



OVERVIEW

GRADES 3 – 5 ARTIST: LAURA OLIVER

MEXICAN AMERICAN ARTS: Symbol Flags

This lesson is designed to be taught with use of the book, *Harvesting Hope*, a biography of Cesar Chavez. Using the United Farm Worker's Aztec Eagle symbol as an example, students will consider how and why symbols are chosen to represent an individual or group cause. They will then design their own symbols representing groups or causes in their community to display on cloth flags.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Cesar Chavez and understand his role in the United Farm Workers' movement.
- Students will understand the definition and purpose of symbols and will create their own symbol flag representing a community group or cause.
- Students will identify how selected principles of design (simplification, color, and line) are used in the creation of a symbol and how these principals affect personal responses to and evaluation of the work of symbols.

LESSON BACKGROUND

During the 1970's Cesar Chavez led a major movement of farm laborers with the hope of securing safe working conditions and fair wages for workers. Farm laborers formed a group called United Farm Workers (UFW) and adopted the Aztec eagle as a symbol representing their cause. Since the majority of the laborers were of Mexican heritage, the symbol represented both their American and Mexican roots (the eagle is a national symbol for America and the Aztecs are the ancient inhabitants of Mexico).

MATERIALS

8.5" x 11" blank paper for sketching symbol designs

Cloth rectangles or squares in a variety of colors suitable for flag backgrounds. (These should be at least 8.5" x 11". Colored construction paper can be used if fabric is unavailable.)

Scrap fabric (or construction paper) for cutting out parts of symbols

Pencils, Markers, Fabric markers

Wood dowels .25" in diameter and 36" long

Craft glue (if construction paper is used instead of fabric, Elmer's glue or glue sticks can be used)

Scissors

Newspaper to cover tables

RESOURCES

Dreyfuss, Henry. *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*. N.Y.: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1984.

Enciso, Jorge. *Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico*. N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1953.

Hoban, Tana. *I Read Symbols*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1983.

Krull, Kathleen. *Harvesting Hope*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 2003.

VOCABULARY

Symbol: Something that stands for or represents something else, especially an object or image representing an (abstract) idea.

Labor movement: The collective effort by a large number of laborers trying to achieve a similar goal or effect social reform. In the 1960s and 1970s, the laborers unified with the common cause of requesting better wages and safer working conditions.

Strike "la huelga": When people who have the same type of job stop working in order to put pressure on their employers to give them better pay or better working conditions.

Community: a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage. A social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.

Emotion: A strong feeling about somebody or something. Any of the feelings of joy, sorrow, fear, hate, love, etc.

Simplify: To make simple or simpler. To make easier to understand.

INTRODUCTION



Explain that a (graphic) symbol is an image that represents something else. Symbols can represent a people, places, things, ideas, or actions. Describe and show students examples

of some well known symbols (skull and crossbones for poison, heart shape for love, stick figure man/woman for restrooms, etc.) Point out that effective symbols use simplification of shape, bold and thick but simple lines, to make them easy to recognize quickly. When symbols use color, the color usually corresponds to the idea that the symbol represents. For example, a symbol representing something scary might be all black. If the symbol is a warning, it might be in red and it might be green or blue if it symbolizes something in the environment.

Explain that sometimes groups of people who have the same idea create a visual image or symbol that represents their idea. In the 1970s many farm laborers faced dangerous work conditions (in the 1970s, the chemicals that farms used on their crops were very dangerous for the people working in the fields) and did not earn enough money to buy food or pay for a place to live. Cesar Chavez helped the farm workers organize to demand safer working conditions and more money for their work. With his help they formed a group called the United Farm Workers (UFW). The UFW wanted a



United Farm Workers Flag

symbol to represent their common cause or idea and choose to use the Aztec Eagle. They chose this symbol because many of the laborers were of Mexican heritage and were descended from the Aztec people of ancient Mexico, and they were working in America where the national symbol is the eagle. How do you think it made them feel to have this as a symbol? (Write feeling words on the board). Point out that the symbol used simple lines and bold colors; it was easy to see from far away and it was easy to draw or paint.



Explain to the students that each of them will create a symbol that represents a group of people or cause important to their community. Ask students to name groups of people in their community and write ideas on the board (examples are stu-

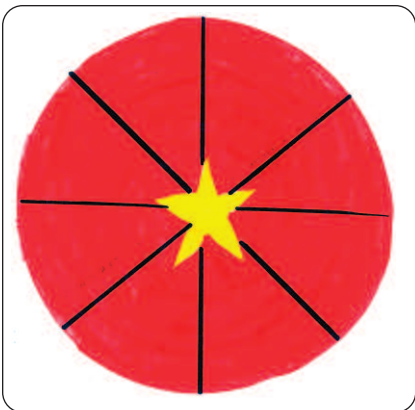
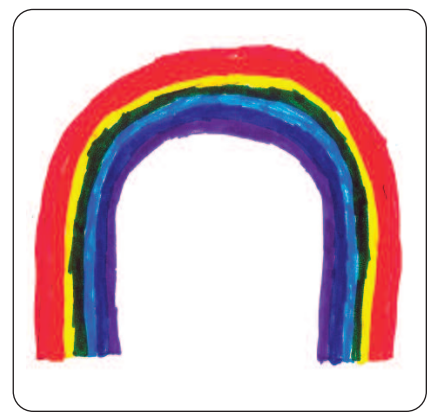
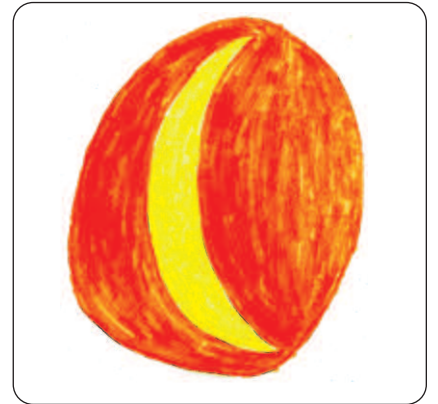


dents, teachers, librarians, police officers, or firemen). What kinds of symbols might be used to represent these groups of people? Ask what kinds of ideas or causes do people in our community have in common? For example, do you

all want something similar, such as sunny weather so you can play outside or a clean school or safe roads where cars do not drive too fast? What kinds of symbols could you make to represent these ideas and common causes? List examples on the board and encourage color, and specific nouns to describe symbols for example; "a black anaconda," "a red tulip," rather than "a snake" or "a flower." Remind students that the symbol they create should be simple and easy to recognize and that they should choose colors that represent the idea they are trying to communicate.



SYMBOL PAGE



STEP BY STEP

Part 1:

1. Show examples of symbols and discuss ways of making simple shapes and bold lines.
2. Have helpers pass out paper pencils, & markers.
3. Students begin preliminary sketches. Remind students to draw with their paper horizontally so their symbols fit the shape of the flag.
4. Students choose fabric squares for flags (fabric squares, symbols sheets with student names on them should be kept together in a safe place in the classroom in preparation for part two).
5. Share symbols.

Part 2:

6. Cover student work surfaces with newspaper.
7. Have helper pass out wooden dowels, glue, and pre-chosen cloth squares.
8. Demonstrate gluing fabric to dowel. Place dowel parallel to one edge of cloth square and approximately 2" from edge. Cover outer inch of cloth with glue. Hold dowel in place and fold glue covered cloth over dowel so that it connects to cloth on opposite side of dowel.
9. Distribute cloth scraps (or paper scraps), fabric markers, and scissors.

10. Students cut out symbol shape and glue it to flag background or draw entire symbol onto flag with fabric markers. If needed, demonstrate how to use cloth markers to draw symbol onto fabric.

During the lesson

Some students will want to design a flag with small details, rather than bold lines. Encourage students not to become involved in time consuming details, but rather have them use thick lines & bold colors. Students should make designs that can be cut from fabric or paper as it encourages simplicity. Fabric markers can be used to embellish a cut-shape symbol. It may help to show them several examples of symbols that use simple forms and few colors. (Symbol page from this lesson can be xeroxed and passed out or tacked on the board to show examples.) Also suggest that as they design their symbols, they stand back and see if their symbol looks clear and easy to understand from 5 or more feet away. If it is not easy of see, they should simplify the design.

Concluding the lesson

Cleaning up:

Allow 10 minutes for clean up.

Post-project discussion:

Have each student share his or her flag in front of the class. Review vocabulary and the story of Cesar Chavez. Have student present flags and talk about why they chose their symbol. Ask them what their symbol represents and why they chose the certain colors. How does it make them feel? Encourage peer comments and questions. If class dynamics permit, have students march with flags.

STANDARDS

Grade 3

- 1.5 Identify/describe elements of art- emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, space, value.
- 3.3 Distinguish/describe representational, abstract, and nonrepresentational works of art.

Grade 4

- 1.3 Identify complementary colors & discuss how artists use them to communicate an idea or mood.
- 3.2 Identify/discuss content of art past and present focusing on different cultures that have contributed to CA history and art heritage.

Grade 5

- 2.4 Create expressive abstract composition based on real objects
- 4.1 Identify how selected principles of design are used in a work of art and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the work of art.
- 5.2 Identify and design icons, logos, and other graphic devices as symbols for ideas and information.

NOTES

Cultural Kaleidoscope is made possible by grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and by the National Endowment for the Arts, federal agencies, and by Cisco Systems Foundation, Citigroup Foundation, Hewlett-Packard Company Foundation, Washington Mutual Foundation, Palo Alto Weekly Holiday Fund, Adobe Systems Action Grant, Arts Council Silicon Valley's Community Art Fund, California Arts Council's Youth Education in the Arts, Fenwick & West LLP, Fidelity Investments, Morrison & Foerster LLP, the Palo Alto Art Center, City of Palo Alto, and private donations.

Cultural Kaleidoscope is a program of the Palo Alto Art Center Foundation. Cultural Kaleidoscope is provided to classrooms free of charge.

