



LEARNING ABOUT MEXICO: MAKING AND USING SALT DOUGH HUMAN PUPPETS IN THE CLASSROOM



Grade: middle school
Course: bilingual, esl, history, language
arts, art, music, science, math,

Rationale

In our world today the classroom teacher often takes a back seat when it comes to getting their student's attention and keeping it. Outside of the classroom, students are continually bombarded with a series of visual, auditory, and kinesic stimuli that take the form of interactive video and computer games. If students are allowed to use these same types of stimuli within the classroom, chances of getting and keeping their attention should increase. Designing and creating, puppets, and then producing puppet skits based on educational curriculum could help accomplish this goal. When students create their own puppet skits, they not only develop problem solving skills, but they are forced to interact one with another in order to produce a finished product. Besides developing a sense of pride in what they have created, acting out skits with the puppets seem to draw out those students who are normally quiet and non-verbal during classroom discussions.

Lesson Overview

This lesson plan is designed to show how to make hand held human puppets. It was written for an eighth grade Special Education class, but can also be used in the regular curriculum grades six to nine. This lesson plan will also contain suggestions on how you can use these puppets in the classroom. Once you have become familiar and comfortable with using puppets in the

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classroom, there is no end to amount of ways you will find to use them. Imagination will be your only limits. The study of Mexico was chosen to illustrate some of the varied ways that puppets can be used as teaching aids.

Puppets skits can be skits that are carefully thought out, written and produced, or they can be very spontaneous, and extemporaneous depending on how you want to use them in the classroom. Skits can be very short or up to about ten minutes in length. I would not recommend that they last any longer. Students and audience tend to loose interest if puppet skits go too long. If more information needs to be given in a skit, break the skit down into two or three episodes or acts.

Puppets can be used to introduce a subject as in the He/She brain skit(see Suggestions for Using Puppets Math and Science curriculum), or they can be used to re-enforce and practice a concept. (see Suggestions for Implementing Puppets into the Language, Family life, and Literature Curriculum.) Puppets can also be used to act out stories from folklore, literature or current events. A fun way to use puppets is to act out a family celebrating a Mexican holiday. Mexican Art could be explored with a puppet displaying an art print and asking the students questions about the print. (see Suggestions for Implementing Puppets into the Music and Art Curriculum). Puppet skits don't need to be played entirely with puppets, In some cases you may want the teacher, puppets, and audience to interact with each other. This technique can be used effectively when you are discussing important issues such as drugs, gangs, or problem solving.

Goals

1. Students will design and create hand held salt dough human puppets, and decorate these puppets in the traditional dress of Mexico.
2. Students will research the history, family life, economics, politics, literature, music and Art of Mexico.
3. Students will use their research material to write a skit relevant to one of the above named disciplines.
4. Students will supply puppet skits with necessary props, scenery, sound effects, and music, that will enhance and add to the meaning of the skit..
5. Students will perform their finished puppet skit for the rest of their classmates.

Suggestions for Implementing Puppets into the Study of Mexico's Family Life, Language and Literature

1. Create a dialogue between two puppets one English speaking and one Spanish speaking. (i.e.) The Spanish speaking puppet could hold up a cup, or any other object, and give the Spanish name. The English speaking puppet could try to repeat it in Spanish, then in English. The Spanish speaking puppet would try and repeat the name of the object in English etc. Puppets could nod their heads yes, or no or make additional comments about the object in their language.
2. Puppets could demonstrate how to give an Oral History interview.
3. Students could take a story from folklore or literature and make it into a skit. (i.e.) the story of La Llorona.

4. The book Children of the Earth can be acted out by the puppets.

Suggestions for Implementing Puppets into the Art and Music Curriculum of Mexico

1. Students will research the music of Mexico to find music to go with the skits they have created.
2. Students will research Mexican composers and musicians and write a skit about one of them.
(i.e.) Students could write a skit about the recent murder of Selena, and use her music in the skit.
3. Students will research Mexican artists and write a skit about them. Students could also display a picture of the artist's work and have the puppets describe the components of the picture, and tell about why and how they think it was created. A group of students could do an extemporaneous puppet skit by having a puppet hold up an art object while asking the questions listed below. The skit could be repeated using different groups of students with different objects until all students have had a chance to participate. In this type of skit there could also be interaction between puppets, teacher, and audience.

Questions To Ask

(These questions were taken from Folk Art Discovery, Museum of International Folk Art, Sante Fe, NM)

- * What is this object?
 - * How old do you think it is? Do you think an object like this is still being made today?
 - * Who do you think created it and why?
 - * What materials do you think the artist used in making this object?
 - * Where did the artist obtain the materials to make this object?
 - * What process did the artist use in making this object?
 - * What can we learn about the physical environment, beliefs, traditions, values of the people from this object?
 - * With what in your life can you compare it?
 - * What can we learn about ourselves through examining this object?
 - * What other questions can you ask to learn more about this object?
4. Students can research the folk music of New Mexico and have a puppet pretend to be singing it. Puppets can discuss the words of the folk music *La llorona*, and ask each other questions such as:
 - * What does this story tell?
 - * Why do you think it might have been written?
 - * What can we learn about the people from this piece of music?
 - * What in your life can you compare it to?

Suggestions For Making Puppets Seem Alive

One way to make puppets seem alive is to use over size props. (i.e.) If skit calls for puppet to handle objects such as a glass, use a full size glass not a miniaturized one. Put sound effects with your puppets when an action is being performed. These sounds should be exaggerated sounds. When the puppet is drinking from the glass make exaggerated gulping sounds. Hold puppets up straight from the elbow. Try to keep the

4. Students could take a Mexican Holiday and act it out with the puppets. (i.e.) Cinco de Mayo, Day of the Dead , or other Mexican holidays.

5. Students could read or view the movie “The Children of Sanchez”, or other movies that deal with family life in Mexico, and write their own version of a poor Mexican family who won the lottery.

Suggestions for Implementing the Use of Puppets into the Political Science and Economic Curriculum of the Study Of Mexico

1. Subscribe to or make available to students a newspaper or magazine from Mexico, or Have students Search these magazines and the LADB for current events happening in Mexico. The story of Salinas and Colossio would make a perfect mystery skit and you could add more episodes to the skit as more information about them was uncovered (see bibliography on where to find information on LADB about these men.)

2. Students could research the lives of famous political leaders of Mexico, and write a skit about a part of their life. The story of Benito Juarez would lend itself for interesting skits.

3. Puppets could be used to discuss an important current event happening in Mexico.

Suggestions for the Use of Puppets into The Science and Math Curriculum of the Study of Mexico

1. Students could research the plants and animals native to Mexico. Students could make plant puppets, or they could hold up pictures of native plants and tell important facts about them. Students could write skits about how plants would feel if their environment suddenly changed.

Imagination is the only limitation when writing puppet skits.

2. Students could research scientists from Mexico, and write a skit about their lives.

3. Students could take articles from current science magazines, translate them into Spanish and then write skits about them. The following skit was created from an article that appeared in the June 1995 edition of the Discover magazine.

Two puppets one a male brain and one a female brain are talking together.

SHE BRAIN: Hey Mr.He Brain, I want to show you something.

HE BRAIN: Yeah, what is it?

SHE BRAIN: Look here in the Discover magazine—it says that I use two brains to process certain information and that you only use one to process the same information. This means that my brain is better than yours because I use more of it.

HE BRAIN: That might be true she brain, but did it ever occur to you that my one brain is so good!!! that it doesn't need two tries . It gets it right the first time!

Although the above skit is short, it grabs the students attention so they will want to find out what the article is all about. Puppet skits do not have to be long. in fact when writing skits try to keep them five minutes or less in duration, no longer than ten minutes. If skits are too long students loose interest.

puppets so the audience can see their faces. Put your pinkie finger and thumb into the arm of the puppet's dress. Move your thumb and pinkie finger to make the puppet's arms move. Put your two middle fingers into the neck and tube of the puppet's head and move your fingers up and down to make the puppet's head twist and turn. For more information on this topic see— Making Puppets Come Alive Larry Engler.

Problems To Avoid When Using Hand Puppets

When students are given puppets, they have a tendency to act out their aggressions with the puppets. If puppets are hit too hard or too often they tend to break or chip. Small cracks can be repaired by putting salt dough into the crack and then touching up with paint. Very large breaks can not be repaired. The student would have to make a new head for their puppet.

Students also tend to use undesirable language and gestures when using the puppets. Therefore a set of appropriate rules should be established before the puppets are used.

Keep skits short. Many short skits are better than one long skit and will hold the interest of the audience better.

Remember the only limitations to the ways you use puppets will be yours or your student's imaginations. Have fun making and exploring the creative roles puppets can play in the classroom.

Recipe For Making Salt Dough

In a large bowl, mix 1 cup salt with 2 cups of flour. Add $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of water and mix until dough sticks together. Knead dough like you do bread dough until the dough becomes pliable and easy to work with.. Add more water or flour as needed until dough becomes desired consistency.

How To Make Hand Held Salt Dough Human Puppets

Materials Needed

Two inch Styrofoam ball.

SALT dough (See Recipe for Making Salt Dough)

Two inch tube, cut from paper roll center, such as toilet paper or plastic wrap, etc.

Glue gun, or other fast drying glue.

Tempera or acrylic paints and brushes.

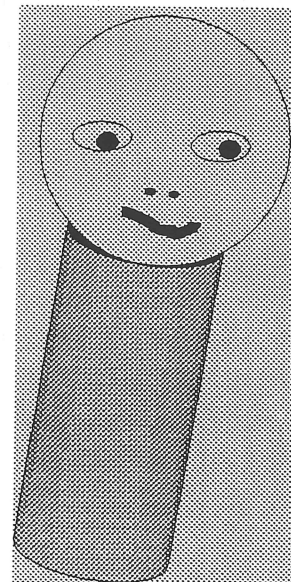
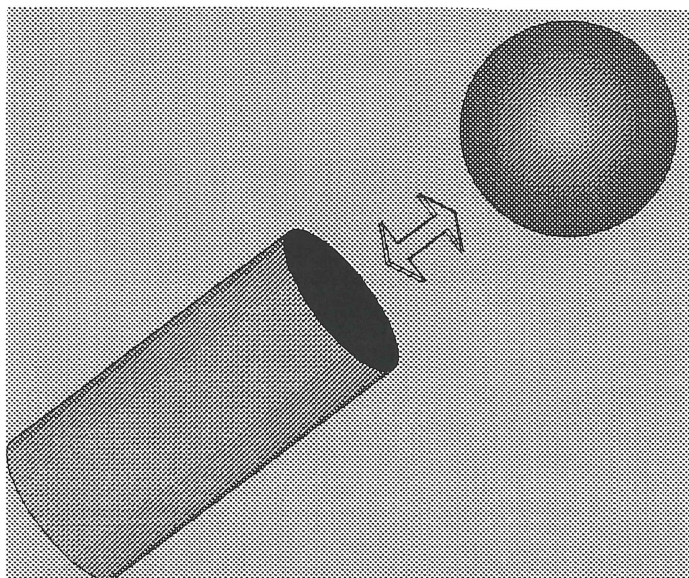
Can of clear spray gloss varnish.

Material for dress.

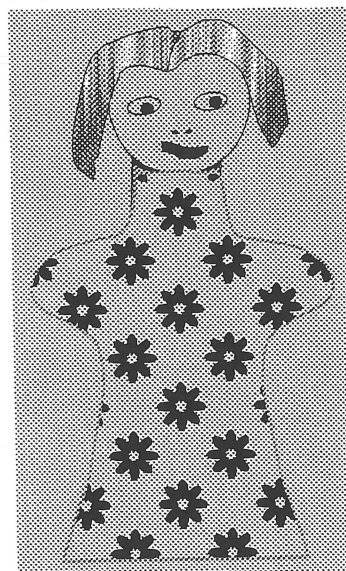
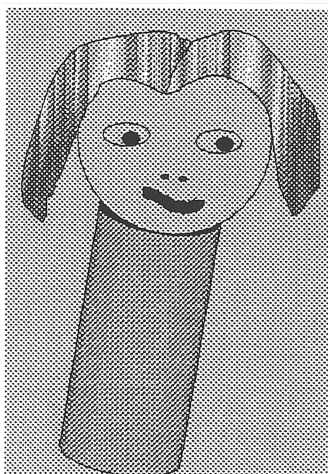
Material for hair such as yarn, fake fur, or an old wig that can be cut up.

Directions

1. Fasten tube to ball with glue to form the neck and head of the puppet.



2. Cover ball with a small covering of salt dough about 1/8 inch thick. Add small pieces of dough to the ball to add the facial features of the eyes, nose, and mouth.
3. Allow the puppet head dry until hard. May take up to two days.
4. Paint puppet head with flesh colored paint. Let paint dry before proceeding.
5. Paint facial features on puppet head. Let dry.
6. Spray puppet head with quick drying clear spray varnish. Let dry.



7. Fasten hair to puppet head using glue.
8. Make a one inch grid and enlarge puppet dress pattern.
9. Cut out dress from pattern along outside of line. Sew along inside of line.
10. Attach dress to puppet with glue.
11. Decorate dress and puppet in the costume of the country and role that puppet is intended to play.

Fold neck opening inward
when attaching to puppet

