



WHAT MY CALAVERA DID AT NIGHT

INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE:

Students will learn about calaveras in the context of Día de los Muertos and create their own stories, in the process learning about multi-paragraph paper writing.

This unit is adapted from a unit that would generally take place in January, tied to the book *Snowmen at Night*. In this story, a boy imagines what his snowman does at night while he's sleeping. Students would make their own very large snowperson, then write a story about what their snowperson did at night. For younger students, this was a project where they would learn how to use a brainstorming web for a multi-paragraph paper, with each section of the web representing a different paragraph. For older students, it was practice for skills that they'd already learned. Hesitant writers were often excited and engaged by creating their snowperson before any of the writing began.

RECOMMENDED GRADES:

Adaptable for elementary and middle school.

ESTIMATED TIME:

2-3 hours

VOCABULARY:

- Calaveras

MATERIALS:

- Pen
- Paper
- Individually-made calaveras (see lesson on calaveras in this thematic unit) OR images of typical Día de los Muertos objects (i.e. calaveras, sugar skulls, ofrendas, catrinas, etc.)

PROCEDURE:

1. To adapt this lesson for Día de los Muertos, instead of snowmen, students will create calaveras. This guide has a number of patterns for calaveras. If time permits, it would be most engaging to use the over-sized one found on pages 42-47; smaller, perhaps more feasible options are on pages 48-50. Stu-



dents seem to love anything that's big. Below are two pictures to give you an idea of what students could make.

2. As students cut out the different parts of the skeleton, encourage them to brainstorm how they're going to decorate or design their calavera. Provide as many different types of art materials as are available—construction paper, crepe paper, tissue paper, sequins, glitter, yarn, fabric, ribbon, etc. Allow students to be as creative as they want in decorating their skeleton.
3. Once the students are ready to begin writing, explain to them that they're going to write a story about what their calavera did the night of Día de los Muertos. This will require students to have some background information on the celebration and an understanding of what people do when they observe Día de los Muertos. From here you can use whatever writing process you're teaching your students. One approach would involve starting with brainstorming and creating the web, then moving on to rough drafting, editing, revising, and creating a final copy.
4. It may be beneficial to give students the first few sentences from the book to start their story. Adapted for Día de los Muertos, you could use the following sentences: "One fall day, I made a calavera very long and loose (you could substitute other adjectives). The next day when I saw him (or her), he was not the same at all. His hat had slipped, his arms drooped down, he really looked a fright—it made me start to wonder: what do calaveras do at night?"
5. Once the stories and skeletons are completed, you can display them in the room both to provide a sense of 'publishing' and decoration for the fall.

