



Papel Picado by Marrisá

Papel Picado

Perforated Paper

Nancy Walkup

In Mexico, *papel picado* (perforated paper), refers to the traditional art of decorative cut paper banners. Papel picado are usually cut with sharp *fierritos* (small chisels) from as many as fifty layers of colored tissue paper at a time. Designs may incorporate lattice-work, images of human and animal figures, flowers, and lettering.

Many papel picado are made especially for the Mexican festival of the Days of the Dead and include skeletal figures engaged in the everyday activities of the living. Other

popular designs include the Virgin of Guadalupe and Christmas nativity scenes. Individual papel picado banners are strung together to create festive, colorful decorations for celebrations.

To make papel picado, a paper *patron* (pattern) is first drawn as a guide. The pattern is laid on top of fifty layers of tissue paper that are placed on top of a lead sheet. The pattern is cut out using a hammer and different sizes of chisels. Artisans also use metallic papers and plastic in addition to tissue paper.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- understand that artists from many cultures use paper to make elaborate cutout designs for many purposes.
- perceive and understand how artists design figure/ground and positive/negative space relationships to create effective compositions.
- create a symmetrical paper cutout that effectively uses positive and negative space.



Papel Picado by Brandy

Materials

- 12 x 12" (30 x 30 cm) newsprint or butcher paper, white or colored paper, and black or other color paper, one per student
- pencils
- rulers
- X-Acto knives
- magazines or cardboard to use as a cutting surface
- glue sticks

Resources

Garza, Carmen Lomas. *Making Magic Windows*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press, 1999.

Trenchard, Kathleen. *Mexican Papercutting*. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 1998.

Setup

Make examples of the different steps of the process: making a pattern, shading in the negative spaces on the pattern, cutting the pattern, and tracing it on the final paper. Make a PowerPoint presentation featuring papel picado and other types of paper cutting from different cultures.

Engage

Tell students that artists from many cultures use the ephemeral medium of paper to make elaborate cut paper designs. Show and discuss examples of papel picado and paper cuts from other cultures.

Create

Have students fold newsprint or butcher paper squares in half and use a ruler to draw borders around the outside edge of the paper. Have them sketch half of a design on the folded paper, being sure that objects touch and connect with other areas to form positive shapes. Ask students to shade negative areas of the design with pencil to aid in cutting. Have them use scissors and X-Acto knives to cut away negative areas, and then open the paper slowly and flatten it.

Trace this pattern on the final paper to be used (white or colored) and then cut away the negative areas. Glue the final cutout on black or a different color of paper. Note: The first cutout could become the final product, but this method provides a finished artwork that has no creases or folds.

Assessment

To what extent does each cutout exhibit symmetry, have a cohesive structure, and effectively use positive and negative space?

Extensions

Use the cutout pattern to make a silkscreen or other kind of print.

Safety Note

To prevent injury, have students use extreme caution in cutting with X-Acto knives and changing the blades. Remind them to keep plenty of free space around them and to always pull the knife toward them, keeping their free hand out of the way.

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