



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary students will ...

- have an understanding of the Mexican holiday, Day of the Dead.
- become familiar with the Day of the Dead art of Tony de Carlo.
- be able to create an artwork honoring a deceased ancestor (or they may do a representation of the spirit and essence of a family member or friend).

MATERIALS

- Visuals of Tony de Carlo's art (many of which are shown on the Internet: www.tonydecarlo.com/html/day_of_the_dead.html)
- Information on Day of the Dead (on the Internet go to: olvera-street.com and click on "Dia De Los Muertos")
- 12" x 18" black construction paper
- White chalk
- White glue
- Oil pastels

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Day of the Dead

Gracious, Not Gruesome

by Cheryl Crumpecker

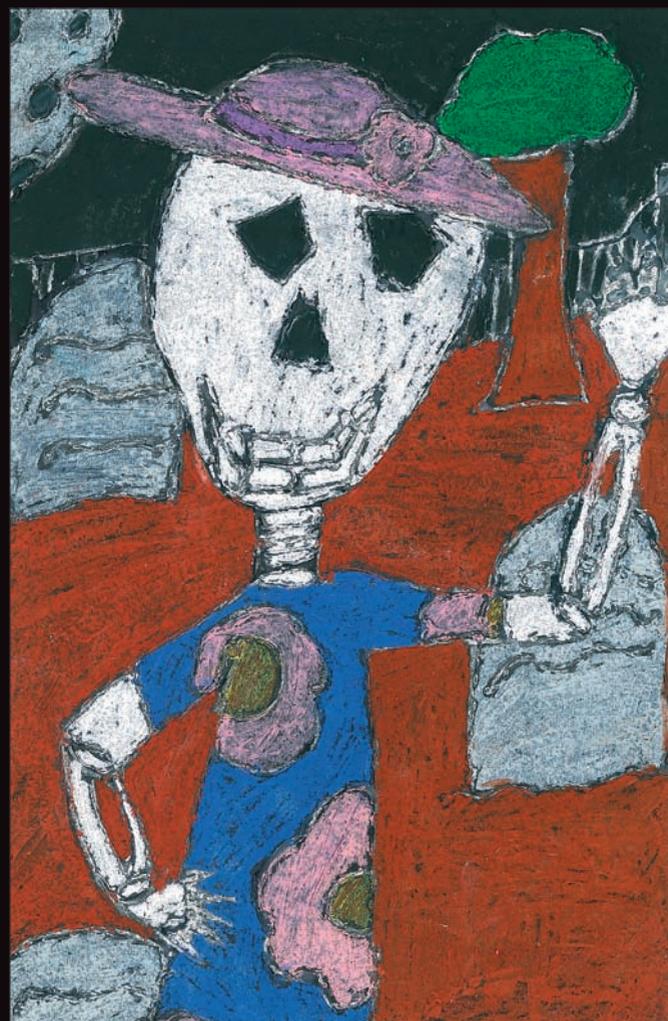
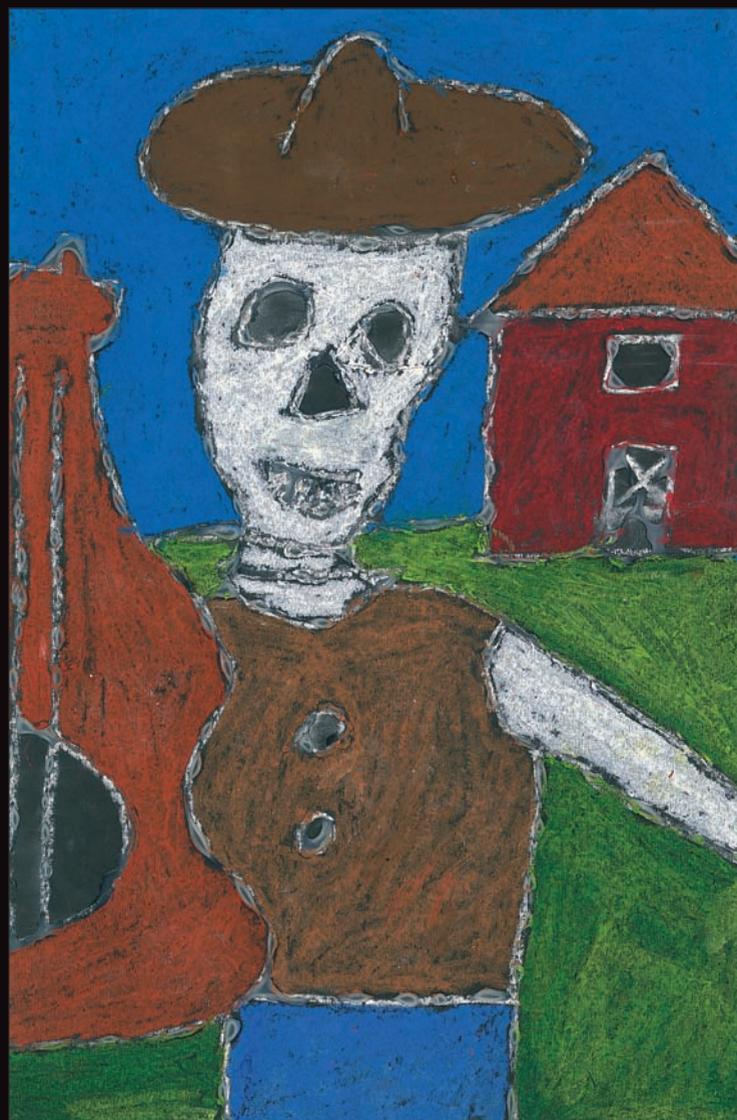
Halloween at our school has always been a time for celebration. Paper bats and witches hang from the ceiling, decorated pumpkins vie for prizes, and costumed students and teachers parade through the halls as classes prepare for an afternoon of fun, food and frolic.

Last year, with the introduction of

Spanish into our language program, Halloween ghosts and goblins moved aside to share their space with the Mexican holiday, "Día de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead).

Although originally celebrated by the Aztecs near the beginning of August, Spanish priests moved the

Day of the Dead celebration to the first two days of November in a effort to change Halloween back into a kinder and gentler holiday by remembering the dead and promoting the continuity of life. The tissue banners ("papel picados"), lively dancing skeletons, miniature altars and sugar skulls help



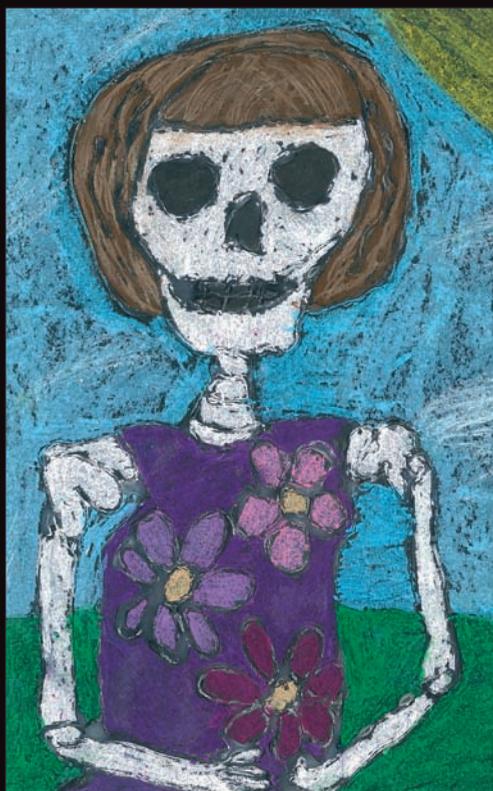
▲ Lauren N.
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change this time of year from totally scary, “give-me-some-candy” festivities to a time to honor our ancestors.

It is at this time that my art classes take the opportunity to view artist Tony de Carlo’s series of Day of the Dead paintings as inspiration for an expressive style of pictures. Although de Carlo most often paints his friends, his dogs and himself, once a year he produces several Day of the Dead pictures featuring skeletons doing everyday activities.

I also provide students with just a few details of de Carlo’s bibliography: Born in California in 1956, moved to Hawaii when he was 8, later returning to Los Angeles, was inspired to paint by his artist mother, and he is a self-taught artist who paints every day, working mainly with acrylic paints and gold, silver and copper leaf.

After discussing de Carlo’s works,



students choose one of their ancestors to honor in their pictures and list things they know about them (e.g. what they liked to do, their hobbies or special talent, pets or favorite color). This information helps them decide what to add to their environments.

After brainstorming their ideas, the students begin drawing. Our friendly classroom skeleton poses to help them make their figures more accurate. The drawings are drawn with white chalk on black paper and are then outlined with glue.

Although Tony de Carlo works in acrylic paints, we color our pictures with thick oil pastels. The oil pastels provide bright, solid colors and the glue lines help maintain the bold, thick outlines of the figures (both characteristics of de Carlo’s work).

Gone are the ghosts of haunted houses, replaced with sensitive portrayals of our past. Deceased grandparents, friends and pets re-enter our lives as funny, poignant memories. ■

Cheryl Crumpecker teaches K-3 at St. Paul’s Episcopal Day School in Kansas City, Missouri.


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