



## Lesson Plan 5: A Creature of Culture

In Lesson Plan One, students learned that Dalí was from Catalonia, but rather than investigating what this meant in regards to his art, they tried to pinpoint similarities between their own culture and his. In this lesson, students begin to explore how Dalí's art is, in part, a function of his Spanish and Catalan heritage. Students are first asked to identify and give examples of what "culture" might consist of in the first place—religion, landscape, art, dance, food, folklore, music, family structures, standards of beauty, holidays and public celebrations, systems of education, how people spend their leisure time, etc. Then they are divided into small groups and turn their attention to Dalí's work. Each group is given a short description of some characteristic of Dalí's Spanish or Catalan culture and then charged with figuring out how it might be coming into play in the six paintings we've been returning to over the course of the past week—*Port of Cadaques (Night)*; *Still Life: Sandia*; *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition*; *Old Age, Adolescence, Infancy (The Three Ages)*; *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*; *The Hallucinogenic Toreador*. Finally, after they make short presentations identifying the links they've made, students are asked to revisit the collages that they made in Lesson Three and write about what characteristics of their own cultures are visible in the works they made.

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Posters/Reproductions of: *Port of Cadaques (Night)*; *Still Life: Sandia*; *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition*; *Old Age, Adolescence, Infancy (The Three Ages)*; *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*; *The Hallucinogenic Toreador*
- "Culture Card" descriptions of Catalan/Spanish culture (see below)
- Student collages from Lesson Three

### ACTIVITY

#### 1. Identifying Characteristics of Culture

The term "culture," as in "the Catalan culture" is rather vague, so this part of the lesson is designed for students to get a working grasp of what a "culture" is made of or where it is visible in daily life. Keep in mind that this is a difficult task because we are frequently so much a part of our own culture that we are blind to its individual parts and can't see what it looks like from the outside. Students may not recognize, for example, that the "nuclear family" or the public education system are indeed characteristics of a particular culture. It's also difficult to differentiate between, say, the way one family does things and the way an entire culture does. When, exactly, does "one way of doing things" become a "culture"? Let your students know the answers aren't necessarily cut and dry and that sometimes there are cultures within cultures that complicate the whole discussion. The important thing is to begin thinking about who you are in relation to the larger world and

the larger way of doing things. As you start, start small and ask your students to give examples—from TV, their lives, current events, their friends and family—to illustrate their ideas; you most likely will have to fill in the gaps as the conversation gets more sophisticated. For your reference, here are a few questions you might use to begin thinking and talking about characteristics of cultures:

- What sort of art does your culture produce or value? Dance? Music?
- How is the landscape and climate part of your culture?
- What sort of religious values or religions are in your culture? Do you see these values reflected elsewhere?
- What sort of government does your culture value? How does this indicate what qualities your culture values?
- Does your culture have any folk tales or mythical stories? What do these stories or myths value?
- How does your culture structure its families, and why?
- What would your culture say is a beautiful man or woman? Why? Are there differences between men and women, young and old? Why is this?
- What holidays does your culture celebrate, and why?
- How are people educated in your culture, and why?
- How do people spend their leisure time? How does this indicate what they value?
- How is money used in your culture? How do people make it? Do people spend it or save it?

## **2. Group Activity**

This group activity is designed to teach students a bit about Catalonian and Spanish culture and to give them practice looking at how Dalí's art was affected by these cultures. Set the six paintings by Dalí near the front of the class where everyone can see them. Divide the students into eight groups—hopefully there will be about three per group—and hand out one “Culture Card” to each group (see following). Instruct the students to read the card and then to look for how this aspect of Spanish or Catalonian culture is visible in one or more of the paintings on the board. When groups are done deliberating, ask them to present their cultural fact and findings to the rest of the class.

### Spanish and Catalonian “Culture Cards”

#### *Geography*

Catalonia is the region in northeastern Spain that extends from the Pyrenees mountain range at the French border down the Mediterranean coastline. Salvador Dalí grew up in the town of Figueres that is located on the Ampurdan plain, a rolling and fertile area compared to the rest of Spain. North of the plain, the Albares mountains rise steeply, ending in the rocky peninsula of Cape Creus where the cliffs plunge into the sea. The wind and the sea have weathered these cliffs for centuries, creating unusual and fantastic rock formations.

The town of Cadaques, where Dalí's family had a summer home, is located on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Mt. Pani rises hugely on one side of Cadaques, and anywhere you go you

can see it in the distance. The sea with its dangerous currents borders the other side. This combination of rugged roads and hard sailing kept Cadaques and Figueres small and isolated from the rest of Spain, and when Dalí was famous, he loved coming back here to retreat from the rest of the world.

Almost two thousand years ago, the Roman Empire managed to cross the mountains and conquer Ampurias in this part of Spain. They built towns and erected buildings, and the ruins of these towns and buildings can still be seen if you go there today.

### *The Legend of St. Narciso*

Just because it was difficult to cross the mountains or sea to conquer Catalonia, that doesn't mean people didn't try. France, which shares Catalonia's northern border, tried to invade Catalonia three times. But all three times, Catalonian legend says, Saint Narciso drove them back.

Saint Narciso was a Roman Catholic priest who was Bishop of Gerona, Spain, from 304 to 307 C.E. For some reason he left the province and, when he returned, he was murdered while saying mass. He was buried in the church and fortress of St. Felix and, people thought, that was that.

But, legend says, when France invaded Catalonia in 1285, a huge swarm of biting flies emerged from St. Narciso's tomb and counter-attacked so fiercely that the French had to turn around and retreat. The French invaded again in 1653, and again, biting clouds of flies rose from St. Narciso's tomb to keep the invaders out. And when the French invaded a third time in 1684, the flies rose from St. Narciso's tomb once more to protect the land where Narciso once lived. Narciso is still buried at the church of St. Felix. And the French have never conquered Spain.

### *Bullfighting*

Almost nothing in Spanish culture is as famous around the world as the bullfight. The *corrida de torros* appeared in Spain in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and, even though more and more people criticize it for being too bloody and violent, it is still one of the country's favorite sports.

But bullfighting is not so much a sport as a spectacle. People know that the bull will always die in the end, so they look for the skillful and graceful movements that the matador makes. Wearing a gold and glittering *traje de luces*, or "suit of lights," a matador is judged most successful by how close he stands and how smoothly he "passes" the bull's horns as it goes charging by. Women throw roses into the ring to show their admiration, and men toss their hats in as a sign of applause.

Most importantly, however, bullfighting is an exhibition of Spanish manhood and courage. The brave man must not only master the bull—he must first master his own fear. As a matter of fact, the *corrida* is sometimes called the *Fiesta Brava*, or "Celebration of Bravery." Some matadors turn their backs to the bulls to show their bravery, and some have even fought while kneeling down!

## *Religion*

Today, 97% of people in Spain are Roman Catholic, but it wasn't always this way. Because of its location in Europe, Spain was invaded again and again through history—by the Romans, the Vandals and Visigoths, the Moors and Arabs, etc.. And while Catalonia was able to resist being conquered much of the time, the rest of the country wasn't so lucky and had no choice but to follow the dominant religion of the conquerors.

Some conquering governments like the Moors were tolerant of other religions and let the people worship pretty much as they pleased. When King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella married in the fifteenth century, however, they proclaimed that Spain was a Catholic nation and drove out people of the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Until 1978, Catholicism was the official religion of Spain. Today, even though most of the people are Catholic, there is religious freedom and there are small communities of Protestants, Jews, and Muslims.

Dalí's mother was a devout Catholic, and Dalí attended a Catholic school. When he and his family spent summers in Cadaques, Dalí often times painted the huge church that seemed to be the center of the town. Many of his other paintings refer to the Catholic religion, too, especially to the Virgin Mary, whom Christians believe to be the mother of Jesus Christ. In Spain, there are two national holidays held to honor her, and in paintings like *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus*, Dalí uses Gala to represent Mary. Can you remember any other paintings where Gala seems more heavenly than human?

## *Economy*

Because the town of Cadaques is located on the Mediterranean Sea, many of the people earned their livings as fishermen. Wherever Dalí walked he would see fishing boats on the water or tied to the shore. At night, once the men came back from fishing, their wives and the women of town would mend the fishing nets so they'd be ready to use the next day. These women would sit on the ground sewing the nets which they'd spread across their laps. It was simple, hard work making a living this way. The first house that Dalí and Gala bought was a small fisherman's house. It had one room, no running water and no electricity!

Cadaques was where Dalí spent his summers. The rest of the year he lived in Figueres where many of the people were olive farmers. Hundreds of years before, the Greeks introduced the olive tree to this part of Spain, and it became the region's major crop. In both Greek and Christian legend, the olive tree oftentimes symbolizes peace and healing. In fact, one of Dalí's nicknames for Gala was "olive."

## *Family*

Salvador Dalí's father was an important man in Figueres. He was a notary (the Spanish version of a lawyer) and made more money than many other people in town. Because of this, he could spoil his son, and Dalí grew up getting whatever he wanted. It was very unusual at this time for a woman to work, so Dalí's mother stayed home and kept house.

One of the most important people in young Salvador's life was Lucia, his nursemaid or nanny who took care of him when he was small. She sang him to sleep and told him many Catalan stories that he'd remember for the rest of his life. Most families in Figueres couldn't afford to hire someone like Lucia to take care of their children—most people were farmers, and farmers didn't make a lot of money. Young Salvador, however, probably loved the attention he got from her.

Most upper-class children went to religious schools, but Dalí's father believed that it was important to support the public school system. However, when Dalí showed up to class wearing a type of cute sailor's outfit which upper-class children wore, the other kids made fun of him, teased him, and hid grasshoppers in his desk. He quickly left the public school and started going to a Catholic one.

### *Food*

The food in Spain varies from place to place depending on culture, climate, and geography, and every region has its own specialty. When Americans think of Spain, however, they frequently imagine olives and olive oil, parsley, almonds, garlic, and saffron (the world's most expensive spice). They also think of chicken, seafood, game, and a world-famous rice dish called *paella*. *Tapas*, a form of Spanish appetizers served before lunch and dinner in bars and taverns, has gained a lot of popularity in the United States in recent years.

From about 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Spaniards take a mid-day break from work called the *siesta*. During this time, shops close down and people take their mid-day meals. This meal—the largest of the day—is frequently followed by a nap before people return to work in the evening. They take their suppers late, usually between 9:00 pm and midnight. Although Catalonians don't observe the lengthy *siesta* that people in other parts of Spain do, the mid-day break is certainly still a part of their daily routine.

Because Dalí grew up in Catalonia where much of the local economy revolved around the sea and agriculture, he probably ate a lot of fish, shellfish, fruits and vegetables, olives, rice and nuts. We know that Catalan bread is a favorite of his. Not only did he paint bread over and over throughout his career, but the outside of his hometown museum in Figueres is decorated with huge loaves of it!

### *Art & Literature*

Like many other aspects of Spanish culture, Spain's art and literature are the result of many different roots coming together. Its architecture is multiple and varied, drawing from Roman columns to Islamic arches and mosques. Its language shows the influence of Arabic, Hebrew, Germanic languages, French and Italian. Spain boasts some of the most individual artists in Western history—El Greco, Velazquez, and Goya to name just three.

Spain's most famous author, Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, was born right around the time that Shakespeare was born in England. At one point in time, his masterpiece, the epic poem *Don Quixote de La Mancha*, had been reprinted more often than any other book except for the Bible.

Dalí greatly admired the paintings of Velazquez in particular, but the largest influence on his work was fellow Catalan artist Pablo Picasso. Picasso's Cubism influenced Dalí, and Picasso's fleshy, rotund women oftentimes appear in Dalí's work. Dalí also knew the artistic traditions from around Europe and America as well—he experimented with Impressionism, put figures like the Venus de Milo into his paintings, and even did illustrations for the Bible.

**WRITING (In-class or as homework)**

*We've just seen how Dalí's Spanish and Catalan cultures influenced his paintings. Keeping this in mind, return now to the collage you made before your visit to the museum and list the images you see there. Then in a short essay, imagine that you're explaining to someone who isn't familiar with your culture why those images are significant. But be careful: you've already written about what you personally intended to do as the artist of your collage—don't repeat yourself. Instead, use your collage as a place to start explaining things about the culture you belong to. For example, are there any religious images? If so, write about the role religion plays in your culture. Are there famous people in your collage? Why are they famous? What does your culture admire about them? Consider some of the different "parts" of culture we looked at in class today—geography, folklore and myth, festivals and holidays, religion, economy, family, food, entertainment, education, etc.—and see if your collage gives you a way to think about how these things function.*