



The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo

Parent's Guide

The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo is a production of Daylight Films and WETA Washington, D.C., in association with Latino Public Broadcasting.

Corporate funding has been provided by Frito-Lay, Inc., and Sabritas. Funding has also been provided by Peter and Helen Bing, the New Hampshire Humanities Council, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS.



Introduction

The following learning activities, designed for children in grades 5-12, accompany the documentary **The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo**. The activities strive to expand an understanding of and connection to the artist's personal and professional life, as well as the colorful and complex world in which she lived and worked. The activities enable you and your child to draw on personal experiences as you work together to explore art, culture, heritage, history and even personal relationships. Where possible, be sure to use local community resources, such as museums and libraries, to enhance the activities' impact.

It is not necessary to view the film in order to use this guide. If you do decide to watch the program, be sure to preview it before sharing it with your child. The film deals with some very mature themes such as sexuality, miscarriage and illness. The story of Frida Kahlo's life may be too advanced for children under the age of 13. You will know best to what your children can or should be exposed, and will be able to select those activities you feel you will all enjoy.



Through your Eyes, Like Frida

Introduction

Frida Kahlo's Mexican heritage, home and culture figured prominently in her artwork and self-identity. Begin this activity by starting a general discussion with your child about Frida's life. Using the film or the resources on this Web site, familiarize yourself with Frida's circumstances and the way her life was reflected in her artwork. Explain to your child how artists are inspired by the world around them and some ways that Frida in particular used her art to express not only her emotions but her physical being as well.

Optional Viewing Segments

You may choose to watch the following segments from the documentary which deal with Frida's childhood, health and cultural influences. (0:00:00-0:14:30; 0:24:30-0:28:00)

Activity

After your discussion, make a list of the aspects of Frida's life that are reflected in her work and the ways that they come into play in her paintings. Examine her use, for example of traditional Mexican dress, religious artifacts, indigenous natural elements such as plants, animals, and fruit; and traditional objects such as masks, pottery and jewelry.

Together, take a look at the painting *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, either on this [Web site](#) or in a book [at your local library](#).

Painted while she and her husband Diego Rivera were in the United States, this painting reveals Frida's striking wit and her love of Mexico. Frida painted herself in "proper" attire: a long, pink dress and lacy gloves. However, she shuns propriety with a cigarette in her left hand and a small Mexican flag in her right. The sun and the moon are in the same Mexican sky, echoing Mexican notions of duality and Christian symbolism involving eclipses and the crucifixion. Frida is critical of the United States and its billowing, lifeless smokestacks, brick buildings, factories and skyscrapers. On the left of the painting, the Mexican sun radiates life and energy, and plants are rooted into the ground; on the right, American buildings radiate light and machines are rooted by electrical cords into a pedestal on which Frida stands.

Examine critically each of these elements and ask your child what does he/she see?

With middle and high school students, further the discussion by asking the following questions:

- What is Frida saying about her culture and heritage in this painting?
- How does this painting reflect her life experiences?
- How does the painting reflect the way in which Frida fits herself into both the traditional and artistic worlds in which she lived and worked?
- In what ways does this painting reflect her socio-political beliefs?
- Do these references make her life experiences more compelling, more poignant?

For elementary school students, further the discussion by asking the following questions:



- What do you see in the picture?
- What does this painting tell you about Frida Kahlo?
- What does this painting tell you about Mexico?
- What does it tell you about the way Frida sees the United States?
- What is most interesting to you about the picture?
- What questions would you ask Frida if you could discuss this painting with her?
- What other questions would you ask Frida about her artwork in general?

Have your child take the time to get to know the painting by observing it closely, making a list of its details, and writing a description of it. Such an exercise will help children understand the value of careful observation. It may also help them learn how to look at and truly see a work of art for the first time. Share your descriptions with each other. How do they differ? How are they similar?

Next, work with your child to take on the artist's role. Think about your immediate world — your culture, heritage, where you live, how you dress, holidays you celebrate — and make a list of things that are most important to you from this immediate world. Then, become artists of any sort and talk about which of these elements you would include in your work and how you might mesh them with your personal life experience.

Explain to your child that one of the greatest qualities of art is the way it "speaks" to each one of us. People may share opinions about a work of art and even feel similar emotional responses, but ultimately our reactions to art and our interpretations of it are as individual as we are.

For the final step, you can put your imagination to work and translate your ideas into a joint or individual artwork!

Optional Activity A (for elementary students)

Celebrate!

To learn more about Mexican culture, explore some of the country's holidays. Select one that you would like to celebrate and assemble its required accoutrements — food, games, artifacts, etc. Invite friends to participate in the festivities. Sites that can jumpstart your search:

Mexonline.com

<http://www.mexonline.com/holiday.htm>

This online guide to Mexico page lists official and religious Mexican holidays, with links to additional information about each holiday.

Mexico for Kids

http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/kids/about/html/holidays/news_kids.html

This page, designed for children, lists several holidays celebrated in Mexico, and descriptions of each.



Optional Activity 2 (for middle and high school students)

About Family

Frida Kahlo's family significantly shaped her life as an individual and artist, much the way most families have an impact on its members. By using the film and the resources on this site, create a family tree that represents Frida's family. Indicate the different ways each family member influenced Frida.

Then, look at some of your family photographs, either of nearby family or family members who have passed or moved away. Talk about their personalities, share anecdotes about experiences you have had with them, and then identify at least one way they have influenced your family, as a unit or individually. You can create a family notebook with pictures and short narratives about how each person in the book had an impact on your family. You might want to copy and send it out as a holiday gift.

Resources

Online

Frida Kahlo Paintings

<http://www.fridakahlo.it/paintings.html>

This Web page has links to numerous different online exhibits and image galleries of Kahlo's work throughout the years.

Frida Kahlo Online

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/kahlo_frida.html

This Artcyclopedia page consists of links to Kahlo's paintings in museums and public galleries, art auctions, photos, biographical information, Web sites and articles.

Kahlo

<http://cgfa.sunsite.dk/kahlo/index.html>

This Web page offers date, medium, and gallery information for 15 different paintings, including "The Suicide of Dorothy Hale," "What I Saw in the Water (*What the Water Gave Me*)," "Portrait of Eva Frederick," and "Self-Portrait in a Velvet Dress."

The Hammond Gallery:

http://www.hammondgallery.co.uk/view_pic.php3?aid=35&pid=436

This page offers views of numerous Kahlo works, including an interactive discussion boards for each painting where users can post comments about her artwork.

Frida Kahlo: Wounded Woman/Cultural Icon

<http://www.ksu.edu/english/janette/installations/Cecilia/kahloint.html>

Describing Kahlo's relationship with her parents, Diego, and herself, this page offers a personal look at Frida's life, as well as "or not:" links that offer alternative explanations of various events in Kahlo's life.

Books



- Fuentes, Carlos. *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*. Harry N Abrams: New York, 1998.
- Herrera, Hayden. *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. Harper & Row: New York, 1983.
- Herrera, Hayden. *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings*. Harper Collins: New York 1991.
- Poniatowska, Elena and Carla Stellweg. *Frida Kahlo: The Camera Seduced*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, 1992.
- Zamora, Martha. *Frida Kahlo: The Brush of Anguish*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, 1990.



The Influence of Battle (especially appropriate for grades 7-12)

Introduction

The Mexican Revolution played a key role in Frida's life and art. She lived through it and experienced many aspects of the war firsthand. In fact, she and her mother tended the wounded in their home.

First, discuss what impact the revolution had on Frida, her family, and on Mexico. (You may choose to watch the segment of the documentary which deals with the Mexican Revolution running from approximately 10-15 minutes into the film.) Talk about some of the close-up experiences Frida had with the battle and how it changed the Mexican political and social landscape. You might want to look at a historic timeline to get a feel for key events that led to and occurred during the revolution, such as leadership changes.

One good source:

Timeline of the Mexican Revolution: 1910-1920

<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Bunker/7475/mexrevtimeline.htm>

This page offers a timeline of the Mexican Revolution, citing key events for each year of the decade.

As your child the following questions:

- What impact did the Mexican Revolution have on Frida?
- What are the specific events that stood out in Frida's memory?
- In what ways did the Mexican Revolution have an impact on Frida's art? For example, the end of the revolution brought great social change to Mexico. How were these changes incorporated into her paintings?

Revolution, wars and acts of terrorism have great impact on the world, and where we live. Think about recent wars and related events that have occurred in the United States — such as 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Or, consider the threats of homeland terrorism.

Ask your child to consider the following:

- What is the impact of such events on you, your family, your community, and the country? How would you convey the impact and your feelings associated with such events in a painting or other type of artwork?
- What is the value of using art as a venue for expressing feelings and political views with regard to revolution, wars and acts of terrorism?

Once you have discussed the above questions, jointly select and create an art form that would best depict these reflections ... suggested art forms: a poem, a song, a cartoon, even a pencil sketch.

Optional Activity A Other Artists



Take a look at other artists whose work, like Frida's, was partially influenced by the Mexican Revolution. The group includes: Diego Rivera, Jose Guadalupe Posada, David Alfaro Siqueiro, Jose Clemente Orozco, and Dr. Atl. How do these artists depict the revolution?

Optional Activity B

A Timeline

Illustrate scenes that represent what occurred during the Mexican Revolution. Or, create an illustrated timeline. Use Frida's journal entries, and paintings, work of other artists, and online resources to provide drama for the scenes. You can choose to depict scenes of more recent revolutions or wars.

Resources

Online

MexOnline.com

<http://www.mexonline.com/revolution.htm>

This page offers a cultural timeline of the Mexican Revolution.

History of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920

<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/projects/border/page03.html>

With photos and explanation, this page offers a history of the 10-year Mexican Revolution, with details of the fighting, the Mexican migration to the U.S., and the U.S. reaction to migration and immigration laws.

Mexico: From Empire to Revolution

http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/digitized_collections/mexico/

This comprehensive Flash and HTML site offers an extensive online history of the Mexican Revolution, with a wealth of photos, text and descriptions to fully engage and enlighten the user.

Mexican Revolution

<http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/M/Mexican-Revolution.htm>

This online encyclopedia entry gives a brief history of the Mexican Revolution, with links to other descriptive encyclopedia entries.

Five Artists of the Mexican Revolution

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2253/>

This online lesson plan teaches students about artists and leaders in the Mexican Revolution, including Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, David Posada, David Alafaro Siquieros, Porfirio Diaz, Francisco Madero, Poncho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, Venustiano Carranza and Jose Guadalupe Posada.

Books

Brenner, Anita. *The Wind That Swept Mexico*. University of Texas: 1984.

Fuentes, Carlos. *Diary of Frida Kahlo*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.

Krauze, Enrique. *Mexico: Biography of Power*. Perennial: New York, 1998.

Films

www.pbs.org/fridakahlo



Art and Revolution in Mexico

http://www.films.com/Films_Home/Item.cfm/1/179/ixs

This page allows users to order the film, "Art and Revolution in Mexico."