

## Spoon Skulls

Glow-in-the-dark icons to celebrate Dia de Muertos (art + social studies)

Sugar Skulls are a folk art tradition from central and southern Mexico, made as part of the Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration. Traditionally, a sugar mixture was pressed into a clay mold to make a skull shape that was dried and then inscribed with the name of the deceased on its forehead. The decorations were used to adorn churches, altars, and cemeteries as a way to honor the deceased and enjoy memories of them.

Sugar Skulls are still an important part of Dia de Muertos, and today they are decorated with colorful icing and sometimes non-edible sequins, beads, or feathers. They are designed to be whimsical and humorous icons, not morbid or frightening monsters like many Halloween traditions. Colorful and ornate images of Sugar Skulls often decorate costumes, are painted on faces, or are worn as jewelry.

Students can create and decorate a long-lasting skull from clay pressed into a common tablespoon used as a mold. Add colorful designs with fluorescent tempera paint or markers, place under a black light and enjoy a glowing Dia de Muertos!

**GRADES 1-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 275°F.
2. Divide each package of clay into 8 pieces. The clay will not dry out, so it doesn't need to be covered or sealed in a bag.
3. Place flour in small bowls.
4. Cut wire into 2" pieces.

### Process

1. Dip the spoon into the flour and tap the side of the bowl to remove the excess. This will keep the clay from sticking in the spoon, but will not affect the performance of the clay.
2. Press the clay firmly into the round scoop of the spoon and slightly down the top of the handle. Make a loop with a piece of string and place it on the clay. Use fingers to move clay over the string so it doesn't show.



### Materials (required)

Staedtler® Fimo® Kids Polymer Clay white (33671-1023) OR Staedtler® Fimo® Effect Nightglow (33228-4813); share 1 pkg between 4 students

1 tablespoon measure

Flour, 1 cup

Cookie sheet and oven

Maysville Cotton Warp, White, 800-yard spool (62800-1040); share one across class

Materials for decorating, recommend:

Crayola® Super Tips Washable Markers, set of 20 (21252- 0209)

Sharpie® Neon Markers, set of 5 (19916-1059) and Sharpie® Ultra Fine Point Markers, Black (21315-2003)

Blick® Essentials Tempera, 8 oz assorted fluorescent colors (00057-)

### Optional Materials

Krylon® Low-Odor Finish, Clear Gloss (23710-1001)

Scratch-Art® Sticks, package of 100 (14907-1045)

Creativity Street® Rhinestones, 375-piece package (61762-1001)

Crafty's® Plumage, 1/2 oz package (approx. 145 feathers) (60909-1003)

Sequin Mix, 4 oz (60718-1004)

Nylon Jewelry Cord, 25 yd spool, Black

## Process, continued

3. Remove it by either turning the spoon over and tapping it on the back side or prying it gently away with fingers
4. With the flat side down and the curved side up, determine the placement of eye sockets in the center of the skull and make two indents with index fingers.
5. Bake the skulls on a plate in the microwave for about minutes. Follow the instructions and place a container of water in with the clay to keep it from cooking too quickly. Allow skulls to cool for one minute before touching.
6. Decorate the hardened skulls with fluorescent markers and tempera or acrylic paint, rhinestones, feathers, sequins, or other materials. Don't cover the entire skull with decorations — leave plenty of white space so the clay will glow through the design. Design the back of the skull, too.
7. When dry, spray a light coating of a clear acrylic finish to prevent the design from wearing away.
8. String the skull onto a string or cord to hang as an ornament or wear as a pendant.

## Options

- Rhinestones can be pushed into the clay before it is baked. The clay will shrink slightly and hold them in place without glue.
- Fully cover the skull with black paint, allow it to dry completely, then etch the paint away with a pointed wooden scratch stick. This will give the skull a spooky, aged look.
- Use a teaspoon to make mini-skulls for small pendants and earrings.

## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

**Content Standard #1** — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

**K-4** • Students know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes.

**5-8** • Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

**9-12** • Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

**Content Standard #4** — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

**K-4** • Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places.

**5-8** • Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.

**9-12** • Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places.



**Step 1:** Press clay into a tablespoon dusted with flour. Loop a piece of string and press into the clay.



**Step 2:** Press into the clay with index fingers to form eye sockets, then place in the microwave with a container of water. Cook for 10 minutes.



**Step 3:** Decorate with fluorescent markers, paint, sequins, feathers, and more. Hang on a string or cord, turn out the lights and turn on the black light to enjoy Dia de Muertos!