

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING: A LETTER HOME

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE:

Students will take information acquired about Día de los Muertos and write a descriptive essay in the form of a letter. Imagining they are living in Mexico during Día de los Muertos, students will write a letter to their families describing everything they experience during the celebrations. They will rely on sensory descriptions to paint a picture, so that the reader of the letter feels as though he or she is actually in Mexico.

This activity is best used at the end of a unit on Día de los Muertos, as students will have to apply much of the knowledge they learn through the unit to write the letter. The expectations for the assignment are easily adjusted to meet the needs of your grade level. Students will go through the different steps of the writing process: brainstorming, rough drafting, revising, editing, final copy and publishing.

RECOMMENDED GRADES:

Adaptable for all grade levels.

ESTIMATED TIME:

2-3 hours

VOCABULARY:

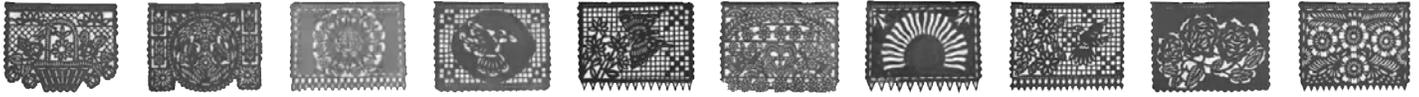
- Día de los Muertos vocabulary and concepts
- 5 Senses
- Descriptive language and imagery
- Letter

MATERIALS:

- Pen or pencil
- Paper for drafting
- Final copy paper
- Books, articles, photos, DVDs about Día de los Muertos

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the assignment explaining to students that they are going to imagine that they are in Mexico for Día de los Muertos. They are going to write a letter to their family describing what this celebration

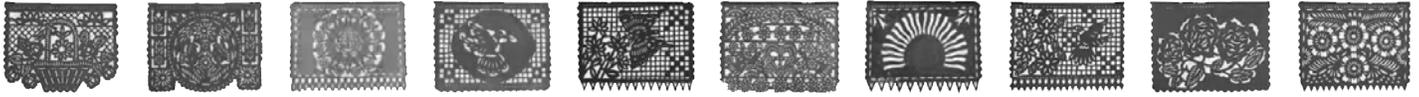


is like. Review any reference materials that have been created through the unit, encouraging students to use as much of the information and vocabulary they have learned.

2. Explain that the purpose of the letter is to paint a picture of Día de los Muertos in the mind of the letter's reader. They want their readers to feel like they are in Mexico too. In order to do this, they will need to rely on lots of sensory imagery or descriptions based on the five senses. If you need to review the five senses or descriptive imagery, follow steps 3-5 below from the "5 Senses Poetry" Lesson. Otherwise, continue to step 6.
3. As a whole group, review or teach the concept of the five senses.
 - Activate students' prior knowledge by asking them to list all of the five senses. Write these on the board or chart paper for students to refer back to throughout the assignment.
4. Once students have an understanding of the five senses, ask the class to volunteer objects or things related to Día de los Muertos that they could use in the poetry. Write their suggestions on the board or chart paper. This would be a good time to review any vocabulary or concepts already covered. For example: ofrendas, Calaveras, sugar skulls, candles, papel picado, etc.
5. With the vocabulary the class has generated, explain and model how to write descriptions based upon the senses. For younger students, you may need to offer guiding examples appropriate for their ability level. Highlight various aspects of descriptive language (such as adjectives, metaphors, and similes) appropriate for your grade level. Some examples:
 - “The flickering candle light cast shadows on the ofrenda” OR “I see the candles glowing on the ofrenda”

 - “The warm atole runs down my throat, warming my whole body, wrapping me in a blanket” OR “I feel the atole going down into my tummy”

 - “The smell of the zempasúchil permeates the air, as if it were a path, guiding the spirits to the ofrendas” OR “I smell the zempasúchil in the air
6. Model the format of a letter and the different parts: date, salutation, introduction, body, and closing. Explain that a descriptive letter is similar to a story, in that students are telling the story of their experience of Día de los Muertos. Students are now ready to write their rough drafts.
7. When students have finished their rough draft, follow your classroom procedure for editing and revising. One approach would be to use the following procedure: rough draft, read out loud to self and revise, read out loud to partner and revise, meet with teacher for final editing and revising. Students then write their final copy on some sort of “special” final copy paper—perhaps paper with a special border then glued onto construction paper. Publish essays by hanging them in a designated area, or, since these



are letters, have the students mail them to their families.

STANDARDS & BENCHMARKS:

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.