

Dear Parents and Guardians,

October 27, 2014

This year we are going to be learning about the Day of the Dead in our classroom. I love celebrating diversity and also love learning about other cultures. We are going to build an altar in our classroom and I am inviting you to participate. If you would like to participate please send a picture of a deceased loved one and if they had a particular food or item that they enjoyed while they lived. There are examples at bottom of the information page as to what items you might want to share about that person.

Day of the Dead

Here is some information about The Day of the Dead (El Día de los Muertos)

This is an interesting holiday celebrated in Central and Southern Mexico on November 1st & 2nd. The indigenous people celebrate ancient beliefs of honoring their deceased loved ones.

They believe that the gates of heaven are opened at midnight on October 31st and the spirits of all deceased children (angelitos) are allowed to reunite with their families for 24 hours. Toys and candies are left for the children (angelitos),

On the afternoon of November 2nd the festivities are taken to the cemetery. The spirits of the adults come down to enjoy the festivities that are prepared for them. People clean tombs, play cards, listen to the village band and reminisce about their loved ones. The family of the deceased loved ones makes an altar with lots of food, bottles of soda, water, etc. for the weary spirits. Traditions like these keep the village people stay close. People believe that happy spirits will provide protection, good luck, and wisdom to their families.

Day of the Dead has gained worldwide popularity in recent years as it has spread from Mexico to America and beyond. It is now celebrated by Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and countless others around the globe who feel a deep kinship with these two special days that honor the dead.

Why is Day of the Dead such a fascinating holiday?

Foremost, the day is a time of celebration. Although losing someone is undeniably a somber and life-changing event, Day of the Dead provides people with the opportunity to rejoice in the living memories of their loved ones.

Day of the Dead serves as a positive affirmation of the cycle of life and death, allowing people to reconnect with the spirits of their loved ones on the Other Side.

Day of the Dead occurs on many levels:

The day of the dead is celebrated as a personal experience, a family event, a social gathering, and a community celebration.

We were all born and one day we will all die, a concept that Day of the Dead helps us acknowledge and internalize, so that we may live our lives with more awareness and meaning.

Day of the Dead expresses the beauty and mystery of life and death. For many, it is a time of partying and celebration; for others, it is a time of introspection. At its most potent, it is a balanced blend of the two.

Water - Souls are thirsty after their long journey from the Other Side, so they appreciate a glass of water upon arrival.

Toiletries - Likewise, the spirit will want to freshen up after they reach the altar, so a hairbrush, a mirror and some soap are always appreciated, along with a small towel.

Other drinks - The favorite drink of the deceased is also laid out on the altar, soda, or anything else!

Items that once belonged to the deceased - Mementos and other things the dead person enjoyed in life are laid out on the altar, and often new things are bought too.

Whether simple or sophisticated, Day of the Dead altars and ofrenda all contain certain basic elements in common. Here are the ofrendas that you will typically see on a Day of the Dead altar:

Candles - Candles are lit to welcome the spirits back to their altars.

Marigolds - These yellow-orange flowers, also called cempasúchitl, symbolize death. Their strong fragrance also helps lead the dead back to their altars. Marigold petals may also be sprinkled on the floor in front of the altar, or even sprinkled along a path from the altar to the front door, so that the spirit may find her way inside.

Incense - Most commonly, copal incense, which is the dried aromatic resin from a tree native to Mexico. The scent is also said to guide the spirits back to their altars

Salt - represents the continuance of life.

Photo of the deceased - A framed photo of the dead person to whom the altar is dedicated, usually positioned in a prime spot on the altar.

Pan de Muerto - Also known as "bread of the dead", pan de muerto is a symbol of the departed.

Sugar skulls - As symbols of death and the afterlife, sugar skulls are not only given as gifts to the living during Day of the Dead, they are also placed as offerings on the altar.

Fresh fruit - whatever is in season: oranges, bananas, avocados etc.

Other foods - Traditional Day of the Dead foods that you would find on altars include atole, mole, tamales, and tortillas. Altars also usually include the dead person's favorite foods, including modern foods like Rice Krispies or potato chips!

A note about foods and drinks on altars

The souls that visit their altars do not actually eat or drink what is on the altar. They can't they have no bodies! Instead, they absorb the aroma and energy of the food, which nourishes their spirits.

After the holiday is over, the foods and drinks on the altars are distributed amongst family and friends, but the foods and drinks are now tasteless and devoid of nutritional value, because their essence is gone.

