

## Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos); A Cultural Holiday: Color Exploration of Warm and Cool Colors

How are elements of art used to express a cultural holiday?  
What are warm and cold colors  
How does color affect the emotion of communication?

### LESSON OVERVIEW/OBJECTIVES

Students will learn about the Day of the Dead holiday to include history, symbols, colors, rituals and cultures. They will also study color through the exploration of warm and cool colors. Students will create two skulls that are iconic to Day of the Dead, one will be made out of warm colors and the other will be made out of cold colors. Through this lesson students will experience how colors are powerful expressions of cultures, holidays and traditions.

### KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO VISUAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM:

#### Based on Utah State Visual Arts Core Curriculum Requirements (3rd Grade)

**Standard 1: The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.**

**Objective 1: Explore a variety of art materials while learning new techniques and processes.**

- Practice using skills for beginning drawings.
- Use simplified forms, such as cones, spheres, and cubes, to begin drawing more complex form.
- Paint with complementary color schemes.
- Make one color dominant in a painting.

**Objective 2: Use a broad range of art materials in supporting the visual arts needs at school.**

- Use as many art materials as possible to help decorate the room.

**Objective 3: Handle art materials in a safe and responsible manner.**

- Ventilate the room to avoid inhaling fumes from art materials.
- Dispose and/or recycle waste art materials properly.
- Clean and put back to order art making areas after projects.
- Respect other students' artworks as well as one's own.

**Standard 2 : The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.**

**Objective 1: Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles**

- Determine how artists create dominance in their work; e.g., size, repetition, and contrast.

**Objective 2: Create works of art using the elements and principles.**

- Identify dominant elements

**Standard 3: The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.**

**Objective 1: Describe how line, shape, color, and texture are used to express ideas or convert stories in art.**

**Objective 2: Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for their own artworks.**

- a. Group significant works of art according to theme or subject matter.
- b. Judge which works of art most clearly communicate through the use of symbols.
- c. Create symbols in art that express individual or group interests.
- d. Create a work of art that uses similar subject matter, symbol, idea, and/or meaning found in a significant work of art.
- e. Select some art for public display around the school.

**Standard 4: Contextualizing: The student will interpret and apply visual arts in relation to cultures, history, and all learning.**

**Objective 1: Compare the arts of different cultures to explore their similarities and diversities.**

- a. Describe why different cultures may have used different materials to create their arts and crafts.

**Objective 2: Connect various kinds of art with particular cultures, times, or places.**

- a. Predict how a work of art or a craft can be connected to an ancient culture.
- b. Describe why a local craft or art form looks like it was made in your area.

**INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

**Students will:**

**Visual Arts**

- Understand that the elements of art are the building blocks for creating works of art.
- Recognize and use warm and cold colors.
- Understand that color can create an emotional response
- Learn how colors and symbols are associated with holidays, traditions and cultures.
- Create Day of the Dead skulls and incorporate cool and warm colors in the art project.

**FOR THE TEACHER LOOKING AND SEEING**

Some things to notice when looking at Day of the Dead visuals:

- Notice the colors that are predominant in the flowers, skulls, etc.
- What objects do you see repeatedly?
- What is the emotional tone of the images?
- How can you tell this is a celebration?
- What warm colors do you see?
- What cool colors do you see?

Some things to notice when looking at the color wheel and color samples:

- What are cool colors?
- What are warm colors?
- What emotions/feelings do warm and cool colors evoke?

## VISUALS - DAY OF THE DEAD

Day of the Dead skeletons and  
Papel Picado



Sugar Skulls

Day of Dead Masks

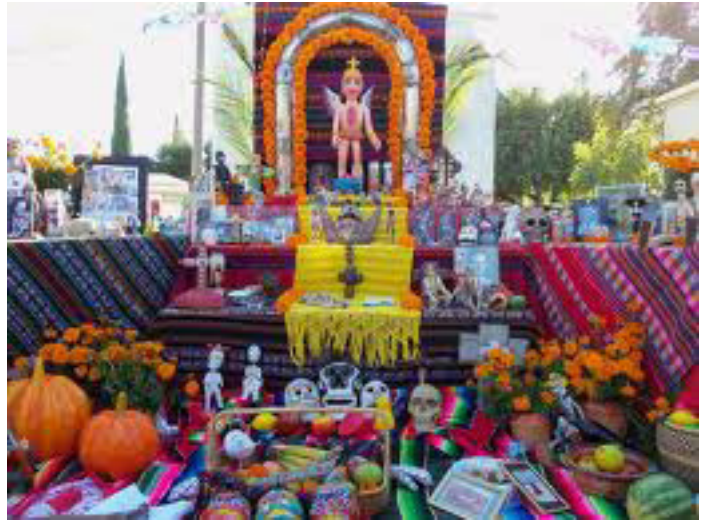


Day of Dead Skeleton



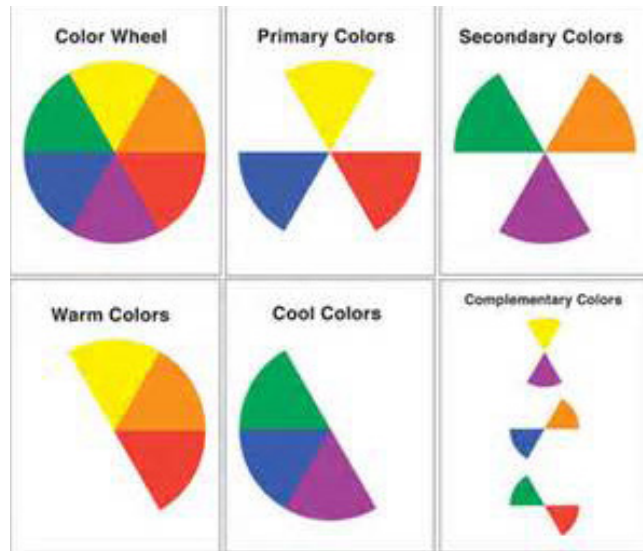
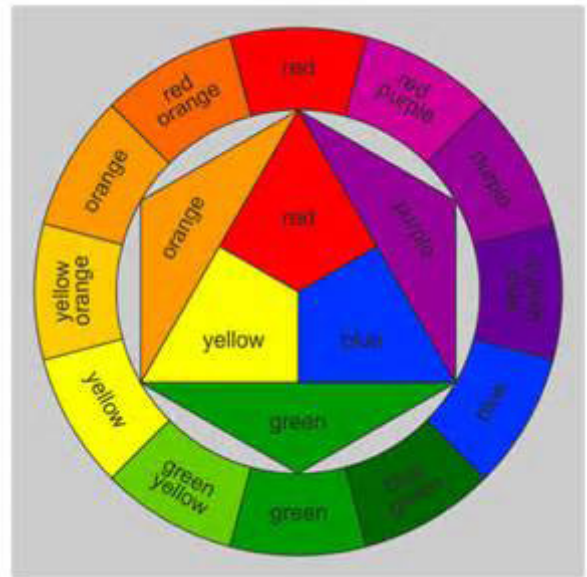
Nancy Rotenberg - Day of Dead Skeleton -  
San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

Sample Day of the Dead Altar



Nighttime Day of the Dead Celebrations

# VISUALS - COLOR WHEEL - WARM AND COOL COLORS



# The Color Wheel



Created by Melissa Haddock (Child) by 36 Months



**Cool**

**Warm**

## SUPPLIES

- Images and art samples presented in this lesson
- White art drawing paper two sheets 8.5" x 11", or 12" x 18" per student
- Black drawing paper two sheets 8.5" x 11", or 12" x 18" per student
- Oil Pastels, Markers, and/or bright paints for cool and warm colors
- Scratch paper for practicing
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Glitter/decorative embellishments (optional)

## VOCABULARY

**Day of the Dead:** noun. an annual celebration to honor the spirits of the dead, observed in Mexico and other Latin American countries on November 1 and 2, concurrently with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Expand. Spanish Día de los Muertos.

**Tradition:** the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.

**Culture:** the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next.

**Elements of art** are color, line, shape, form, space, value, and texture. Artists use these tools to create visual art—representational, abstract, and non-representational.

**Warm and Cool Colors:** colors on opposite sides of the color wheel give opposing feelings. The warm colors; reds, and yellows, are often associated with fire and sun, which suggest warmth. On the other side, cool colors; blues and greens, are often associated with water, sky, and spring, which suggest coolness. Psychologically, cool colors are said to be calming, whereas warm colors energize. Optically, cool colors appear to recede, and warm colors give the impression of being closer.

**Complementary colors:** color pairs that sit opposite one another on the color wheel.

**Primary Colors:** colors which cannot be made by mixing other colors: red, yellow, blue.

**Secondary Colors:** a color which is made by mixing two primary colors.

## INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

### Quick Writing and/or discussion

Before beginning the lesson, show some pictures of Day of the Dead art to students. Give students a few minutes to respond to the images. Use any of the following prompts:

- Who knows about Day of the Dead and can describe it?
- These images remind me of \_\_\_\_\_.
- The colors make me think of \_\_\_\_\_.
- I would describe the mood of these pictures as \_\_\_\_\_.

## Introduction

Introduce your students first to the Day of the Dead holiday and show the included images.

## About Day of the Dead

Day of the Dead (Spanish: *Día de Muertos*) is a Mexican holiday observed throughout Mexico and around the world in other cultures. The holiday focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember friends and family members who have died. It is particularly celebrated in Mexico where the day is a bank holiday. The celebration takes place on October 31, November 1 and November 2, in connection with the triduum of Allhallowtide: All Hallows' Eve, Hallowmas, and All Souls' Day. Traditions connected with the holiday include building private altars at the graves called *ofrendas*, honoring the deceased using sugar skulls, marigolds, flowers of the dead, skeletons, tissue paper decorations, fruits and nuts, incense, and the favorite foods and beverages of the departed. They also leave possessions of the deceased. The idea behind visiting the graves is to encourage visits by the souls, so that the souls will hear the prayers and the comments of the living directed to them. Celebrations can be humorous or sombre as celebrants remember funny or serious events and anecdotes about the departed.

## Day of the Dead Symbols

Some of the most popular Day of the Dead symbols are skulls and skeletons. They are showcased predominantly leading up to the holiday. They are usually bright, colorful, whimsical and lighthearted. They represent mortality and the life cycle. The Day of the Dead skulls appear in many forms such as sugar skulls, in bread, souvenirs, papel picado and on alters.

Skeletons are always represented in a lighthearted fashion. They are generally long and skinny, made out of paper mache, wood, plastic etc., they may be dressed in traditional or professional clothing, and are a range of sizes.

Other symbols include marigold flowers, bread, tissue paper decorations and papel picado. The art itself is vibrant, detailed and rich in history.

## Color Wheel and Warm and Cool Colors

Introduce the color wheel. Point out primary and secondary colors (See visuals).

Warm and Cool Colors - Yellow, orange and red are called the warm colors on the color wheel. Blue, green and purple are often labeled cool colors. How can colors give this impression of temperature? Is it based on scientific fact or is it based on how those colors make us feel?

Open a discussion with students about ways to categorize colors. Suggest that the way you are going to categorize color is by the way it makes you feel. Find scrap samples or color chip cards and organize them into two groups: warm colors and cool colors. Use the color wheel as a point of reference so that you can be sure you have placed each of these in one of the categories.

After you have divided your color samples into two piles, list all of the colors on a chart divided into the cool section and the warm section. Look again at the color wheel and notice how it has been divided by these categories.

Warm and cool colors evoke emotional responses. Colors on opposite sides of the color wheel give opposing feelings. The warm colors; reds, and yellows, are often associated with fire and sun, which suggest warmth. On the other side, cool colors; blues and greens, are often associated with water, sky, and spring, which suggest coolness. Psychologically, cool colors are said to be calming, whereas warm colors energize. Optically, cool colors appear to recede, and warm colors give the impression of being closer. You can play with naming colors like paint chips to evoke the warm and cold feelings.



For visual examples here are a list of fine art samples you could google to show:

### Cool Palette

*The Old Guitarist*, Pablo Picasso  
This painting projects a melancholy mood

*The Long Leg*, Edward Hopper  
*Houses in Provence*, Paul Cezanne  
*The Basin at Deauville*, Raoul Dufy

Cezanne and Hopper have used cool colors to lend a sense of serenity to scenes from nature. Dufy creates an effective abstract by using blues with a touch of red for contrast.

### Warm Palette

*Farmhouse in Provence, Arles*, Vincent Van Gogh  
Warm colors lend a feeling of heat or intensity to this landscape. You can feel the warmth of that sun radiating off the trees and the land.

*Table Set in a Garden*, Pierre Bonnard  
The artist has used warm and cool colors together to create a sense of contrast between the coolness of the shade and the warm invitation to the table.

### Art Project

**Step 1:** Begin the project with a covered workspace to protect against spills etc.



**Step 2:** Give each student two sheets of rectangular white paper (size determined by the teacher). On each of the two sheets of rectangular white drawing paper (size determined by the teacher), draw a skull and spine with a black oil pastel on each sheet. While reinforcing the lessons of cool and warm colors, use oil pastels, markers or paint to add lines, patterns, flowers, and any other decorative lines to the skulls and spines. One will be colored in cool colors, the other in warm. Please note that the above example is for drawing and layout purposes, not for warm and cool color lesson.



**Step 3:** Along the sides of the skulls, draw large and small flowers like you saw in the Day of the Dead pictures. Marigolds are the traditional flowers but flowers of any design are acceptable. Use oil pastels, markers, or brightly colored paints to paint or color the flowers.



**Step 4:** After the skulls and flowers are painted and colored in, cut out the skulls and flowers. Glue onto black drawing papers. Encourage some overlap with the flowers if there are many.

**Step 5:** As a final embellishment, set out a tray of craft jewelry and allow kids to decorate. For glitter, use school glue to draw lines around shapes then sprinkle and shake with glitter.

photo credit: <http://www.deepspacesparkle.com>  
 lesson adapted from: <http://www.deepspacesparkle.com>



### Reflect

Have students respond to one of the following prompts or use the prompts to generate a class discussion about color and Day of the Dead.

- How do the colors of Day of the Dead make you feel?
- Why do you think these colors are used? Are they warm or cold?
- Looking at your two different skulls, describe the differences in them in terms of design and emotional content.

### Supplemental Lessons

**Google Day of the Dead Videos for Students** - This will show you a whole host of You Tube videos about this holiday that you can share with your students.