) are given why the student selected this person for this project, but might not be clear or contain many supporting details. Sequences of events in the person's life are clear and detailed.	Narrative contains few details describing the selected figure traits, personality, life history, connections to the student, etc. A brief reason is given for why the student selected this person for the project but there are no supporting details.	Narrative contains only one or two details describing the selected figure. No reasons are given for why the student selected this person for the project.	Narrative is unclear or does not describe the person selected for this project.