



Mexico: El Dia de los Muertos

Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading

The celebration known as El Dia de los Muertos began in Mexico many years ago. The first people to live in Mexico were called the Aztecs. The Aztecs did many important things, but later when explorers from Spain discovered Mexico, they made many changes.

The way people live is known as culture. One part of culture is religion. As part of their religion, the Aztecs believed that the spirits of their dead ancestors came back to visit every year. To honor their ancestors, the Aztecs had a month long celebration. When the Spaniards came to Mexico, they brought their own religious beliefs and blended them with the Aztecs. Dia de los Muertos is a celebration that came about as a blending of both of those cultures.

Although Dia de los Muertos began in Mexico, the celebration has spread into the United States. The day begins with a trip to the cemetery so families can decorate the graves of the deceased. Families also share a meal, decorate sugar skulls, and create an ofrenda to honor the deceased. An ofrenda is an altar built to look like the Aztec temple, with many levels. Each part of the ofrenda is decorated with items that help families remember their loved one. The ofrenda is set up in a home, or sometimes in a public area.

Dia de los Muertos is a special celebration to help families honor and remember their loved ones who have died. It teaches children about death without being afraid. And, it is a time for families to come together and remember.

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



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Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading Questions

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. Why do people celebrate El Dia de los Muertos?





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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?
Spanish and Aztec
3. Describe how El Dia de los Muertos is celebrated today:
The celebration includes the cleaning and decorating of gravesites, eating a meal, decorating sugar skulls, and creating an ofrenda to honor deceased loved ones.
4. What is an *ofrenda*? **An altar designed to honor deceased loved ones. It is designed to look like an ancient Aztec temple.**
5. Why do people celebrate El Dia de los Muertos? **The tradition is a way to celebrate and honor the lives of deceased family members. It is also a way to explain death to young people and share family stories about family members without making young people fearful of death.**