

I can hear you all thinking, “What, another Day of the Dead project?” But, since many of us present Day-of-the-Dead projects to every grade level, one can never have too many choices.

This is absolutely one of my favorite lessons. It’s easy enough for almost any grade level—I do it with my second-graders—yet can be detailed enough to keep eighth-graders interested.

It uses a limited number of easy-to-acquire supplies, which is great for tight budgets. It can also be easily broken down into manageable steps for shorter classes, and takes less than two hours to finish, which is important, as the Day of the Dead comes so early in the school year.

The following procedures are based on a 30-minute class period.

DAY 1 Introduce or review the Mexican holiday *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), focusing on the use of *calacas* (whimsical skeletons) to remember the deceased in a fun and loving way.

Give each student a skeleton handout. While cutting out all of their skeleton’s parts, students should be thinking about an action pose for their *calacas*, such as riding a bicycle, bending, reaching, dancing, playing a musical instrument and more.

The skeleton parts are then glued into place to create their poses. It helps to have a large jointed skeleton available to show students how the bones fit together and how they will bend; paper skeletons work fine in this respect. I also read *Dem Bones* by Bob Barner, which helps reinforce bone placement.

It usually takes my students about 30 minutes to completely cut out and glue their skeletons together. The skeletons are placed on the drying rack for later use.



▲ Andrew, grade 2.

< Lilly, grade 2.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Elementary students will ...

- understand the relationship of *calacas* to the Day of the Dead.
- create an environment by cutting a variety of lines from paper strips.
- cut out skeleton parts and assemble them into an action pose.
- depict a skeleton in a whimsical, not scary, manner.
- create clothing and accessories for skeletons from construction paper.
- use scissors and glue with control.

MATERIALS

- Handout of skeleton parts
- 12" x 18" construction paper
- 3" x 12" construction paper strips in a variety of colors
- Construction paper scraps
- Scissors
- Pencils
- *Dem Bones*, by Bob Barner (Chronicle Books; 1996)

DAY 2 Create a background by cutting a variety of lines from 3" x 12" colored strips. Glue the lines on the paper from the top down, overlapping slightly. Other objects can be cut from scrap construction paper to make more complex environments that include buildings, trees, flowers, cars and clouds. These can be tucked into the strips.

DAY 3 Dress the skeletons and create appropriate accessories. Show students how to lay their skeletons on top of construction paper scraps and trace around them, trac-



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Eye-Catching Calacas

by Cheryl Crumpecker



Meghan, grade 2.

ing slightly larger than the body to create clothing that will fit. Cut out clothing and glue it to the skeleton. Glue the skeleton to the background, and continue to add accessories to complete the picture.

DAY 4 This day is used to finish up the last details. Most students don't finish early, but I have a worksheet or free drawing paper available for the few who might have some time on their hands.

All that is left is to display these delightful creations. These eye-catching cut-paper *calacas* never fail to bring a smile to the faces of all who view them. ■



Elliot, grade 2.



Sophia, grade 2.

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