Elementary Background Reading Activity: El Dia de los Muertos

The Mexican celebration **El Dia de los Muertos** means Day of the Dead. It is a holiday that honors family members who have passed away. It is a special way for families to remember their loved ones without being afraid of death.

El Dia de los Muertos is celebrated in Mexico and some regions of the United States. This unique holiday came from the Aztec culture. The Aztec was a native group that lived in Mexico. They observed death with special rituals and practices that sometimes lasted more than a month. When the Spanish Conquistadors came to Mexico in the early 1500’s, they tried to convert the Aztecs to religion which was Catholic. The result was a blending of the Spanish and Aztec cultures which created a new celebration called El Dia de los Muertos. During the celebration, people clean and decorate grave sites, have special foods like mole and pan de muertos, decorate sugar skulls, and make the ofrenda.

The ofrenda is a special altar that honors deceased loved ones. It is usually found in homes and sometimes in public locations. It is in the shape of an Aztec pyramid with three to four tiers. The ofrenda has special objects placed on it to represent earth, wind, fire and water. To represent the earth, people place special foods and flowers on it. They will use papel picado to represent wind, candles to represent fire, and place a glass of water on the ofrenda to quench the thirst of the weary soul. It is believed that the alter helps to welcome the soul back to earth during the celebration.
Name: ________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________

**El Dia de los Muertos: Reading Questions**

1. What does *El Dia de los Muertos* mean in English?

2. *El Dia de los Muertos* is a blending of which two cultures?

3. Describe how *El Dia de los Muertos* is celebrated today:

4. What is an ofrenda?

5. What special elements are represented on the ofrenda?
**ACTIVITY KEY**

1. What does *El Dia de los Muertos* mean in English?
   - Day of the Dead

2. *El Dia de los Muertos* is a blending of which two cultures?
   - Aztec and Spanish

3. Describe how *El Dia de los Muertos* is celebrated today:
   - Cleaning and decorating of grave sites, special foods like mole and pan de muertos, decorating sugar skulls and the ofrenda

4. What is an ofrenda?
   - A special alter that honors deceased loved ones

5. What special elements are represented on the ofrenda?
   - Earth – special foods and flowers
   - Wind – papel picado
   - Fire – candles
   - Water – glass of water