



Mexico: El Dia de los Muertos

Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading

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 a blending of two cultures: the Aztec and Spanish. The Aztecs were an indigenous group that lived in Mexico thousands of years ago. They observed death with special rituals and ceremonies that took place over the course of a month. When the Spanish Conquistadors came to Mexico in the early 1500's, they tried to convert the Aztecs to the Catholic religion. One result of the blending of the two religions was the creation of the celebration now known as El Dia de los Muertos.

How do people celebrate Dia de los Muertos? The celebration typically takes place on November 1. On that day, people visit the grave sites of the deceased in order to clean and decorate the graves. Making and decorating sugar skulls is another activity associated with Dia de los Muertos, as is sharing a family meal to eat traditional foods such as Pan de Muerto and mole. Another custom is to create an ofrenda to honor deceased loved ones.

The ofrenda is placed in homes and sometimes in public locations such as parks. A traditional ofrenda is built 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. Papel picado is used to represent wind, candles represent fire, and food and flowers represent the earth. A glass of water is placed on the ofrenda to quench the thirst of the weary soul. Because it is believed that the alter helps to welcome the soul back to earth during the celebration, family members choose items that represent the deceased. Family members and friends gather around the ofrenda to share happy memories of the deceased loved one.

Source: <http://nationalgeographic.org/media/dia-de-los-muertos/>



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Name: _____

Date: _____

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?





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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading **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 altar 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