

# GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

## INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE:

Students will explore the specific regions of Mexico through the use of mapmaking. Students will learn about and discuss the differences, similarities, and significance of various regional celebrations of Día de los Muertos. In the process, students will become familiar with basic Mexican geography and the regional and cultural differences in the celebration of Día de los Muertos in Mexico.

## BACKGROUND:

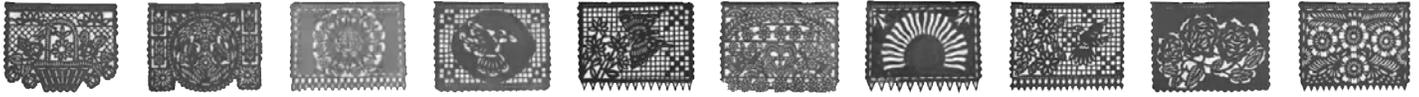
Día de los Muertos celebrations in Mexico vary according to regional and cultural influences. The differences, for instance, may reflect the regional availability of certain flowers and foods during November or the cultural impact of living in metropolitan versus rural areas. Below are some examples of these many variations:

### Mixquic:

- The celebration lasts from Oct. 31st – Nov. 2nd.
- On Oct. 31st it is believed that the souls of deceased children return to visit with family when the church bells toll 12 times. The family prepares a table with white flowers, water, salt and a candle for each child who has passed away. The visiting souls are fed with atole and sweets. The next morning they are given breakfast. When the church bell tolls 12 again, the souls of the children depart (TSF, p. 139-140).
- On November 2nd, everyone gathers in the cemetery, bringing flowers, candles and candlesticks, and wooden crosses.
- In their homes, people create an altar for those who have passed away. Often the altar has a white table cloth, picture of the patron saint of the family, a photo of the deceased, flowers, candles, and some form of a beverage. Foods and other favorite things of the deceased are also set out (TSF, p. 140-142).

### Mexico City:

- In Mexico City, people often build altars representative of the regional style from where they originate.
- Ofrendas can be very traditional or quite unique—there is a great deal of variety. Often food, except for pan de muerto or small fruit, is not a part of the ofrenda at all.
- The skulls and skeletons are very popular in Mexico City, like other urban areas. Rural areas rarely use



these as much.

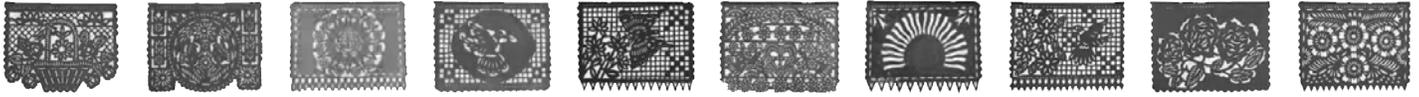
- Museums, public buildings, hotels and shops will often create an ofrenda.

#### **Oaxaca City:**

- Very little Spanish influence, the Spanish versions of All Souls' and All Saints' Day are more bleak and sad, while in Oaxaca, Day of the Dead is a celebration, much like a party (DoD, p. 2).
- Living family members return to the cemetery in mid-October to invite their deceased family members to the celebration (DoD, p. 2).
- The altars are either inside the house or in a protected area outside. They are almost always built by the men of a family and must be constructed against a wall or corner so that it is impossible to step behind it (DoD, p. 65).
- Arches often made of sugarcane, bent and tied together, create the frame for the altar (DoD, p. 67).
- The ofrendas often have cloth, flowers, hanging fruit, candles, pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Christ child, saints and photos of the deceased family (DoD, p. 69-76).
- On November 1st, family members put out hot food, water, and incense (DoD, p. 77-83).

#### **Huaquechula, Puebla:**

- Origins of the styles of offerings unknown, but seem to come from early Spanish colonial traditions (TSF, p. 21).
- Families will sometimes hire a builder to help construct elaborate altars (TSF, p. 21).
- The market held at Huaquechula before Day of the Dead has many of the items used in the ofrendas: pottery—like incense burners, candlesticks, or figurines; sugar figures—especially white lambs with pink decorations; bread; and cempasuchil and other flowers (TSF, p. 67).
- The ofrendas here are built in tiers, unlike those found in any other part of Mexico.
- Many of the houses in Huaquechula have rooms with high ceilings and often the ofrendas will reach to the tops of these rooms (TSF, p. 67).
- The ofrendas are made out of largely white and gold materials: white satin, netting, and paper with gold braid, gold stars and images of angels and cherubs (TSF, p. 68).
- In Puebla, some continue the tradition of setting the dining room table with a place for each dead relative, nearby or on the chairs the family places some of the favorite things of the deceased person (TSF, p. 21).



## RESOURCES:

“TSF”: Carmichael, E. and Sayer, C. (1992). *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

“DOD”: Haley, S., Fukuda, C. (2004). *Day of the Dead: When Two Worlds Meet in Oaxaca*. Oxford, NY: Berghahn Books.

## RECOMMENDED GRADES:

Adaptable for all grade levels.

### Estimated Time:

45-90 minutes.

## VOCABULARY:

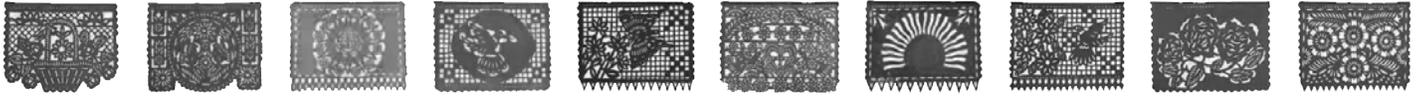
- Altar
- Ofrenda
- Copal
- Mixquic
- Mexico City
- Oaxaca City
- Hauquecula, Puebla

## MATERIALS:

- Computer with internet access
- Projector

## PROCEDURE:

1. Display a map of Mexico with the specified areas above labeled. Point out major components of Mexico—the U.S.-Mexico Border, Mexico City, and major rural and urban areas. Then, present the information about each region to students. To make this portion of the lesson more interactive, you could create a Google map, inserting a ‘pin’ into each highlighted area and then typing the information about each area into the map. See the link listed below for an example of how to do this (the example was created to map settings of various multicultural children’s literature). <https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msid=203533340684638434090.0004b74a15618a5b29230&msa=0&ll=13.049112,13.359375&spn=130.324711,257.695313>



2. To create your own map:
  - Go to Google Maps and click on “My places” at the top left hand side of the screen.
  - Give your map a title.
  - Find the small map at the bottom of the right hand of your screen. Drag the rectangular outline over the area of Mexico. The large map should adjust to show Mexico.
  - Now you can begin adding pins. Find the pin icon on the top left hand side of the large map. Click it and then drag and drop it to a location you would like to highlight.
  - A text box should open up when you drag and drop the pin. Type the Día de los Muertos information specific to that area in the text box and hit save. Students could even copy and paste photos specific to that region’s celebration into the descriptions.
  - If computers are accessible, older students could complete this activity as an individual or small group project.
3. Older Students:
  - Compare and contrast different regional celebrations of Día de los Muertos. Choose two regional celebrations and complete a Venn Diagram that compares and contrasts aspects of these celebrations. Then, use the Venn diagram to write a compare and contrast essay on these two celebrations
4. Students could also research how people in Guatemala and Ecuador observe Día de los Muertos and compare this with what they’ve learned about Mexico. Younger Students: For younger students who may not be able to grasp the significance or discussion of regional differences in Día de los Muertos, they could focus on comparing Día de los Muertos to Halloween to reinforce the idea that Día de los Muertos is NOT the Mexican version of Halloween, as many students believe. If students are familiar with Memorial Day, this could be used as an example of a holiday that has more in common with Día de los Muertos. Students can complete a Venn Diagram comparing the two, then write an essay about the similarities and differences between the two celebrations (for a more in-depth discussion of this activity, see the specific lesson plan on Expository Writing: The Compare and Contrast Essay).

## STANDARDS & BENCHMARKS

### Writing

#### Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.