

## Dia de los Muertos Day of the Dead

October 31 – November 2 are known as Dia de los Muertos in Mexico. Unlike our Halloween, it is not a scary time, but a celebration of life. It is a time to honor our loved ones that have passed away. A personal altar, known as *ofrenda* in Spanish, is set up to attract the spirit of the person. Each one is lovingly created to fit the departed's personality.

Skeletons play a huge part in this celebration and are often depicted doing everyday tasks such as getting married, getting dressed, or dancing and singing.



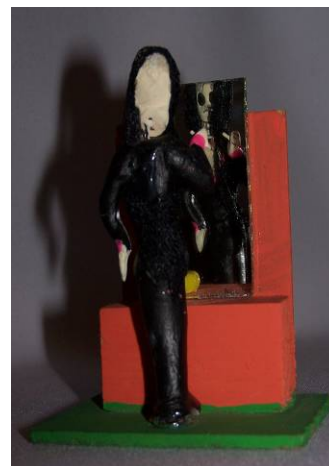
Teacher-created  
example



Teacher-owned “Pop  
Up Altar” note card



Teacher-owned  
“Couple Singing”



Teacher-owned “Lady  
Getting Beautiful”

**Target Group:** Grades K-4

**Goal (Terminal Objective):** Students will learn about Dia de los Muertos while creating a skeleton like one that would be used for this celebration.

**Objective:** Students will create a skeleton using air dry clay for Dia de los Muertos.

### **National Standards:**

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Visual Arts Grades K-4 Content Standard 6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

**Purpose:** Students will learn about the Mexican celebration of Life known as Dia de los Muertos while creating a skeleton from air dry clay.

**New Vocabulary:** Dia de los Muertos, ofrenda, coils

**Materials:**

medium gauge wire, wire cutters, round object to roll wire around such as the handle of a small paint brush or shish kabob skewer, containers for water, pictures of skeletons used for Dia de los Muertos and the following Sargent Art supplies -



**#22-2003**



**#22-1540**



**#22-1506**

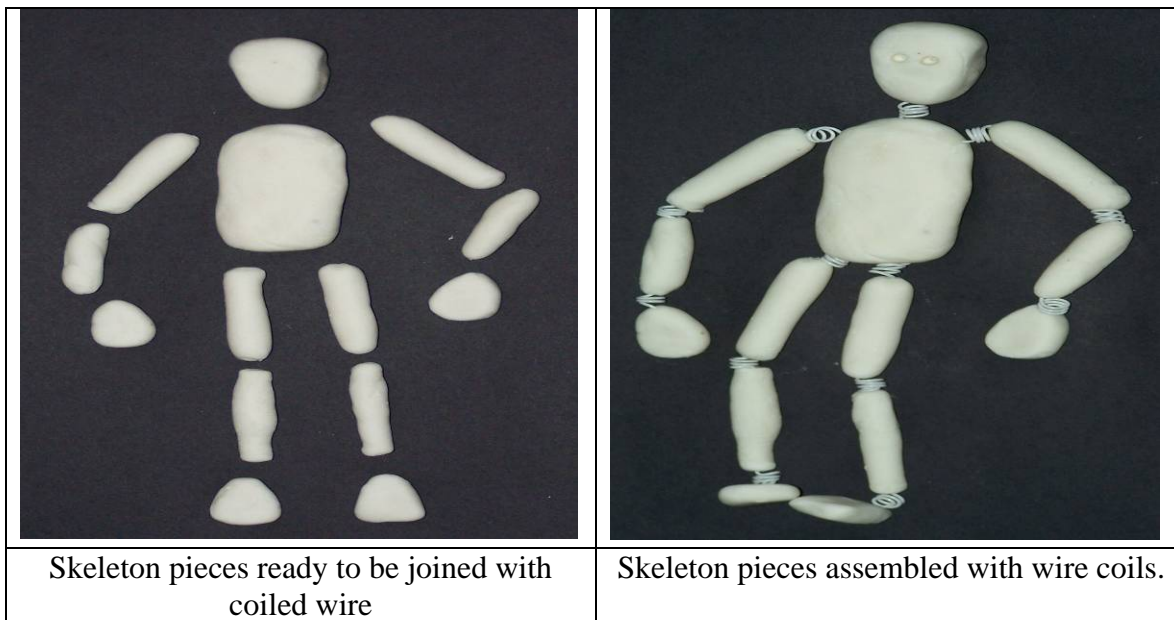
**Time:** one to two art periods depending on the degree of complexity of the project

**Introduction and Motivation (Set):**

Many wonderful pictures may be obtained by doing a *Google Images* search of Dia de los Muertos. Ask children if they know what Dia de los Muertos is. Explain the celebration to them and show them pictures of the skeletons and *ofrendas*. Show them the example of the skeleton that they are going to be making.

**Instruction:**

Students will take a small piece of Sculpt-it! air dry clay and form the skeleton's head. Use a pinch-pull method and make the bottom of the skull smaller than the top. The body will be in the shape of a rectangle. Smooth out each piece of clay as the work progresses. Arm and legs will be long coils of clay. Hands and feet will be a triangle shape.



Roll the wire around a small paint brush handle or shish kabob skewer. Cut this coil into smaller pieces that will be used to join all of the pieces together. After the coil of wire is cut into smaller pieces, bend each end of the wire up from the coil.

Draw on a representation of the skull and rib cage with markers. Add decorations with the Liquid Metals markers. If time permits, add hats onto the skeleton.



Details of finished skeleton

**Activities:**

**(1) Guided Practice:**

1. Students will begin with a piece of clay rolled into a ball and begin to make the skull.
2. Use a flattened rectangle shape of clay for the body. Roll coils of clay for the arms and legs. Younger students will find it easier to use one coil per arm and leg. Form flattened triangles for hands and feet.

3. Smooth out each piece of the skeleton as the work progresses. Use a small drop of water on the end of a finger rubbed into the clay if necessary.
4. Wrap the wire around something small and round to form a coil of wire. Cut this into smaller pieces to join the pieces of the skeleton together.
5. Use markers and Liquid Metals markers to add details and decorations to the skeleton.

(2) Independent Practice and Check for Understanding: The teacher will circulate among the students as they work to make sure that they are staying with the objectives of the lesson. Ask a direct question when understanding is not being observed. The teacher will help when necessary and add positive reinforcement as the students work.

(3) Closure: Students display their work. The teacher will guide a critique to point out the strong qualities of successful compositions.

**Evaluation:** Teacher will evaluate the works individually based on the following criteria:

Level One -- The finished skeleton has all of the necessary pieces. The clay was smoothed out prior to joining the pieces together. The wire has been rolled into a coil and cut into pieces large enough to hold the work together. Markers were used to add details and decorations to the skeleton. The craftsmanship is excellent.

Level Two -- The finished skeleton has all of the necessary pieces. Most of the clay was smoothed out prior to joining the pieces together. The wire has been rolled into a coil and cut into pieces large enough to hold the work together. Markers were used to add details and decorations to the skeleton. The craftsmanship is good.

Level Three -- The finished skeleton has most of the necessary pieces. Most of the clay was not smoothed out prior to joining the pieces together. The wire has been rolled into a coil but the pieces cut were not sufficient enough to hold the work together resulting in pieces falling off the finished skeleton. Markers were used to add details and decorations to some of the skeleton. The craftsmanship is variable.

Level Four -- The finished skeleton does not have the necessary pieces. None of the clay was smoothed out prior to joining the pieces together. The wire has not been rolled into a coil causing pieces to fall off of the finished skeleton. Markers were not used to add details and decorations to some of the skeleton. The craftsmanship is poor.

**Extension:** If time allows, students could put their skeletons into an environment and show the skeletons doing some every day task.

**Resources:**

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/>

<http://www3.niu.edu/newsplace/nndia.html>

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[www.sargentart.com](http://www.sargentart.com) 10/23/2007