



INTRODUCTION

Día de los Muertos is an important celebration in Mexico and other parts of South America that dates back to the Aztec Empire, before the arrival and conquest of the Spanish. In recent decades, it also has become increasingly celebrated in U.S. cities which have significant Hispanic populations. Oftentimes in the U.S., Día de los Muertos is misunderstood as a variation of Halloween, but it is a very different celebration. It is a time during which families remember and honor their loved ones who have died. Death is celebrated as a natural and normal part of life. It is believed that during Día de los Muertos, the spirits of those who have passed away return to visit their family and loved ones who are still alive. Families and communities create altars filled with brightly colored flowers, papel picado, sugar skulls, pictures of the deceased, and favorite foods. Cemeteries are cleaned and decorated. All of this is done as a way of inviting the spirits of our loved ones back to visit with us for one day out of the year.

The following thematic guide was created with the hope that it would encourage increased cultural awareness, appreciation and acceptance of Día de los Muertos. The first part of this guide includes a more in-depth introduction to Día de los Muertos. The lesson plans that follow focus on teaching about Día de los Muertos through various literacy and art-based activities. In the process of participating in these lessons and activities, students will better understand the cultural significance and purpose of Día de los Muertos celebrations.