

ARTE PARA TODOS

# SUGAR SKULLS





# TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

THIS LESSON HAS BEEN WRITTEN FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS WITH TEKS ALIGNED TO GRADES K-5. SUGGESTIONS ARE INCLUDED FOR SCAFFOLDING CONTENT TO ACCOMMODATE STUDENT NEEDS. TEACHERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ADAPT LESSONS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND TO FIT THEIR TEACHING OBJECTIVES.

## Primary

Art: 117.102 - 117.303

- (1A)(1B)
- (2A) (2B) (2C)
- (3A)(3B)(3C)(3D)
- (4A)(4B)(4C)

## Secondary

Art: 117.102 - 117.303

- (1A)(1B)
- (2A) (2B) (2C)
- (3A)(3B)(3C)(3D)
- (4A)(4B)(4C)





WHAT ARE SUGAR  
SKULLS?

A DÍA DE LOS  
MUERTOS  
TRADITION



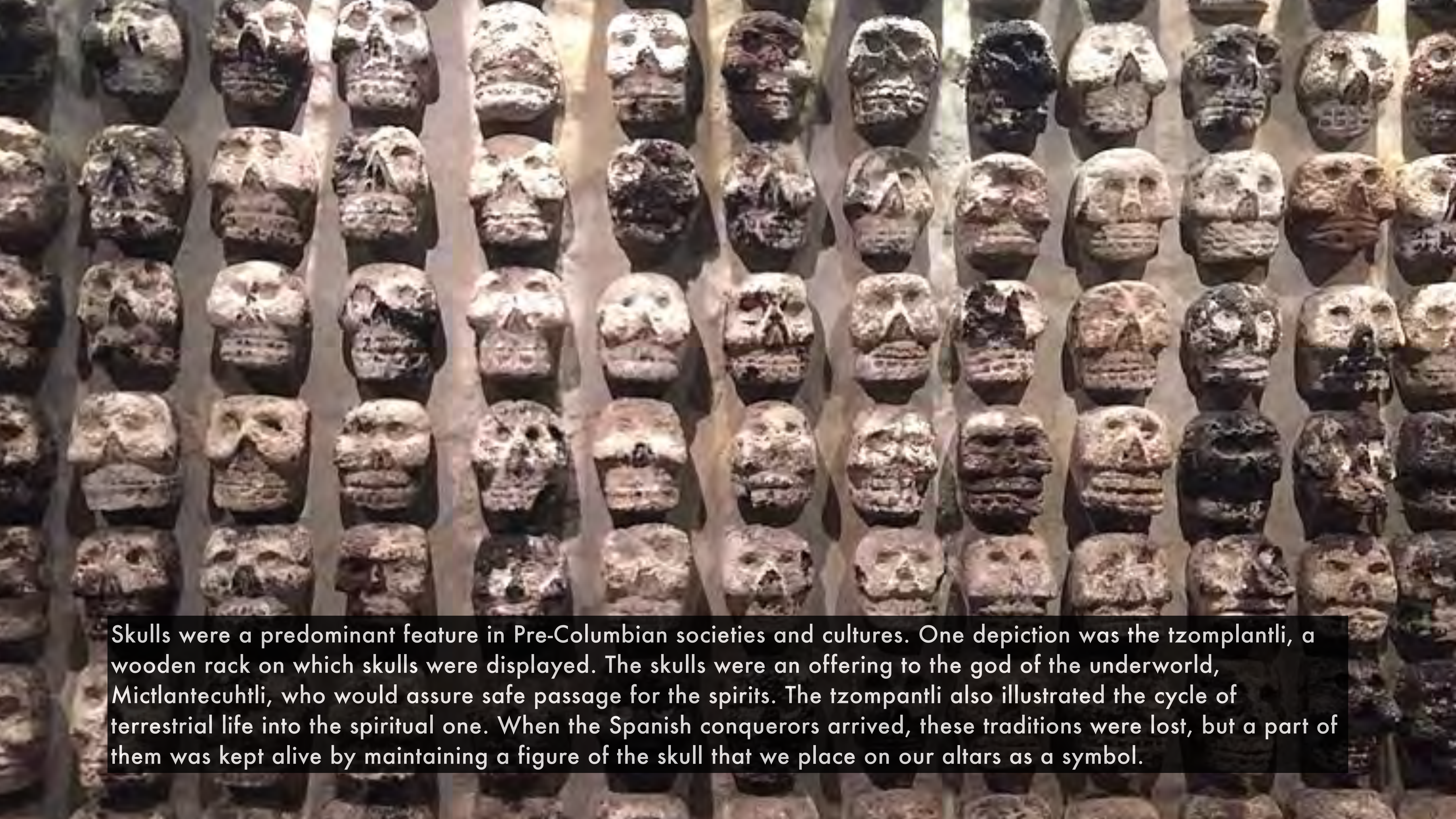


# WHAT ARE SUGAR SKULLS?

Sugar skulls are a confection molded from sugar paste. The design and construction of these figures can vary from region to region. Today, calaveras, or Sugar Skulls, are widely created in Mexico for the Day of the Dead celebrations in November. Sugar skulls are a popular offering since they mark the sweetness of life, and tie back to pre-Columbian skull motifs.







Skulls were a predominant feature in Pre-Columbian societies and cultures. One depiction was the tzomplantli, a wooden rack on which skulls were displayed. The skulls were an offering to the god of the underworld, Mictlantecuhtli, who would assure safe passage for the spirits. The tzompantli also illustrated the cycle of terrestrial life into the spiritual one. When the Spanish conquerors arrived, these traditions were lost, but a part of them was kept alive by maintaining a figure of the skull that we place on our altars as a symbol.



# HISTORY OF SUGAR ART

Alfeñique are folk art confections made from sugar paste. They originated in Italy where figurines were made from sugar for religious decorations. The first mention of sugar art was from Palermo, Italy, when figures of lambs and angels were made to adorn the Catholic church for Easter.

It eventually became popular in Spain, and the missionaries brought the tradition to Mexico. Alfeñique was used to replace the Aztec tradition of making figurines of amaranth for ofrendas, or altars. Amaranth is an ancient grain with high nutritional value, comparable to corn or rice. The Spanish brought sugar cane, which became the main ingredient in the making of figurines for altars instead. Skulls made out of sugar became a Dia de los Muertos tradition that continues to this day.





# A GENERATIONAL ART FORM

For generations, Mexican artisans created and maintained the tradition of making sweet skulls. They have since become one of the most iconic elements of Day of the Dead in Mexico. Families of artisans have passed down the tradition of creating sugar skulls, and new generations are trained to prepare them with either sugar or chocolate.

Sugar skulls are labor intensive and artisans are disappearing as easily fabricated and imported candy skulls take their place.





Sugar skulls can be enjoyed as treats, but their main function is to adorn altars and tombs with a sugary delight for the visiting spirits. The sugar skulls are arranged on the ofrendas to prepare to honor loved ones.





It is a tradition for families to head to the grave site at the stroke of midnight on October 31. There, they decorate their loved ones ofrendas with both large and small handmade sugar skulls.

It's important to take note that on November 1 (All Saints Day), smaller sugar skulls are placed on the ofrendas or graves to remember the children that have passed on. Then, on November 2 (All Souls Day), the smaller skulls are replaced with bigger, more decorative skulls for adults who have passed on.





Sugar skulls that represent a departed soul have their names written on them. The artwork on the skulls reflect folk art style with happy smiles, colorful icing and foil, ribbons, feathers, gems, glitter, and names written across the forehead. Dia de los Muertos is a joyous occasion, where families and communities come together for a festive celebration.

Sugar skulls are just one colorful aspect of the rich cultural history of Dia de los Muertos. It is a time to honor your loved ones and celebrate life.

**Continue the tradition by creating your own calaveritas!**





# MATERIALS

- 2 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 egg white from an extra large egg, or 2 from small egg
- 1 teaspoon light corn
- Cornstarch, about a half cup for powdering surface





# STEP 1

Sift sugar into a large mixing bowl.





# STEP 2

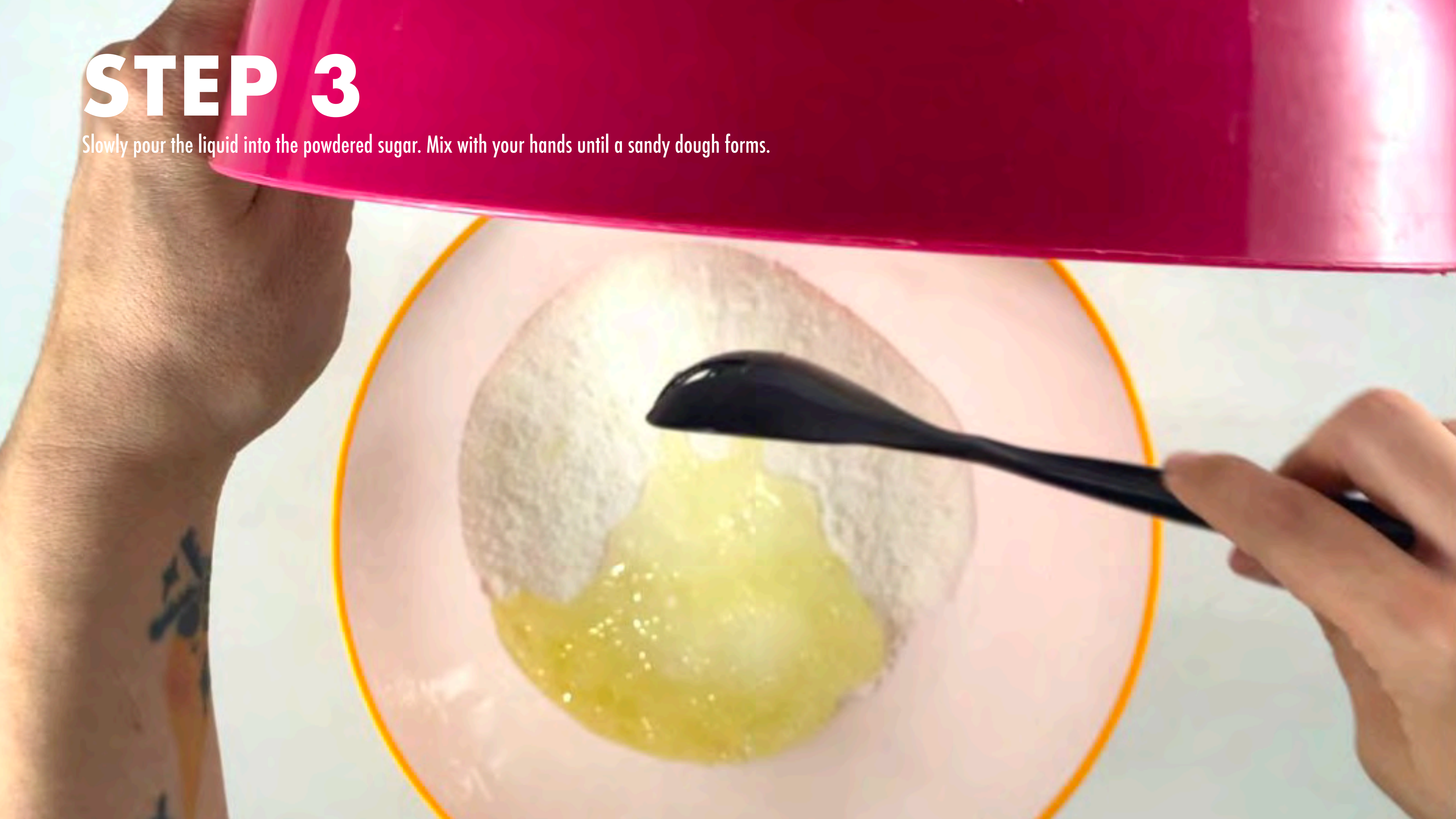
In another bowl, mix the egg whites and corn syrup.





# STEP 3

Slowly pour the liquid into the powdered sugar. Mix with your hands until a sandy dough forms.





# STEP 4

Mix the ingredients together.





# STEP 5

Form dough into a ball. At this point you can continue or you can refrigerate dough for later use. Lightly dust surface with cornstarch as well as your hands.





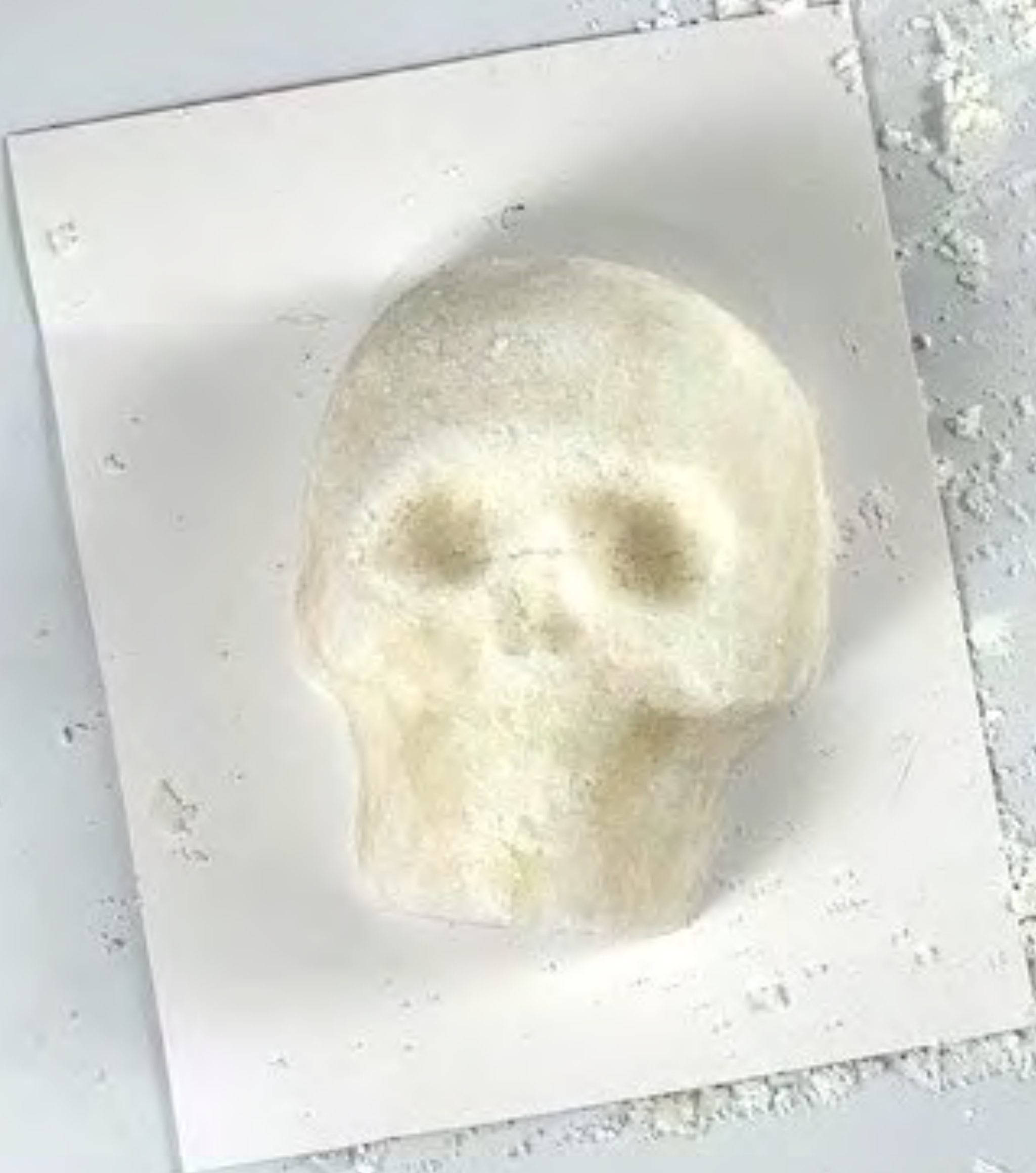
# STEP 6

Pinch off a heaping tablespoon of dough and shape it into a skull.





You can also use a pre made skull shaped mold.

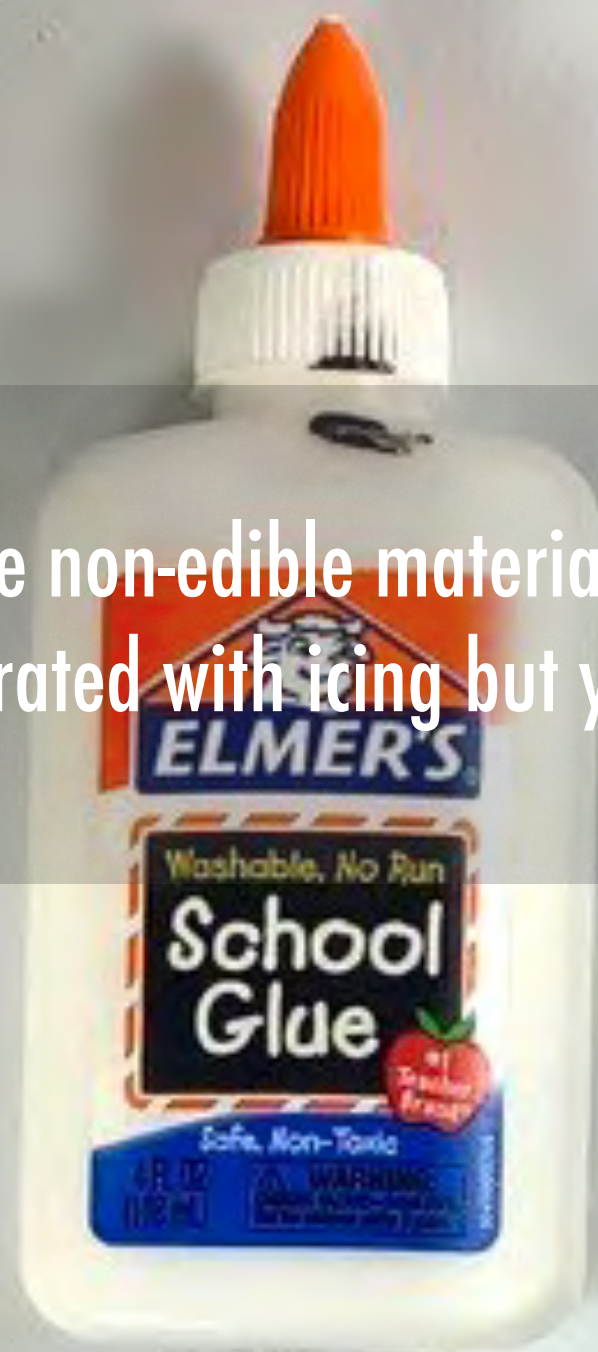




# STEP 7

Decorate!

Once your sugar skull is dry, decorate it using icing or you can use non-edible materials such as jewels, feathers, glitter or colorful foil. A sugar skull is traditionally decorated with icing but you can also use non edible materials for skulls that are strictly decorative.





For this example we used puff paint, glue, glitter and gems.





Place your finished skull on an ofrenda or share one with your friends!

