

Folk Art in Education: How Alebrijes Can Influence Education

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Introduction

- Began as an effort to teach children about other folk art and cultural styles
- Intended goal of raising awareness to the benefits of teaching other forms of art
- Themes of bilingual education and inclusion
- Ways that bodies of people can connect throughout common modern movements

Project overview and process

Primary Goals:

- Focus on education
- Focus on a common connection to avoid alienation
- Highlight and create an interest in cultural differences

Secondary Goals:

- Highlight new advancements as well as older art styles
- Create acceptance surrounding bilinguality in art and storytelling

Tertiary Goals:

- Focus on the current problems in Oaxacan region
 - Rising costs
 - Deforestation
- Understand the cultural significance that colors and patterns can have

Folk Art: A Quick Background

- Folk art and fairy tales are seen as different, mainly in class status and training level
- Folk art commonly made by people without training
 - I.e.: the “common folk”
- Folk art commonly goes hand in hand with stories
 - This storytelling helps to involve creative writing and thinking on more than one level
- Stories tell morals or express points of cultural significance of the world around us.

Why use folk art in education?

- Sense of understanding for one's own and other cultures alike
- Opens channels of interest and communication in young ages
- Gives a sense of differing challenges and global knowledge
- Unique in the sense that most types of folk art are done by untrained artists.

What is an alebrije?

- An Alebrije is a piece of sculpture that represents a fantastical animal, from one of multiple categories
- Urban Legend states that the name came from a dream that Pedro Linares had.
 - Most likely a local arts project
- Can be made from paper mache, as the first ones were, or wood.
- Typically native to Mexico, with a focus on the Oaxacan region.

The Wooden Base of an Alebrije: Copal

- The figures are most popularly described as being made of wood, primarily the Copal tree
 - Very soft wood, easy to carve , traditional, and has few to no knots that make carving hard
- However, this tree is also going through one of its many cycles of deforestation
- While the wood is popular for its benefits and fragrances, people have in some cases had to travel or steal to obtain enough to use in Alebrije sales.

Sustainability in Modern Alebrijes

- Fortunately, there are sustainability movements
 - Keep the tree secure and growing to repopulate
 - Use other suitable forms of wood
 - Use paper mache
- In addition, this provides a space for many students to engage with culture: as environmental movements grow, the interest base and pool of potential volunteers grows with it

Highlight: Palo Que Habla Biodiversidad

“Since its inception, the workshop has been committed to its natural and social environment and we can proudly say that we have generated more than nine hundred jobs and have planted more than twenty-one thousand copal trees in our region to date.”

-Palo Que Habla Website

- This is an organization with a specific focus on the education of students and family

<https://jacoboymariaangeles.com/>



Painting of Alebrijes: Natural Dye

Positives:

- Natural Dyes have more of a personal connection to the earth and the people of the area
- Made of native plants and ingredients
- Give a beautiful natural rustic color.
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Negatives:

- Not as easy to come by the supplies
- Time consuming
- The cost of supplies have shot up to it not being quite as cost effective

Painting of Alebrijes: Acrylic Paint

Positives:

- Easy to obtain in a large art supply market
- Bright and in a wide range of easily available colors that tend to look good to a wider audience, including the shine.
- Open to a wider market

Negatives:

- Cheaper paint can look less appealing to a potential customer, depending on the paint brand
- Not the same connection to the rustic natural dyes

Pattern , Color, and Animal Importance

- There is significance in every choice made in the design of these creatures
- Patterns: geometric forms that relate back to possible polytheistic beliefs and values.
- Colors: relate back to the elements
- Animal: hold various meanings of wisdom, healing, and others.

Family Structure in Alebrije Creation

- Different roles for different people in the process
- Traditionally: Father/Older Son: wood collecting and carving, women and younger children: sanding and painting.
- Now that time has progressed, more male painters, women involved in the process of wood collecting
- As time continues, these roles become more fluid than they were

Storytelling in Art and Art Education

- Storytelling: benefits of being a way to blend art and writing and imagination, a multidisciplinary study
- Helps students to understand a broad range of cultures in some way, shape of form
 - Older stories to modern movies
- Improves literacy
- Oral tradition: a large connection point between ancestors, their hopes and dreams, and a modern generation.

Sale of Alebrijes

- Where can alebrijes be sold?
 - From market stalls, in stores, and can be shipped overseas as well
- Some alebrijes marketed with sustainability tactics in mind
- Difference between painting and dyes on the cost.

The Effects of Folk Art on Biases and Bigotry

- Level of understanding between people from different backgrounds
 - Specifically, in this case, to mitigate the levels of upset and bigotry towards hispanic and latine students
- Lack of alienation between cultures as students grow and learn other facets and interact

Back to School: What Does this Mean from an Education Standpoint?

- Helps students understand each other from a cultural and ethnic perspective
 - Helpful, especially at a young age
- Gives teachers a chance to understand possible implicit and explicit biases in the classroom space
- Avoiding cultural and ethnic alienation of students as well

Bilingual Education

- Bilingualism is somewhat, but not heavily present
- Throughout American history, the presence of English Language Learners (ELLs) and language programs have come into focus and faded out
- As more ethnic minorities and refugees come to the US, take into account the “melting pot” image and the inclusion of all.
- Allows a change for ELLs in a previously underprivileged space

Conclusion

- Many benefits to teaching about folk art
 - More specifically, for alebrijes, can teach about oral tradition, family, sustainability, and color and pattern significance as well as allowing for imagination
- Overall, this would be a learning experience for all involved, from teachers to students, both for education and implicit bias studies.



This is a Documentary with Pedro Linares about Alebrijes

Thank you for your time!