

**RITUAL AND *EL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS***  
**A Day of the Dead Curriculum Handbook for Teachers**



**PREPARED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF  
THE MEXICAN MUSEUM**

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# **RITUAL AND *EL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS***

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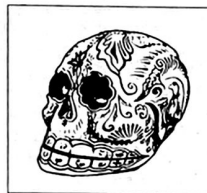
## **The Mexican Museum**

Fort Mason Center, Building D  
Laguna and Marina Boulevard  
San Francisco, California 94123  
415-441-0445

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Text by Bea Carrillo Hocker  
Associate Curator of Education  
The Mexican Museum



## **INTRODUCTION**

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As the cultural diversity of California students continues to grow, there is an increased need for students to understand and appreciate the unique contributions of all ethnic and cultural groups, as well as to become aware that there are fundamental cultural experiences which we all share in common. Ritual, for example, is universal. Humanity since pre-history has used it to celebrate and solemnize human and spiritual experiences. To understand the fundamental relationship between ritual and its practitioners is to recognize the similarity of all peoples.

The objective of this curriculum is to acquaint the student with the ritual festival of the Mexican *El Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of the Dead. But more importantly, this handbook also provides insight into the social functions which ritual serves within any cultural group. Perhaps through this understanding the student can learn not to judge other people's customs as invalid or "weird" because they are different from the familiar but instead to perceive the inner structure and meaning of these customs and how they may be similar to their own cultural traditions.

It is the overall goal of this handbook to stimulate in the student an appreciation of the fact that we are all different and yet the same.

*This material is directed to 6th through 12th grades but can be adapted easily to 4th and 5th grades by simplifying vocabulary and sentence structure.*



## HISTORY OF THE MEXICAN MUSEUM

The Mexican Museum, the first American institution of its kind devoted to Mexican American art outside of Mexico, was inaugurated on November 20, 1975.

The purpose of the Museum is to foster an awareness and appreciation of the vast and varied artistic and cultural heritage of the Mexican people. The Mexican Museum has the primary duty of collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting objects of art from the artistic periods which comprise the Mexican and Mexican American experience. Its collection is divided into five sections: Pre-Hispanic Art, Colonial Art, Mexican Fine Arts, Mexican American Fine Arts and Folk Art.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The Education Department of The Mexican Museum offers the following programs:

- Docent tours of the exhibitions (Spanish or bi-lingual upon request).
- One hour in-museum arts and crafts workshops designed to enhance the tour experience.
- Check-out slide/cassette and artifact kits on themes relating to Mexican culture.
- Outreach lectures and workshops.

*For further information call the Education Department,  
Monday through Friday, 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. at: 415-441-0445.*

## LA TIENDA

"La Tienda", The Mexican Museum shop, offers a wide range of handcrafted objects created by Mexican artisans in the rich and vital tradition of Mexico's folk art. Included in this selection are masks, ceramics, toys, wood carvings, textiles and many other items. Books, posters, catalogs, postcards and photographs illustrating Mexico's art and culture are also available.

### **The Mexican Museum**

Fort Mason Center, Building D  
Laguna and Marina Boulevard  
San Francisco, California 94123  
415-441-0445

### **Museum and La Tienda Hours:**

*General Public:*

Wednesday through Sunday  
12:00 to 5:00 P.M.

### **Program Hours:**

Monday through Friday  
10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

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*Sorcerer, Trois-Frères, c. 15,000-10,000 B.C., 2' high.  
Ariege, France*

### TEACHER'S NOTE

The following introduction "What is the Purpose of Ritual" should be read by the teacher or a student out loud to the class or the teacher should photocopy the page and assign it for individual reading in class or at home. The reading should be followed with a class discussion or written assignment on the following topic.

Name ceremonies which you have observed or which are practiced in your community related to family, school, club, church, city, etc. Do these ceremonies serve any of the purposes listed in the reading?

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RITUAL?**

*Definition of Ritual:*

*A form or system of solemn ceremonies.*

Most of us have been involved in some kind of ritual either as a participant of an actual ceremony or as a spectator. We might have observed a graduation or wedding ceremony and wondered why we go through so much expense and fuss to put on these ceremonies.

**How did ritual start and why has it continued to be part of our lives?**

There exists in a cave in France a pre-historic drawing of a man disguised as a reindeer taking part in a hunting ritual. Pre-historic people suffered many hardships because their existence depended solely on what nature provided. Drought, floods, earthquakes and savage animals were their enemies. In time, pre-historic people began to believe that by performing certain acts or ceremonies, they could somehow gain some control over these destructive forces of nature. We can assume that this was the original purpose of ritual. Why has ritual persisted to this day?

**Ritual serves several purposes in our lives:**

1. It is a way people can attempt to control the uncontrollable.

*Example:* It is believed by certain cultural groups that rain dances and ceremonies can bring forth much-needed rain.

2. It provides a way of outwardly demonstrating our emotions.

*Example:* Flag ceremonies, speeches, gun salutes are public ceremonies that allow us to show our pride and love for our country.

3. It allows us to set group standards.

*Example:* Our funeral rituals demonstrate that the dead must be given respect and their contributions in life to family and the community must be acknowledged.

4. It provides an outward demonstration of group approval.

*Example:* When we attend a wedding ceremony, we are indicating by our presence that we approve of the union of that particular man and woman as husband and wife. Graduation ceremonies acknowledge and commend students for their successful completion of academic work.

## THE RITUAL OF *EL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS*

Archaeological excavations of pre-Hispanic grave sites and cities show evidence that since remote times the Mexican people have honored their dead with ritual, burying them with offerings of pottery, food, toys and household objects. Although not many written records exist, many examples of death rites have been portrayed in pre-Hispanic Mexican art such as murals, painted pottery and carvings on walls, monuments and artifacts. Archaeological findings such as these demonstrate ancient cultural beliefs which emphasize death as an important part of the cycle of life. In contrast, American culture generally tends to define death as the absence of life. The idea of the unity of life and death has continued in Mexico and is the dominant theme of the art and customs of the November 2nd festival of *El Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of the Dead.

The traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* are rooted in pre-Hispanic Mexico and Catholic ritual. In the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV established the feast of Allhallows, or All Saints' Day, to be celebrated on November 1st. The evening of October 31st, which to the ancients had been a time for the gathering of dead souls, and which was sacred to the Celtic god of the dead, came to be known as Allhallows' Eve—later Halloween. By the thirteenth century, November 2nd was firmly established in the Roman Catholic calendar as the feast of All Souls, a day to remember the dead with prayer. When the Spanish conquered Mexico in 1521, they sent their priests to Mexico to destroy or incorporate as many of the early native rituals into Catholicism as possible. The Catholic feast of All Souls' Day merged with the Indian rituals of death and became the rich and unique festival of *El Día de los Muertos*.

Although many of the Indian communities have abandoned the original traditions of this festival, there are some areas which still keep alive the customs of previous generations. The Zapotecs of Oaxaca, for example, still celebrate the Day of the Dead with their entire families. The Zapotecs believe that the spirits of their dead relatives will return to their homes on the evenings of November 1st and 2nd. To welcome the spirits as honored guests, family altars are cleaned and



*"Noche De Muertos" ("Night of the Dead") by Angel Zamarripa*

freshened on October 31st. During the year, mothers set aside money to purchase new dishes to place on the family altar since old crockery is not acceptable. Yellow marigolds, candles, toys, religious pictures, cut tissue-paper designs, and the personal mementos and photographs of the deceased decorate the altar. Incense, liquor, cigarettes, and food such as tamales, fruit, nuts, chocolate, candies,

sugar skulls and bread of the dead serve as offerings.

In the early morning, around 4:00 A.M., of November 1st, the children spirits are expected. At about 8:00 A.M. their departure is marked by the blowing out of tiny candles and their removal from the altar. At about 3:00 P.M. the adult spirits arrive and the large candles are lit. It is believed that the spirits will go away weeping if nothing is offered to them. About 8:00 P.M. prayers are said at the altar. On the morning of November 2nd, everyone attends mass at church and towards evening the cemeteries slowly fill with people. Graves are cleaned and beautifully decorated with *zempasúchil* (yellow marigolds). Incense is burned and food is offered until dawn. The altars and decoration are removed on November 4th.

These customs vary from region to region but the pre-Hispanic philosophy that death is part of life serves as the framework which unifies and gives form and purpose to the celebration of *El Día de los Muertos* throughout Mexico.



## TEACHER'S NOTE

### *Learning Through Storytelling*

Cultural groups sometimes use storytelling to teach lessons to the young. Author Fernando Horcasitas' story instructs Mexican children as to their responsibility in carrying out the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos*. However, there is a second underlying theme or purpose to this story.

It also reveals to the reader the cultural values or standards which the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* encourage in Mexican society. Use this story as a basis for class discussion. What are these ideals?

Students should deduce that this cultural festival emphasizes the importance of family ties - ties so strong they extend beyond death. For those who believe that the souls return for this holiday, this feast is a celebration of joy that the dead are reunited with the living and the family is again together in spirit. The story also emphasizes obedience to parents and the importance of maintaining cultural traditions.



ing that in the entire pueblo, in every home, on top of each embroidered table-cloth, there were sugared breads, *mole* (meat and gravy dish), fruits, chocolate, a glass of water, peanuts, cigarettes, sugar cane, the yellow *zempasúchil* (marigolds) and hundreds of sputtering candles - all these things to welcome the dead with dignity. The woman wandered through the streets calling out to her son but with no result.

The boy, finally tired from his games, was leaving the forest when he noticed that behind him came a large procession of the old ones. He saw his father, his grandparents, great grandparents and his great-great grandparents. They were hungry and thirsty, shivering with cold, and carried their empty food bags and rolled sleeping mats under their arms. The old ones looked forward to returning to their home where they knew they would be welcomed to warm themselves, eat and sleep for one night.

"What are you doing here?" the old ones scolded. "Why are you not waiting for us in your home?" The astonished boy could not answer. The dead ones tied the boy to a tree and left him there the entire night. At sunrise, when the perfumed smoke of the copal (incense) was disappearing, and when the candles on each *ofrenda* were being snuffed out, the old ones again slowly passed through the forest and untied the boy and continued their journey. The boy returned home crying, "*mamacita* (dear little mother) now I believe that the dead do return. Next year we will buy them food and we will await all of them."

After a pause, the wiseman finishes his story. "We love and respect our dead. That is why I light for them a fire and provide them with food and drink and my children and grandchildren will do the same for me once a year when I too return shivering with cold and suffering with thirst and hunger."

## AROMAS AND SWEETS FOR OUR DEAD

### A Day of the Dead Story by Fernando Horcasitas

*The old wiseman tells this story to the children of the village of Milpa Alta.*

"The dead surround us like little children; they look for us, they need us," and he continues his story.

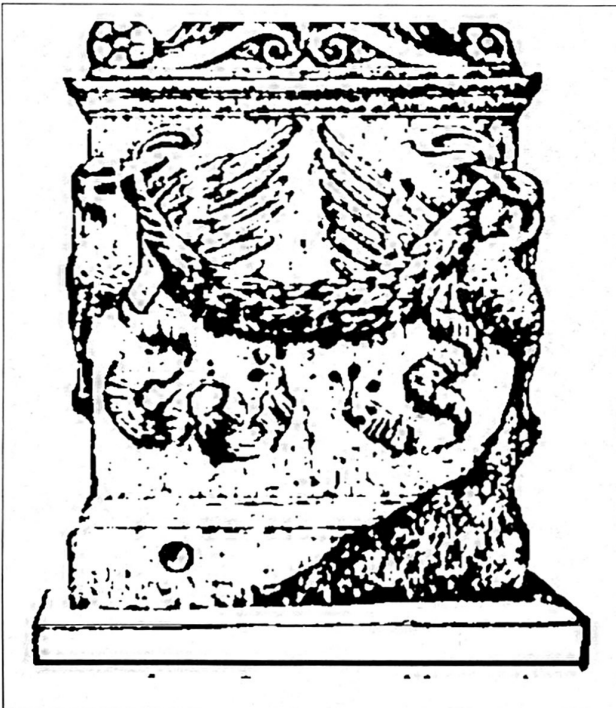
"Son," the mother said to the unbelieving boy. "Why don't you go to the forest to cut wood? Why don't you earn a few cents to buy the bread, the tamales and the *aguardiente* (an alcoholic drink) for the *ofrenda* (offering altar) of the dead? Don't you know that our beloved dead ones suffer with cold, hunger and thirst after journeying so far all day? We need to prepare the way for them with fires, flowers and candles. They only visit us once a year!"

The Day of the Dead arrived and the disobedient boy went to play in the forest and by evening he still had not returned home. The unhappy mother cried upon see-

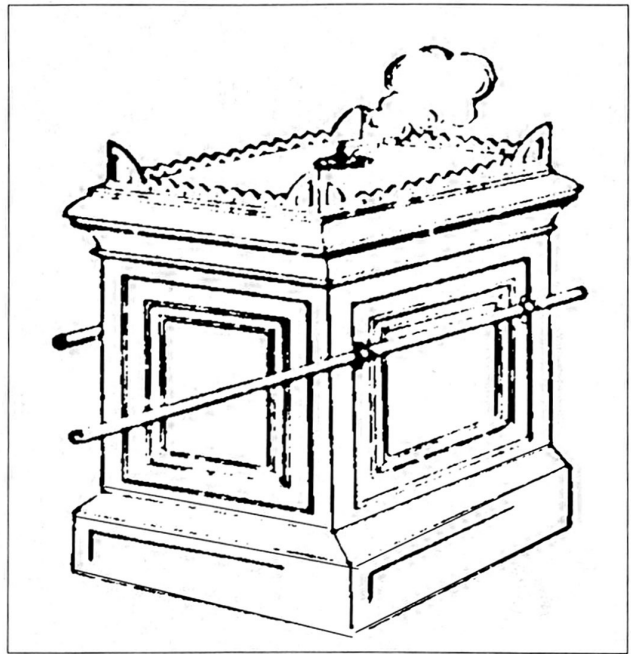
## UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF THE ALTAR

An altar is a raised structure which serves as the focal point of religious worship. The word "altar" comes from the Latin *altare* (high altar) derived from *altus*, meaning "high." The altar was brought to existence because of a religious need. Early worshippers sought "holy" or sacred places such as high mountains or secret caves to set themselves apart from the ordinary world and achieve communication with the supernatural or spiritual realm.

Since these special places were often far away from people's homes, worshippers began to create symbolic holy places or structures which would help make this connection between humans and the divine. Linked to this idea, the altar became the "table" on which images, symbols and objects representing deities were placed to make the invisible gods visible. The altar became the place where worshippers could achieve some kind of intimacy with their gods. Today many of the world's religions continue to use the altar as the focus of religious worship and as the symbolic meeting ground between heaven and earth.



*Jewish Altar of Incense*



*Ancient Roman Altar in the Museum at Arles*

### TEACHER'S NOTE

*Subject for discussion*

Although our homes may not have altars, we might have a cabinet, a wall, a shelf, or a window sill where our family keeps special mementos, heirlooms, photographs, trophies or awards which honor the memory of past family members or which represent important achievements or events of the family. Does your family have a special place for keepsakes of this type?

### THE OFRENDA

*Ofrenda* is the Spanish word for "offering" and also refers to a Day of the Dead altar. The *ofrenda* is a home altar which is actually used all year long for daily prayer and to honor Christian saints and redecorated for this festival of the dead. The purpose of altars for the dead is to honor and please the returning souls. One does this by placing items, food and drink on the altar which had pleased the honored souls in their earthly existence. Each soul has his or her portion of food and drink laid out on the table and the families believe that the souls partake of the *essence* of the food. The living are fed by the actual substance of the food. Souls without living relatives are believed to wander about looking for their place of honor. Many people leave small portions of food outside their doorsteps for these wandering souls.

## RITUAL OBJECTS OF THE OFRENDA

### TEACHER'S NOTE

The objective of the explanations given in "Ritual Objects of the *Ofrenda*" is to acquaint students with the symbolism of each item. However, it is also the intent of this information and an ensuing class discussion to broaden the students' perception of the similarity of some U.S. practices to Day of the Dead traditions. Use the following questions to stimulate discussion after the reading.

#### *Candles*

Have you ever participated in a ceremony where lighted candles were used? What was their significance? What do you think the blowing out of candles on a birthday cake signifies?

#### *Sugar Skulls*

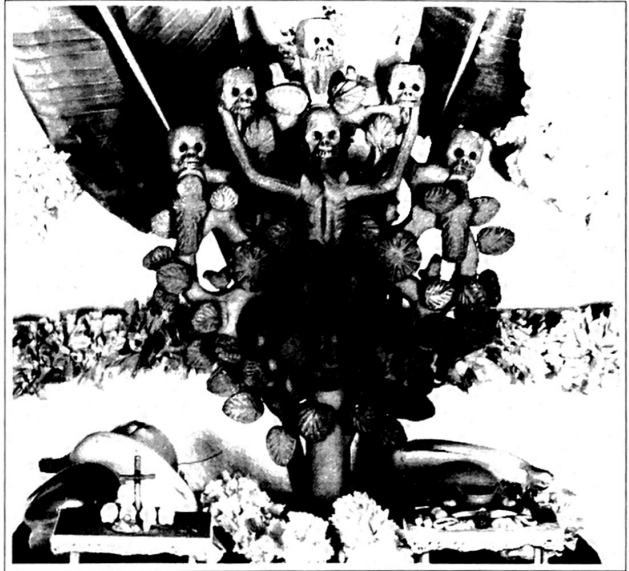
Can you think of a holiday where candy serves as a symbol for the theme of the celebration? Candy hearts symbolize love on Valentine's Day. Easter candy eggs associate the birth of a new baby chick with Christ's Resurrection from the tomb and with new life or regeneration.

#### *Zempasúchil*

Why do you think flowers are an important part of our funeral ceremonies? In what other ceremonies do flowers play an important role? Flowers help us express our feelings towards people and about important events. On what type of occasions do we give or receive flowers? What feelings are we expressing on these occasions?

#### *A Glass of Water*

Have you ever gone to a christening? Water is usually a part of this ceremony. How is it used and what does it symbolize?



### CANDLES

In religious ceremonies the lighting of candles can symbolize enlightenment, new spiritual life, or that the participants have started the process of worship. In Mexico candles are placed on the *ofrenda* to light and guide the way of the souls to the altar. Day of the Dead clay candleholders range from the very plain to ornate candelabra.



### SUGAR SKULLS

Day of the Dead sugar skulls are created in a variety of sizes from sugar paste which is pressed into ceramic molds. The *calaveras* (skulls) are decorated with flowers and scrolls of colored icing and metallic colored foils. Some bear popular Mexican names written on the forehead and are for the *ofrendas* but also for living children as a treat. Friends and sweethearts also exchange skulls with their names. The living consume the skulls and associate pleasant sensations with their symbolic deaths and understand that in the end, death will feed on the living.

### ZEMPASUCHIL

The yellow marigold, *zempasúchil*, was the symbolic flower of death of the Aztecs of pre-Hispanic Mexico. Perhaps this association was made because once the marigold is cut, it dies very quickly. Flowers on the *ofrenda*, along with other organic elements, refer to the earth and regenerative forces of nature. In some regions, marigold petals are strewn to create a symbolic pathway leading souls to the *ofrenda*.

### A GLASS OF WATER

Water is placed on the *ofrenda* to quench the thirst of the souls after their long journey and also to emphasize that water is the main support of life.

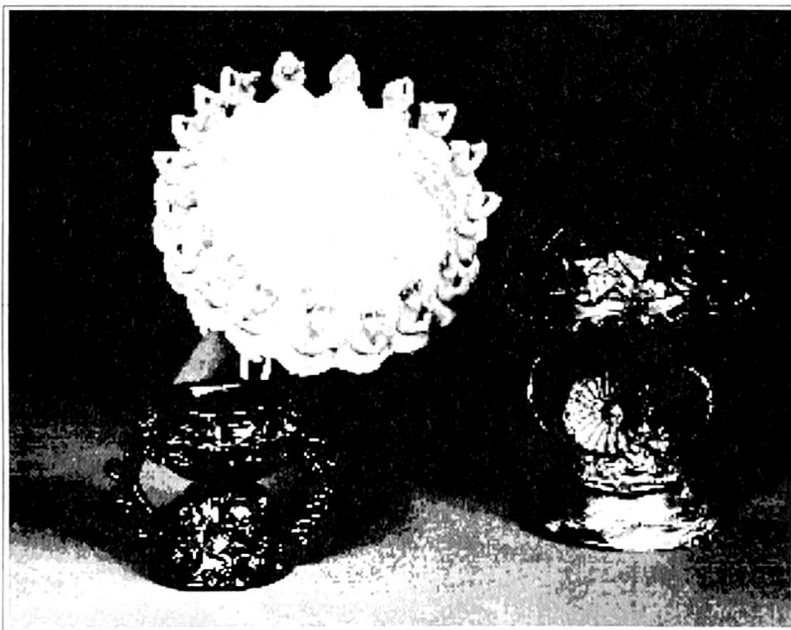
### INCENSE

Each region that keeps the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* creates its own distinct style of ceramic incense burners for use at grave sites and on the *ofrendas*. The resin from the copal tree is burned in the burners and the perfumed smoke surrounds the altar and grave, providing an atmosphere of mystery. The burning of incense has been associated with ritual since early history by civilizations throughout the world. The almost magical transformation of earth matter (tree resin) into something ethereal (smoke) has motivated people to associate incense with the symbolic transformation of the physical to the supernatural. The rising movement of smoke toward the heavens has also inspired humanity to use incense as an offering to the gods.



### PAN DE MUERTOS OR BREAD OF THE DEAD

*Pan de muertos* is specially made to be placed on *ofrendas* and graves. It is sweet bread flavored with anise, orange peel and orange glaze. There is a wide variety of form and decoration. There are round loaves with a central raised knob of dough, representing the skull, and crossed bone-shaped decorations radiating from the central knob. Others are very sculptural: human shapes, some with "baker's clay" (bread and water) heads of Christ or angels stuck into protruding knobs of dough, others in the shape of angels, animals, rings or of Christ upon the cross. The bread is baked for both the living and the dead. It is not surprising that *pan de muertos* is the dominant food of this feast for since antiquity bread has symbolized the mainstay of human life.

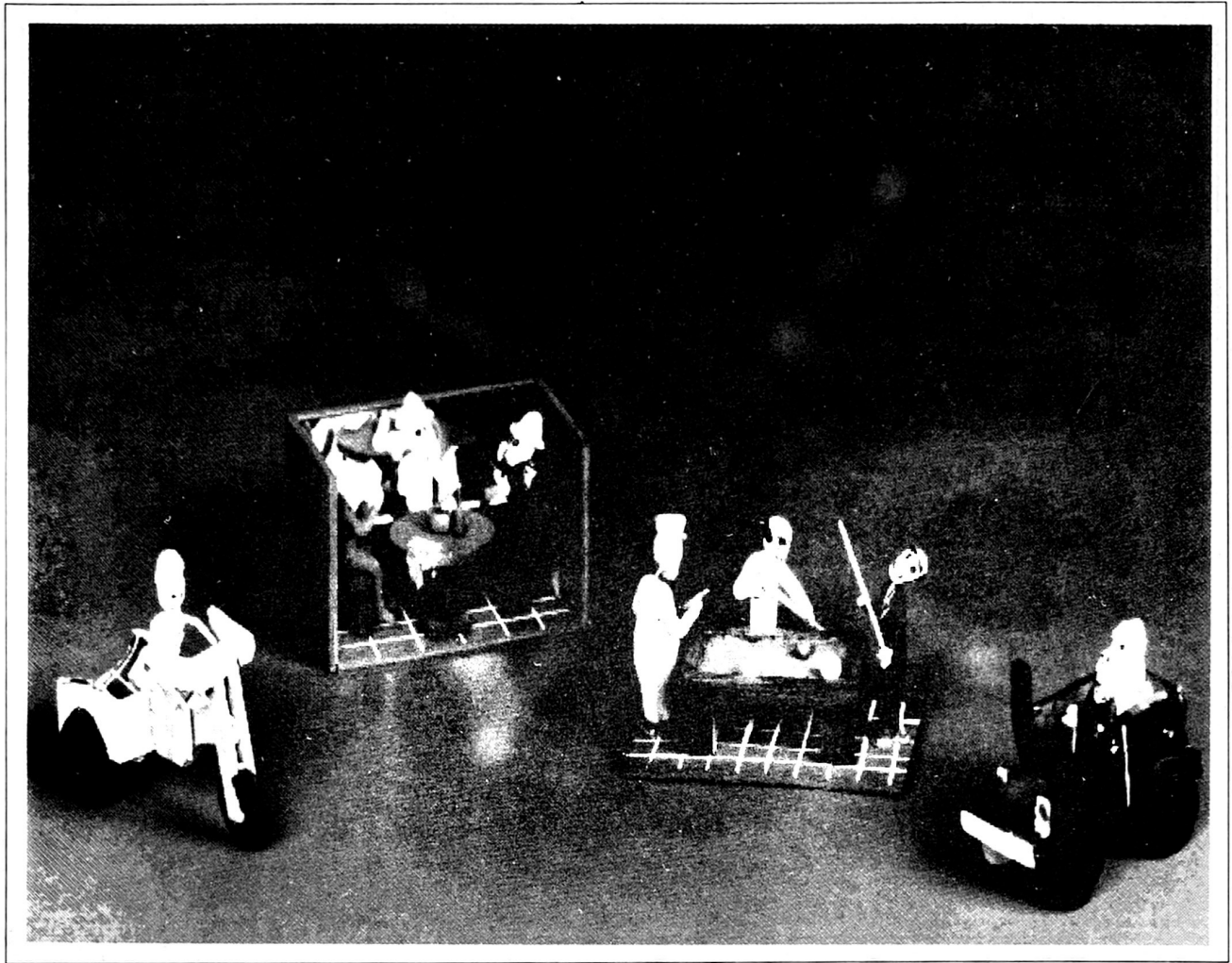


### PAPEL PICADO

(Tissue-Paper Cut Outs)

During *El Día de los Muertos* tissue paper banners with cut-out designs of animated skeleton figures adorn altars, homes and storefronts everywhere. They are made in pads of 25 or 50 sheets with the design drawn on the top and then cut out with small metal chisels and a hammer. The process is similar to leather tooling. Each chisel has a sharp tip of a different shape which the artisan hammers through the layers of paper to punch out a design.





### **DAY OF THE DEAD TOYS**

A wide variety of toys appear for sale in the public market as preparations for this holiday begin. Painted clay skeleton figures portray the deceased resuming their normal activities such as getting married, playing cards, etc. These are placed on the *ofrendas*. There are also pull toys, pop-up toys and crank boxes with similar death imagery which are given to children. These toys poke fun at death and remind everyone that whether rich or poor, famous or unknown, beautiful or homely, all will become a skull in the end. These toys also introduce children to the idea of death in an atmosphere of joyful celebration.

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## DEATH IN PRE-HISPANIC MEXICO

The ancient cultures of Mexico have represented death repeatedly in their art. Their drawings and sculptures clearly express their ideas and feelings about death.

This head is divided in two halves. One side represents a human face and the other the fleshless face of death. In the pre-Hispanic mind, life and death were perceived not as opposites but as two complementary parts which formed the complete cycle of life.

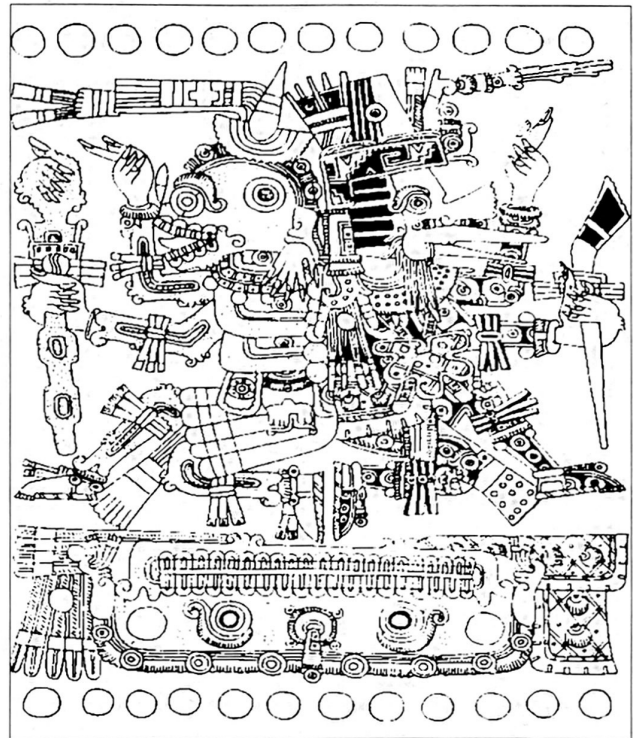


*Sculpture of Life and Death, Zapotec Culture,  
A.D. 600-900, Oaxaca, Mexico*

The drawing at top right illustrates the gods of life and death joined back to back. Life nourishes death and death in turn generates new life. Life and death are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other.

The drawing at bottom right portrays Mictlantecuhli with a skull mask and costume of painted bones. His black hair is curled and studded with starlike eyes since he dwells in a region of utter darkness. He is adorned with paper rosettes, cones and banner. This portrayal is in great contrast to our image of death which we clothe in a black sinister hooded cloak. The Mexican death figure wears the joyous trappings of life and positions himself in an attitude of dance.

*\* Codex - painted picture manuscripts created in Mexico during the pre-Hispanic period or shortly after the Spanish conquest.*



*Mictlantecuhli, God of Death and Quetzalcoatl,  
God of Life, \*Codex Borgia, Aztec*



*Mictlantecuhli, God of Death and Ruler of Mictlán,  
region of the dead, Codex Borbonicus, Aztec*



*Aztec drawing of sacrificial death ritual.*

### **AZTEC DRAWING OF SACRIFICIAL DEATH RITUAL**

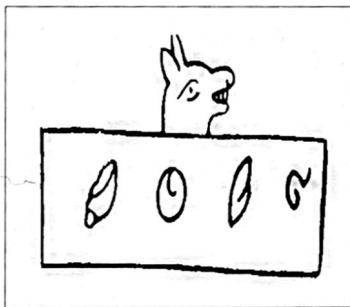
In pre-Hispanic Mexico there were many myths about how the universe was created. Almost all of these stories related that the gods had voluntarily given their blood and lives to bring about life on earth. In time the early peoples of Mexico came to believe that since the blood of the gods had provided for the beginning of life, then the life-blood of men could sustain the gods in their eternal struggle to maintain life on earth. It seemed logical, then, that the heart, the human life force, had to be the most suitable food for the gods.

The Aztecs believed they were the chosen people of the sun and their mission in life was to provide the sun with the nourishing "precious liquid", the blood of man. Aztec myths related that the sun was born each morning and each night he battled his brothers, the stars, and his sister, the moon. His defeat in battle would mean eternal darkness on earth and the death of all living things. It was the Aztecs' belief that the sun must be fed constantly to ensure its strength and survival and they instituted human sacrifice in large numbers. Human hearts became the food of the sun. The death of the sacrificial victims was seen not as the end of human life but as a necessary act in the preservation of all life.

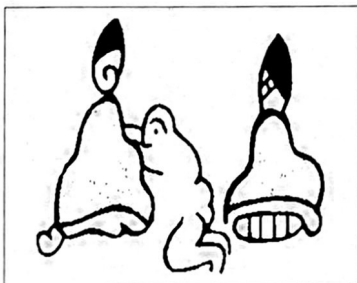
## LIFE AFTER DEATH

According to ancient Mexican belief, the nature of one's death and not the quality of one's life determined where the soul might dwell in the afterlife. The paradise of the sun god was reserved only for the souls of warriors who died in combat or on the sacrificial stone and for women who died in childbirth. Those who died by drowning, by lightning, from leprosy, or any illness believed to be related to the water gods, went to the paradise of the rain god, Tlaloc. But those who died by other means went to Mictlán, the dark and silent region of the dead. These souls underwent a series of magical trials as they passed through eight regions before they reached Mictlán. The drawings below from an Aztec codex (painted manuscript) portray the trials:

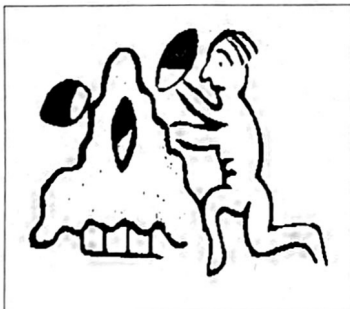
### The Nine Regions of the Underworld Codex Vaticanus A, Nahua



1. The dead must cross a deep river, and thus a dog was buried with the dead, so that it could help its master cross the river.



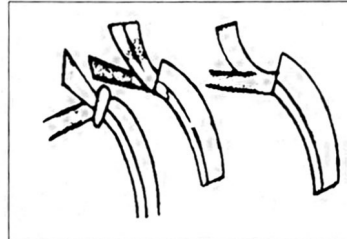
2. The soul must pass between two clashing mountains.



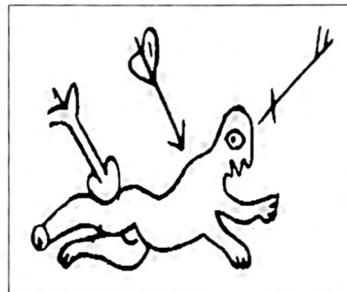
3. In this region the souls must climb over a mountain of blades made of sharp obsidian (black glass-like volcanic stone).



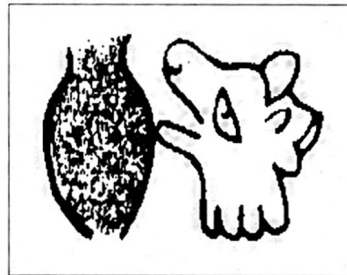
4. The soul is subjected to an icy wind that cuts like obsidian knives.



5. Next the souls must pass through a place where souls float like flags.



6. The soul is pierced by arrows.



7. Next the souls must pass through the region where wild beasts devour human hearts.



8. The dead must pass through the place of the blinding dark fog.

9. Those souls that did not lose their way found rest in the final realm of Mictlán.



## THE CELEBRATION OF EL DIA DE LOS MUERTOS BY MEXICAN AMERICANS

In the United States during the 1960's, Chicanos (Mexican Americans) organized themselves into a national political movement for the purpose of securing economic and social changes that would benefit Mexican Americans. Chicano artists realized their art could play an important role in furthering the goals of the movement. For inspiration they looked to the art produced by Mexican artists prior to and after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Mexican artists of this period had used their art to convey political messages to the people, especially through murals and posters. Following their example, Chicano artists also popularized the mural and the poster as a political art form often using Mexican art styles and themes.

This rediscovery and association with Mexican art influenced Mexican Americans to further explore and establish ties with their Mexican heritage. Chicanos learned Mexican music, art and customs and changed them to blend with American life. The celebration of *El Día de los Muertos* was of special attraction to Mexican Americans as the customs associated with this festival made possible the acknowledgement of Mexican ancestors.

In the early 1970's, artistic and cultural groups within the Mexican American community began to invite artists and community members to install *ofrendas* in galleries, centers and other public places. The creators of the *ofrendas* took this opportunity to pay homage to

past Mexican personages of historical and social significance and to past community members who by their life or death had contributed to the good of the Mexican American. In following years *ofrendas* were augmented with theatrical productions and outdoor processions.

The transference of *El Día de los Muertos* from Mexico to the United States has been of significant value. Day of the Dead practices in the United States enable Mexican Americans to establish bonds with their historical and cultural roots and generate an understanding and appreciation of Mexican culture in the general community. These tradi-

tions also inspire the emergence of ethnic traditions in the United States among other cultural groups. Day of the Dead celebrations are open and enjoyed by all members of the community and since death and the loss of loved ones is a common human experience, these types of rituals promote feelings of kinship among all participants.



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## VOCABULARY LIST

*acknowledge:* to recognize as a fact of truth

*commend:* praise

*rite:* ceremony; formal act or procedure

*mural:* large-scale picture painted directly on a wall

*archeology:* study of people, customs and life of the distant past by excavating and classifying the remains of ancient cities, tools, monuments, etc.

*artifact:* anything made by human skill or work

*dominant:* having chief influence

*merge:* combine; blend; unite

*philosophy:* system of beliefs, viewpoint; reasoning

*realm:* kingdom; world; domain; province

*intimacy:* a closeness; on a private or personal level

*essence:* basic quality or character; the heart, core or spirit of a thing

*substance:* material; matter; stuff

*enlighten:* cause to understand

*organic:* of living things

*regenerative:* to be able to give new life

*emphasize:* to stress

*ethereal:* airy; delicate; unearthly

*mainstay:* chief support

*complementary:* serving to fill out or complete

*preservation:* saving; safeguarding; maintenance

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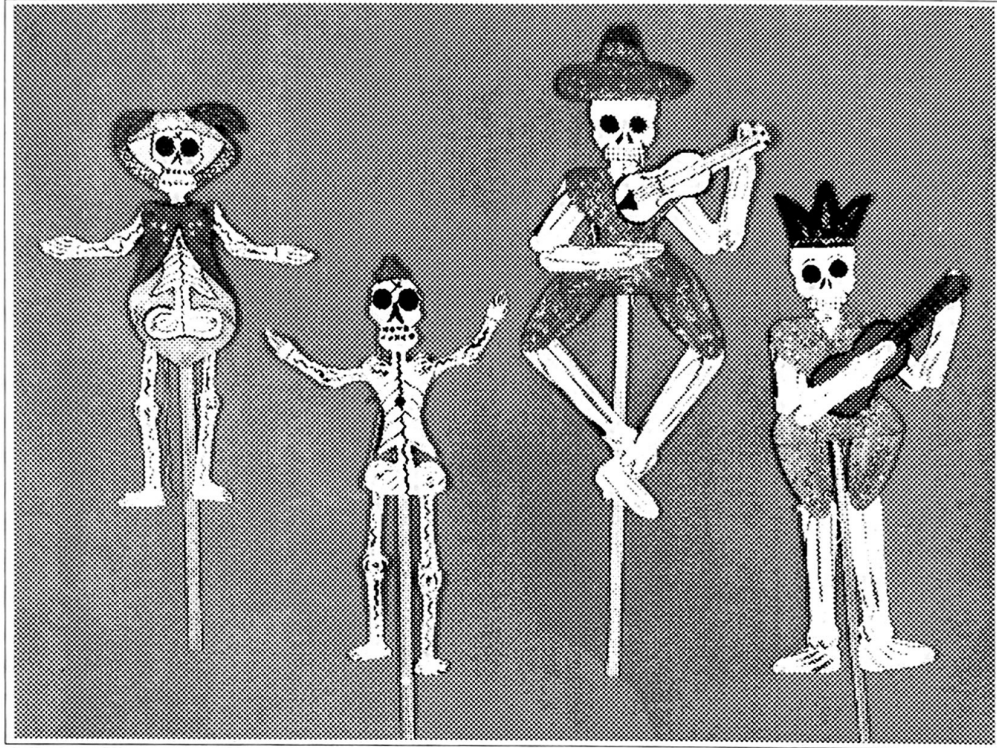
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## DAY OF THE DEAD CRAFTS



MAKING A PAPER "CALAVERA"  
and a  
SKELETON "JUMPING JACK"



**DIRECTIONS FOR  
CREATING A PAPER "CALAVERA" (Skull)**

**TEACHER'S NOTE**

**MAKING A PAPER "CALAVERA" (Skull)**

It is recommended that you first make your own paper skull so that the process is clear to you. An excellent exercise in reading comprehension can be part of this art activity if students are allowed to create their *calaveras* by following the step by step instructions on their own.

**MATERIALS:**

- \* A copy of pattern and directions for each student
- \* 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of white poster board or heavy weight construction paper for each student
- \* Pencils with erasers, scissors, several rolls of masking tape, staplers
- \* Hole punchers, string or yarn for ties if *calaveras* are to be used as masks
- \* Elmer's glue and newspapers to protect desks or tables
- \* Crayons, felt pens and collage can be used to decorate the *calaveras*
- \* If collage is used, you will need a good assortment of colored papers (foil gift wrap, colored construction or art paper or even colored printed magazines)
- \* Glitter is a traditional form of decoration

**PREPARATION:**

**Collage Decoration** - With paper cutter or scissors cut colored papers into various sized squares and put into several containers for placement on student desks or tables.

**Mask Ties** - If *calaveras* are to be used as masks, cut 2 pieces of string or yarn into approximately 10" lengths for each student.



1. CUT OUT PATTERN PIECES, including eye and nose holes and heavy black lines marked by arrows (to create slits). DO NOT CUT ON DOTTED LINE.

2. Place cut patterns on heavy paper. TRACE AROUND

PATTERN PIECES, around eye and nose holes and into slits.

3. CUT OUT TRACED PIECES, INCLUDING SLITS. Cut out eye and nose holes only if *calavera* is to be used as a mask.

4. MAKE A SCORED FOLDING LINE. With pencil, lightly draw dotted line around face area as shown on pattern. Open a pair of scissors to its full range and with point of blade lightly scratch a continuous line over the dotted line. This will create a "scored" line which will enable paper to fold back when skull is constructed. Erase pencilled dotted line.

5. DECORATE your *calavera* with whatever materials are available to you. Traditional *calavera* decorations are flowers, leaves, scrolls, birds and written names or sayings, but you can create designs of your choice. DO NOT GLUE THE TWO PIECES TOGETHER.

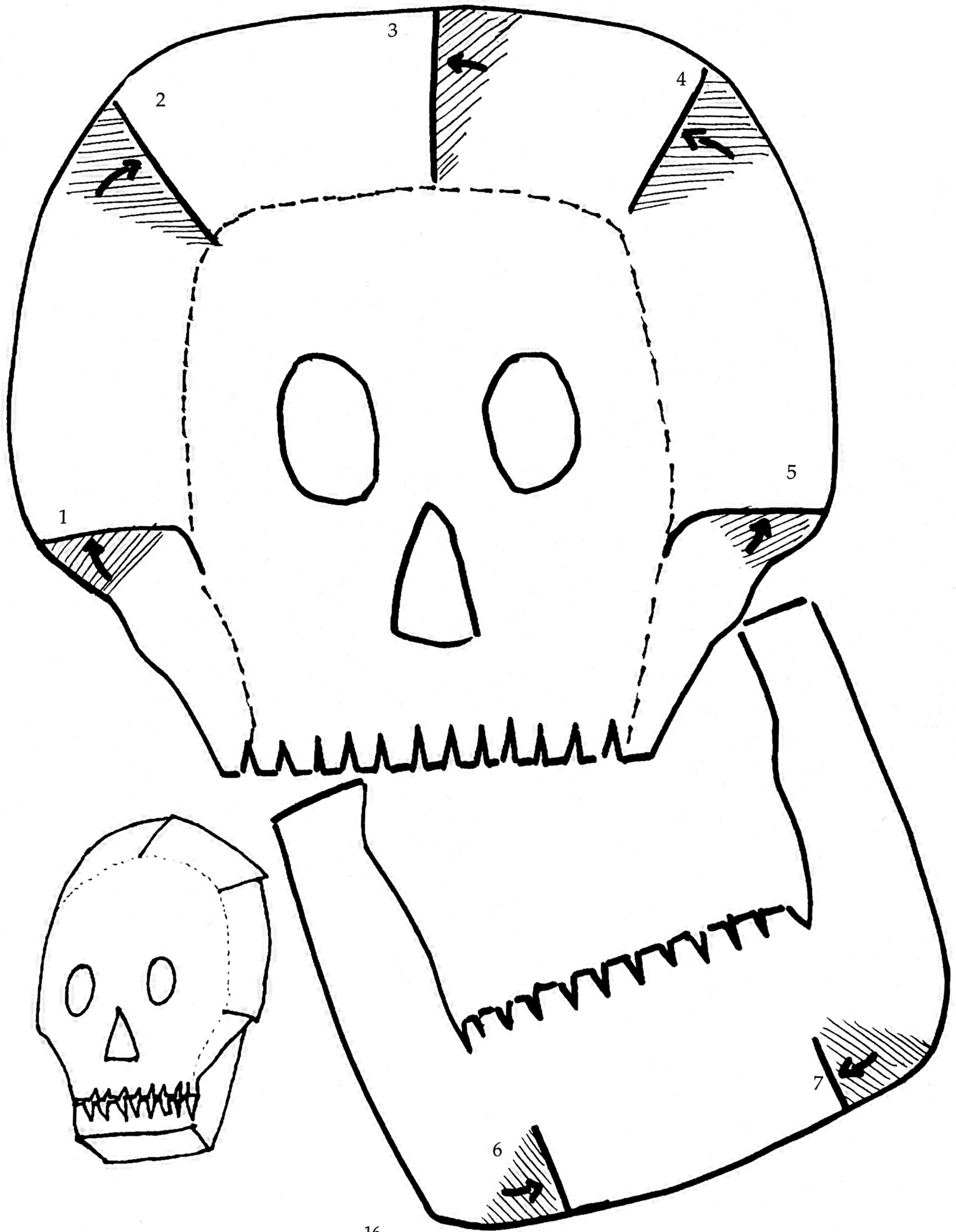
6. CONSTRUCTION OF CALAVERA:

a. Cut nine pieces of masking tape to approximately 1" length and place near you on the edge of table or desk.

b. Start with the top half of skull. Work with blank side of the *calavera* facing you. Use the paper pattern as your guide. Overlap shaded areas of slits (as shown on paper pattern) under unshaded areas of slits in the direction shown by arrows. Hold overlapped slits in place with pieces of masking tape. Continue the same process on "jaw" piece. Use a stapler to reinforce all taped slits.

c. Slide "jaw" under "face" piece. Tape both pieces in place. See drawing for placement. Reinforce taped pieces with staples.

7. If you plan to wear your skull as a mask, punch holes on both sides of mask, and tie a piece of yarn or string through each hole.



## TEACHER'S NOTE

### SKELETON "JUMPING JACK"

(Advanced version: not recommended for use in classrooms below 5th grade level.)

#### MATERIALS:

- \* 1 can spray adhesive
- \* one copy of pattern sheet for each student
- \* one 8 1/2" x 14" sheet of white poster board per student to be used as backing for pattern sheet (should be of a thickness that can be cut with scissors without difficulty)
- \* crayons or preferably felt pens
- \* (optional) colored construction or art paper to be used for decoration of figure
- \* wood paint stirrers (one for each two students)  
Paint stores will sell these for a few cents.
- \* 1/4" brads available at office supply stores (8 are needed for each jumping jack)
- \* ball of white thick crochet thread
- \* Elmer's glue
- \* newspapers to protect desk or table
- \* hole puncher

#### PREPARATION:

Trace or glue all pattern pieces on one sheet of 8 1/2" x 14" paper.

Photocopy completed pattern page on legal size paper (one per student).

Cut poster board in 8 1/2" x 14" sheets (one per student).

Lightly spray adhesive on each posterboard sheet (one at a time) and quickly place a copy of pattern page on top of the board and smooth in place with soft cloth.

Cut pieces of crochet thread to approximately 14" lengths (4 per student).

With mat cutter and metal ruler, cut paint stirrers in half lengthwise.

You will need to run the blade over the length of the stirrer several times on "hard wood" paint sticks.

## DAY OF THE DEAD

### "JUMPING JACK"

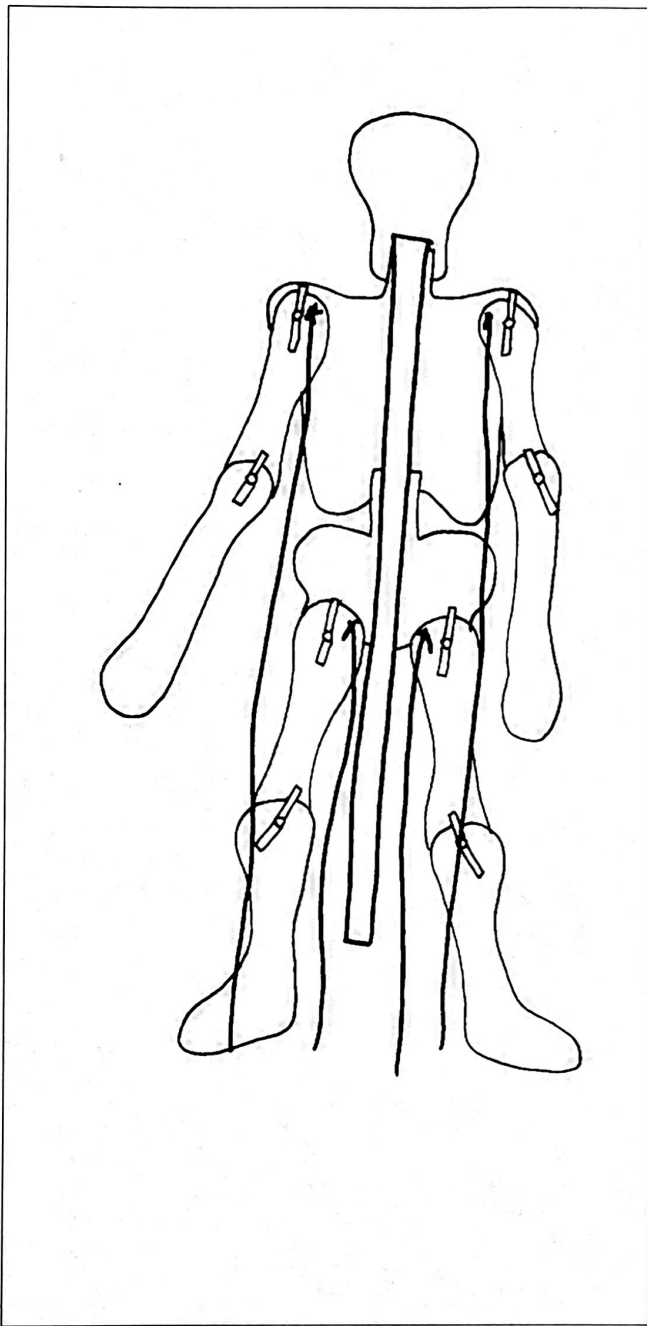
(advanced version)

#### DIRECTIONS

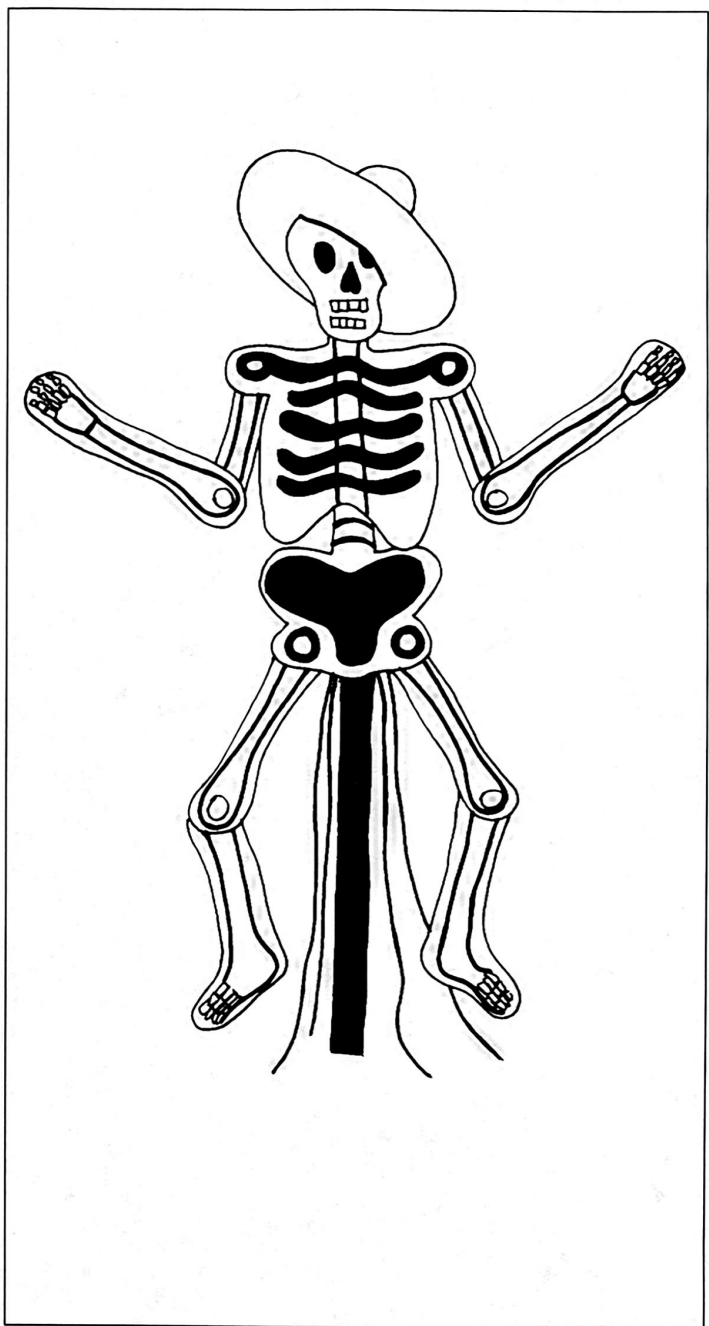
1. Cut out pattern pieces.
2. Punch out circles with hole puncher, including circles marked with radiating lines.
3. Tie a string around each hole marked with radiating lines.
4. Arrange pieces to form figure by placing each piece next to its matching letter.
5. Stick brads through matching letter holes to join legs and arms and to attach these to torso and hips.

BUTTON END OF BRAD SHOULD BE FACING BLANK SIDE OF FIGURE. MAKE CERTAIN THAT HOLES TIED WITH STRING ARE PLACED TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE FIGURE (see drawing on next page of "back view").

6. Place the neck on top of the dotted square on the head and glue.
7. Place the spine on top of the dotted square on the rib area and glue.
8. Draw skull, ribs and leg and arm bones of skeleton.
9. Draw or glue cut-out accessories such as hat, tie, jacket, shoes, etc. Be sure not to glue anything on top of the figure that will hinder movement.
10. Starting at the neck (on the back side of the figure), glue wood stick down the length of the figure. Secure stick with tape until glue dries.



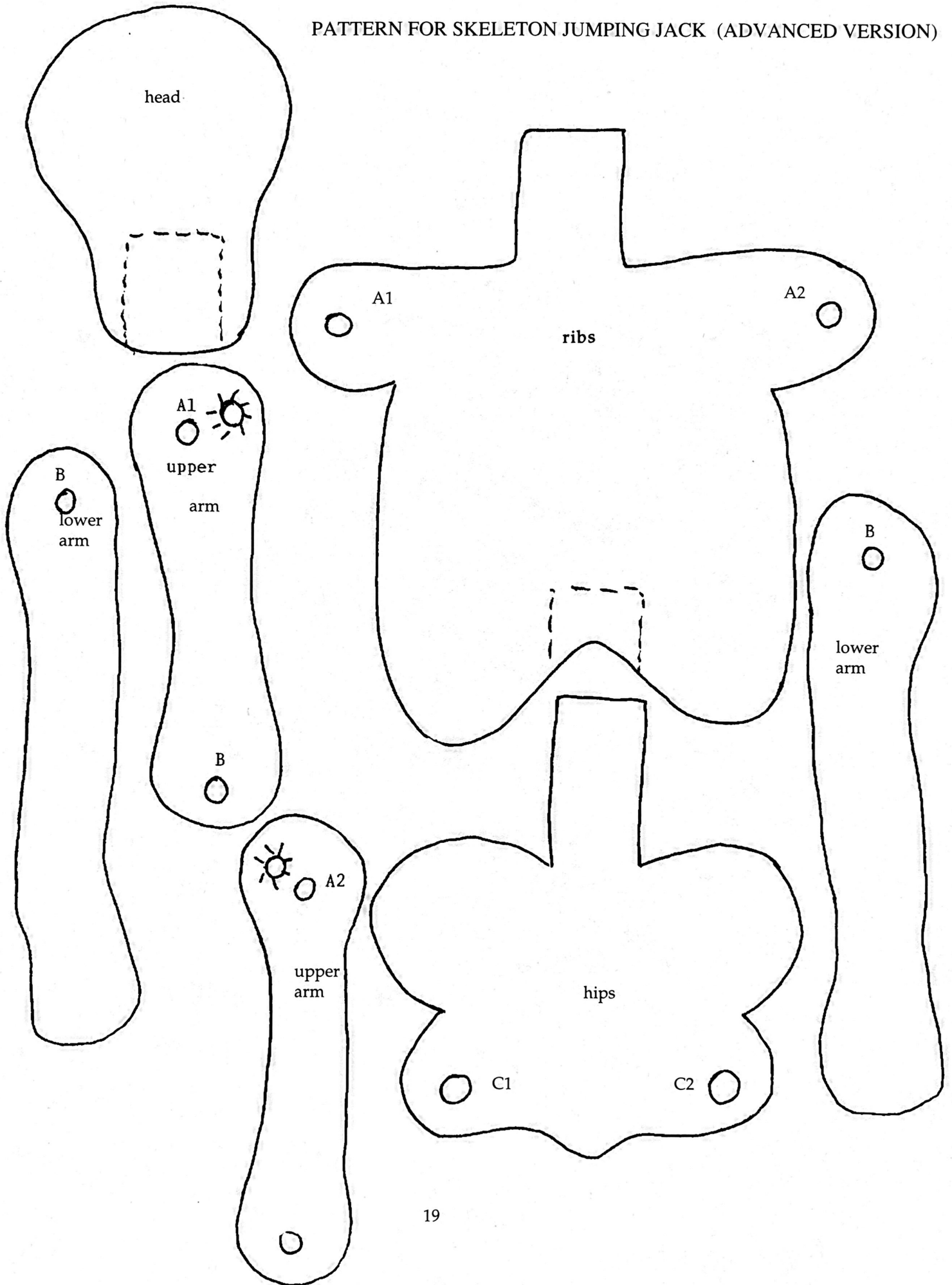
**BACK VIEW OF SKELETON  
JUMPING JACK**



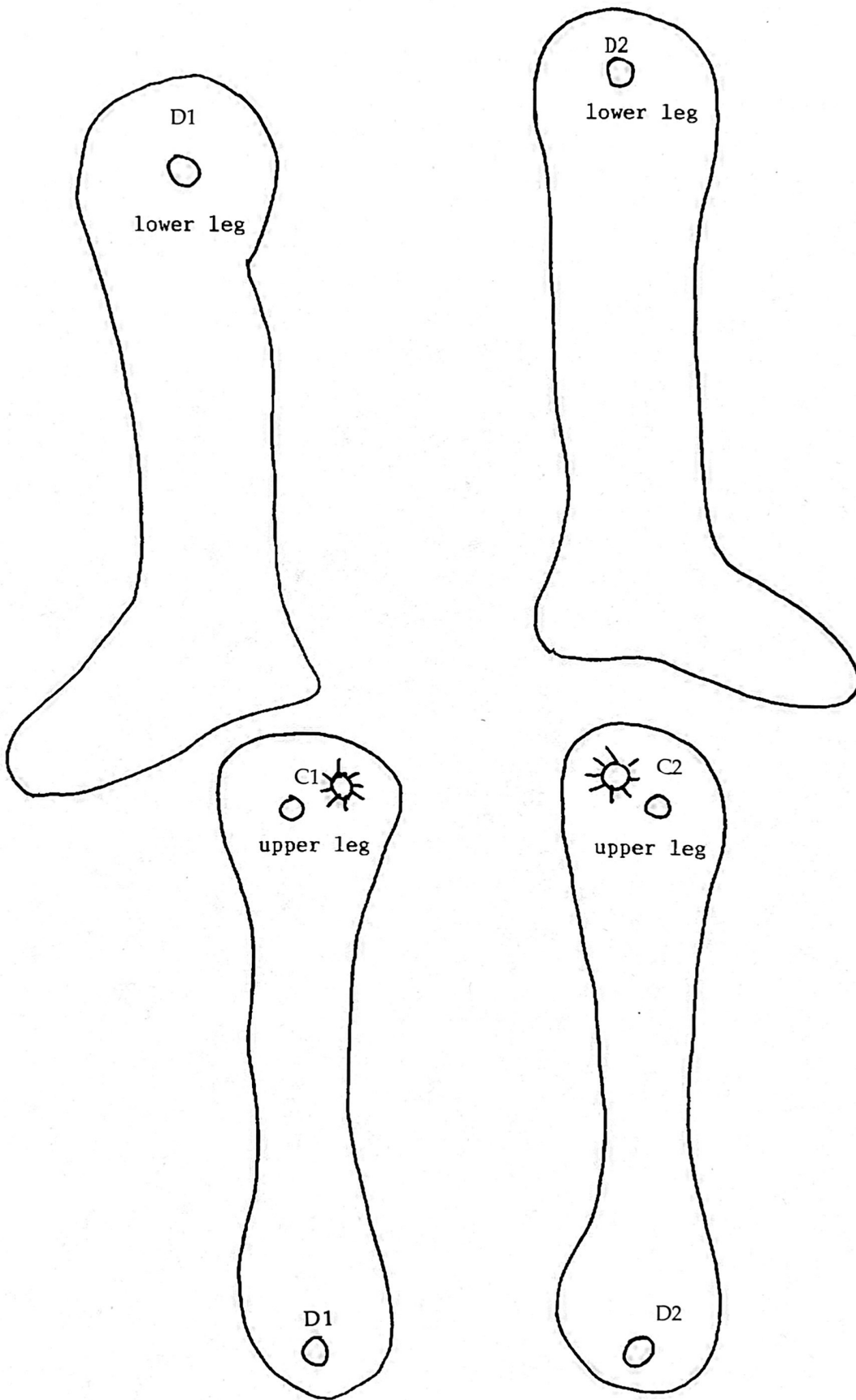
**FRONT VIEW OF SKELETON  
JUMPING JACK**



PATTERN FOR SKELETON JUMPING JACK (ADVANCED VERSION)



#2 PATTERN SHEET FOR SKELETON JUMPING JACK (ADVANCED VERSION)



TEACHER'S NOTE

**SIMPLIFIED SKELETON**

**" JUMPING JACK"**

*MATERIALS:*

- \* 1 copy of pattern page for each student
- \* 1 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of white poster board for backing of pattern page
- \* can of spray adhesive
- \* 1/4" brads, 4 per jumping jack (can be purchased at office or stationery supply store)
- \* ball of thick crochet thread
- \* crayons or preferably felt pens
- \* colored paper for decoration or collage
- \* 1 wood chopstick for each jumping jack
- \* glue
- \* newspapers to cover desk or table
- \* scissors and hole punchers

*PREPARATION:*

Cut posterboard into 8 1/2" x 11" sheets.

Mount pattern pages on posterboard with spray adhesive.

Cut thread to approximately 9" pieces (4 per skeleton).

**SIMPLIFIED SKELETON**

**" JUMPING JACK"**

*DIRECTIONS:*

1. Cut out pattern pieces.
2. Punch out circles with hole puncher, including circles marked with radiating lines.
3. Tie string around holes marked with radiating lines.
4. Join arms and legs to body by inserting brads through holes. Holes with string should be placed behind and toward center of figure. Button end of brads should be on the front side of figure.
5. Draw skull, ribs and leg and arm bones of skeleton.
6. You might want to add fun accessories such as a hat, bowtie, jacket, blouse, etc. Be sure not to glue anything on the figure that will hinder movement.
7. Starting at the neck, glue wood chopstick lengthwise on the back side of the figure.

PATTERN SHEET FOR SKELETON "JUMPING JACK"  
(SIMPLIFIED VERSION)

