

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES: DIEGO RIVERA (1886-1957)
FRIDA KAHLO (1907-1954)

Supplies needed:

Art Box:

- 17 laminated examples (11 for Rivera, 6 for Kahlo)

Learning Center Gallery:

- Framed print: Frida Kahlo: “Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera” (est.1932-1933)
- Framed print: Diego Rivera: “Mother’s Helper”

OTHER

- Crayons & markers from students’ classroom supplies
- 10 feet yellow banner paper (cut from rolls in kiln room at far west end of hall)

Reference Books (Cook Library):

1. Diego Rivera, Florence Arquin, 759.972RIV
2. Diego Rivera, Linda Bank Downs 759.972DOW oversize
3. Diego Rivera, Museum of Modern Art 759.972RIV
4. Mexican Muralists, Desmond Rochfort 791.730972ROC
5. Diego, Jeanette Winter, J Biography Rivera
6. Diego River-Mexican Muralist, Jim Hargrove, J Biography Rivera
7. The Journey of Diego Rivera, Ernest Goldstein, J Biography Rivera
8. Diego Rivera: A Retrospective, Founders Society Detroit Inst. Of Arts, 759.972RIV
9. Frida Kahlo: The Paintings, Hayden Herrera, 759.972 KAH
10. Frida Kahlo: The Brush of Anguish, Martha Zamora, 759.972KAH oversize
11. Frida Kahlo: Portraits of an Icon, 759.972 KAH oversize
12. Frida, Jonah Winter, J759.972KAH
13. Frida Kahlo, Jane Anderson Jones, J Biography Kahlo
14. Frida Kahlo, Mike Venezia, J Biography Kahlo
15. Frida Kahlo, Deborah Kent, An Artist Celebrates Life, J Biography, Kahlo F

AHEAD OF TIME NOTE:

- Sign & copy the “Famous Artist Series” Take Home Note (1 per student).
- Copy presentation sheets for your use (leave originals in plastic sleeve)
- Cut a 10-foot piece of yellow banner paper (rolls of paper located in kiln room). Hang banner in hallway outside of the classroom to allow the students the experience of working as a team and creating art on a wall.

PRESENTATION (40 minutes):

Show laminate #1, photo of Frida & Diego, 1929 (ref book # 15, page 23.)

Today we are going to talk about *two* Mexican artists who not only had a lot in common in their art, but they were married to each other! Their names are Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo; they are regarded amongst the most famous 20th century artists of Mexico and their work is widely respected and enjoyed worldwide.

You will find *imagery* in both of their works that reflects a pride and love for the country, history and people of Mexico. They both felt art should be for all people to enjoy – not just the elite classes. Diego chose subjects meant to promote social change. Frida's art was more personal, showing her feelings about Mexico and individual hardships.

Let's begin with the work of Diego Rivera: Diego was born on December 8, 1886 (about 130 years ago) in a small village in Mexico called Guanajuato (gwan-uh-hwa-tow). From a very young age, Diego loved to draw pictures.

Show laminate #2, "The Train", 1889, pencil drawing (ref book #1, page 8).

- *This is a pencil drawing of a train that Diego drew at age 3. ("wow" reaction)*

When he was little, his parents gave him a box of colored chalk and allowed him to color all over the walls of his huge bedroom..... He drew beautiful pictures of things from his memory and his imagination; these were his first murals. Later in life, Diego Rivera became famous for painting murals in buildings all over the world.

Ask: Can anyone tell me what a mural is?

- *A mural is a picture or a photograph, a very large one, which is painted or applied directly to a wall.*
- *Murals are not like paintings; they cannot be moved and put in museums...The only way to see a mural is to travel to the cities or buildings where they were painted OR to view them by photograph.*

Ask: Can you think of a mural you have seen? Where was it?

When Diego was old enough to go to school, all he could think about was drawing and painting. Other subjects bored him and he was not getting good grades. His parents decided to send him to a special art school called San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts. He was much younger than the other students but equally as talented.

Show laminate #3, "Head of a Woman", 1898 (ref book #8 pg.26 fig.9)

- *This pencil drawing was done by Diego at the young age 11*
- *This is drawn in the same style of the master artists in Europe – Diego probably studied their pictures, and then was able to copy their technique.*

After many years at art school, the Mexican government recognized Diego's amazing artistic talents and gave him a grant to study art in Europe. In 1907, when he was 21 years old, he traveled to Europe and spent 12 years traveling through Spain, Belgium and France where he studied with famous artists and practiced their techniques.

In 1919 Diego traveled to Italy to study Renaissance art...there he discovered the frescos of artists such as Michelangelo.

Ask: Can anyone tell me what a fresco is?

- *A fresco is a process of applying paint to wet plaster. The paint colors blend easily on the wet plaster, like watercolor paints.*
- *As the plaster and paint dry, they harden together and become “permanent.”*

Show laminate #4, example of Renaissance fresco by Masaccio

Diego liked the frescos in Italy; how the large pictures showed lots of characters and actually told a story about the people. Diego decided that *this* was what he wanted to do! For two years he stayed in Italy and studied how to make frescos.

The fresco making process is complex, requiring a team of workers: First the artist must draw the entire picture in full scale to the exact size of the wall or space to be painted. This drawing is called a “cartoon”. After that the teamwork begins: plaster mixers, plaster spreaders, tracers who transfer the outlines from the paper “cartoon” to the damp plaster, paint mixers and ultimately the painter who applies the paint to the drawing. The fresco painter plasters just as much of his wall as he expects to be able to paint that day. So the “cartoon” is divided into small sections. The work must be completed then and there; because the colors are permanent. Once the plaster dries, it is not possible to go back and make corrections – so it requires an artist of great talent!

In 1921, once he mastered fresco making techniques, the 35-year-old Diego returned to Mexico to begin his career painting big frescos on walls (“murals”). Accordingly, he is connected with the 20th century revival of fresco painting.

During this time, Mexico was in the middle of the Agrarian Revolution; many people were unhappy with how the country was run and wanted to see a change. They wanted to make Mexico a country where all people would have better opportunities for a good life; where the common Mexican could have political rights, land-ownership and education. Diego loved the people of Mexico and supported their effort to fight for fairness and equality among all of the people.

When Diego returned to Mexico in 1921, his first paintings told stories of the people of Mexico, showing them at work.

Show laminate #5, *Women with Flowers and Vegetables*” and framed print, *“Mother’s Helper”*

Diego helped convince the Mexican government to launch a program to decorate the walls of public buildings for *all people* to enjoy. Through his paintings, the illiterate could “read” the history of Mexico. (Ask: *What does “illiterate” mean?*)

Present two laminates #6, *“The Flower Carrier”*, 1935 (ref book #8, page 112.) and #7 *Sugar Cane*

- *Are these people at work or at play? Do you feel a sense of struggle?*
- *Although Diego illustrates social injustice -- showing the workers’ hardships -- his people look healthy and happy. (Perhaps this is Diego’s way of showing a respectful portrayal of the Mexican worker?)*
- *Despite the social commentary, Diego’s frescoes are decorative, ornamental and elegant. The colors and form create pleasant images.*

Painting murals took months and sometimes *years*. This required a lot of help from assistants. Here is a mural that shows Diego and his assistants painting a mural!

Show laminate #8 & #8A, “The Fresco Process”, (ref book #2, page 40) Point out these details in the mural:

- *Diego made pencil sketches (“cartoon”) of all of the images.*
- *He used math equations to figure out exactly how to fit everything on the space of wall he was given.*
- *Assistants built scaffolding to reach the height of the wall; Diego would climb up and place his chair while he worked on his paintings. The fresco technique required help from many skilled assistants: some would first mix the plaster and apply it to the wall, others would trace Diego’s sketches onto the plaster and still others would grind down paint pigment and mixing it with water until it was just right.*

Remember how Diego loved to show the story of people working? Well, here one part of a mural painted about United States auto workers. In the 1930’s, cars were a relatively new invention. Diego believed architects and engineers were the true “first class artists.”

Present laminates #9 & #10, “Detroit Industry Mural-North & South Walls” (est.1932-33)

- *This mural is divided into 3 major sections: 1) Top section shows monumental figures 2) Middle shows everyday work environment of the workers 3) Lower edge shows a day in the life of a worker.*
- *Ask: “By looking at this painting, can you tell what Detroit is famous for? (Making something, working in a factory, melting steel, the car industry.)*
- *The hands along the top are coming out of a volcano and are holding metal which represents mining of minerals from the earth for their hands to turn into something useful.*

Now we are going to shift our focus and discuss Diego Rivera’s wife and fellow artist Frida Kahlo. When Frida was in high school, she was not yet interested in creating art, but she loved to watch Diego Rivera paint his murals on buildings near her school.

In September of 1925, when Frida was just 18 years old, she was in a terrible bus accident and was very seriously injured. She had to spend many, many months in bed so her mother had an easel attached to her bed.

Show laminate #11, “Accident”, (ref book# 10, page 25.)

- *This is a pencil drawing done by Frida when she first received her easel.*

While recovering, her friends from school used to visit her and bring her art books from which she learned various techniques. Over the bed, they placed a mirror so she could see her reflection. This was the beginning of Frida’s career as a portrait artist.

Show laminate #12, Self Portrait 1926, (ref book# 13, page 49.)

- *This was her first self portrait, painted as a gift to her boyfriend at the time.*
- *Notice her early talent of having her image almost light up in front of a black background. Her paintings ALWAYS conveyed some type of emotion.*

After she regained her strength and was able to walk again, Frida continued with her artwork. She heard that the famous Diego Rivera was working on a mural at the National Palace and gathered up her paintings and went to him. Diego did not like to be disturbed while painting, but Frida *insisted* he take a look at her paintings! She wanted to know if he thought she was good enough to pursue her craft as a serious painter. He not only liked her paintings but he liked Frida's strong, independent personality. As they talked, they realized that they agreed on many things – especially their ideas about the Mexican revolution. Frida liked that Diego Rivera used his art to support the struggle of the people. They became friends, and then eventually got married in 1929 even though Diego Rivera was more than 20 years older than Frida.

Present framed print: “Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera” by Frida Kahlo (est. 1932-33).

- *Here is a portrait of the couple painted by Frida 3 years after their wedding.*
- *They were a very close couple. Often times, Frida would accompany Diego to the buildings he was working on and keep him company. Sometimes their dog would come, too.*

During this time (1931-33), Diego traveled to America to paint murals in San Francisco and Detroit (the two we looked at together). Frida began to miss being home in Mexico. She was irritated that Diego spent so much time in America and felt there were people in Mexico who had stories to be told as well. Here is a painting she made that shows her resentment about being away from home.

Show laminate #13, “Self Portrait on the Border Between Mexico and the United States”, 1932, (ref book # 10, page 48.)

- *Diego's work may have influenced to her – notice how there is more subject matter in this painting, almost like a mural on canvas. Frida uses symbolism and objects in her portraits to tell how she is feeling.*
- *She is facing Mexico with her back turned to America. What does this mean?*
- *How does she show America? (dirty, industrial, loud)*
- *How does she show Mexico? (historic Aztecs, beautiful, fertile, simple)*

Once back in Mexico, Frida began to paint portraits of herself as a way to express her feelings. For many years you can see this in her self portraits.

Show laminates #14 & #15,

What thoughts do some of the portraits convey? Who is she thinking about? Does she appear happy or sad?

- *Frida would rarely show her feelings and seldom cried; however, many of her self portraits show tears. Her portraits were very expressive of her feelings.*

From the late 1930's Frida's work continued to gain popularity and was shown in many famous exhibits. All the while, she endured constant medical treatment and surgeries to try to relieve the pain from her old injuries. In 1953, Frida's only individual exhibition was held in Mexico. At the time she was confined to her bed due to spinal problems, but she did not want to miss the exhibition and insisted her bed be brought to the exhibition so she could personally greet the guests... the same strong, independent personality that Diego Rivera fell in love with 20 years before!
Show laminate #16, picture of Frida in bed, painting her plaster body cast with a mirror.

Less than one year later, Frida Kahlo died of pneumonia; however, her popularity as an artist continues to grow. Her birthplace was turned into a museum, many books were written about her work and a major motion picture, "FRIDA", was released in 2003 to tell about her painful but inspiring life as a famous Mexican artist.

A few years later, after nearly 50 years as a professional artist, Diego Rivera died of heart failure at age 71 (1957), but his murals will last for generations in Mexico as well as the United States. If you ever make a trip to Mexico, you won't have to travel far to find his and other murals. They have become part of the culture on the streets and within the buildings in and around Mexico City.

SUGGESTED PROJECT (20 minutes)

You will need a large piece (10 -12ft) of roll paper from teacher's workroom. Tape to secure on wall in hallway or classroom.

Supplies needed per student: Crayons & markers from students' desks

Today we are going to work as a team and create a large mural. How will you work so that everyone gets a chance to draw? How will you work together to be sure the mural tells a story?

While Diego Rivera used murals to show the events in the lives of the people of his country, as well as the struggles of his country, Frida Kahlo used her paintings to show the events, the pain and struggles of her *own* life. In both cases their techniques were very effective in telling a colorful and sometimes emotional story.

- The subject of our mural will be **"A Day in the Life at Butterfield School"**
- What story do you want to tell? Fill the whole space with color and images!

Think about images of Butterfield or special Butterfield events that are important to you. Try to show various aspects of our school, not just the classroom so that, when finished, many "views" of the school will be represented. Feel free to draw a self portrait, or tell a story about how you are feeling today.

PLEASE LEAVE 5 MINUTES FOR STUDENTS TO PRESENT THEIR WORK

FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

Take Home Note

Diego Rivera (1886-1957)

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)

Today in class, the students learned about two 20th century Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo who were married to each other.

You will find *imagery* in both of their works that reflects a pride and love for the country, history and people of Mexico. They both felt art should be for all people to enjoy – not just the elite classes. Diego chose subjects meant to promote social change. Frida’s art was more personal, showing her feelings about Mexico and individual hardships.

Frida Kahlo was a talented self-taught artist whose art was used as an expression of her feelings. Frida Kahlo’s renown as an artist has continued to grow. Her birthplace was turned into a museum, many books were written about her work and a major motion picture, FRIDA, was released in 2003 to document her painful but inspiring life as a famous Mexican artist.

Diego Rivera was a highly skilled, formally trained artist who was primarily known for his murals adorning public buildings all over Mexico City as well as San Francisco and Detroit.

Rivera’s murals will last for generations in Mexico as well as the United States. If you ever make a trip to Mexico, you won’t have to travel far to find his and other murals. They have become part of the culture on the streets and within the buildings in and around Mexico City.

The children created a mural today, using imagery to tell stories of ***“A Day in the Life of Butterfield School”*** through their art.

Sincerely yours,

Butterfield School Art Volunteers