



Google Arts & Culture

The Life and Art of Frida Kahlo

in association with  sixredmarbles

Self-portrait with Small Monkey, Frida Kahlo, 1945, Museo Dolores Olmedo

How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a **roadmap** for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by **Google Arts & Culture's partners**. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what's available to you via the **Google Arts & Culture** website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it's especially geared toward students ages 13 to 16.

Your journey in this lesson will take you through three major topics:

- Chapter 1: Frida Kahlo's Life
- Chapter 2: Kahlo's Influences
- Chapter 3: Kahlo's Art and Legacy

You'll see some helpful signs along the way:



Estimated time for completing the chapter



Audio recording or video



Link to more online content



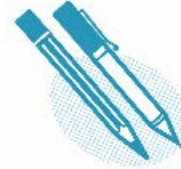
Learning activity

Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:



A device that connects to the Internet
(a computer or tablet)



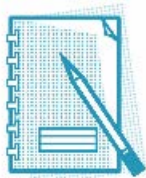
A tool for writing your responses and
big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)



Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)



Scissors



A notebook



Scrap paper

Explore! Google Arts & Culture pictures are **big**. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even **tiny** details.

Welcome to *The Life and Art of Frida Kahlo*

In this lesson, you'll meet one of the best-known artists of the 20th century—Frida Kahlo. You'll find out about her childhood, how she became an artist, and what influenced her work. You'll also get an up-close view of some of her most celebrated works. After you've learned about Kahlo and her influences, you'll create some art of your own, using Kahlo's painting as inspiration.

What will you do?

1. Find out about the life of one of Mexico's most inspiring artists.
2. Learn how Kahlo's life experiences impacted her creativity and her subject matter.
3. Tour some of Kahlo's major works.
4. Explore how Kahlo inspires other artists.



Viva la Vida, Frida Kahlo, 1954, Museo Frida Kahlo

What's in this lesson?

1. Discover how Kahlo became an artist.
2. Learn about how Kahlo's relationships impacted her subject matter.
3. Find out which major themes dominated Kahlo's work, and why.
4. Explore why many regard Kahlo as an inspiration for women and the LGBTQ community.

By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the origins of major themes in Kahlo's work.
2. Explain how Kahlo's life experiences impacted her work.
3. Point to several characteristics of Kahlo's work, and integrate what you learned by creating art of your own.

Vocabulary

muse, corset, indigenous, isthmus, folk art, socialism, botanical

Need help with some of these terms? See the glossary at the end of this lesson.



Chapter 1:

Frida Kahlo's Life



What is this chapter about?
Key events and details in
Kahlo's life



*How long will this
chapter take?*
1 hour

Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. Where do you think artists find inspiration?
 - Give three examples of what might inspire artists in their work.
 - Explain each of your choices in two to three sentences.



Discover

2. What do you already know about Frida Kahlo? If you are unfamiliar with Kahlo, write down three questions about this artist to answer as you explore this lesson.

Young Frida

Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón was born in 1907 in Coyoacán, a former village that now lies within Mexico City. Kahlo was born in her family home, known today as “La Casa Azul,” or “The Blue House.”

When she was just six years old, Kahlo came down with polio, a disease that left her with a limp and a damaged right leg. It was during her recovery that her father encouraged her interest in the arts and literature.



This early watercolor is thought to reflect real sites in Kahlo’s hometown. See more of Kahlo’s early work in [this exhibit](#).



See the Blue House as it was when Kahlo lived there in [this exhibit](#).



'The Bus'

When she was 18 years old, Kahlo was in a terrible bus accident that nearly killed her. She was hospitalized for a month and then bedridden at home for two additional months. She began painting during this time, after her mother gave her a box of paints and a portable easel. The bus from her accident was later a subject in her work, but she never painted the crash.

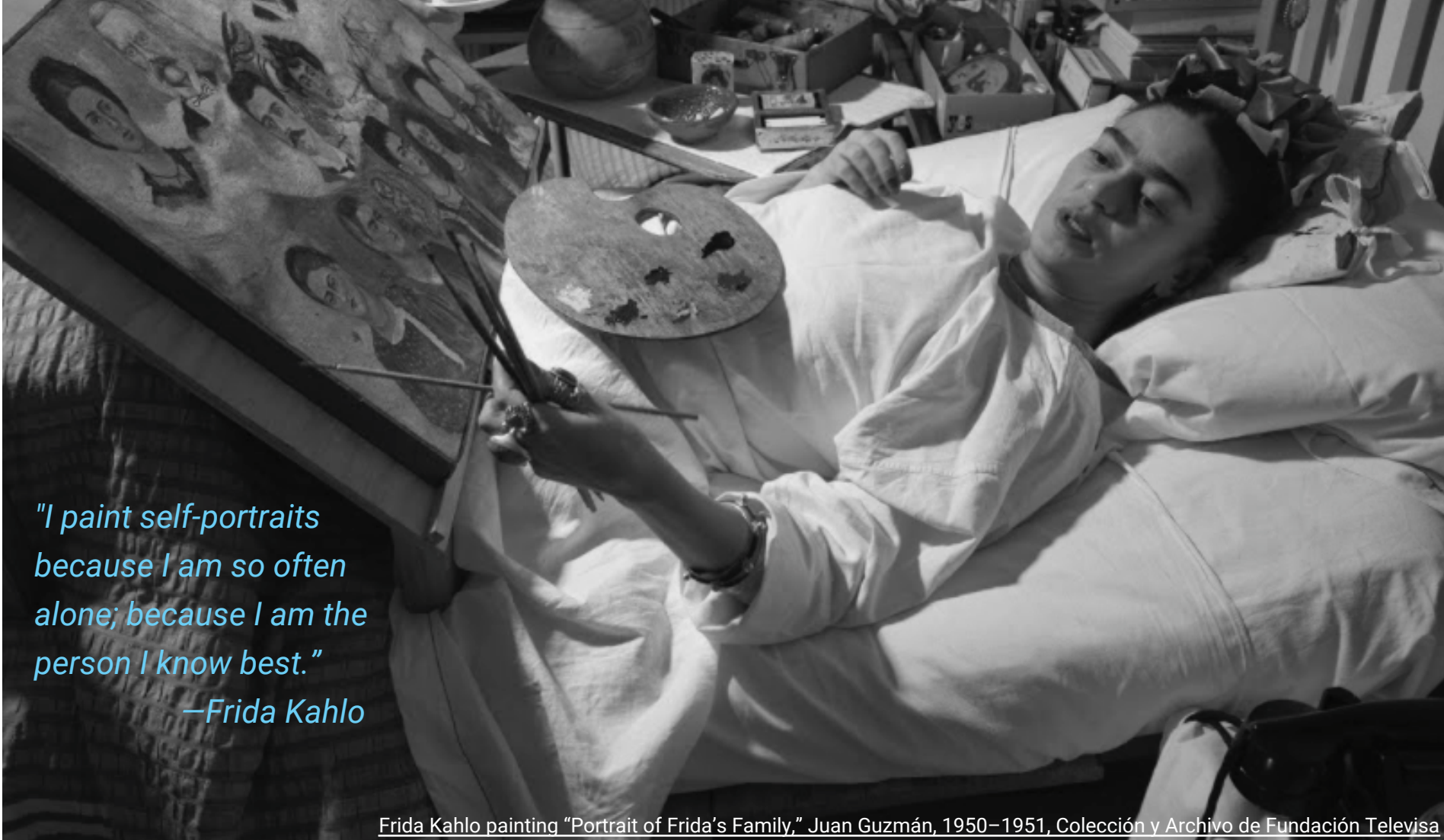


Look at '[The Bus](#)' more closely to find out more about this painting. Then, view [this drawing](#), in which Kahlo reveals some of her memories of the crash.



The Bus, Frida Kahlo, 1929, Museo Dolores Olmedo

Kahlo would never fully recover from the damage to her body caused by polio and the bus accident, but she continued painting even when bedridden by surgery or illness. She often painted self-portraits.



"I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone; because I am the person I know best."

—Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo painting "Portrait of Frida's Family," Juan Guzmán, 1950–1951, Colección y Archivo de Fundación Televisa



Read more about Kahlo's self-portraits, and see one of the most famous, '[Self-Portrait with Monkey.](#)'

[Tour](#) 'Self-Portrait with Monkey, 1938.'

Kahlo Meets Diego Rivera

Kahlo met the famous Mexican artist Diego Rivera for the first time in 1922, when she was in high school. Rivera was painting a mural in the Simón Bolívar Amphitheater.

In 1928, Rivera was painting murals for Secretaría de Educación Pública. Kahlo asked Rivera to look at the work she had created during her recovery from the accident. He told her that her work showed promise and to keep painting. Not long afterward, the two began a relationship. They married in 1929.

Their relationship was often tumultuous. Both Rivera and Kahlo had many relationships outside of their marriage. Their first marriage ended in divorce, but they later remarried. They remained deeply connected to one another throughout their lives.



Read more about Kahlo's early life and marriage in [this exhibit](#).



Frida and Diego Rivera at the house of the sculptor Ralph Stockpole. In the background is one of Stockpole's works. Peter A. Juley, 1931, Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo

Chapter 1: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below in your notebook.



What did you learn about Kahlo in this chapter that you didn't know before? Write a summary paragraph about what you learned.



Chapter 2:

Kahlo's Influences



What is this chapter about?
How Kahlo's life impacted her art



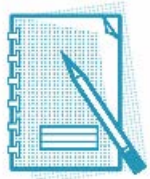
How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. What is a **muse**? Why might an artist look to a muse for inspiration?



Discover

2. From what you know about Kahlo's life so far, what might be her greatest influences?
Why do you think so?

Her Influences

Health

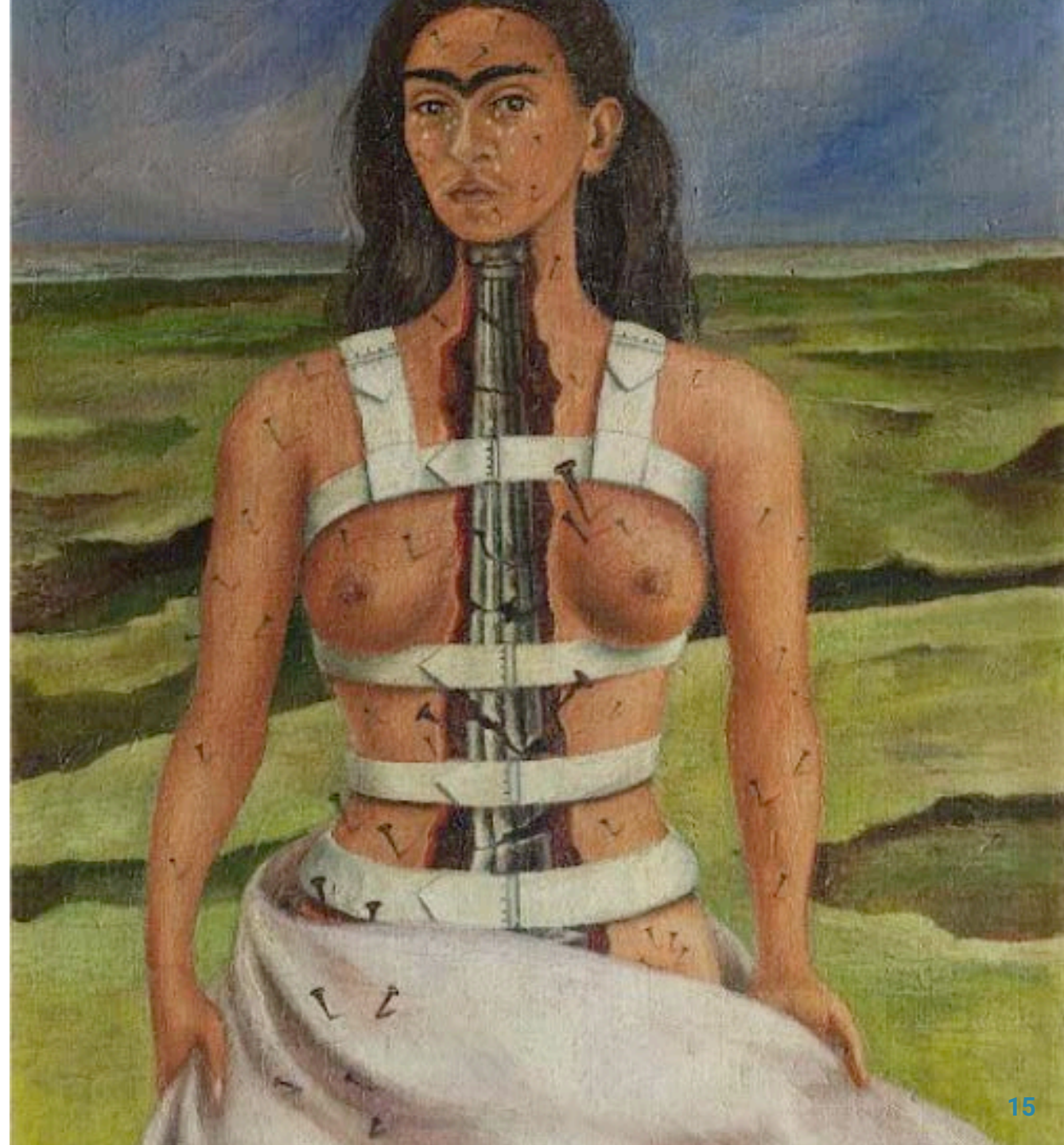
The physical pain and ailments resulting from polio and the accident continued to haunt Kahlo for the rest of her life. However, Kahlo seemed to turn her physical difficulties into a muse for her work. Many of her works, such as 'The Broken Column' (right), show the deep connection between Kahlo's physical state and her emotional one.



Read more about 'The Broken Column' [here](#).

[Tour](#) 'The Broken Column.'

Find out more about Kahlo's relationship with her body in [this story](#).



Kahlo's physicality even influenced her fashion—she wore long skirts and dresses to hide what she referred to as her “sick leg.” She also wore support **corsets** for her spine, sometimes painting elaborate designs on them. Kahlo's iconic appearance inspired many fashion designers.



Learn more about Kahlo's wardrobe and her inspirational fashion legacy [here](#) and [here](#).



Installation shot of Appearances Can Be Deceiving exhibit, Museo Frida Kahlo



Mexican and European Heritage

You may have noticed from the photograph on the previous page that Kahlo's fashions were also heavily influenced by her homeland. Many of the dresses Kahlo favored were of Tehuana origin. The Tehuanas are **indigenous** Mexicans from the **Isthmus** of Tehuantepec in the state of Oaxaca. Kahlo's mother was from Oaxaca and shared with Kahlo elements of Oaxacan indigenous culture, including folklore.

As a result, Mexican **folk art** often heavily influenced Kahlo's work. Kahlo's father was German, and European artistic traditions are also found in many of Kahlo's paintings.



Read more about these influences on Kahlo's art in [this story](#).

Family

Kahlo's close relationship with her family, particularly her father, heavily impacted her life and art. Her family were frequent subjects of her work. The painting shown here is an unfinished portrait "family tree."



Find out more about Kahlo's father's influence in [this exhibit](#).

Marriage

Kahlo's marriage to Diego Rivera also profoundly influenced on her art. Some works show her love for Rivera; others show her despair following a newly discovered affair or a recent breakup.



Learn more about the famous couple's ups and downs in [this exhibit](#).



Family Portrait (Unfinished), 1949–1950, Frida Kahlo, Museo Frida Kahlo

Other Relationships

Rivera was well known for his many extramarital affairs, and the couple's first marriage broke up because of his affair with Kahlo's sister, Cristina. Kahlo also had several extramarital relationships with both men and women.

Politics

Rivera and Kahlo shared similar political views, inspired both by their Mexican heritage and by **socialism**.



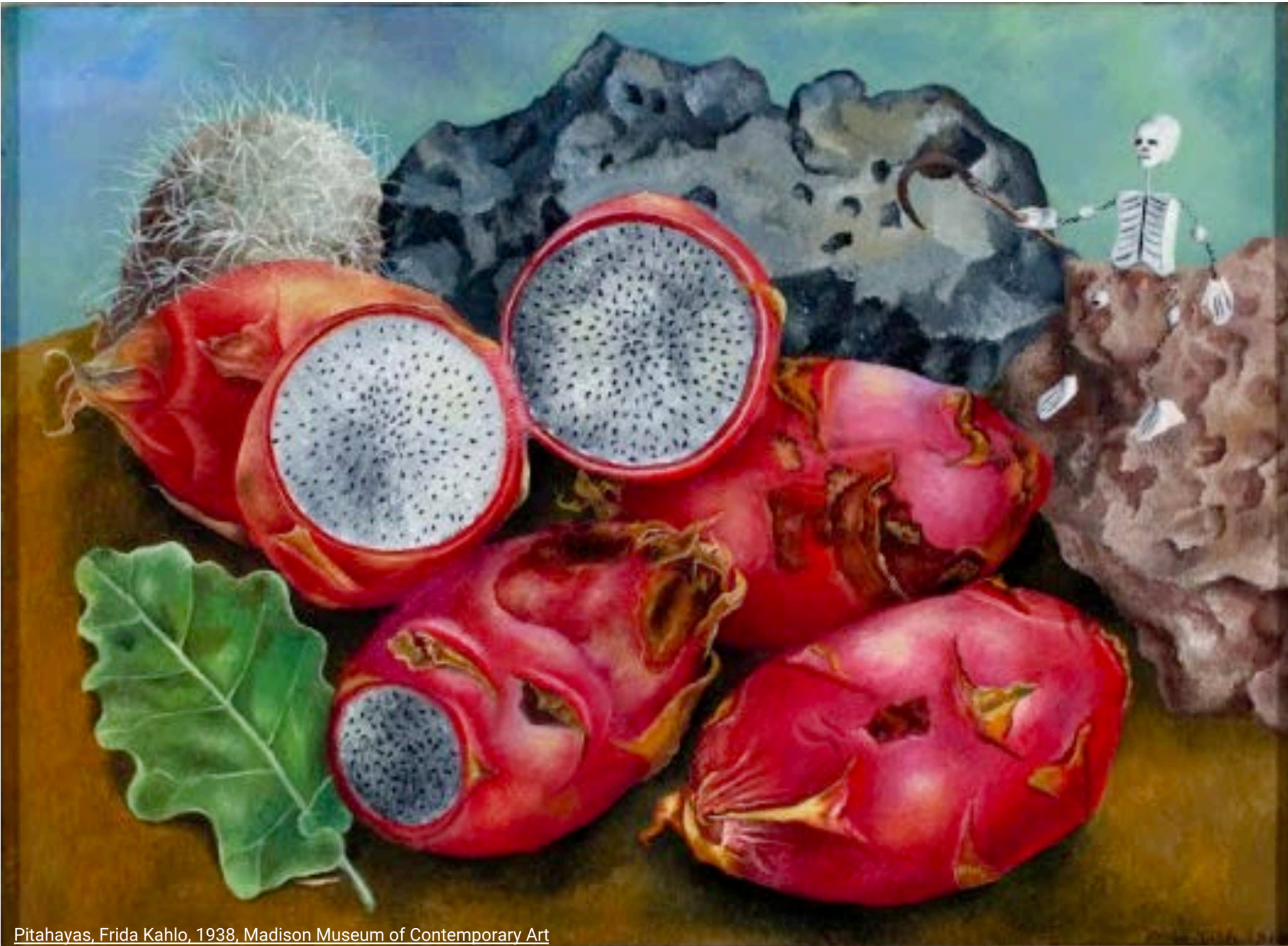
Diego Rivera, Leon Trotsky, and André Breton, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, 1938, Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo

Rivera and Kahlo invited Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky to stay with them in Coyoacán after he fled the Soviet Union. Trotsky and Kahlo engaged in a secret love affair during this time.



Read more about Kahlo and politics [here](#).

See the self-portrait she made for Leon Trotsky [here](#).



Nature

Kahlo collected plants throughout her life, and her garden was filled with them. She also had many pets, including monkeys, dogs, and birds. Her love of the natural world is expressed in many of her paintings.

Sometimes, the plants in her paintings have both **botanical** and human characteristics.



Find out more about Kahlo's relationship with nature in [this exhibit](#).

Chapter 2: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below in your notebook.



Consider what you wrote at the beginning of the chapter about what you thought might be Kahlo's greatest influences. Were you correct? Explain your answer.



Chapter 3:

Kahlo's Art and Legacy



What is this chapter about?
An up-close look at some of Kahlo's work and legacy



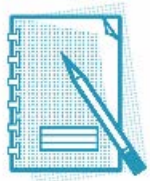
How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 3: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. Now that you know more about Kahlo's life and art, why do you think other artists look to Kahlo as inspiration for their work? Explain your answer.



Discover

2. If you were to list the top five things that might influence your work as an artist (of any type of media—painting, photography, sculpture, film, music, etc.), what would they be? Explain why you chose these things.

Kahlo's Art Up Close

Now that you have uncovered details about Kahlo's life and her influences, you can virtually tour Kahlo's work to fully explore how those influences played out in her paintings.



'The Two Fridas'

Read more about why Kahlo created this work of art [here](#). Then, explore this artwork further in a [tour of the painting](#).



The Two Fridas, Frida Kahlo, 1939, Museo de Arte Moderno



'Girl with Death Mask'

Learn about the symbolism in this artwork through this [tour of the painting](#).



'Self-portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States'

Kahlo lived in several places in the United States during her marriage to Rivera. However, she longed to return to Mexico. This painting represents Frida's life during this period—she is pictured astride the two cultures. The United States is represented with symbols of industrialism, while the symbols for Mexico include plant life and elements of Mexican indigenous culture.



[Read more](#) about how this painting reflects her experiences. Then, find out about the symbols that appear in this painting by viewing this [tour of the artwork](#).



Want to see more? View [this story](#) to see how symbolism plays a role in several of Kahlo's works.

Frida's Legacy

Kahlo has inspired artists of all types around the world. You saw earlier that fashion designers throughout history have used her characteristic style as inspiration. Visual artists, performers, and others have also “channeled” Frida Kahlo in their artistic creations.

Use the links below to see examples of other artists who have been inspired by Kahlo's life and legacy.



[Watch](#) multimedia artist Alexa Meade bring Kahlo's legacy to life in *Frida and I*.



Read [this story](#) to find out how Kahlo's life inspires LGBTIQ artists today.



See how the English National Ballet has been inspired by Kahlo's life in [this story](#).



Read what musician Lila Downs has to say about Kahlo's inspiration [here](#).



Frida Kahlo, photographed for the October 1, 1937 issue of *Vogue*, Toni Frissell, Condé Nast Archive

Chapter 3: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by completing the activity below in your notebook.



Choose examples that reflect Kahlo's life experiences from each of the paintings you saw in this chapter. Explain your examples' significance to Kahlo's life.

Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.



Reflect: Answer these questions:

- At the start of this lesson, you considered what artists might use for inspiration. Based on what you've learned, what do you think Kahlo's greatest inspiration was? Explain your answer.
- Consider the artwork you viewed throughout this lesson. What are some common characteristics and elements?



Summarize: View Kahlo's painting '[The Mask](#).' Then, answer the questions below.

- Why do you think Kahlo hides her face with a mask in this self-portrait?
- From what you know about Kahlo's life, what might the mask represent?



Create:

Now that you have learned all about Kahlo's art, it's time to use this knowledge—and your digital skills—to make art inspired by Kahlo! First, log in to your Google account. Then, follow the directions in the [video tutorial](#) to create your art. You will revisit many of the paintings and stories you saw in this lesson on Google Arts & Culture's [Faces of Frida](#) page. Explore the many additional stories, exhibits, and more on this page, then get creative!

Just for Fun! Download **Google Arts & Culture's** app on your smartphone or tablet, click the camera button in the app, and then choose the Art Filter. Make yourself the subject in Kahlo's 'Self-Portrait with Monkey.'

Glossary

- **botanical:** of or relating to plants
- **corset:** a woman's tightly fitting undergarment that goes around the rib cage
- **folk art:** artwork of various types that is typical of a particular culture and often created by untrained artists; can be characterized by bright colors, strong forms, simple arrangements, and/or flattened perspective
- **indigenous:** originating in a certain place
- **isthmus:** a narrow piece of land that connects two other land masses across a water body
- **muse:** a person who serves as a source of artistic inspiration
- **socialism:** a political and economic theory of social organization that puts forth the idea that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be controlled by the community as a whole