

## ALEBRIJE SCULPTURES

**Recommended for Grades 6-8 (could be adapted for younger or older students)**

*Throughout their travels Isaiah and Julia Zagar collected Folk Art, or handmade work that reflects the stories, people, cultures and traditions of a particular region. Folk art can include pottery, wood carving, weaving, and more. Within the walls of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens there are many examples of work from other cultures. Much of this work comes from Mexico, especially Oaxaca (Wah-Ha-Kah), a city and state in Southern Mexico.*

*Artists in Oaxaca produce many types of handmade items, but this lesson focuses on "Alebrifes," which are often carved out of wood or made from papier-mâché. They are in the form of animals, both real and imagined, and are usually very colorful.*

*Use the resources at the end of this lesson plan to learn about culture and Folk Art in Southern Mexico, specifically in Oaxaca. You can then create Alebrije sculptures of your own!*



### Learning Objectives

- Learn about the city of Oaxaca and the Alebrije art form.
- Identify how Isaiah Zagar has collaborated with Oaxacan artists and what types of work he incorporates at PMG.
- Create a papier-mâché Alebrije sculpture.
- Think critically and imaginatively about your sculpture.
- Focus on folk art and its relationship to their own cultures and lives.

### Materials

- Computers and Internet access
- Mexican Music (optional)
- Examples of Mexican folk art, specifically from Oaxaca
- Images of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens
- Sketchbooks or paper
- Recycled plastic bottles, cardboard (tubes), wire, and cartons.
- Papier-mâché Paste (white glue or flour and water solution)
- Newspaper
- Masking Tape
- Pencils, Pens, and Markers
- Acrylic or Tempera Paint
- Paint Brushes and Palettes
- Scissors
- Brown paper towels
- Water containers



### **Discussion Questions**

- How is folk art different or similar to other art forms that you're familiar with?
- How does folk art reflect Mexican culture?
- What stories can be told from Alebrije sculptures?
- Why might Isaiah Zagar have chosen to include Alebrije figures at PMG?
- What are these figures similar to in your culture?
- What types of folk art (or other practices) represent your own cultures?

### **Key Vocabulary**

**Alebrije** Brightly colored Mexican folk art sculptures of realistic or imagined creatures.

**Culture** A way of life of a group of people—their behaviors, beliefs, values are generally all the same and passed on for generations.

**Folk Art** Handmade work that reflects the stories, people, cultures and traditions of a particular region. The artistic skills are passed down through generations, often within families. Folk art can include pottery, wood carving, weaving, and more. Many types of folk art were first created to be functional but later were made only for aesthetic value.

**Oaxaca** A state and city in southern Mexico.

**Papier-mâché** A malleable mixture of paper and glue, or paper, flour, and water, that becomes hard when dry.

### **Activity**

1. Present examples of Mexican Folk Art and define terms. Introduce Mexican culture and how Folk Art plays a role in the lives of families.
2. Present the work of Isaiah Zagar. You can use the virtual tour and the webpage "Highlights from the Collection" to see examples of Zagar's incorporation of Oaxacan Alebrije sculptures, as well as other Mexican influences, such as his use of sculptures from the Aguilar Family.
3. After showing examples of Alebrijes, sketch out ideas for your own sculptures, including the final design or pattern. Attribute meaning to their designs and choice of animal. Write down any thoughts or stories that come to mind while designing.
4. Make sculpture armatures out of wire, cardboard (tubes), bottles, crumpled paper, and cartons. Bind the materials with tape.
5. Mix the papier-mâché paste out of white glue or flour and water. Use  $\frac{3}{4}$  white glue to  $\frac{1}{4}$  water or 1 part flour to 1 part water.
6. Dip strips of newspaper in the paste solution and adhere it to your structure. Only complete up to four layers of newspaper before letting dry COMPLETELY. Repeat this process until sculpture is solid and stable.
7. Once the sculptures are completely formed, sketch out their designs on the body of your Alebrije. Once the sketches are complete you can begin painting.
8. If you are in a group, after the paint has dried and you finish your Alebrije sculptures, you can present your animals to the group and give reasons for your design and choice of animal.



### **Adaptations**

Younger children can create Alebrije sculptures out of Styrofoam or paper plates and cups. They can decorate these materials with markers and pens. Older children or adults could make Alebrije figures with clay and learn how to fire and glaze them. All age groups can write stories or poems about their hand-made creatures. For Spanish Language classes, students can present their sculptures while speaking Spanish.

### **PA Core Academic Standards**

#### **Arts & Humanities: Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening**

Visual Arts 9.1.8.A

Speaking and Listening 1.6.8.A

Visual Arts 9.1.8.B

#### **History**

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.A

World History 8.4.8.A

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.D

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2.8.G

### **Resources**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alebrije>

<http://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/alebrijes.html>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA\\_U86G-yRQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA_U86G-yRQ)

<http://mexicanalebrijes.com/>

<https://www.fofa.us/oaxacas-folk-arts>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handcrafts\\_and\\_folk\\_art\\_in\\_Oaxaca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handcrafts_and_folk_art_in_Oaxaca)

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/mexico/articles/a-brief-introduction-to-mexican-folk-art-in-10-pieces/>

<https://www.phillymagicgardens.org/about-us/virtual-tour/>

<https://www.phillymagicgardens.org/highlights-from-the-collection/>