

The text below is information that correlates with the slides on the Day of the Dead General Classroom Presentation. It is here for your convenience, as a general guideline of information you may choose to include in your classroom discussion.

SLIDE 1: INTRODUCTION

On November 1st and 2nd spirits visit their relatives and friends on Earth. A few weeks before the holiday, families prepare to welcome the souls of their relatives and ancestors who return at this time every year.

Day of the Dead is not the same as Halloween. It is a time for remembering loved ones and honoring their memories. It is a time for families and friends to come together to reflect on life and pass on family stories.

For older audiences: Day of the Dead is the result of blending indigenous and Catholic traditions. Many traditions in Latin America resulted from mixing rituals already familiar to indigenous groups with new rituals from Europe. It is a product of religious syncretism.

SLIDE 2: WHAT IS DAY OF THE DEAD?

Day of the Dead celebrates the lives of those we have lost. People who observe Day of the Dead believe that the loved ones who have passed away return to earth for a few days each year. The spirits protect the living throughout the year and so their family welcomes them back with open arms and lots of treats!

Families decorate and clean the tombs and gravesides of their loved ones, placing flower offerings, food, and candles in order to show the spirits how much they love and miss them.

For older audiences: Some families celebrate Day of the Dead at home, in a communal area, like the living room. They cook the spirit's favorite foods and may organize a family dinner in their honor, sharing stories about their loved one.

This ritual gives families the opportunity to pass down stories about their ancestors. Anecdotes and moral lessons are passed down generationally through stories. This is especially important in families where relatives may not be able to read or write. Talking about the spirit allows her/his memory to live on, but also passes on family histories to younger generations.

SLIDE 3: ANCIENT ROOTS

Day of the Dead is an ancient holiday. It was celebrated by indigenous cultures like the *Mexica*, or Aztecs, hundreds and maybe even thousands of years ago! When these civilizations collected their harvest, they set aside flowers and food for their deceased loved ones in order to ask for their protection. They believed that the loved ones returned and co-existed with them at this time and wanted them to feel welcome.

SLIDE 4:

People today still offer their loved ones flowers and food. The *ofrenda* (offering) is often referred to as an altar and it is the most important part of the celebration. It is the place where the family welcomes back the spirit to earth by presenting all of the earthly items it may not be able to find in the afterlife.

Every *ofrenda* is different and unique to the person to whom it is dedicated. They are created with the age of the spirit in mind. For example, *ofrendas* to children include candy while *ofrendas* dedicated to pets will have treats and toys.

What do you see on the *Ofrenda*?

SLIDE 5:

Traditional *ofrendas* include four main elements:

WATER to quench the thirst and for purification.

SALT to season the food and for purification.

BREAD to represent the food needed for survival. The bread created especially for Day of the Dead is called *Pan de Muerto* (Bread for the Dead)

CANDLES to guide the spirits back home.

You will also often find:

Flowers: specifically marigolds known as *Cempazuchitl*

Photos of the spirit

Incense: *Copal* is the traditional incense used. It comes from the sap of a tree and is believed to guide the spirit home when it is burned.

Favorite foods or drinks: *Mole* (Chocolate scented savory stew) and other aromatic dishes are prepared, again to lead the spirit home. Adult spirits are welcomed with liquors and spirits, such as tequila or *mezcal*.

Candy: traditional candies and sugar skulls are placed on the *ofrenda*. Sweet treats are for adult spirits with a sweet tooth and child spirits.

Papel Picado: Often made at home, or purchased from a local artisan, the cut paper adds a colorful accent to *ofrendas* and gravesites. *Papel picado* is a very traditional decoration in Mexico.

Religious symbols: *milagros*, statues, and pictures of saints are often used, as Day of the Dead was adapted into a Catholic religious ritual.

Skulls: The *calavera* is ubiquitous around the holiday. Friends trade sugar skulls with their names on them and local artisans create dioramas and sculptures showing skulls participating in daily activities such as parties, dinners, weddings and dances!

SLIDE 7:

People may dedicate their altars not just to loved ones, but to famous characters or people who they admire. This artist created an altar to Frida Kahlo.

SLIDE 8:

What do you see on this altar?

SLIDE 9:

Today, Day of the dead is celebrated all over California and throughout the United States! People paint their faces like skulls and enjoy watching performances by Aztec dancers, mariachis, and other traditional Mexican performers. Where will you celebrate Day of the Dead?

SLIDE 10:

Prepare to design your own *ofrenda*. Think of a subject to whom the altar will be dedicated (It can be a family member, a deceased friend, historical figure or popular artist). What would you add? What would make that *ofrenda* special?

(Use the Ofrenda exercise and handout included in the packet with your class).