Día de los Muertos Teacher Workshop

Fall 2012

K-12 Curriculum Resource Guide developed and presented by the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Tulane University
I. Introduction

- Mexicans believe that during the day of the dead, the dead come back to visit their beloved who still live.
- It is a time of great festivity and reunion, rather than mournful lamentation.

II. The roots

A. European roots

- Catholic celebration of All Saints
- Medieval dances of death: staging of devils and angels fighting for the souls of the dead. Death is represented as a fearful lady (sandglass, scythe, cart)

B. Pre-Columbian roots

- Cyclic time: dry season/ rainy season, death/life
- Agricultural celebrations: day of the dead coincides with the beginning of harvest
- Aztec celebrations to the dead

III. The offering: la ofrenda

- Purpose:
  1. To honor and welcome them.
  2. To make them know that they have not been forgotten in death.
  3. To remind them of the sweetness of life that they once enjoyed.

- Elements:
  1. It is done on a table that has a colorful tablecloth (purple, orange, white)
  2. Photographs of the deceased are placed in a central location
  3. Copan incense
  4. *Cempasuchil* (yellow marigold flowers) and *terciopelo* (a purplish-dark pink flower that looks like velvet).
  5. Water: it is believed that the souls arrive thirsty from their long trip, and that they drink the water from the glass that we offered them. Thus, it is believed that as the night progresses the level of water in a glass placed on the ofrenda sinks too quickly to be by evaporation.
  6. Ornaments with skulls (*calaveras*). The most popular ones are made of sugar and have names on golden paper in the front.
  7. Traditional dishes (*mole*, *tamales*, and *pan de muerto*) and other things the deceased liked (favorite foods, candies, fruits, liquors, or cigarettes).
  8. *Papel cortado* (paper cut with figures relative to death)

- A family reunion: Family members help in the ritual preparation of the altar, cleaning of graves, and all the little tasks that go into the offerings for the dead.
- Institutions (community centers, businesses, museums, universities, schools, stores, etc.) build ofrendas for Mexican heroes.

IV. The celebration

- October 18 –the souls start their journey. In Morelos, the Pleiades set on the sun axis just before dawn.
- October 28 –dedicated to those who had a violent death.
- November 1st –dedicated to the *muertos* (dead children).
November 2\textsuperscript{nd} – dedicated to the dead adults.
On this day, people go to the cemetery and they wash and paint the gravestones.
Then they decorate them with flowers, candles, and copal incense
When night falls a feast is laid out upon the gravestones. Both the living and the dead share a meal and drink together into the night. Sometimes bands play music.

V. \textit{Las calaveras}
Another tradition is to write sarcastic poems about the people around us.
In these poems, Lady Death comes to take them away.
They are usually funny because in these poems we make fun of death but also of the living.

 References

http://www.lunadreams.com/calacafeast/


Sugar Skulls

*Día de los Muertos*

Sugar Skulls are a traditional folk art from Southern Mexico used to celebrate *Día de los Muertos*. Mounds of colorful sugar skulls are sold by vendors in open air village markets during the week preceding the holiday. Spirits of the desad are welcomed back to their homes with beautifully decorated altars made by their loved ones. Sugar skulls, marigolds, candles, incense and special foods adorn home altars. Families take the flowers and sugar skulls to the cemetery to decorate the tombs on November 2. Sugar skulls are colorfully decorated with Royal icing, pieces of bright foil, colored sugars and usually bear the name of the deceased loved one being honored. They are easy to make by children and adults, and if kept dry, they can last a year.

**Classroom Timing:**

Medium and Mini skulls can be mixed and molded today, air-dried tonight, ready for icing tomorrow. 2 days, approx. 50 minute sessions for 1-2 skulls per student.

**Large Skulls:** Generally, take 3 days, unless creatively choreographed with after school helpers.

**Day 1:** Mix the sugar and mold the skulls early in the morning. Late in the day, if the skulls have hardened a little, scoop them out. Save the scoopings to mold smaller skulls. If you get a late start, the skulls may be scooped out early the next morning. If it is warm or very dry, cover with plastic wrap so skulls dry out slower. Let the skull halves dry, upside down, overnight.

12-14 hours is usually OK between molding and scooping.

**Day Two:** Large skulls are ready to be assembled. You need some white icing today for assembly. Let skulls dry until late in the day, or preferably, tomorrow. Have a small group mold medium and mini skulls from the saved "scoopings" from yesterday.

**Day Three:** Today, the large skulls and the smaller skulls made from scoopings will be well dried, and ready for Icing. This is the real fun day ... Make it a Friday... and hose the kids down with a hose before they go home!

**Tip:** Let the skulls dry at least 1 day in the classroom before the student tries to take it home. Skulls will be very hard and set up in about 24 hours. If kept dry, skulls will look good for up to 2 years! – From mexicansugarskulls.com

**Try This in Your Classroom!**

As there are many ways for decorating the skulls, so to are there different recipes. Some recipes call for granulated sugar, while others suggest powered sugar. Most important, though, is the meringue powder. If you cannot find meringue powder in a local store, there are many places online that sell large bags specifically for making sugar skulls. Meringue powder allows the sugar to harden.

**Supplies Needed:**
1 set of plastic skull molds
Mixing bowl and spoon
2 cups of granulated sugar
2 teaspoons of meringue powder
2 teaspoons of water
1 piece of cardboard, approximately 5" x 5"

Mix the dry ingredients together in the bowl. Sprinkle the water in and continue to mix until the sugar is completely moistened and becomes the consistency of moist sand. Scoop some of the mixture into the mold and pack it evenly and firmly. Place the piece of cardboard on top of the mold and quickly flip it over so the sugar skull pops out. Very carefully slide it onto a flat surface.

Continue making the rest of the skulls. Let them dry for 24 hours in a dry place.

**Royal Icing:**
2/3 cup of water
1/2 cup meringue powder
2 pounds of powdered sugar
Electric mixer
Concentrated food coloring (the kind professional cake bakers use)
1 pastry or Ziploc bag
Plastic cups
Spoon

Blend the ingredients with an electric mixer until the peaks form in the icing. If using assorted colors, scoop the white icing into separate bowls and add a dab of different colored food coloring in each one. Mix again. Scoop the icing into the pastry or Ziploc bag (snip the corner for the latter). Continue until you have several bags of different colors. Keep sealed and refrigerated until use. – Recipe from azcentral.com

**Visual Arts Standards:**
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture
- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
- Use knowledge of structures and functions
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

**Louisiana Content Standards:**
- CL-1-B3 participating in age-appropriate cultural activities, such as music, rhythm, dance, games and/or celebrations.
- CL-1-E2 Describing and evaluating commonly held generalizations about the target cultures.
- CL-1-B4 identifying social and geographic factors that impact cultural practices
- CL-1-E4 identifying and explaining significant factors (geographic, historical, economic, political) that impact cultural practices.
Papal Picados
Dia de los Muertos

Papal Picados (Spanish for "perforated paper") can be a great way to decorate your class, while having students learn about a very important aesthetic in Mexican culture. This lesson can be conducted in a Spanish, social studies or an art class, is particularly well suited as part of an interdisciplinary project.

Introduction and Discussion
Display sample papel picados. Introduce the following information about papel picados to your students. Compare and contrast paper cutting techniques found in other cultures such as the German scherenschnitte, Polish wycinanki, Chinese hua yang, Japanese kirigami, and French silhouettes.

Papel Picado Background Information
These colorful banners can be found hanging about the streets during any Mexican fiesta or celebration. Usually made of tissue paper, the cut banners are hung together like a string of flags. For the Dia de Muertos, the designs feature skeletons, skulls, crosses, and tombstones. Because of their fragility and the time spent creating them, cut-paper banners are themselves symbols of the transitory quality of life.

The tradition of papel picado can be traced to pre-Columbian times when papermaking thrived throughout Mesoamerica. The bark of the amate tree, a type of fig tree, was used to make a rich colored brown or beige paper. Cut-paper figures used in ceremonies were created to represent any number of human and animal spirits.

As Dia de los Muertos celebrates life and death, papel picados also represent this birth and rebirth. These paper banners are not meant to be preserved, but should also die at the end of each fiesta.

Try This in Your Classroom!

- Introduce or review the concepts of positive and negative space, repetition, and pattern, if needed.
- Check for your students understanding of the concepts.
- Demonstrate for your students how to cut a paper design with repetitive designs from one piece of tissue paper.
- Choose a colored tissue and place it on the table horizontally.
- Fold it accordion style from the bottom up making about 3-4 folds. Leave one inch at the top of the tissue paper to attach a string.
- Using scissors cut a series of repeating shapes from the folded edges of the tissue.
- Unfold the tissue paper to reveal the pattern. Flatten the tissue paper on the table.
- To prepare for hanging, lay the end of a long piece of yarn or string horizontally across the top of the paper where you had previously reserved one inch of paper.
- Fold the edge of the paper over the string to create a 1/2 inch flap. Glue the edge of the flap down with the string under the fold. Very little glue is needed

Materials Needed:

colored sheets of tissue paper 11” x 14” size; scissors; string or yarn; glue
Visual Arts Standards:
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture
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- Use knowledge of structures and functions
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

Louisiana State Content Standards:
- CL-1-B3 participating in age-appropriate cultural activities, such as music, rhythm, dance, games and/or celebrations.
- CL-1-E2 Describing and evaluating commonly held generalizations about the target cultures.
- CL-1-B4 identifying social and geographic factors that impact cultural practices
- CL-1-E4 identifying and explaining significant factors (geographic, historical, economic, political) that impact cultural practices.
Marigold Making
*Cempasúchil*

Marigolds are essential for making an ofrenda (altar) for deceased loved ones. They are placed on the altars, along with pan de muertos (bread of the dead), velas (candles), and photos of friends and family who have passed on. Marigolds are originally from Mexico and grow in warm, semi-warm, dry and cool climates. This ancient plant species is widely used for medicinal purposes throughout Mexico.

**Supplies:**
- 1 package of multicolored tissue or crepe paper
- 1 package of green pipe cleaners
- Scissors

**Directions:**
Take four to five sheets of the tissue paper and layer them (if you want multicolored flowers, use different colors. To be true to the marigold tradition, use only gold tissue paper). Cut into 8-inch squares. Keeping the sheets layered, take one set of squares and fold it like an accordion so it looks like a thin rectangle. At the center of the rectangle, cut a small v-shaped notch on both sides. Take the end of a pipe cleaner and twist it around the notch. With the stem pointing straight down, gently pull up one layer of tissue into the center. Pull up the remaining layers, one by one. Repeat for the other side of the flower. Once all the layers are pulled up, fluff them in place to look natural. Continue making more flowers with the remaining stacks of squares.

**Tips and variations:**
For sturdier stems, wrap two pipe cleaners together. Cut smaller or larger squares to change the size of your flowers. Add more layers for thicker flowers or less layers for thinner ones. For a shiny effect, dip the top edges in white glue and then dip in loose glitter. Glue a pin on the back of a flower for a fluffy lapel decoration. Make smaller flowers and string them together as garland.

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Foreigners have more trouble understanding *Los Dias de Los Muertos* than any of Mexico's other fiestas. At first glance, Day of the Dead decorations, colored paper garlands, little skeletons performing daily tasks and sugar skulls inscribed with names remind visitors of Halloween. Other tourists discover that much like Memorial or Remembrance Day back north, families here visit, clean and decorate graves of loved ones for the November 1 and 2 holidays. Many families honor their ancestors and dead with home altars, laden with harvest fruits, traditional bread with crossed bones on dough on top, all to greet the spirits as they return to the home for 24 hours each year.

**BLENDING ANCIENT CULTURES WITH THE CHURCH**

This holiday is a perfect example of the complex heritage of the Mexican people. The beliefs of today's Mexican are based on the complicated blended cultures of his ancestors, the Aztec and Maya and Spanish invaders, layered with Catholicism. The origins of the Days of the Dead reach into the ancient history of Europe and Mexico. In the eighth century, the church decreed November 1 as All Saints Day. Setting aside the day to honor the martyrs and saints was an attempt to replace the 2000-year tradition of the Celts and their Druid priests who combined harvest festivals and celebrated the new year on November 1.

The Celtic dead were believed to have access to earth on Samhain, October 31st, when the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead relaxed. The Celts danced around huge bonfires, wearing animal heads and hides to confuse the spirits and burned crops and animals as offerings to the returning dead.

Around the end of the first millennium, the church reinforced its attempt to cover the Celtic celebration by designating November 2 as All Souls' Day to honor the dead. All Souls' Day was celebrated with parades, big bonfires and the people dressed as saints, angels and devils.

In the language of the day, All Saints Day and All Souls' Day were known as All-hallowsmas, and October 31 was "All Hallowed's Eve" or Hallowe'en.

When the Spaniards arrived in Mexico they encountered two-month celebrations honoring death, the fall harvest and the new year. For more than 500 years, the goddess Mictecacihuatl (Lady of the Dead) presided over Aztec harvest rituals using fires and incense, costumes of animal skins, images of their dead and offerings of ceramics, personal goods, flowers and foods, drink and flowers.
While the church attempted to transform the joyous celebration to a suitably tragic image of death and a serious day of prayer focusing attention and reflection on the saints and martyrs. The people of Mexico did not fully adopt the early priests' ideas, and by keeping their familiar ceremonies, All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day evolved into the celebrations that today honor the dead with color, candles, joy.

THE AZTEC AND MAYAN BELIEFS

The Aztec, Mayan and other indigenous traditions have enriched the Mexican's attitude about death. From these ancestors has come the knowledge that souls continue to exist after death, resting placidly in Mictlan, the land of the dead, not for judgment or resurrection; but for the day each year when they could return home to visit their loved ones.

Daily life in ancient Mexico was so uncertain and difficult that death was expected at every turn. Death, in fact was revered, believed to be the ultimate experience of life, life's own reward, even welcomed as a better option when people are struggling for survival. The Mexican still views death as a transition of life, a normal stage in the circle of life on earth, a natural progression, not an ending.

Writer Octavio Paz commented about his people's relationship with death saying, The Mexican is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, and celebrates it. It is one of his favorite playthings and his most steadfast love.

THE THREE DEATHS

Los Dias de Los Muertos is a time for remembering friends, family and ancestors. A lovely tradition that resonates with the center of the belief was retold on the website Latino.com by Victor Landa, from San Antonio, TX.

Landa quotes the legend, "In our tradition, people die three deaths. The first death is when our bodies cease to function; when our hearts no longer beat of their own accord, when our gaze no longer has depth or weight, when the space we occupy slowly loses its meaning.

The second death comes when the body is lowered into the ground, returned to mother earth, out of sight.

The third death, the most definitive death, is when there is no one left alive to remember us."

TRADITIONS and CUSTOMS

The act of preparing an altar by placing photographs, flowers, candles, favorite foods and drink of the loved one provides a special time to remember, and to transform grief into acceptance. The living invite the spirits of the family to return home for a few hours of laughter, tears and memories.
An important aspect of the holiday is the closure that it provides for families who have lost a loved one during the previous year. Without embalming, burial must take place within 24 hours of death. During this short period, the body is laid out in the coffin at home, surrounded by candles, flowers, family and friends. While the family and friends gather, and sit in vigil during the night, then return for another week to recite the rosary, there is often little time for acceptance or reality. Preparing for the return of the spirit each fall lets the family remember and honor their dead, and gives them a chance to heal.

Some families prepare the altar of offerings at the family grave site, lighting a candle for each dead one, remembering the names, and placing flowers or coronas (wreaths) at the cemetery. Many stay to visit, eat, drink and pray while they keep a vigil during the night. All night, throughout the cemetery there is a grand family reunion of huge extended families, alive and dead, as one by one, through stories, memories and dreams, the dead return. On this night, those who wait realize the importance of living to be well remembered, working to be well respected and loving to be well missed.

Once the night has passed, and the spirits have returned to their world, the ones remaining known that for another year they have triumphed in the struggle of life and that the only way to celebrate death is to live with courage. They have faced death and have won, saying, "Look here, you old bald skull - you fleshless one - you didn't get me - I have survived to live again today."

**PREPARING THE ALTAR**

Even families with very limited budgets spare no expense when preparing the altar to honor their family. They want their spirits to enjoy the offerings and to return each year to continue this special spiritual companionship.

The altar is prepared in a place of honor in the home, using empty boxes on a table to form a pyramid of three or more levels, then a white tablecloth covers it all. Four candles are placed on the top level to represent the cardinal directions. A candle is lit for each dead family member, and one extra so that no one is left out. The candles, which represent hope and faith, burn during the night, so that there is no darkness.

Copal is the resinous sap of a Mexican tree, burned as incense since the time of the Aztecs as an offering to the gods. On the Day of the Dead altar, the scent attracts spirits, drawing them home. It is also used to cleanse the area, and to ward off evil.
While most altars are laden with the favorite foods, sweets, drinks, and harvest fruits of each family spirit, even the most basic altar includes these basic needs:

- **WATER** to quench the thirst and for purification
- **SALT** to season the food and for purification
- **BREAD** to represent the food needed for survival

A washbasin, soap, towel, mirror and comb are placed nearby so the spirits can clean up when they return.

The hand crafted skeletons, *Calaveras* are funny and friendly rather than frightening or spooky. They represent the beloved dead ones, their occupations and hobbies. As they are placed on the altar, the delightful skeleton figures bring back fond memories and cause the grieving ones to smile. The figures with the smells of favorite foods, help the spirits find the right house.

Three *calaveras*, which represent the trinity, are placed on the second level. Colorful tissue paper, *papel picado*, is cut into intricate designs and strung to flutter over around the altar. This custom comes from the Aztecs who used paper banners in rituals. The colors used represent:

- **Black** for the Prehispanic religions and land of the dead
- **Purple** from the Catholic calendar to signify pain, suffering, grief, mourning
- **Pink** for celebration
- **White** for purity and hope
- **Yellow** and **Orange** for the marigold, the sun, light
- **Red** representing for Christians, the blood of Jesus; and for the indigenous, the life blood of humans and animals

Flowers, symbolizing the brevity of life, are massed and fashioned into garlands, wreaths and crosses to decorate the altar and the grave. The marigold is the most traditional flower of the season. In Aztec times it was called the *cempasuchil*, the flower of 400 lives.

The fragrance of the *cempasuchil* leads the spirits home. Sometimes paths of the petals lead out of the cemetery and to the house to guide the spirits. A cross of marigold petals is formed on the floor so that as the spirit approaches the altar, he will step on the cross and expel his guilt.

Personal items of the spirits remembered, the child's toys, household saints, photos of those honored are added to the altar, along with the tools and utensils used each day, serapes, guitars or drums, gourds for carrying water and cigars or cigarettes.
The Mexican flatters and woos death, he sings to her, dances with her, lifts his glass to her, he laughs at her. Finally, he challenges her, and in the challenging, death loses her power to intimidate him. Once he knows death intimately, death is no longer wrapped in a cloak of mystery or causes him to fear the darkness.

Once the fear of death has been defeated, the clutch she has on the hearts and minds of the living is lessened once and for all. Death's morbid side is buried under music and remembrances, while skeletons laugh and dance and sing as Mexico celebrates life in its embrace of death.

Reprinted from

By Judy King
1999
The Day of the Dead
-- Mexico honors those gone but not forgotten
By Dale Hoyt Palfrey

Her face is unforgettable and she goes by many names: La Catrina, la Flaca, la Huesuda, la Pelona--Fancy Lady, Skinny, Bony, Baldy. A fixture in Mexican society, she's not some trendy fashion model, but La Muerte--Death.

Renowned writer Octavio Paz observes that, undaunted by death, the Mexican has no qualms about getting up close and personal with death, noting that he "...chases after it, mocks it, courts it, hugs it, sleeps with it; it is his favorite plaything and his most lasting love."

November 1, All Saints Day, and November 2, All Souls Day are marked throughout Mexico by a plethora of intriguing customs that vary widely according to the ethnic roots of each region. Common to all, however, are colorful adornments and lively reunions at family burial plots, the preparation of special foods, offerings laid out for the departed on commemorative altars and religious rites that are likely to include noisy fireworks. In most localities November 1 is set aside for remembrance of deceased infants and children, often referred to as angelitos (little angels). Those who have died as adults are honored November 2.

From mid-October through the first week of November, markets and shops all over Mexico are replete with the special accouterments for the Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead). These include all manner of skeletons and other macabre toys; intricate tissue paper cut-outs called papel picado; elaborate wreaths and crosses decorated with paper or silk flowers; candles and votive lights; and fresh seasonal flowers, particularly cempazuchiles (marigolds) and barro de obispo (cockscomb). Among the edible goodies offered are skulls, coffins and the like made from sugar, chocolate or amaranth seeds and special baked goods, notably sugary sweet rolls called pan de muerto that come in various sizes invariably topped with bits of dough shaped like bones and, in some regions, unadorned dark breads molded into humanoid figures called animas (souls). All of these goods are destined for the buyer's ofrenda de muertos (offering to the dead).

At home members of the family might use the purchases to elaborate an altar in honor of deceased relatives, decorating it with papel picado, candles, flowers, photographs of the departed, candy skulls inscribed with the name of the deceased, and a selection of his or her favorite foods and beverages. The latter often include bottles of beer or tequila, cups of atole (corn gruel) or coffee, and fresh water, as well as platters of rice, beans, chicken or meat in mole sauce, candied pumpkin or sweet potatoes and the aforementioned breads.

The spirits of the dead are expected to pay a holiday visit home and should be provided with an enticing repast and adequate sustenance for the journey. Frequently a wash basin and clean hand towel are provided so that visiting souls can freshen up before the feast. The offering may also include a pack of cigarettes for the after-dinner enjoyment of former smokers, or a selection of toys and extra sweets for deceased children. In setting up the altar, a designated area of the home is cleared of its normal furnishings. The arrangement often consists of a table and several overturned wooden crates placed
in tiers and covered with clean linens. The offerings are then laid out in an artistic and fairly symmetrical fashion. The smell of burning copal (incense) and the light of numerous candles are intended to help the departed find their way.

Meanwhile, at the family burial plot in the local cemetery, relatives spruce up each gravesite. In rural villages this may entail cutting down weeds that have sprouted up during the rainy season, as well as giving tombs a fresh coat of paint after making any needed structural repairs. The graves are then decorated according to local custom. The tomb may be simply adorned by a cross formed of marigold petals or elaborately embellished with colorful coronas (wreaths) and fresh or artificial floral arrangements. In many areas children's graves are festooned with brightly colored paper streamers or other festive adornments.

On November 2 family members gather at the cemetery for gravesite reunions more festive than somber. Some bring along picnic baskets, bottles of tequila for toasting the departed or even a mariachi band to lead a heartfelt sing-along. Local merchants set up provisional stands outside the cemetery gates to sell food and drinks. The booming reports of pyrotechnic rockets may announce the commencement of an open-air memorial mass, the occasion’s most solemn interlude.

While death is a topic largely avoided in the USA, the remembrance of deceased ancestors and loved ones is traditional among diverse cultures around the globe, often marked by lighting candles or lamps and laying out offerings of food and drink. Such celebrations can be traced back as far as the glory days of ancient Egypt when departed souls were honored during the great festival of Osiris.

In Mexico the Day of the Dead is a holiday that tends to be a subject of fascination for visitors from abroad. With its rare mix of pre-Hispanic and Roman Catholic rituals, it is also a perfect illustration of the synthesis of pre-Hispanic and Spanish cultures that has come to define the country and its people.

Death held a significant place in the pantheons and rituals of Mexico's ancient civilizations. Among the Aztecs, for example, it was considered a blessing to die in childbirth, battle or human sacrifice, for these assured the victim a desirable destination in the afterlife. The success of the Spaniard's spiritual conquest in Mexico is due in part to their willingness to incorporate certain pre-Hispanic customs into Christian practices.

Not surprisingly, as Mexican society has modernized, long-held customs have begun to fall by the wayside, particularly among urbanites. But the rapid encroachment of U.S. culture, intensified since the enactment of North American Free Trade Agreement, seems to have spurred many citizens to actively pursue the preservation of Mexican traditions. While each October the country's supermarket shelves are now crammed with plastic pumpkins, witches' hats and rubber masks, government and private institutions have recently increased promotion of commemorative altars displayed in museums, educational centers and other public venues.

Most Mexico guidebooks make special mention of Day of the Dead customs, focusing on the celebrated all-night candlelight vigils in cemeteries at Janitzio Island and Mixquic, to the extent that either may draw nearly as many awed observers as celebrants. Mixquic, once a farming island of the Aztec empire, is now a district of Mexico City that has retained something of a rural village ambiance and its ancient indigenous roots. The
area takes on a busy and festive air in the final days of October as merchants set up street stands to hawk their wares for the Day of the Dead. In the cemetery, all family burial plots are elaborately embellished with an array of earthly delights in the hope of luring departed spirits. At 2 p.m. November 1, relatives gather at each tomb to mourn the loss of loved ones with la llorada—the weeping. Later, when dark would normally envelop the graveyard, the glow of thousands of votive candles illuminates the way for the departed. At Midnight they are called home with the mournful tolling of bells. Then each soul is lovingly remembered with recitations of the Rosary.

Day of the Dead festivities in villages throughout the state of Michoacan have a distinctive flavor reflecting the culture of the area's Purepecha Indians. Having successfully resisted conquest in the pre-Hispanic era, this ethnic group remained immune to outside influences until the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors. As in other parts of Mexico, floral tributes, regional repast and candlelight vigils in each local cemetery are integral to the November 1 and 2 celebrations, but among the Purepechas (or Tarascans, as the Spanish named them) these activities are relegated to women and children. Meanwhile, the male population commemorates the season with other rituals related to the fall harvest. Throngs of visitors annually trek to the Island of Janitzio to witness the graveyard vigil there, although equally colorful celebrations may be observed more serenely in most other Michoacan villages.

These Day of the Dead rituals are echoed in cities and villages throughout Mexico. As each locality offers distinctive traditions and a unique flavor bound to fascinate the curious traveler, a visit to any Mexican cemetery would be a worthwhile addition to the itinerary of anyone touring the country this time of year.


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Activity Suggestions from the North Texas Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts


All Students

Traditional ofrendas may include favorite foods, candles, flowers, incense, photographs, and shoes to help the spirits return to Heaven more comfortably. Musical instruments might be placed on the ofrenda of someone who was a musician in life.

As a class or group project, create an ofrenda to honor a special person who is no longer living. Ofrendas can be made to honor a specific artist, perhaps in the style of that artist. Students could research the artist’s life to choose works of art and other appropriate items to include in the ofrenda for the artist.

If possible, borrow a life-sized skeleton model from the science department and have students use it as a model, drawing it with white crayon or pencils on black paper. Emphasize scientific study of the skeleton and accurate proportions when drawing skeleton figures.

Use colored tissue or fadeless paper to make papel picado banners of original design. String the banners together and hang them in the classroom. Papel picado cut from newsprint paper can also be used as stencils for screen prints.

Elementary Students

Use strips of white construction paper to make three-dimensional skeleton figures to hang as mobiles. With assorted colors of construction paper, add details to represent specific characters such as cowboys and cowgirls, artists, bicycle riders, football players, skateboarders, or any other figures that can be identified by clothing, hair, and accessories.

Secondary Students

Investigate the work of Jose Guadalupe Posada and create cartoons with social or political content. Skeletons can be used as a basis for figures, but encourage students to show interaction between figures, dress them in contemporary clothing, and make social comments on human behavior.
RESOURCES

<stonecenter.tulane.edu/html/LARCslides.htm>

The Stone Center’s own Day of the Dead slide show. Available for free download at the above address. The presentation is saved as a PowerPoint Slide Show and includes the slide description.

www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/teachers/

From azcentral.com, comes a 31 page downloadable Day of the Dead packet that includes papel picado lessons, mask, word searches and much more. Though the packet is designed for use in the elementary classroom, you will find many useful items on this site.

<discover.npr.org/features/feature.jhtml?wfId=1066094>

David Brower of member station KRWG reports from Las Cruces, New Mexico, where residents are marking All Souls Day, Dia de los Muertos, by honoring some of the people who have shaped the history of the city, which is celebrating its 150th birthday this year. They’re expanding on an annual festival, The Day of the Dead, on which Mexican-American families remember family members who have died. – FROM NPR’s Morning Edition. Nov. 2, 1999.

<discover.npr.org/features/feature.jhtml?wfId=1006616>

For many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, November 1st marks El Dia de los Muertos (el DEE-ah day los MWAIR-tos), or the Day of the Dead. Traditionally it’s a time of celebration, and rememberance of dead loved ones. Day of the Dead traditions include altars - or "altares" (ahl-TAH-rays) - made to honor the dead, picnics and parties held in cemeteries, and candy skeletons for children. Daniel speaks to Vida Mia (VEE-da MEE-a) García, and her mother Angela Garcia from the Esperanza Cultural Center in San Antonio, where they are building an altar for their late father and husband, Tony. – FROM NPR’s All Things Considered. Nov. 1, 1998

WEBSITES

www.mexicansugarskulls.com

This site is a wonderful resource if you need to purchase materials for your altar or looking to decorate your room with authentic details. It also has plenty of materials for teachers and the family if you are interested in doing crafts related to día de los muertos.

www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/scmfaq.html

This site was developed and is maintained by a professor of Agronomy at Iowa State University. With obvious and easy navigation, It is well suited for use in the classroom. Included in his site are many statistical facts and cultural resources about the author’s homeland, Mexico.
www.dayofthedead.com/

This site appears to be devoted not to the deceased, but to the living. The site was developed to an advertising piece for the authors Day of the Dead manuscripts. Some of the books appear to be useful in the K12 classroom.

www.members.aol.com/jporvin/cs_muer.htm

Showcasing three years of Día de los Muertos activities in the elementary classroom, Casa de Joanna is an excellent resource for sample lesson plans.

www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/americartes/visual/lessons/dayofthedead.html

Great lesson plan that incorporates the Day of the Dead video available in LARC Lending Library. Good links too!
Día de los Muertos
TEACHER PACKET
Welcome Teachers and Parents

azcentral.com is proud to offer this education packet as part of our Dia de los Muertos site. Adults and children alike often get their first exposure to this important celebration through the colorful art, food and folk traditions of the holiday and its close association with the more common Halloween celebration.

Our goal is to educate and inform those seeking information on this celebration through articles, original art, and interactive projects like the ones that you will find in this packet. We hope that you use this information as well the pages found on the web site to enrich young minds as well as your own.

Inside This Packet
• Word search game
• Mix and match puzzle
• 4 coloring pages
• Papel picado lesson plan, including an easy to use template for younger children.
• Calavera mask project
• Skeleton puppet project
• Bibliography
Word Search

Find these words in the grid above. Keep in mind that the words may be hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally or backwards.

1. ofrenda
2. papel picado
3. piñata
4. altar
5. day of the dead
6. calaca
7. zarape
8. copal
9. ceras
10. calavera
11. cascarones
12. candles
13. marigold
14. pan de muerto
15. Oaxaca
16. angelitos
17. mole
18. máscara
19. dulces
20. mariachis
## Mix and Match

Match the following vocabulary words to their definitions.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ofrenda</td>
<td>A. <em>Yellow marigolds that are symbols of death</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pan de Muerto</td>
<td>B. <em>The art of Mexican paper cutting</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cempazuchitl</td>
<td>C. <em>Burning incense left at altars</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Calaca</td>
<td>D. <em>Offerings to honor the dead</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alfeniques</td>
<td>E. <em>Day of the Dead</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cascarones</td>
<td>F. <em>Illustrator whose satirical drawing 'La Catrina' is one of the most recognizable figures of Day of the Dead</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Papel Picado</td>
<td>G. <em>Bread of the dead</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Copal</td>
<td>H. <em>Festive egg shells that are filled with confetti and trimmed in glitter</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Dia de los Muertos</td>
<td>I. <em>Poems and songs written about the festival</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Angelitos</td>
<td>J. <em>Whimsical skeleton figure that represents death</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Calaveras</td>
<td>K. <em>Colorful iced sugar skulls</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Jose Guadalupe Posada</td>
<td>L. <em>Souls of children who have died</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Papel Picado Lesson

This lesson was developed for students in grades 3-12. The complexity of the lesson can be increased to accommodate different age levels.

National Visual Arts Standards Addressed

- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture
- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
- Use knowledge of structures and functions
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

Objectives for Students

- Understand the role of papel picados in the Days of the Dead celebration
- Recognize and identify papel picados
- Describe and analyze the visual qualities of papel picados
- Use positive and negative space to create a cut paper composition
- Use symmetry, repetition, and pattern in a cut paper composition

Materials

- colored sheets of tissue paper 11" x 14" size (one per student)
- scissors
- string or yarn
- glue

Vocabulary

- amate paper
- fierritos
- geometric shape
- negative space
- Otomi
- papel picado
- patron
- pattern
- positive space
- Puebla, Mexico
- repetition
- symmetry
**INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION**

Display sample *papel picados*. Introduce the following information about *papel picados* to your students. Compare and contrast paper cutting techniques found in other cultures if time and resources permit.

**PAPEL PICADO BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Colorful paper banners, called *papel picado* (Spanish for "perforated paper") can be found hanging about the streets during any Mexican fiesta or celebration. Usually made of tissue paper but sometimes of more durable plastic, the cut banners are hung together like a string of flags. For the Days of the Dead, the designs feature skeletons, skulls, crosses, and tombstones. Some artists create intricate designs that take many hours to make. Because of their fragility and the time spent creating them, cut-paper banners are themselves symbols of the transitory quality of life.

The tradition of *papel picado* can be traced to pre-Columbian times when papermaking thrived throughout Mesoamerica. The bark of the *amate* tree, a type of fig tree, was used to make a rich colored brown or beige paper. Cut-paper figures used in ceremonies were created to represent any number of human and animal spirits. Today, a group of indigenous people, the Otomi from the village of San Pabilto, continue to make cut-paper figures from their handmade *amate* paper.

The festive *papel picado* banners created throughout Mexico today are usually made with tissue paper or plastic. Banners are cut with a hammer and sharp chisels called *fierritos*. As many as 50 layers of colored tissue paper can be cut at one time. To guide the cutting, a patron or pattern with a drawn design is placed on top of a stack of tissue paper. Some of the best *papel picado* is made in the small village of San Salvado Huixcolotla in Puebla, Mexico, where artists work to create paper and plastic decorations for the Days of the Dead, Mexican Independence Day (September 16th), and Christmas.

The tradition of making cut paper designs is practiced in many cultures throughout the world. Some of the more famous techniques are the German *scherenschnitte*, Polish *wycinanki*, Chinese *hua yang*, Japanese *kirigami*, and French silhouettes.

**DEMONSTRATION**

Introduce or review the concepts of positive and negative space, repetition, and pattern if needed. Check for your students understanding of the concepts. Demonstrate for your students how to cut a paper design with repetitive designs from one piece of tissue paper. Choose a colored tissue and place it on the table horizontally. Fold it accordion style from the bottom up making about 3-4 folds. Leave one inch at the top of the tissue paper to attach a string. Using a scissors, cut a series of repeating shapes from the folded edges of the tissue. Unfold the tissue paper to reveal the pattern. Flatten the tissue paper on the table. If possible, iron to remove the folds. To prepare for hanging, lay the end of a long piece of yarn or string horizontally across the top of the paper where you had previously
reserved one inch of paper. Fold the edge of the paper over the string to create a 1/2 inch flap. Glue the edge of the flap down with the string under the fold. Very little glue is needed to achieve a strong hold. Glue sticks can be used to avoid using too much glue. Discuss what would happen if you had cut too near to the edge of the tissue.

**IMPORTANT:** If you want each student to contribute a cut paper design to create a banner, cut your string long enough to hold all of their tissue cutouts. Plan to allow one inch between sheets of paper as you add them to the string. Leave several inches at both ends to hang the completed banner in the hallway or across the ceiling of your classroom. Hang the banner high enough to keep curious hands from damaging the finished work.

Check for your students understanding of the concepts. Distribute the materials and allow the remaining class period for making cutouts.

**ASSESSMENT**

To plan the assessment of your students' learning, review the objectives of the lesson. Draw the content for the assessment from the objectives as they reflect the information, process, and skills presented in the lesson. Any number of strategies can be used to involve your students in assessment, including group discussions, verbal or written presentations, and games.

Based on the objectives of the cut-paper design lesson, the following content areas could be addressed in the assessment process:

- Demonstration of understanding of the role of the papel picados in the Days of the Dead celebration
- Recognition and identification of papel picados
- Description and analysis of the visual qualities of papel picados
- Description of the tools, materials, and techniques used to make the papel picados
- Identification of positive and negative space
- Use of symmetry

**MAKING SIMPLE PAPEL PICADO**

Fold a rectangular piece of paper in half. In pencil, sketch one half of a design on one of the folded halves. Rulers may be used to divide the paper into grids or sections. Objects or designs must touch and connect to other areas of the paper as they form the positive shapes on the paper. Negative areas to be cut away may be shaded in pencil to aid in cutting.

Use scissors or a craft knife to carefully cut away negative areas of the design (cut over cardboard if using craft knives). Open slowly, flatten, and glue to a background paper. To create more complex designs, fold the paper more than once. Try using different kinds of paper: butcher paper, fadeless colored paper, origami paper, and colored tissue paper.
*Papel Picado* is the Mexican art of cut paper. Artists use a hammer and chisel to "punch designs out of stacks of layered tissue paper--up to 40 layers thick. Designs can portray people, animals, flowers and lettering. *Papel picado* made especially for the Day of the Dead include skeletal figures engaging in human activities of the living. Individual banners are strung together to create festive and colorful decorations for the celebration.

To make simple *papel picado* for the classroom, fold a rectangular sheet of tissue paper in half. Using a pencil, sketch one half of a design on the folded side of the tissue paper. Use rulers to divide the paper into sections. Designs must touch and connect to the other areas of the paper in order to form the shapes on the paper. Shade in the areas to be cut away.

With scissors or a craft knife, carefully cut away the shaded areas of the design. Open the paper carefully.

For more complex designs, fold the paper several times.

Once several banners are made, measure the yard or string to extend beyond the length of the banners. Fold over the top of the banner over the string and glue or tape. Use the banners to decorate the *ofrenda*.

*Source: CRIZMAC Art and Cultural Education Materials (free resources)*
Instructions: Cut out white areas very carefully.
**Make Your Own Calavera Mask**

**Materials**
- crayons
- paint
- markers
- scissors
- string or yarn
- paper punch
- glue
- glitter, buttons, tissue paper, feathers etc.

**Instructions**

Print out the calavera mask. Cut out the eyes. Color and decorate with glitter, paints, feathers etc. Let dry and punch two holes (one on either side of the skull above the cheek bone). Tie an 8"-12" piece of string or yarn through each hole.

Now you have a mask you can tie around your face, just above your ears.
Make A Skeleton Puppet

Materials
Crayons, paint, markers, scissors, string or yarn, paper punch, glue, glitter, buttons, tissue paper, feathers etc.

Instructions
Print out the skeleton parts. Punch holes in the bones next to letters (each leg and arm bone with have a hole at either end, etc.). Cut out all of the parts. Color and decorate with glitter, paints, feathers etc. as you like. Let dry and tie bones together matching the letters (string will go through both B holes and both C holes, for example). Once the skeleton is assembled, you can move him about as you like.
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