

Felt Skulls for Dia De Muertos

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Specialized tools and materials used:	Experience level required:
Hand-sewing with embroidery floss and needles (preferably with Large Eyelets) Felt, Sharp Scissors	beginner

Grade Level (of this example): middle school (8th Grade Spanish Class)

Topic/Content Standards (for this example): knowledge and understanding of other cultures, using languages other than English within and beyond the school setting.

Summary of Project:

This activity is used in Spanish classes to learn about the Latin American holiday Dia de Muerto (Day of the Dead). During this holiday, people honor and remember their deceased family and friends by creating an ofrenda (altar) and filling it with meaningful objects. Students were given a paper skull pattern to trace directly onto a piece of felt twice to make a front and back. They also cut felt in the shape of skulls, eyes, mouths, and other decorative markings to stitch onto one of the skulls. Once completed, students stitched the pieces together and stuffed them with polyester fiber fill. The colorful floss not only held the pieces together, but was also part of the intricate decorations common on Sugar Skulls.



Students thoroughly enjoyed sewing their sugar skulls, learning basic stitches (running, whip stitch and blanket stitch), and helping each other to understand the process. Teachers were pleased to see students displaying unexpected skills and hidden creativity. The project was completed in two 45 minute class periods. If any student was not able to finish within that time frame, the projects are small enough to bring back to their classrooms and complete during free time.



For many students, this is their first time hand-sewing. The most challenging part was threading the needle. Try to find embroidery needles with large eyelets and use sharp scissors for cutting felt/fabric material. Other modifications would be to use fabric or hot glue for students who significantly struggle with sewing or try machine sewing if available. For more advanced options, offer other materials such as, sequins, buttons, and beads and/or in combination with decorative hand or machine sewing stitches.

Hand-sewing Resources:

- Basic stitches used in the project are: Running Stitch, Whip Stitch, Blanket Stitch
- <https://makezine.com/2016/03/22/5-basic-stitches-you-need-know-plus-textile-tips/>
- <https://www.instructables.com/class/Hand-Sewing-Class/>

Machine Sewing Resources:

- Basic stitch used in the project is: Standard - Forward
- Try more decorative stitches
<https://www.instructables.com/class/Machine-Sewing-Class/>

Suggested resources

- Advanced Adaptation: [ETextile Felt Skull Brooch : 8 Steps \(with Pictures\)](#)
- <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-10-31-here-s-how-to-have-a-stem-them-ed-dia-de-los-muertos-celebration>

Possible Content explorations

- Another idea or option is to combine contemporary embroidery with vintage imagery. Find a historical figure or place and emphasize or enhance by outline with embroidery stitches.
<https://www.mybluprint.com/article/embroidery-on-photos>