"La Piñata" Lesson: Diego Rivera
Created by Art in Action

La Piñata, Diego Rivera, 1953

Art in Action is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
dedicated to bringing art to children for over 30 years
Artist Background: Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera
(1886-1957)

• Diego Rivera was born in Mexico in 1886. He lived most of his life in Mexico, where he painted murals showing Mexican culture. His murals are similar in some ways to ancient Mayan stellae. He was married to another painter, Frida Kahlo.

• Rivera was actively involved in the politics of his country. He was upset by the political and social conditions in Mexico and the mistreatment of workers and poor farmers. He painted about these social conditions to make others more aware of the hard life of the lower classes.

• Rivera traveled to Europe, studying art in France and Spain before moving to New York. He was influenced by Cezanne’s solid forms and bold colors, and by the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque. He claimed his favorite artist was Henri Rousseau.
• Other Mexican artists, including Orozco and Siqueiros, were part of a new Mexican mural movement, painting large fresco paintings on walls in Mexico City, New York, and other places. Through mural painting, Rivera was able to share his ideas with the public with dazzling force and beauty. The Mexican government, which commissioned these murals, officially recognizes Rivera’s work as a national monument.

• Rivera presented universal ideas, using images, colors, and masterful composition, in both social and political murals and in traditional renderings of everyday Mexican culture.

• Rivera incorporated many interests into his paintings, including science, medicine, archaeology, political history, philosophy, mythology, and industrial technology.
Art Discussion: La Piñata

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What is happening in the painting?
Children gather around a piñata and scramble on the ground for candy, food, and toys. A boy is blindfolded as he takes his turn at batting the piñata. Some children are pushing their way into the group and one of the boys has fallen down. An adult offers a piece of food to a crying child who might feel left out of the party. What did you notice first?

Where do diagonal lines show action?
Diagonal lines show movement and action. The two children on the left are bent over as they reach in to grab the treats. The diagonal line of their bodies creates forward movement. The red serape on the blindfolded boy swings out in a diagonal line to create a sense of motion as he hits the piñata. The piñata swings in the air as the diagonal lines of bright orange and yellow streamers create movement. Where else do you see diagonal lines showing action?

Where do you see primary and secondary colors?
Rivera uses colors to move our eye around the painting. The red skirt and serape draw our attention to the center of the painting and to the treats on the ground. Yellow in the piñata is repeated in the boy’s shirt in the center of the group. The blue overalls contrast with the red orange serape. Rivera paints the group on the right with secondary colors. The crying boy is dressed in green, the mother has a green skirt and orange shawl, and the little shy girl is dressed in a bright orange skirt. Can you find purple on one of the children? Which color did you notice first?
Is Rivera inviting us to the party?
We feel like we are standing close to the group of children at the piñata party. The children closest to us are in the foreground and therefore larger than those in the middle ground. Rivera has crowded the group in a tight circle overlapping bodies to create a sense of excitement around the fallen treats. Look carefully and count how many children are scooping up treats. This party looks like it may be in the evening because of the dark background. Do you want to join the party?
Art Project: Aztec Sun (35 mins)

Materials:
- paper plates (2 per child)
- tempera paint: all colors
- paintbrushes
- triangle pieces
- color pictures of Aztec suns
- markers
- yarn (12” each)
- glue
- scissors
- stapler

Prepare ahead (20 mins):
Draw 11 - 12 rays for sun using pencil with repeated or continuous triangles on outer rim of both paper plates with points along the outer edges.

1. Cut out triangles created by drawing sunrays.

2. Paint both front and back of suns and rays, including the cutout triangles. Use different bright colors for each of the plates. Paint triangles using same colors or others. Let dry. Assemble Aztec sun and final decorations after pieces are dried.

Activity instructions (15 mins):
1. Look at pictures of Aztec suns to paint own Aztec sun. Notice the bright colors and facial features of the suns.

2. Choose one plate for top and the other for bottom. Position top plate so that rays of bottom plate show through empty triangular spaces.

3. Staple yarn to bottom plate in 2 places 3” apart at top to use as hanger.

4. Glue plates together.
5. Use cut out triangle pieces to make Aztec sun face. Make eyes, nose, and mouth and position them on Aztec sun.

6. Use other triangle pieces to make border around the face or to decorate face. Cut some pieces into smaller triangles.

7. Draw repeated lines using markers to show rays of sun.

We hope you enjoy this special-edition celebration lesson. We encourage you to visit our website, www.artinaction.org, and try a free, more in-depth sample lesson.