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Little Graffiti Village

Explore urban renewal and build a glowing, colorful, miniature community!

(art + social studies)

Palmitas, Mexico is a lot brighter these days because of a wonderful government-sponsored urban renewal project. A youth organization that calls itself "Germen Crew" used graffiti as a means of expression, until the group teamed up with the government of Mexico to brighten up and rehabilitate Palmitas, a town located 1-1/2 hour outside of Mexico City. More than 200 houses were painted and turned into a giant colorful canvas that covers 65,000 square feet of a hillside façade. The project was led by Mibe, a street artist who works in Mexico City. The entire mural took 2-1/2 months to finish. Mibe says of the crew, "Graffiti, art, and its history have transformed us and allowed us to avoid bad decisions."

In addition to the beautification of the town, the mural also caused a boost in tourism to the area. Working hand-in-hand with residents, the artists chose to paint 200 drab cement and cinder block homes in shades such as bright lavender, lime green, and incandescent orange. Seen from a distance, the individually painted homes combine to form an abstract, swirly rainbow design. In some cases, bright swirls that begin on the wall of one house run across several homes before ending in a graceful curlicue.

Before the mural, Palmitas was an area where people avoided going out after dark or interacting much with each other. But as the project was nearing completion, neighbors began talking to one another more, and children spent more time together on the steep stairways that ran through the neighborhood. A greater sense of community spirit has evolved since the mural's completion.

Materials (required)

Blick Studio Watercolor Paper by Fabriano, pkg of 10 sheets, 22″ x 30″ (10080-1022); one sheet makes three houses

Stonehenge Paper, Black, 22″ x 30″ (10423-2002) (for black houses or roofs)

Snippy Scissors, Pointed, (57040-2005); one pair per student

Blick Studio Tracing Paper Pads, 50 Sheets, 9″ x 12″ (10609-3003); share across class

Velcro Brand Sticky Back Fasteners, Package of 15 Coins, White (57319-1010); share at least two packs across class

Aleene's Quick Dry Tacky Glue, 4 oz (23884-1104); share four across class

Markers for black paper:

Prang Metallic Markers, Set of 6 (21281-0069)

Pentel Wet Erase Chalk Markers, Set of 4, Primary Colors, Chisel Point (22132-1009)

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Optional materials:

Marvy Uchida Corru-Gator Paper Crimpers (62951-)

Chartpak Pickett Arrows and Shapes Templates, General Purpose Metric (55476-2010), or Squares (55476-1800)

Create a mini Palmitas in the classroom using papers and chalk markers. The houses start out as a flat template, are "painted," and then folded into a house with windows that can be lit from within.

GRADES 3-8 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Learn about the transition of the town of Palmitas and view before-and-after photographs of the homes on the hillside.
2. Cut watercolor paper (for white houses) or Stonehenge paper (for black houses), into 7″ x 22″ strips (three strips per sheet). This paper will form the walls.
3. Cut the remaining 22″ wide piece into three pieces measuring 9″ x 7-1/4″. This paper will form the roofs.

Process

1. Lay a 7″ x 22″ strip of paper on a table and fold 1″ in on one end of the paper. With the inch folded in, fold the paper in half. Open the paper, and fold each end into the center. This will result in four creases. Make sharp creases using a bone folder or other tool. This method can be used with any size strip of paper and will create the four walls of the house. By varying the size of the strip, the size of the houses can be changed. Apply Velcro to the 1″ flap and the other end of the strip so that when fastened, the walls of the house stay together.
2. Crease the 9″ x 7-1/4″ piece of paper in half so that each side of the crease measures 4-1/2″ x 7-1/4″. This piece will create the roof of the house. The peak of the roof will be determined by how open or closed the paper is held. Use a paper crimper, if desired, to add ridges.
3. Fold the roof piece and trace the peak created onto one wall of the house. A steep peak or a shallow peak can be made. Cut out the two triangles outside the tracing of the peak of the roof. Repeat this process on the wall that will be opposite the first peak by skipping one square on the strip of paper.
4. On the long strip that makes the walls of the house, cut out windows and doors using scissors. To make window panes, glue thin strips of paper to the inside of the wall of the house. Optionally, use a template to trace windows.
5. With the strip flat on the table, "paint" the house using paint markers. Consider the design where the walls will meet. To create the continual mural design of the town of Palmitas, stand the house up with the Velcro attached and place it next to another house. Make marks on each house to help visualize how the design will continue from one to the other.
6. Cut pieces of tracing paper larger than the window openings and glue them to the inside of the house. Either glue the roof in place, or use tape. The village can be flattened and "re-built" if the roofs are not affixed permanently.
7. As an option, illuminate the houses using battery-operated flameless candles.

Options

1. Use risers to mimic the look of the Palmitas hillside by displaying a whole village of houses at different levels.

Step 1: Cut strips of paper and fold. Open and cut the peak of the roof on every other side. Cut out the roof.

Step 2: Cut windows and doors from the walls. "Paint" the houses using paint markers in bright colors.

Step 3: Velcro the sides of the house and add a roof. Display as a village!

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating
Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting
Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.