

How to Make an Amulet Necklace

Aurelia Gomez

Objectives

1. Students will understand how amulets, milagros, and ex-votos are used in diverse cultures (historical and cultural understanding).
2. Students will learn about the forms and symbols used to create amulets, milagros, and ex-votos (perceiving, analyzing, and responding).
3. Students will find their own solutions in the process of creating amulet necklaces by exploring materials, design, line, shape, color, and texture (creating and performing).

Materials

aluminum tooling foil cut into 3 x 4" (7 x 10 cm) pieces, craft foam 6 x 9" (15 x 23 cm), pencils, scrap paper, scissors, string, beads, ballpoint pens

Motivation

Ask students if they are wearing any special types of medals or necklaces with symbols like a cross, a star of David, a heart, or a special charm. What do the symbols mean? You may want to pass out pre-cut shapes to talk about what the shapes symbolize. Do shapes always have the same meaning?

Why do people wear charms? Why do people do things to encourage good luck? Do students have good luck charms? What are they and how do they use them? Ask students to think about people they admire, adults, and/or sports figures. Do these people do special things to encourage good luck such as a special number, wear a certain jersey, or carry a special item?

What kinds of protection do people



use every day? Do students wear bicycle helmets, skateboard pads, or other physical protections? Of what other forms of protection are they aware?

Explain that amulets are used for protection, as a charm, and to fulfill wishes. *Ex-votos* (Spanish for miracle) are presented as gifts in gratitude for answered prayers or as a petition or request for divine assistance. Show images of amulets, ex-votos, and milagros, if possible.

Tell students that they will be making amulet necklaces. They can think about what they wish for, what they want protection from, or want to give thanks for. What shapes convey that feeling? They can draw a body part, an object, a symbol, or any shape that they like.

Procedures

Have students sketch their ideas on the scrap paper. When they are ready, have them draw the images lightly on the aluminum. Next, have students cut the shape out carefully with scissors. The aluminum can be flattened by rolling a pen over it when it is resting on foam.

Emboss designs on the amulet with the point of the pen. Make sure the foam is still underneath. Students can write messages and make designs using different kinds of lines. They can also turn the amulet over and emboss from both sides. Have students use the pen tip or a hole punch to poke a hole in the amulet, or cut an opening with scissors for the string to go through. Some students may want to make a tab and fold it over to make a conduit for the string. Thread the string through and add beads. Use knots to separate the beads and add another decorative element if desired. Have students tie the necklaces around their necks or the neck of a friend or loved one. Enjoy the good luck!

Evaluation

Have students wear their amulet necklaces and explain why they made them. Students can photograph each other wearing their amulet necklaces. Create a display of the photographs with labels explaining each image.



Resource

Francis, Doris, ed. *Faith and Transformation: Votive Offerings and Amulets from the Alexander Girard Collection*. Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2007.

Aurelia Gomez is director of education at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. aurelia.gomez@state.nm.us

WEB LINK

www.internationalfolkart.org