



Day of the Dead/Día de los Muertos: A Time to Remember and Rejoice

Overview:

Students will learn how the “Day of the Dead”-- celebrated first in Latin America --relates to the life/death/life cycle in the garden and to the autumn migration of the monarch butterflies to Mexico at about the same time as “Day of the Dead.”

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

-  **Tell** why both November 1 and November 2 are both days that this holiday is celebrated in Latin America, the US and elsewhere.
-  **List** at least eight items that would be appropriate to put on the Day of the Dead altar and explain what each signifies.
-  **Explain** that the Day of the Dead (DOD) starting by the Aztecs thousands of years ago is one of the most important holidays in Latin America.
-  **Explain** how the migration of the monarch butterflies from the US to Mexico (over 2,000 miles) relates to the DOD and some of the reasons why the number of monarchs migrating is significantly smaller than in the past.
-  **Explain** how the life cycle is symbolized today on the DOD altar using a plant that is a staple in Latin America (corn/maize).

Materials:

-  Chalk/Dry Erase Board and chalk/markers
-  Table for altar
-  Items for altar (see Preparation section)
-  Poster: “The Cycle of Life (for Corn/Maize)”
-  Colored tissue paper for papel picado, stapler and string
-  Monarch butterfly photos on 8 1/2x11 paper with large enough borders on which to write messages to dead loved ones
-  Paper skeleton patterns, paper and brads
-  Copies of the poem “Viva El Amor Eterno; Long Live Eternal Love” by Ginette Rondeau for all the students

On the Board:

-  “The Cycle of Life” Poster
-  Vocabulary
-  Student Reflection Questions

Suggested Snack:

-  Pan de Muerto and Champurrado (<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/7224/pan-de-muertos-mexican-bread-of-the-dead/>)

Preparation:

- 🍓 Find out if there are several parents who celebrate Day of the Dead and who would like to assist you and the students in helping set up an altar inside or out in the garden during this lesson.
- 🍓 These items can be arranged on the altar (a table with a colorful tablecloth, preferably made of fabric from Latin America):
- 🍓 The cycle of life represented by the various stages of corn/maize: kernels of corn as the seed, a picture of corn growing in a field, cob of corn or photo of one, a corn tortilla, and dried corn cobs with kernels that can be taken off and planted.
- 🍓 Items representing the 4 elements in nature: earth (fruits & vegetables [e.g., an orange & a corn cob]); water in a cup (for a drink after the journey of the spirits [represented by the monarchs which fly to Mexico at this time of year], wind (plastic flute or cut paper garlands [papel picado] that blow in the breeze); fire (votive candles) and incense (copal: a resin from various tropical trees or incense sticks such as: white sage or cinnamon).
- 🍓 4 levels of the altar and 4 directions of the earth (use boxes of varying sizes “terraced on each other and covered with colorful cloth or crepe paper for the levels of the altar where items can be placed, and a drawing of 2 arrows crossed pointing N, S E & W.)
- 🍓 An arch of bamboo decorated with real (tied on) or artificial marigolds (made with tissue paper and pipe

Other Resources:

- 🌿 *El Dia de Los Muertos – The Day of the Dead A Mexican Celebration* by Ann Stalcup, 1997. (This is a handbook for teaching children about the Day of the Dead. It includes background information, instructions for making a Day of the Dead altar, and related art projects and recipes.) Available from Amazon.
- 🌿 *Day of the Dead* by Linda Lowery, 2004. A 48 page storybook about the Mexican holiday celebrated around the world. ISBN-N-57505-581-3.
- 🌿 *Dia de Muertos en Mexico: a traves de los ojos del alma: Oaxaca/Day of the Dead in Mexico Through the Eyes of the Soul: Oaxaca*, by Mary J. Andrade. This is a 87-page paperback which has wonderful photos illustrating Day of the Dead in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Also, Ms. Andrade has written a number of similar books on how “Day of the Dead” is celebrated in other Mexican states.

cleaners). The bright colors and strong scent of the marigolds are believed to “help the spirits find the altar & the graves.”)

-  Marigolds (Flowers of the Dead/Flores de Muertos [latin genus: Tagetes]. The Aztecs associated death with the marigold which is ironic since it is a hardy plant that adapts easily to challenging conditions such as poor soil, extreme heat and lack of water. The color of marigolds – bright orange – was considered by the Aztecs to be the sacred color of the land of the dead.
-  Rooster feathers to remind us of the dawn of each day.
-  A frog image or stuffed toy which symbolizes fertility and reminds us of each day’s twilight (when frogs typically croak at the end of each day.)
-  Money (pennies in a jar) which people need to survive but it’s also important to be generous with our money.
-  Sugar skulls/masks of skulls/paper or paper maché skeletons
-  Personal items related to the oneself or the departed person (e.g., mirror [for the self to remember the duality of life and death]; favorite foods of those who have died; photos of those who have died; favorite toys of children who have died; other possessions of those who have died [e.g., clothing, books]

Vocabulary:

-  Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos
-  mourn (v)
-  indigenous (e.g., the Aztec people in Mexico before & after the Europeans/Spaniards arrived)
-  altar/ofrenda
-  the cycle of life
-  corn/maize
-  skull/calavera (sugar skull/calavera de azucar)
-  skeleton/calaca (check translation)
-  Flower of Death/flor de muerto: marigold
-  migrate
-  Bread of Death/ pan de muerto
-  Champurrado: a beverage of corn, chocolate, cinnamon, brown sugar, milk and water that is typically drunk on Day of the Dead

Learning Activities:

- I. Warm-up Activity (5 min.)
 - A. Begin lesson by asking students if they know what the celebration “Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos” is about? If some do, ask them to share and also if their families celebrate one or both of these two special days ask what they put on their altars?

- B. Say, “Day of the Dead” actually is celebrated on November 1 and November 2 ‘ Why is that? (on November 1 the dead children’s spirits are celebrated and mourned; on November 2 the dead adults’ spirits are celebrated and mourned.
 - C. Clarify that “Day of the Dead” celebrations started long ago with the Aztecs in Central America and Mexico. These days honor children (little angels/ “angelitos”) who have died on November 1 and on November 2 honors adults who have died.
 - D. Say today you are going to have an opportunity to create a “Day of the Dead” altar and learn what each item we put on the altar symbolizes.
2. Learning Activity (25 minutes)
 - A. Ask for student volunteers to place the items listed under Preparation above on the altar and explain what they think they each symbolize.
 - B. Refer to the Poster “The Cycle of Life (for corn/maize” and ask them to describe each item and explain why we call it the “cycle of life?”
 - C. Other activities could be: (1.) students make papel picado garlands out of colored tissue paper and then staple them on string to hang in the classroom or outside near the altar; (2.) write names of loved ones who have died on monarch butterfly photos and hang them up around the altar; (3.) make paper skeletons using a pattern and brads to connect the extremities at their joints and hang them with string around the altar; or (4.) students read aloud together the poem “Viva El Amor Eterno/Long Live Eternal Love” by Ginette Rondeau and then individually write 1-2 paragraphs about: what story does the poem tell? How does the poem make you feel?
 3. Snack (5 min.)
 4. Reflection (5 min.)
 - A. Have students answer the reflection questions in their garden journals.

Student Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways does the celebration of “Day of the Dead” help people remember those who have died?
2. Do you think the celebration of “Day of the Dead” makes people feel happy, sad or both? Please explain your answer.

Assessment Questions:

1. The “Day of the Dead” celebration was started by:
 - A. The Aztecs
 - B. The Mayans

- C. The Spanish
2. The Aztecs believed that the spirits of those who had died to be represented by:
 - A. Daffodils
 - B. Monarch butterflies**
 - C. bumble bees

Standards:

CCSS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.