

LVM Día de los Muertos Lesson

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Learning Objectives

- Review background information about Jose Guadalupe Posada, Mexican lithographer and printmaker.
- Express thoughts and feelings about a skull etching by Jose Guadalupe Posada using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).
- Build vocabulary related to the human skeleton.
- Create a story based on the Posada skull etching.

Materials

1. Jose Guadalupe Posada's 20th Century Skeletons Handout



What is going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?
What else can you see?

2. VTS at a Glance <http://www.vtshome.org/pages/vts-downloads>
3. The Calaveras of Jose Guadalupe Posada by Gail S. Mhyre
http://artmuseumjournal.com/calaveras_of_jose_guadalupe_posada.aspx
4. Writing paper and pens (or pencils).

Preparation

Download and review the VTS at a Glance description.

Download and review the Jose Guadalupe Posada bio.

Arts Experience 45 minutes

Distribute the bio and ask students to take turns reading it out loud.

Review vocabulary related to the human skeleton.

Distribute the handout and ask students to answer each question.

Conduct a class discussion using the VTS format.

Ask the students to write a short story about the skeleton etching with a beginning, middle and end.

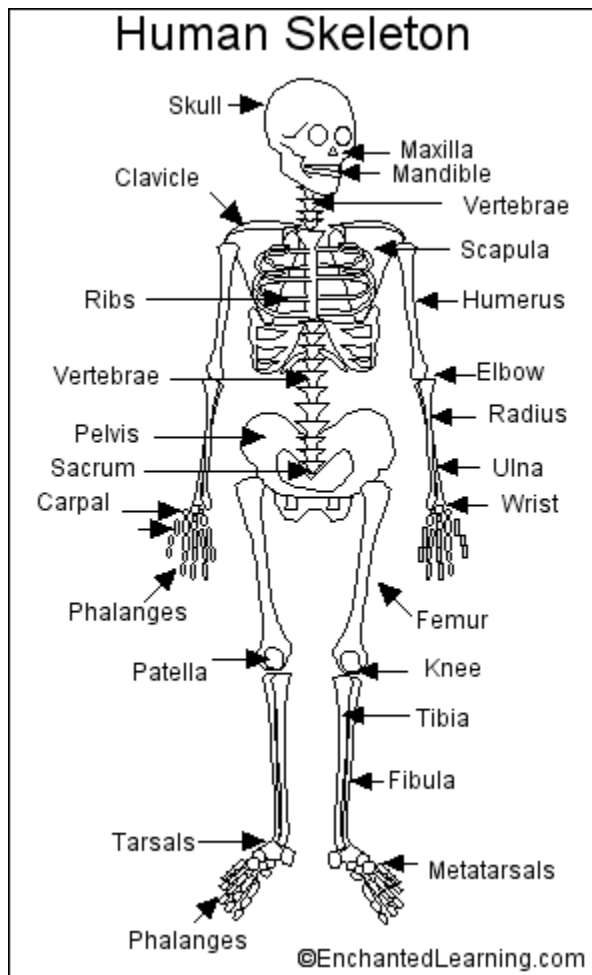
The students can use the answers they wrote in the handout to help them create their story.

Sources

Start with the Arts Curriculum, VSA arts 1994

Art Museum Journal http://artmuseumjournal.com/calaveras_of_jose_guadalupe_posada.aspx

Visual Thinking Strategies <http://www.vtshome.org/>



Calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada

By GAIL S. MYHRE

Art Museum Journal Art Museum Journal October 23, 2009

http://artmuseumjournal.com/calaveras_of_jose_guadalupe_posada.aspx

José Posada (1852-1913), Mexican lithographer and printmaker, is best remembered for his *calaveras* or skull etchings. These have been adopted across Mexico and elsewhere as iconic images used in celebration of *Día de los Muertos*, which takes place November 1 and 2, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day on the Catholic calendar. Posada's most famous work, the zinc etching *La Calavera Catrina* or *The Elegant Lady Skeleton* (ca. 1910), has been widely reproduced not only in prints but also by numerous modern Mexican artists and artisans in such varied media as clay, tile, papier-mâché and metal.

Born in Aguascalientes, Mexico on February 2, 1852, José Posada is listed on a 1867 census document as a painter. At the age of 16, he became an apprentice to the printer and publisher José Pedroza, in whose studio he learned lithography and engraving. He eventually purchased Pedroza's shop in the town of León de los Aldamas. Posada's most prolific and important work, however, was done in the Mexico City printing shop of Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, where he began as a staff artist around 1890 and soon became the publisher's chief artist. There Posada abandoned lithography and began to work first with engraving on type metal and later with relief etching on zinc. Unfortunately, since many of his original sheets and books have disappeared, it is often difficult or impossible to determine the specific subject or date of a Posada illustration.

Posada's images were created primarily as headers for *broadsides*, cheap one-page leaflets with brightly printed graphics that reported the news and social issues of the day. The artist was intensely political, having favored the revolutionary *Zapatistas*, and used his *calaveras* to great effect as social satire. *Calaveras* art might also be based on popular songs or stories, as with Posada's type metal engraving *Calavera Don Quixote* (ca. 1905). His images might also illustrate everyday life, as seen in several small *calaveras* portraying market women and in the engraving *Calaveras de los patinadores* or *Skeletons of the Streetcleaners* (ca. 1910).

Posada's illustrations found a responsive audience in the general Mexican population, given the wide cultural familiarity with skull and skeleton aesthetic forms in pre-Colombian Mayan art. Though to modern American eyes these depictions may have appeared macabre, the *calaveras* were accepted by contemporary Mexican viewers as salutary reminders of the eternity of the spirit and the equality of all men in death. One example received in this way was Posada's *Gran Fandango y Francachela de Todos las Calaveras – Happy Dance and Wild Party of All the Skeletons* (ca. 1910).

Other artists working for Vanegas Arroyo's print house used similar, if somewhat less nuanced, imagery. In fact, the print *Calavera Zapatista* by Manuel Manilla (1830-ca. 1895) was long considered to be a work of Posada. Posada was employed as a commercial illustrator with Vanegas Arroyo until his death from enteritis on January 20, 1913.

Posada's influence on later generations of Mexican artists is undeniable. Mexican Muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957) included a *calaveras* modeled on Posada's *Catrina* as a deliberate homage in his fresco *Suena de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park)* (1947-1948). In the wall painting, Posada himself walks arm-in-arm with his skeletal creation, while Rivera depicts himself as a child holding her opposite hand. As a young boy, José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), also an artist of the Muralist movement, visited Posada in his Mexico City print shop, and in his autobiography wrote, "This was my awakening to the existence of the art of painting."^[1]

For further reading, a remarkably complete book of Posada's work, *José Guadalupe Posada: Ilustrador de la vida Mexicana*, was published by the Fonda Editorial del la Plastica Mexicana in 1963. More generally available texts include *Posada's Popular Mexican Prints* (selected and edited by Roberto Berdecio and Stanley Appelbaum, Dover Publications, 1972) and *José Guadalupe Posada and the Mexican Broadside* (Diane Miliotes, Art Institute of Chicago, 2006).

Basic VTS at a Glance

by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine

Starting the Lesson

Introduce the VTS: it allows students to examine art, to think, to contribute observations and ideas, to listen, and to build understandings together. Ask students to recall these aspects of the process often. Call students' attention to the first image. Always give students a moment to look in silence before you invite them to speak.

Asking the Questions

After they have examined the image, ask the question, **What's going on in this picture?** Once students have learned this question, use variations. Whenever students make a comment that involves an interpretation (a comment that goes beyond identification and literal description), respond first by paraphrasing, and then ask,

What do you see that makes you say that? Once students understand the point of this question, begin to vary it.

In order to keep students searching for further observations, frequently ask them, **What else can you find?** Again, variations are useful once students are familiar with the point of the question.

Responding to Students' Comments

Listen carefully to students, making sure that you hear all of what they say and that you understand it accurately.

Point to what they mention in the slide. Be precise, even when it is a comment that has been repeated. Use encouraging body language and facial expressions to nurture participation.

Paraphrase each comment. Change the wording, but not the meaning of what is said. In rephrasing, demonstrate the use of proper sentence construction and rich vocabulary to assist students with language.

Accept each comment neutrally. Remember that this process emphasizes a useful pattern of thinking, not right answers. Students are learning to make detailed observations, sorting out and applying what they know. Articulating their thoughts leads to growth even when they make mistakes.

Link answers that relate, even when there are disagreements. Show how the students' thinking evolves, how some observations and ideas stimulate others, how opinions change and build.

Concluding the Lesson

Thank students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed. Encourage them to think of viewing art as an ongoing, open-ended process. Avoid summaries; linking throughout is enough to show how conversations build.

Un Vistazo al VTS Básico.

Empezando la clase

Presentar VTS: permite que los alumnos observen las obras de arte, piensen, contribuyan con observaciones e ideas, escuchen y construyan juntos un mejor entendimiento del arte. Pide a los alumnos que se fijen a menudo en estos aspectos del proceso. Hacer que los alumnos presten atención a la primera imagen. Siempre darles unos minutos para mirar en silencio antes de invitarles a hablar.

Haciendo las preguntas

Después de que hayan observado la imagen, pregúntales: ¿Que esta pasando en esta imagen? Cuando los estudiantes ya hayan aprendido esta pregunta, usa variaciones. Siempre que los estudiantes hagan un comentario que implica una interpretación (un comentario que vaya más allá de la identificación o de una descripción literal), primero responde parafraseando lo que se ha dicho, luego pregunta: ¿Qué ves que te hace decir eso? Cuando los estudiantes ya entiendan la finalidad de esta pregunta, empieza a variarla. Para que los estudiantes sigan involucrados en observar más detalles, pregúntales frecuentemente: ¿Qué más puedes encontrar? De nuevo, las variaciones son muy útiles una vez que los estudiantes ya entiendan la función de la pregunta.

Respondiendo a los comentarios de los estudiantes

Escucha atentamente a los estudiantes, asegurándote de que oyes y entiendes exactamente todo lo que ellos te digan. Señala lo que ellos mencionan en la diapositiva. Se preciso, aun cuando se trate de un comentario ya repetido. Utiliza gestos y expresión corporal para alentar la participación de la clase. Parafrasea cada comentario. Cambia las palabras, pero no cambies el significado de lo que dicen. Cuando parafrasees, usa correctamente la gramática y un vocabulario amplio para ayudar a los estudiantes a enriquecer su vocabulario. Aceptar cada comentario de un modo imparcial. Recuerda que este proceso no está dirigido a conseguir respuestas correctas sino a establecer unas pautas útiles para pensar. Los estudiantes empezarán a aprender cómo hacer observaciones detalladas, clasificando y aplicando lo que ya saben. Una articulación coherente del pensamiento conduce al desarrollo, incluso cuando se cometen errores. Asociar las respuestas que estén relacionadas entre sí y también intentar hacerlo cuando parezca que hay diferencias de opinión. Así se mostrará de qué modo evolucionan los pensamientos de los alumnos y como algunas observaciones e ideas estimulan a los demás, de la misma manera que las opiniones van cambiando al irse agregando información y construyendo una visión más rica y compleja.

Concluyendo la clase

Da las gracias a los estudiantes por su participación. Cuéntales las cosas que más hayas disfrutado. Anímalos a pensar que mirar obras de arte es un proceso en curso, siempre abierto y sin final. Evita hacer sumarios, conectar y enlazar las ideas durante el proceso es suficiente para enseñar como la conversación se va desarrollando.