The Folk Arts of Oaxaca: Integrating the Pre-Columbian Roots of the Traditional Folk Arts of Oaxaca, Mexico Into the Middle School Art Curriculum

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Magic Carpets of The Ancient Zapotec
What is it that you can tell from these images?
Oaxaca, Mexico

Has anybody heard of Oaxaca, Mexico?

Some things about Oaxaca.
- Catholic country, located southwest of Mexico City.
- Agricultural society since 1600 B.C.
- Elevation of 5115 ft. similar to Denver.
- Tropical climate.
Oaxaca, Mexico
Zapotec People

- Can anybody think how agriculture might help civilizations to develop?

- What do you think was the next step for the development of civilization?
Do these images have anything to do with what might be necessary for the development of civilization? What makes you say that?
Communications in Cities

- What kinds of communications run a city like Denver?

- If you lived in a civilization that began in 1600 B.C., what kinds of methods could you use to communicate with the people?

- What about a writing system? How could you display writing if newspapers did not exist?
What is agriculture like in an agriculturally based society? What makes you say that?
Agriculture

If agriculture were the most important part of your survival as a community, how would you make sure it was respected?

The most important crops for the ancient Zapotec were corn, beans, and squash. These were grown together in a *milpa*, just as they are today.

If you thought a food was sacred how might that change how you treated it?
Corn

- The ancient Zapotec believed that their flesh was made of corn.

- How do you think this affected their harvest celebrations?

- How do you think this affected their view of death?
Zapotec Ruins

Monté Alban: White Mountain.

Mitla: Place of the Dead.

What do these titles tell you about these cities? What makes you say that?
What if this were a secret code hidden in the walls?
Some people in this village still know what these codes mean.

What do you think is the reason for this?
What more can you say about these designs?
How do these images show how a secret code could be hidden in plain sight?
What do these images say about the rug weaving tradition in Teotitlán del Valle?
What more can you say about the rug weaving tradition in Teotitlán del Valle?
Your Turn

✧ What would you want to leave behind in a code based on what you know about the ancient Zapotec, or your own beliefs?
Image credits

Map of Oaxaca:
http://www.oaxacainfo.com/

Photos: Amanda Archer.
http://www.redfalcon.com/AKAPhoto.html
akarcherarts@yahoo.com
Oaxacan Woodcarving

Magic in the Wood
What is going on in these images?
Can you imagine a town built on top of a mountain?

Why do you think people chose to build a city up here?
The Ancient Zapotec Tombs

Everything that lives eventually dies, right?

Can you think of an instance where this is not true?

Death is a universal theme, the opposite of life, a compliment to the nature of life. What more can you say about this theme?
What can you say about this tomb?

What makes you say that?

What else can you say about this tomb?
How the ancient Zapotec honored death.

- They built elaborate tombs like those of the Egyptians.
- They made figurines, ceramic urns and food.
- They thought this would inspire the dead to help the living.
Figurines

Does anybody have a statue of some type in at home?

What does that statue mean?

Is it the real person? Or, is it the representation of a person? How so?
What more can you say about these Oaxacan Figurines?
Why do we even have statues in our culture?

Can you think of some famous statues in our culture and what they might mean?

Why were they built?
Figurines are like statues.

The ancient Zapotec used these figurines in tombs and on altars. Why?

What else can you say about figurines?
What can you say about this figurine based on this context? What makes you say that?
Calendar System

- Sacred Calendar to mark special community celebrations.
- Solar Calendar to mark the agricultural seasons.
- Round Calendar to keep track of 52 year increments that were like a century.
The Concept of Zero

Does this three calendar system seem complicated?

It was, and the ancient Zapotec needed the concept of zero in order for it to function.

Why would zero be needed for a complex calendar system. How does a zero function?
Sacred Calendar

- 13 cycles of 20. How many days does that make?

- Certain days were considered festival days, celebrated with food, art and dancing.

- People were given names of calendar days based on the day they were born. These were associated with an element or an animal.
What might be associated with these animals? What makes you say that?
Mexican Surrealism

- Surrealism is based on something that is not real. It is fantasy.
- In Mexico, it is a style of artwork or literature.
- Woodcarving is a type of surrealism. Many types of creatures are shown eating or drinking.
What can you say about how these carvings might be surreal? What makes you say that?
Can these things really happen? Animals, mermaids and skeletons eating, drinking, or playing music?

Sometimes the images are half-animal and half-human.

What would be the purpose for creating such images?
Arrazola and San Martín Tilcajete

Arrazola is a town in Oaxaca where some of the woodcarvers started to capitalize on the craft of woodcarving that had been associated with mask making.

They use copal, a special wood for their carvings.
Can anybody remember picking up a stick and thinking that it looked like an animal?

That is what woodcarvers do. They create a carving based on the shape of the wood.
Then, they paint it with acrylic paint or natural resins.
San Martín Tilcajete on left, Arrazola on right.

What makes these carvings similar or different in style, line, paint application, or design?

Does one example have a more surreal feel to it? How so?
Image Credits

Photos by: Amanda Archer.

http://www.redfalcon.com/AKAPhoto.html

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