

# Make a Paper Mache Sugar Skull

There are many special traditions associated with the Mexican holiday of *Día de los Muertos* (The Day of the Dead.) Have you ever noticed beautifully decorated skulls made of candy at these celebrations? These *calaveritas de azucar* (sugar skulls) are another way to remember loved ones that are no longer with us and ponder the destiny we all share.

## Calaveritas de Azucar

Sugar skulls, or *calaveritas de azucar*, are a staple during Dia de los Muertos celebrations. They are shared as offerings to deceased loved ones on *ofrendas* (altars) or given to living friends and family as a sweet treat. There are two main ways to make sugar skulls. In the process of *Dulce al vaciado* (candy casting), a syrup is made from sugar and water and poured into a skull mold and left to dry.



Another option is to use *Alfeñique Paste*, a mixture of powdered sugar, lemon juice, egg whites, and color dyes, also set to dry in a skull mold.

Create your own version of *calaveritas de azucar* using paper mache! Paper mache is an easy way to create three dimensional sculptures using items you can find in your home.

**MATERIALS:** newspaper, paper towel or toilet paper roll, tin foil, tape, scissors, paint, flour, water, spoon, and bowl.



# Make a Paper Mache Sugar Skull

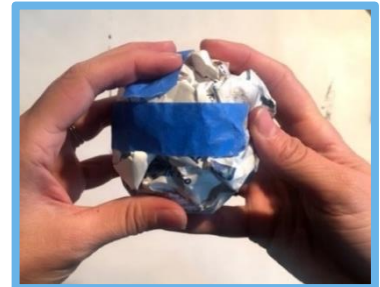
**STEP ONE:** Take several sheets of newspaper and scrunch them together in your hands into the shape of a ball. Take painters tape or masking tape and wrap around the newspaper ball so that it keeps its shape.



**STEP TWO:** Cut the end of a paper towel or toilet paper roll and tape to the bottom of the newspaper ball. You may need to fill in with more newspaper and tape so it all stays together.



**STEP THREE:** Cover the whole shape with layers of tin foil. Use your thumbs and fore fingers to press in the shape of eye sockets and jawline.



**STEP FOUR:** Now it's time to make your paste! Gather flour, water, a spoon, and a bowl. Spoon about four heaping scoops of flour into the bowl. Slowly add water while stirring the mixture. Work out all the lumps. The paste should be smooth but not too watery. It should have the consistency of a creamy soup.



**STEP FIVE:** Cut strips of newspaper you will use to dip into paste. Use your fingers to scrape extra paste off newspaper strip and back into the bowl.



# Make a Paper Mache Sugar Skull

**STEP SIX:** Slowly cover your tin foil skull with the strips of newspaper after they are dipped into the paste. Smooth as you go. Cover with at least two layers of newspaper and paste. Leave over night to dry or dry completely with a hair dryer.



**STEP SEVEN:** Let your paper skull dry. Then, paint it with white paint. Take black paint and add large circles for the eye sockets, an upside-down "v" for the nose, and some skeletal teeth!



**STEP EIGHT:** Use colorful paint or markers to add decorations. They should be bright and fun. Some common motifs are florals and colorful dots



*Learn more about Dia de los Muertos during the Penn Museum's [CultureFest celebration](#). This activity and translation were created in partnership with the [Mexican Cultural Center](#).*

