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FRIDA KAHLO DIEGO RIVERA & MEXICAN MODERNISM

THE JACQUES AND NATASHA GELMAN COLLECTION

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IDENTITY BOXES

TOPIC:

Examining Frida Kahlo's intentional construction of her mestiza persona, or mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritages.

RATIONALE:

By learning about the motivations and personal lives of artists and identifying similarities from their own lives, kids develop a personal connection and build empathy.

RESOURCES INCLUDE:

FOR FACILITATORS:

- A How-to facilitate guide including information about the intentional construction of Frida Kahlo's public persona, directions and sample prompting conversation questions. Guide includes complementary links for background research, two activity extensions and an **inspiration video** demonstrating the creation of an identity box.
- High resolution images of the artwork
- Supplementary example images of fashion, jewelry and cultural styles referenced in the exhibition
- Two student worksheets
- Instructions for kids
- Brainstorming identity map worksheet

FOR KIDS:

- Instructions for kids
- Brainstorming identity map worksheet
- Optional paper box template



Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) in a hammock, 1948, Bridgeman Images

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DIG DEEPER *(helpful links)*

We recommend learning more about the history of the politically-constructed category of mestizaje in order to facilitate an inclusive conversation honoring multiple ways of being Mexican.

 [The Myth of Mestizajes](#)

 [pbs.org](#)

Frida's selection of dress, makeup, hairstyle, and jewelry function as an extension of her art. Frida Kahlo crafted her identity by embracing and displaying traditional Mexican culture and dress while incorporating Western fashions. Kahlo's clothes celebrated her cultural and historical ties while embracing modernity and the fashion culture of the day. In carefully choosing her dress, the artist often made a political statement.

Frida Kahlo celebrated her Indigenous roots in many ways. Kahlo was born to a German father and a mother of Spanish and Indigenous descent. Although she was considered a mestiza, a person of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, she closely identified with her Indigenous heritage. Mestiza/o or Mestizaje has a complex and often traumatic history due to colonization in Latin America. Mestizaje was an identity created by the state meant to celebrate Mexico's Indigenous past, but it also endorsed whiteness and maintained marginalization of Indigenous and Black people.

Share these example images and compare them to photographs, paintings, or representations of Frida Kahlo.

EXAMPLE IMAGES

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

Looking at this photograph of Frida Kahlo, where do you notice celebrations of mixed heritage?

Where do you notice celebrations of traditional Mexican culture?

Can you spot Spanish colonial jewelry?

Can you spot traditional Indigenous huipil blouses?

Can you spot an Indigenous jadeite necklace?

Can you spot the high fashion that reflects Western fashions?



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In addition to having a publicly crafted persona, Frida Kahlo overcame many personal challenges in her life. The physical and emotional adversities she overcame strengthened Kahlo. She lived with the lingering effects of childhood polio, narrowly escaped death in a tragic bus accident, and felt much grief over not being able to have children. Painting became a path for her survival and self-expression. Where can you see elements of pain or challenges depicted in her artworks?

In this photograph you can see that despite being physically fragile and using a wheelchair, Kahlo holds her artist's palette, showing strength, determination, and artistic agency.

Gisèle Freund, *Frida and Dr. Farill*, 1951. Gelatin silver print; 112.5 x 10 in. in. The Vergel Foundation and MondoMostre in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL). COPYRIGHT TBC: © Gisèle Freund-RMN. Image courtesy Throckmorton Fine Art, Inc.

FACILITATOR TIP

This art making project requires deep introspection and has the opportunity to connect bring up trauma for kids. Incorporate socio-emotional learning into your practice in order to be mindful of kid's mental health.

Educators are not advised to step into the role of psychologist or counselor, unless they are explicitly trained and licensed to do so. However, we can do our best to take proactive measures to mitigate significant stress.

Here is a helpful resource if this activity brings up past trauma or processes current stress.

DIG DEEPER *(helpful links)*

 [Trauma Toolkit](#)

ACTIVITY EXTENTION

What some might interpret as cultural appropriation others understand as reclamation (**cultural appropriation** is the inappropriate adoption of another culture's customs, practices, ideas, and so on). Kahlo presents different versions of herself by celebrating the multitude of Mexico's cultural histories. The artist's intentional choices speak of an agency and control that she is claiming over her inherited legacies; she is making a statement of authenticity and power. Kahlo's heritage includes Indigenous roots from Santo Domingo Tehuantepec, Mexico. However, in her fashion she combined traditional elements from numerous cultures—including Indigenous people from several places in Mexico and Guatemala, the Olmec who occupied the tropical lowlands of the modern-day Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco, and the Oaxaca traditions, which include several different groups of Indigenous peoples: Zapotec, Nahuatl, and Mixtec tribes, each with distinctive textile traditions. Investigate examples of reclamation and appropriation throughout history and the nature of the other native roots of Kahlo's wardrobe choices in order to form your own opinion.

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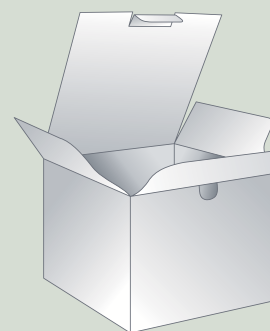
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IDENTITY BOXES

CREATE YOUR OWN IDENTITY BOX

Just like Frida Kahlo we all have complex inner lives and personal styles. Art is an excellent vehicle to develop and discover your own identity and can be a way for communicating and sharing these ideas – whether they relate to personal identity or a cultural or community identity. Building on the idea of how Kahlo revealed aspects of her identity and challenges through her artwork, take time to reflect on your own identity and what you choose to reveal to the world versus what you prefer to keep to yourself. Create a representation of your internal and external self.



🕒-🕒-🕒-🕒 YOUR TURN!

1. Fill out the identity map to assist your brainstorm before starting the artmaking project.
2. Think about a hollow form that could represent your identity. It could be an altered shoebox, a transformed cereal box, a handcrafted papier-mâché form, or the paper template we provided. It is helpful if you are able to deconstruct the form and flatten to draw, paint, write, or create a collage on the surface.
3. Reflect on challenges or adversities that you have overcome and pushed you to grow. How did you show strength and determination in these situations? Brainstorm different ways in which you could represent these challenges. Make a collage of images and words or sketch your own depictions.
4. On the inside of your form or paper template illustrate a representation of what you have overcome.
5. Reflect on your public persona or your personal image. What do you like to show about yourself through your actions, clothing, hairstyles, or other personal style choices? What do you feel proud of in sharing about yourself? Make a collage of images and words or sketch your own depictions.
6. On the outside of your form illustrate a representation of your personal style and public image.
7. Complete your identity box by reconstructing it into the shape desired and reflect on your process with the questions below.

IDENTITY MAP

BOX TEMPLATE

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what ways did the project prompt self-reflection and self-expression? What was it like to think about your identity in this way? What was it like to communicate these ideas through artmaking?

Are there certain aspects of your identity that you wish to incorporate more into your public persona? Why do you think that now is the time to do that?

What would you like others to know about your identity box? (Determining whether to share about your internal identity is your choice. Finding trusted friends or adults to share with can support you in processing any emotions emerging from this self-reflection.)

How does it feel to look at the outside of your box in comparison to the inside of the box?

What would you change about or add to the outside of your box, if anything? What would you change about or add to the inside of your box, if anything?

ACTIVITY EXTENSION:

Fill out the identity map for Frida Kahlo.

Use the biography and artwork in the exhibition to infer what Kahlo might have added to this map!

FRIDA'S BIOGRAPHY

