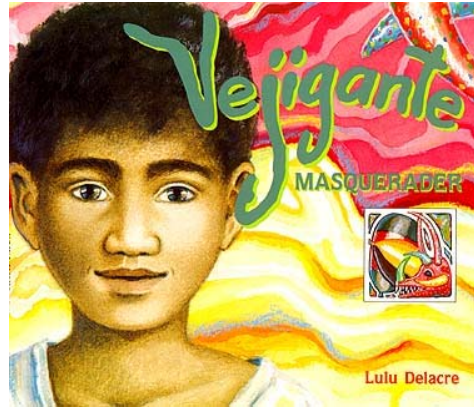


“Climbing up the tamarind tree with a friend to eat its fruit was as commonplace as hunting for tiny brown lizards. I used to gently open their mouths and hang them from my earlobes as earrings!”

Lulu Delacre



Vejigante Masquerader

Lulu Delacre
Scholastic 1993

Grade Levels

K-4

Curriculum Areas

Language Arts • Art

National Language Arts Standards

NL-ENG.K-12.7 EVALUATING DATA

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems.

They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources [e.g., print and non-print texts, and artifacts].

NL-ENG.K-12.8

DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Art Education Standards

NA-VA.4 UNDERSTAND THE VISUAL ARTS IN RELATION TO HISTORY AND CULTURES

Grades K–4

Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationship to various cultures.

Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places.

Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

Objectives

To learn about the history of the Vejigante character; introduce the book, *Vejigante Masquerader* written by Lulu Delacre.

To introduce to students that carnival in Puerto Rico draws upon the influences of other cultures on their own culture.

To introduce the Vejigante masks; music and dance associated with the carnival and festivals.

To draw upon the ethnic, popular and folk art of Puerto Rican cultural heritage for their own art work.

Summary

Ramón longs to participate in Carnival. He works hard to make a costume and buy a mask, so he can join in the pranks with all the other masqueraders. Inspired by Carnival in Ponce, Puerto Rico, this bilingual story overflows with plentiful detail, and offers marvelous possibilities for sharing both language and culture, including an introductory description, glossary of chants, vocabulary, and instructions on mask making. The closeness of family and community threads throughout; the joy and color of Carnival abound. Searching for the twenty-eight hidden lizards (one for each day of February) draws the reader even more deeply into the illustrations.

Author's Background

Lulu Delacre was born in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. She enjoyed growing up there and says, "Climbing up the tamarindo tree with a friend to eat its fruit was as commonplace as hunting for tiny brown lizards. I used to gently open their mouths and hang them from my earlobes as earrings!"

Lulu began painting at an early age. She traveled to many places with her family, including Argentina. After graduating from the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Puerto Rico, she was accepted into "L'Ecole Supérieure d'Arts Graphiques" in Paris, France. After her training to be an artist she moved to New York.

Vejigante Masquerader focuses on Carnival time in Puerto Rico. Lulu wanted to highlight this tradition because she had grown up being mesmerized by the *Vejigantes*. She was also interested in sharing this tradition with her children. Knowing that they were seeing the world through two different cultures, two different languages, and two different heritages, Lulu wanted to make sure they understood her culture. Lulu has continued to write and illustrate her own books.

About the Vejigante

Vejigante Masquerader uses the character of the Vejigante to explore the ways in which Spanish, African, and Caribbean cultures have combined to form Puerto Rican culture. This melding of diverse traditions is a microcosm of the ways in which societies adapt to outside change by absorbing new influences and reformulating old rituals to retain their cultural identity.

Vejigante Lesson Plan Exit Studio 1996.

[Excerpt]

The Vejigante is a fantastic, colorful character introduced into carnival celebrations in Puerto Rico hundreds of years ago. He is a classic example of the blending of African, Spanish, and Caribbean influences in Puerto Rican culture. The name *Vejigante* comes from the Spanish word for bladder, *vejiga*. The Vejigante inflates a dried cow's bladder and paints it to resemble a balloon. During the carnival celebrations in Loíza Aldea and Ponce, the Vejigantes roam the streets in groups and chase children with their *vejigas*.

The Vejigante's costume is made from scraps of fabric and looks like a clown suit with a cape and batwings under the arms. The Vejigante is

such an old character that he is even mentioned in the classic novel *Don Quixote* written in 1605.

Different towns in Puerto Rico have variations on the characters. In the southern town of Ponce, the masks are made of papier-mâché with many curved horns and fangs. In the northern town of Loíza, the African influence is evident in the masks made from coconut shells and carved wooden horns. The Vejigantes lead call-and-response chants with the crowd.

The book and video set *The Vejigante and the Folk Festivals of Puerto Rico* tells the legend of the Vejigante and how he still appears today in carnival celebrations in three cities in Puerto Rico. The book gives insight into the differences in style and symbolism in these three festivals and is illustrated with beautiful drawings to color. The video *The Legend of the Vejigante* contains actual footage of the carnival celebrations plus detailed instructions on making the papier-mâché mask the Ponce Vejigante wears.



Vejigante Masquerader
Lulu Delacre 1993
Illustration Page 23

Creature of Culture: The Vejigante

The third week of July marks the Fiestas de Santiago in the Puerto Rican town of Loíza and the appearance of the mysterious and colorful Vejigantes. Originally brought with the traditions of the Spanish conquistadors, the character and its celebration were transformed by this African community into a blend of Christian and Yoruba rituals. The Vejigante is also found in two other towns with their own variations on the theme--Ponce in February and Hatillo in December --but the African influences are strongest in Loíza. The mask of the Loízan Vejigante is made from a coconut husk, brightly painted and adorned with wooden horns and fangs. His costume is

constructed from colorful scraps of fabric and resembles a clown suit with batwings under the arms. Sometimes a cape is added as well. In the rituals of the festival, the Vejigantes represent the Moors, the enemy of the Christians in the Holy wars. The blending of African and Spanish culture has given the characters double meanings, so the knight of Santiago is also the Yoruba god of war, Ogun, and the Vejigantes represent the resistance to Catholicism.

The Vejigantes roam the streets of town in bands, looking for women and children to scare with their fierce faces. They rattle their *vejigas* (traditionally made from dried cow's bladders filled with pebbles but these days more often from a stuffed sock or paper bag tied to a stick) and playfully whack bystanders. They dance to the African rhythms of *bomba* and *plena* music through the streets. The Vejigantes also lead the crowds in call-and-response chants. Everyone knows these nonsense rhymes and sings along.

Activity

The Looking Exercise will provide an introduction to the folk art masks used in Puerto Rico for carnivals. Point out the *Vejigante* masks. Tell students that these masks are made and worn in the southern part of Puerto Rico. Explain to students that a *vejiga* is a cow bladder and that the *Vejigante* is a make-believe character that has been part of carnival celebrations in Puerto Rico for hundreds of years. Originally, the cow bladder was filled with air or water and used to playfully hit people during Carnival. The challenge is to teach about the masks in a historical and cultural context of folk arts. Study the *Vejigante* masks through videos, images, or the Internet. Does anybody know when and where the *Vejigante* masks are worn in Puerto Rico? Some students may respond with guesses, some will responded with clear memory of the video, or pictures or the Internet.

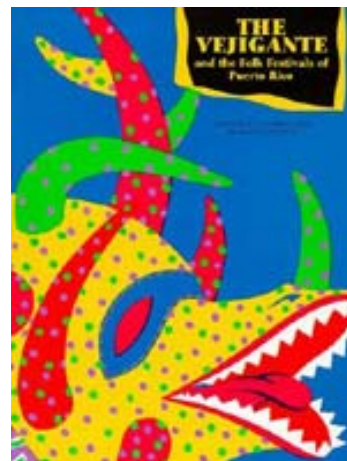
Divide students into small groups. Work with each group to find out more about the history of *Vejigante* masks [See Resources section for helpful Internet websites]. Finally, guide students to make their own *Vejigante* masks out of papier-mâché or make drawings of masks, use the coloring book illustration of Jaguar costumed figure, or make finger puppets of masked figures. (Excellent pictures can be found in books listed in the Resources)



Vejigante Masquerader
El Boricua

A Cultural Site - Puerto Rico

<http://www.elboricua.com/vejigante1.html>



The Vejigante and the Folk Festivals of
Puerto Rico

Edwin Fontáñez

Washington DC: Exit Studios. 1996

**LOOKING EXERCISE:
THE VEJIGANTE MASQUERADER
Lulu Delacre
Illustration and Text Page 24**



What is going on in this picture? What do you notice? Describe everything you see.

Are the masks the same or are they all different? What do you think will happen next?



Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña
<http://www.icp.gobierno.pr/aaa/index.htm>

Resources

Delacre, Lulu. *Vejigante Masquerader*. New York: Scholastic. 1993

Fontáñez, Edwin. *The Vejigante and the Folk Festivals of Puerto Rico*. Washington, D.C.: Exit Studios. 1996

Fontáñez, Edwin. *The Legend of the Vejigante*. Washington, D.C.: Exit Studios. 1996 [Video]

Kaucher, Shari. *Boriquén-Then and Now: The Art and Culture of Puerto Rico*. Tucson, Arizona: Crizmac Art and Cultural Education Materials, Inc. 2003

Swebbey, Jane. *Latino Art and Culture*. Washington D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. 1996

Internet Websites

Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican Arts, Archaeology, Literature, Music, and History

Exit Studio
<http://www.exitstudio.com>

Lulu Delacre website
<http://www.luludelacre.com/>

Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Puerto Rico
<http://www.museocontemporaneopr.org>

Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico
<http://www.mapr.org>

Museo del Barrio [Specializing in Puerto Rican Arts]
<http://www.elmuseo.org>

PBS Masterpiece Theatre - Puerto Rico: A Timeline
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/woman/timeline.html>

Puerto Rico y el Sueño Americano
<http://www.prdream.com/>

Scholastic Page About Lulu Delacre
<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=2912>

Vejigante
<http://www.elboricua.com/vejigante1.html>

Learn about Puerto Rican arts, literature, archaeology, museums, music, cultural events and history.
<http://www.icp.gobierno.pr/galeria/index.html>