

Using Art to Promote Dignity and Human Rights for Indigenous Women and Men

Rita E. Moran, City College of San Francisco

ESL Lessons Using the Maya Woman Collection

These paintings by contemporary Tz'utuhil and Kaqchikel Maya painters of Guatemala can serve as powerful prompts for communication. For more information on specific paintings, go to MayaWomenInArt.org/gallery.html and double-click on the image in question. See the commentary provided below the picture.

You are also invited to schedule an exhibition of 12 to 60 paintings from the Maya Woman collection at your college or university. Fees are waived for educational institutions.

Communication

Levels 1-3:

These exercises are for pair or small group communication. Students should choose a painting that they find interesting, and talk about it.

FOR EXAMPLE: In the Gallery, find the artist María Teodora Mendez de González and click on her painting *Convivio Familiar / Family Gathering*.



1. Happy or sad?

- Is this a happy painting?
- Is it a sad painting?
- Is it an angry painting?
- What is beautiful?
- What is ugly?

2. What are they doing?
 - Point to a man. What is he doing?
 - Point to a woman. What is she doing?
 - Point to an animal. What is it doing?

3. Count:
 - How many people are in the painting?
 - How many animals are in the painting? What kind of animals are they?
 - How many houses are in the painting? What are the houses made of?

4. Look at the people:
 - What are they wearing?
 - Are they wearing traditional clothes?
 - Are they wearing modern clothes?
 - What are they wearing on their feet?
 - Are there old people in the painting?
 - Are there children in the painting?
 - Are there babies in the painting?

5. Colors:
 - Point to something blue. How do you say this in English?
 - Point to something red. How do you say this in English?
 - Point to something yellow. How do you say this in English?
 - Point to something green. How do you say this in English?

6. The same or different:
 - What is the same as in your country?
 - What is different?

Level 4 and above:

A. Make up a conversation.

1. In the Gallery, find the artist Matías González Chavajay. Look at the painting in which a young man and a young woman are sitting at a table with their families. The name of this painting is *La Pedida / The Request*.



2. In a small group, have each student choose a person in the picture.
 - Who is the young man? The young woman? What is their request?
 - Who are their parents? Who is the person in the middle?
 - Imagine the conversation that these people are having. What does each person say?

Perform your conversation for the class.

B. Work with a partner.

1. Student 1: Choose a painting that you like. Describe the painting to your partner, but don't tell your partner which one it is.
2. Student 2: Draw the picture that your partner describes.
3. Now compare the drawing with the original painting.
4. Change roles. Student 2 describes a painting, and Student 1 draws.

Level 6 and above

- A. Choose a painting that reminds you of daily life, or a celebration, or a problem in your own culture. What is different in your culture? What is the same? Write about it, or discuss it with a partner.
- B. What do these paintings reveal about the lives of indigenous women in Central America?
 - Do women in your country have similar problems?
 - Do they have similar joys?
 - How is life different for women in the U.S.?
 - How is it similar?

Writing

- A. In the Gallery, find a painting that you like. Choose a person in the painting who looks interesting. Imagine this person's life. Make up a story about the person:
 - Who is this person? Describe him/her.
 - What is this person doing now? How does he/she feel?
 - What did this person do yesterday?
 - What will the person do tomorrow?
- B. Teacher chooses an artist with several paintings in the collection.
 1. Individual students write descriptions of particular paintings.
 2. Individuals read the descriptions one by one, and the class figures out which painting is being described.

Grammar

In the Gallery, find the artist Pedro Rafaél González Chavajay. Look at all of his paintings. Find the one that shows a whole town of people with lots of corn. The name of this painting is *Blessing of the Corn*.



A. Present Continuous

What are the people doing? Write 8 sentences about things they are doing right now.
Example: The women are carrying baskets.

B. Prepositions of Location

For each question, use one of these words to write a complete sentence:

above behind over in
below in front of under on

Example: Where are the houses?
The houses are behind the people.

1. Where is the soup?
2. Where are the water jugs?
3. Where are the musicians?
4. Where are the cooks?
5. Where is the fire?
6. Where is the yellow corn?
7. Where is the red corn?
8. Where are the candles?

C. There is / There are

What do you see in this painting? Write 8 sentences, using there is / there are.
Example: There are four candles in the painting.