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FRIDA KAHLO DIEGO RIVERA & MEXICAN MODERNISM

THE JACQUES AND NATASHA GELMAN COLLECTION

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GUIDE

ILLUSTRATING IDIOMS



Nickolas Muray, *Frida with Olmeca Figurine*, 1939. Carbon print; 10.7 x 15.7 in. (27.3 x 40 cm). The Vergel Foundation and MondoMostre in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL). Photo by Nickolas Muray; © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives, courtesy of Throckmorton Fine Art, New York City

HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGE

INSPIRED BY:

Diego on My Mind by Frida Kahlo.

TOPIC:

Understand the concept of *Lo real maravilloso*, or the *Marvelous Real*, used in the exhibition *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism: From the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection*, by comparing it to the grammatical expression of idioms.

RATIONALE:

Drawing parallels between historical concepts and modern-day applications helps kids understand relevance and expands cultural understanding by demystifying an important cultural notion.

RESOURCES INCLUDE:

FOR FACILITATORS:

- A How-to facilitate guide including information about the *Marvelous Real* concept, definitions of common idioms in the United States of America and in the United Mexican States, directions and sample prompting conversation questions. Guide includes with complementary links for background research, and an **inspiration video** demonstrating the creation of an illustrated idiom.
- High resolution images of the artworks
- One student worksheet
- Instructions for kids
- **FOR KIDS:**
- Instructions for kids

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CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

**"I never paint
dreams or
nightmares. I paint
my own reality."**

What do you think Kahlo meant when she said this?

What can we tell about Lo real maravilloso from this quote?

What do you think is Lo real maravilloso in your life?


DIEGO ON MY MIND:

Diego on My Mind by Frida Kahlo

What does the title of *Diego on My Mind* mean literally? Figuratively?

What clues does the artwork provide and what can we infer?

DIG DEEPER *(helpful links)*

 [Influences of Aztec Mythology](#)

 [Aztec Imagery](#)

What is Lo real maravilloso, or the Marvelous Real?

The term that has come to be known as Lo real maravilloso reflects Mexico's layered cultural heritage, multiple and conflicting histories, contradictions in everyday life, and social discord to create artworks with improbable juxtapositions, visual elements combined or next to each other that would or could not happen in reality. In 1949 the Nobel prize-winning Cuban novelist and musicologist, Alejo Carpentier, published an essay on Lo real maravilloso Americano—a discussion of the theory now known as magical realism (a style of fiction and literary genre that paints a realistic view of the modern world while also adding magical elements). Counter to other art critics of the time, Carpentier defends Lo real maravilloso as a uniquely Latin American phenomenon. In Latin America it is apparent in all art forms across the region. Lo real maravilloso is seen in the histories of the continent beginning with those who searched for mythical locations such the fountain of youth and El Dorado, a lost city of gold. There is a wealth of mythologies that inform artists of this region, much like Frida Kahlo. Artworks like *Diego on My Mind* by Frida Kahlo blur the line between the imagined and reality.

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera married in 1929. They had a passionate love and a complicated relationship. Their partnership included artistic competition and conflicts, but also close companionship and shared interests, such as their affection for pets and political activism. Despite the volatility of their marriage, they had deep admiration for each other's work. You can learn more about Frida Kahlo in the biography link below. A miniature version of Diego Rivera might not literally be on Kahlo's forehead, but for this artist, that is her version of reality.

FRIDA'S BIOGRAPHY

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Take a look at *The Bride who Becomes Frightened when she Sees Life Opened*, or other images from the exhibition where can you see visual elements next to each other that might not happen in reality? Where do you see elements of *Lo real maravilloso* in Frida Kahlo's other artworks?

Similar to the Marvelous Real, idioms are a literary device that combines elements in unlikely or unrealistic ways, creating new meanings from their original intent while still honoring their literal translation. In other words, idioms are phrases understood to mean something different from what individual words in the phrase imply. Idioms have two understandings, one that is literal (meaning exactly what the words say) and another that is figurative (new meaning is implied separate from the original meaning—using devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, and symbolism).



Frida Kahlo, *The Bride who Becomes Frightened when she Sees Life Opened*, 1943. Oil on canvas; 24.8 x 32.1 in. (63 x 81.5 cm). The Vergel Foundation and MondoMostre in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL). © 2020

ACTIVITY EXTENTION

Interview other grown-ups in your life. What are some common idioms they use? Are there any idioms that are embedded in family or cultural traditions?

Next- create your own idioms!
What kind of fantastical phrase is missing from your life?

Investigate interesting idioms with your kids. Here are a few examples to get you started. What do these idioms mean figuratively?

"Every cloud has a silver lining"

literally means that at the edges of clouds we can see the sun shining there like a silver outline. This idiom figuratively means that every difficult or sad situation has a comforting or more hopeful aspect, even though this may not be immediately apparent.

The phrase

"barking up the wrong tree"

connects to hunting dogs being tricked into believing the prey animals were up a certain tree when in fact they had escaped. Figuratively it means to be pursuing a mistaken or misguided line of thought or course of action.

The idiom

"by the skin of your teeth"

came from a story in the bible which has been interpreted to refer to thin enamel coating on our teeth. The figurative meaning of the phrase is 'narrowly' or 'barely' and it is commonly used to refer to a narrow escape from disaster or to imply that you succeeded in doing something but 'only just'.

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Create an artwork that represents an idiom of your choice. (This could be done in many forms—collage, painting, drawing, mixed media, and so on.)

🕒-🕒-🕒-🕒 YOUR TURN!

1. Research and choose an idiom that interests you, being sure to understand both its literal and figurative meanings.
2. Brainstorm which visual clues might connect to both the phrase's literal and figurative meanings.
3. Create a work of art that combines elements of both meanings.
4. Display and share your works of art!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

In what way does your artwork blur the line between the imagined and reality?

How do you feel you have captured the marvelous or bizarre nature of your reality?

After creating your own artwork, how does it change how you look at art that has elements of the Marvelous Real?

What idioms are common in the United Mexican States (the official name of Mexico)?

The literal translation of "no tener pelos en la lengua" is

"not to have hairs on your tongue."

This Spanish idiom means that someone is a straight shooter and will always speak their mind. For example: "Mi amigo no tiene pelos en la lengua." (My friend tells it how it is.)

"Tomar el pelo" literally means

"to take the hair,"

and is used when someone is tricking or making fun of someone else, but in a good-natured way. So, if a friend tells you he won \$10 million, you might say: "Me estás tomando el pelo."

"Tirar la casa por la ventana" is literally translated as

"to throw the house through the window,"

and it means that no expense has been spared or that money is no object.

INSPIRATIONAL VIDEO