Ancient Ofrenda

Elements of an Altar
9th Annual Dia de los Muertos Festival Exhibit

Education Packet

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Arizona State University Museum of Anthropology
GUIDED GROUP VISIT INFORMATION

1. If you would like to schedule a visit to ASUMA, please contact Catherine Nichols at anthro.museum@asu.edu

2. Please arrive at least 10 minutes prior to your scheduled time.

3. The museum can accommodate up to 30 students, but 10-15 students are ideal. Please include the number of students that plan on attending so arrangements can be made to have sufficient staff for your visitation.

4. One chaperone must be present at all times for each group of 20 children. Two chaperones are preferred.

5. Please schedule your visit one week prior to the date you want to visit the museum.

6. Discuss museum behavior before your scheduled visit. Students should have an understanding of museum etiquette.

7. The museum is ALWAYS free; there are no fees for students, teachers, or volunteers. Museum hours are Monday through Friday, 11 AM to 3 PM. Other times can be arranged by appointment.

Please share this material with other educators. This packet is available for download at http://asuma.asu.edu/Education/EducationalMaterials
Día de los Muertos
an introduction...

Smelling pan de muerto (bread of the dead) bake in the oven, picking out sugar skulls from the local street vendors, and hearing fireworks go off in the town streets are all part of what occurs during the hustle and bustle in preparing for the celebration of the Day of the Dead in contemporary Mexico. For centuries the tradition of Day of the Dead has held on to its original beliefs in keeping the memory of former loved ones alive as well as commemorating their annual return. During the celebration of Día de los Muertos, death is not seen to be woeful or depressing, but rather accepted as something that exists in the ever-apparent duality of life. It is a shift from one world to another and when the spirits transcend the borders on the days of November 1st and 2nd, a celebration occurs in honor of loved ones returning home for a few hours to reunite with their families.

The celebration of Day of the Dead is thought to have been around for centuries possibly originating with such native Mexican cultures such as the Aztecs, Maya, and Olmec. It is reported that during the 9th and 10th months of the year, ceremonies referred to as ‘Feast of the Little Dead Ones’ and ‘Feast of the Adult Dead’ were conducted as an offering to the dead (Carmichael 28). ‘The Sweeping of the Way’, a dance followed by cleaning streets and homes of the village is a practice that resembles what is seen today when cleaning the cemeteries and homes of current towns (Carmichael 32). Although there is striking evidence of similar symbology and customs between today and ancient times, one cannot say with any certainty that this celebration is a direct continuation of early Mesoamerican culture. Over time, culture-to-culture contact has allowed an assortment of iconography and traditions to evolve along with the origins of Day of the Dead. With the introduction of Catholicism from the Europeans, many of the original Mesoamerican practices were forbidden based on the idea that the natives were practicing pagan rituals. However, such traditions such as the offering of food, incense, paper ornaments, dancing and music are all elements that have survived and continue to be conducted during the holiday today (Carmichael 31).

Although there are many variations in the celebration of Day of the Dead from region to region or even town to town, building altars and visiting the graves of the deceased seem to be a standard for the holiday. By constructing an altar, one is honoring and welcoming the deceased to take part in the festivities put on by family and friends. Memorabilia such as pictures of the deceased, their favorite foods, toys, and objects that symbolize something unique about that person are also displayed on an altar. Many altars have an arch representing the universe, marigold flowers otherwise known as cempasuchitl flowers often make up these archways. At times, petals from the cempasuchitl flowers are made into paths to
help the souls find their way not only from cemetery to home, but also from home back to cemetery (Carmichael 18). Although it is understood that the deceased may not be physically present, it is sensed that their soul is near (Carmichael 21).

This year the ASU Museum of Anthropology would like to include everyone in viewing the altar built by a community of nationwide artists and ASU students. The goal for this year’s exhibition will be to experience the space of one traditional altar emphasizing on the four elements: Earth, Wind, Fire, and Water. With history that traces as far back as the Ancient Aztecs, Maya, and Olmec cultures, Dia de los Muertos may be recognized as a Mexican celebration that has remained aligned with its indigenous roots. In this exhibit it is our goal for artists and viewers to find inspiration from the imagery and folklore of pre-Columbian culture and transform the four elements into a contemporary expression of this significant cultural festival.
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Origin

For centuries, it has been understood that the people of Mexico have cherished their ancestors with strong memory and unique ceremonies. Although the deceased loved ones were not physically present, people understood their souls to be close, especially during certain times of the year.

Today November 1st and November 2nd are the days devoted to Day of the Dead, however prior to European conquest the celebrations lasted over two months. One activity the ancient people practiced was hanging gifts in a tree. People would then climb the tree to the highest point possible to retrieve a gift. It was believed that the person who went the highest was the closest to the Gods and ancestors of their people (Andrade 43). Sweeping and cleaning of streets, homes, and grave sites were also important practices carried out then as well as today (Carmichael 32).

Although there are many similarities and differences that have occurred in the celebration over time, most believe the traditions seen today originated from the culture of pre-Columbian peoples. Their practice of an agrarian lifestyle so long ago may have been the inspiration for their view of death and the cycle of life. The harvesting of crops signified the life and death of the Earth and the elements that reside in it (Andrade 43). The exhibit and education packet will present various ways these elements are depicted through culinary practices, activities, and art used to celebrate the Day of the Dead today.

Aztec Poem

We come but to sleep,
we come but to dream:
It is not true, it is not true,
that we come to live upon the earth.
Like the grass each spring
our hearts grow green,
put forth their shoots.
Our body is a flower: it blossoms
and then it withers (Ayocuan 15)
Though the holiday varies from region to region, there are many important elements that every Dia de los Muertos altar must have. Building ofrendas is one of the most significant aspects of the holiday that represent the four natural elements Earth, Fire, Wind, Water.

Earth may be seen in view of the harvest foods used to prepare the favorite dishes of the diseased and a candle symbolizing fire may be lit to represent a person’s soul. (Andrade 78).
One of the most popular decorations found on an altar or in other areas of a community is papel picado. The vibrant adornment is made of tissue paper and exemplifies the element of wind as it sways in the breeze (Andrade 78).

Containers of water may be found at an altar so that the soul may be able to quench their thirst after a long journey (Andrade 79).
All Saints Day, November 1st and All Souls Day, November 2nd is a time when the deceased come home to be with their family and take part in the festivities that recognize the duality of life and death. Ofrendas or altars are built to honor the departed family members by placing marigold flowers, pictures, skeletons, candles and memorabilia on an altar to respect the individual and to celebrate their return.

Making an Altar
An altar-maker can also create a box in remembrance of someone famous such as Elvis Presley or Mr. Rogers. Remember that the Day of the Dead is a Celebration! Every altar is colorful and playful; the altars are a way of showing off the life and personalities of those who have passed.

Materials:
- A box or container
- Flowers
- Candles
- Candy
- Paint
- Sugar skulls
- Any decorations
- A picture of the person or of an event
- That person’s favorite things
Directions:

1. Paint the box in any way you want. Use bright colors.
2. Decorate the box with glitter and flowers.
3. When everything is dry add the sugar skulls, skeletons, and candy.
4. Personalize your altar with your loved one’s picture and favorite things.
5. Put your altar in a place where it can be seen and celebrated.

Student Altar Project

This project asks each student to build his or her own altars or ofrenda for someone they wish to honor. This may include someone you look up to, a loved one, or a pet who has passed on.

A few materials that may be used to make an altar are a shoebox and traditional objects that may be found at an altar for Día de los Muertos. The student may also want to include at least 3 items that he or she would put in an altar to honor their loved ones.

Have each person present his or her ofrenda to the class. This assignment should give students to experiment with different materials and also allows them the opportunity to put their own personal thoughts and feelings into constructing these altars.
Dia de los Muertos Glossary

*Source: www.azcentral.com

Alfenique- a special confection used to fashion skulls, fruits and other figures.

Altar de muertos- the offering that family and/or friends prepare for their dead loved ones

Angelitos/ angelitas- the souls of the children who have died, literally “little angels”

Arco- decorated arch sometimes placed on the graves or on the altar de muertos

Atole- an ancient drink made from corn meal and water flavored with various fruits

Calacas- whimsical skeleton figures that represent death; slang for skull or death

Calavera- a skull, also a slang term for “daredevil”

Calaveras- songs and poems about the festival

Calaveritas de azucar- sugar skulls made for the Dia de los Muertos

Careta- mask worn by dancers to scare the dead away at the end of the celebrations

Catrina- famed Dia de los Muertos artist Jose Guadalupe Posada’s icon of death. Catrina means: a wealthy woman, it is said in a sarcastic manner

Cementerio- cemetery

Cempazuchitl- a yellow marigold, the symbol of death, also known as Cempasuchil or zempasuchitl

Copalli- a scented resin used to make incense

Dia de los Muertos- Day of the Dead

Golletes- a doughnut shaped bread, glazed with pink colored sugar that is placed on the altar

Iluminacion- the ceremony that takes place in the cemetery, where hundreds of candles are lighted to guide the souls to their altars

Mole- a thick sauce made from a variety of ingredients including chilis, sesame seeds, herbs, spices, and chocolate/fruits
Ofrenda- an offering, refers to the goods set out on the altars

Pan de los muertos- bread of the dead

Papel picado- colorful tissue paper with intricate, festive designs cut out

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**Word Search**

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

- ofrenda
- papel picado
- piñata
- altar
- day of the dead
- calaca
- zarape
- copal
- ceras
- calavera
- cascarrones
- candles
- marigold
- pan de muerto
- Oaxaca
- angelitos
- mole
- mascara
- dulces
- mariachis

Source: www.grupofantasia.com/search.htm
Papel Picado

Papel picado is a form of "folk art," meaning that it is a popular traditional art form handed down from generation to generation. In Mexico template patterns cut the designs into stacks of colored tissue paper producing many paper cuts-outs at once from a single pattern. Papel picado is very similar to making paper snowflakes except a stencil is used.

Materials:

- 8" x 10" sheets of colored tissue paper, stacked and folded in half like a book
- Scissors
- Straight pins
- String
- Glue
- Pattern

Directions:

1. Pin the pattern to the paper taking care to place the center edge of the pattern on the folded edge of the tissues (see samples 1 and 2).
2. First cut into the pattern and tissue around the edges to make the border.
3. Next, cut out large "negative" shapes by first puncturing the center of the areas to be cut out and then following the outlines. The small geometric shapes can be cut out by folding on the dotted lines and then cutting the solid outlines.
4. When completely cut, unfold and separate the tissues. Fold each tissue along the top edge about 1/2". Apply glue to this flap and wrap each tissue around the string, pressing the glue into the string to secure.

This information was obtained from:

http://www.nps.gov/tuma/PapelPicado.html
**Flower of the Dead**

The Marigold flower is seen all throughout the Día de los Muertos celebration. In view of the ancient Aztec poetry, one can see that flowers have played a major role physically and metaphorically in the day-to-day life of individuals of the past and present. For some, the flowers are said to represent the “smell of death”. The flowers are also used to help decorate gravesites, and altars as well as help guide the way for the souls returning home (Salinas-Norman 15).

**Materials:**
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Yellow crepe paper
- Pipe cleaners (any color)
- Florist’s tape

**Instructions:**
1. Starting at one end of an unfolded package of crepe paper, use pencil and ruler to measure off strips 2 ½ inches wide.
2. Fold each strip into four equal parts.
3. Leave paper folded while making cuts ½-inch deep, starting at top edge. Cuts should be ¼ inch apart.
4. Trim each petal to desired shape.
5. Hold straight edge of a strip in one hand while gathering petals with the other hand around a pipe cleaner.
6. Wrap a 6-inch length of florist’s tape around the bottom of the gathered petals to fasten them to the pipe cleaner.
7. Continue to wrap florist’s tape in a downward spiral around the entire length of pipe cleaner.
8. Starting at outside of flower, fluff petals by carefully bending them out-ward from the center.
Skulls and skeletons may be some of the most famous iconography for the celebration of Day of the Dead. The skeletons are often depicted doing humorous day-to-day activities that living people may participate in. Putting on a mask can create a new identity for the person wearing it.

With this activity students will be able to create their own skeleton mask with humorous expressions or symbols that are often seen in Day of the Dead iconography. Each student will color and draw his or her own skull on a plain white paper plate. After all of the drawing and coloring, each student should cut out holes for the eyes and cut the plate to be in the shape of a skull. It may be easier to think of the general shape of a skull with a half circle that meets a half rectangle. Also use a whole punch on either side of the mask to string yarn through in order to tie the mask on.

The second part of this activity is to have each person present their mask and talk about the symbols and expressions they made for their mask.

Materials:

- Plain white paper plate (not plastic coated)
- Markers / colored pens
- Scissors
- Whole punch
- Yarn
Jorongo - A jorongo is a large coat usually made from wool with a hole in the middle for a person’s head. A jorongo may also be recognized for the unique colorful patterns that make up the coat.

Materials:
- Large-sized paper grocery bag (plain)
- Scissors
- Markers or paint and paint brushes
- Hole punch
- Yarn

Instructions:
1. Cut hole about 6 inches in diameter in center of bottom of bag for child’s head.
2. Starting about 1-1/2 inches up from the bottom, cut hole about 4 inches in diameter in each side of bag.
3. Use markers, crayons, or paint to fill in jorongo’s woven pattern.
4. Draw “V” neckline on front and back of bag. Do not cut out.
5. Punch holes around the top of the bag and tie yarn through the holes as fringe.
Danza De Los Viejitos
(Dance of the Old Man)

Entrance:
Dancers hobble onto dance area, single file, holding their backs as if it hurts to walk. Knees are kept together and bent.

Section 1:

Counts

2  Tap right heel on floor
2  Tap right toe on floor
2  Tap left heel on floor
2  Tap left toe on floor
Tap 3  Step right foot across left foot
Tap 3  Step left foot across right foot
Tap 5  Tap cane on floor
Hold 3  Twist head right
Hold 3  Twist head left
Hold 3  Twist trunk right
Hold 3  Twist trunk left
Tap 5  Tap cane on floor
Hold 3  Jump forward, feet together
Hold 3  Jump backward, feet together

Section 2:
Midway through the dance, the “oldsters” suddenly begin to dance and leap with great agility and vigor. For this section, encourage children to show off their best cross-kicks, lunges, can-cans, etc., for about 1 minute. Dancers then repeat section 1 and exit. Tell Children to remember to hobble out, single file, holding backs.

Source: Salinas-Norman
Create a Day of the Dead Scene

Using the clips below, create your own scene by using your fingerprints to make calacas (skeletons), cactus, flowers, etc... You can also draw different expressions on your calacas to go along with the activity they are doing.
Recipe for Pan de Muerto
(Day of the Dead Bread)

Ingredients
- 1 teaspoon dry yeast
- ¼ cup warm water
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 6 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ cup melted butter
- orange-flower water (optional)
- egg wash (1 egg white plus ½ egg yolk)
- powdered or granulated sugar for sprinkling
- ¼ teaspoon aniseed
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg

Preparation
Combine yeast and water and 1/3 cup of flour. Let mixture stand until it doubles in volume.

Place remaining flour in a large bowl and dig a hole in the center. Place eggs, salt, sugar, aniseed, nutmeg, butter, and orange-flower water inside hole. Beat together, then add yeast mixture, combining it with the dough. Knead on a floured board for 15 minutes or until the dough no longer sticks to the surface. Add flour as needed.

Place the dough in a greased bowl. Cover with a cloth and let rise in a warm draft free area for three hours or until the mixture doubles in volume.

Preheat the oven to 450 F. Pinch off one third of the dough and form two-inch balls. Roll each ball into a long rope. Mold pieces of the rope to resemble little bones and set aside.

Shape the remaining dough into a round loaf and lightly brush it with egg wash. Place the loaf on a cookie sheet and arrange dough “bones” in a pattern of the loaf. Brush with the remaining egg wash.

Bake for 10 minutes. Lower the temperature to 350 F and continue baking for 30 minutes. Sprinkle with sugar and serve at room temperature.

Source: Andrade 185
Atole of Galletas Maria  
(Beverage prepared with cookies)

Ingredients:
- 6 cups milk
- ½ pound sugar
- 6 drops almond extract
- 1 package Maria’s cookies (Sold at Mexican markets)
- 1 pinch baking powder

Preparation:
Grind cookies in a blender. Combine all ingredients including cookies in a saucepan, stirring constantly over low heat until mixture thickens. Serve warm.

Source: Andrade 181

Pumpkin in Tacha  
(Baked Pumpkin)

Ingredients:
- 1 small pumpkin
- 3 raw sugar sticks-piloncillos (Sold at Mexican markets)
- 2 teaspoons quicklime-cal (Sold at Mexican markets)
- 1 cinnamon stick

Preparation:
Cut pumpkin into pieces. Dissolve quicklime into 12 cups of water and cover the pumpkin. Let pumpkin and water solution stand in a covered pot overnight. The following day, rinse and drain pumpkin. In a saucepan, add 4 cups of water to raw sugar and cinnamon and cook over medium heat, until mixture thickens and becomes syrup. Pour syrup over the pumpkin. Then place the pumpkin in a baking dish and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for an hour and a half. Cut into smaller pieces and serve.

Source: Andrade 18
The Contemplation of Death

Food, air, essence
aromas of flavors in its great care
warmth, smoke, sigh
fumes of dried fruit filled with roses.

The shawl, the life, the sweet gesture,
the smile in the flight of the angels,
and the encounters spiced to please the palate.

How flavorful death tastes at home
with resignation and good food
waiting for them to come visit us.

Quietly they come, carrying on their shoulders their
wisdom and the mystery,
but they already know where the clean home is
where the family
where the feelings and memories are.

The offering is complete:

The cempasuchitles in a cross and kneeling are the fruits,
the candles, the candle holders, the pictures and the most
beautiful memories,
the kindest gesture, the company of the dead, of our own,
everything ready, the lit copal, the scent of incense,
they have returned, they are coming, they are tired:
they will spend a few days visiting,
a bit of sugar liquor for the sleep,
let’s toast with death
to life. (Julie Sopetran 25)
**Citations**


**Picture Citations**

- [http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/05vG2AF4wkgr9/610x.jpg](http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/05vG2AF4wkgr9/610x.jpg) (Women holding Candle)
- [http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1345/1216255981_f8e5913915.jpg?v=0](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1345/1216255981_f8e5913915.jpg?v=0) (Diego Rivera Origin)
- [http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/01ckdjo7i52Ke/610x.jpg](http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/01ckdjo7i52Ke/610x.jpg) (Earth)
- [http://www.disfrazatemex.com/disfrazes/Infantiles/Indito%20de%20manta%20con%20jorongo%20nav..jpg](http://www.disfrazatemex.com/disfrazes/Infantiles/Indito%20de%20manta%20con%20jorongo%20nav..jpg) (Old Man Dance)
- [http://www.disfrazatemex.com/disfrazes/Infantiles/Indito%20de%20manta%20con%20jorongo%20nav..jpg](http://www.disfrazatemex.com/disfrazes/Infantiles/Indito%20de%20manta%20con%20jorongo%20nav..jpg) (jorongo)
- [www.grupofantasia.com/search.htm](http://www.grupofantasia.com/search.htm) (Word Search)
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