

Day of the Dead

All about Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

Day of the Dead is the English name for the Mexican festival called Día de los Muertos (say: dee-a de loss mur-toes). It is a celebration where the dead are honoured. Surprisingly, it is not a sombre and miserable time, but a time of happiness and memories. It is celebrated in Mexico, Ecuador, and other areas in Central and South America as well as in areas of North America, such as California and Texas, where Mexicans have brought the tradition.

The festival lasts for three days from 31st October until 2nd November and it is a carnival of colour with flowers, food, candles, parades, prayer and fun. People dress up as skeletons and wear colourful, fancy costumes and masks.

The first day is on the same day as Halloween in the UK, the 31st October. On this day at midnight, it is believed that the gates of heaven are opened, releasing souls of those who have died. The second day, the 1st November, is when the spirits of children who have died visit. The third and final day, the 2nd November, is when the spirits of adults visit.



Ofrendas

Ofrenda is the Spanish word for altar, which is an area created at graveyards where candles are lit to remember loved ones who have died. Altars have lots of things on them including: pictures of the deceased person, things they liked, food, candles, flowers and gifts.

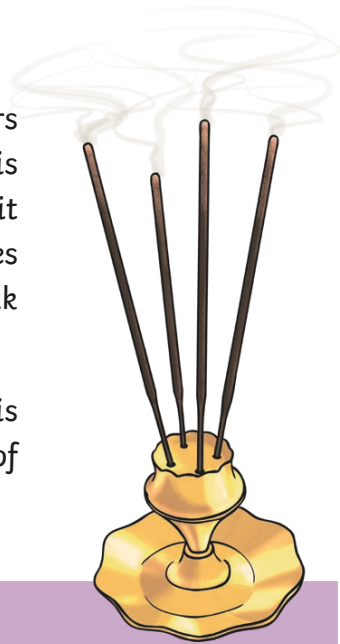


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Soul Attraction

Candles (las velas) are lit during the afternoon at altars to burn all through the night. The light of the candles is said to guide the way for souls. Sometimes each candle lit represents a person who has died. Also, coloured candles have meanings: purple for pain, white for hope and pink for celebration.

The final thing added to the altars is incense, which is a nice-smelling, white smoke thought to attract souls of those who have gone.



Pan de Muertos (say: pan de mur-toe)

During the celebrations, a special bread called Pan de Muertos (bread of the dead) is eaten representing people who have died. This can be found in the shape of a skull or sometimes a round loaf decorated with bone shapes. The bread is often decorated with brightly coloured icing or seeds, meaning 'happiness'.

Calacas

Skeletons are a main symbol of Day of the Dead. They are seen in decorations and also in sweets, chocolates and toys. The toys and dolls are called 'calacas' and are used to show children that death is something of which you should not be afraid. Calacas are usually smiling and having fun because they are laughing at death and showing that the afterlife is good.

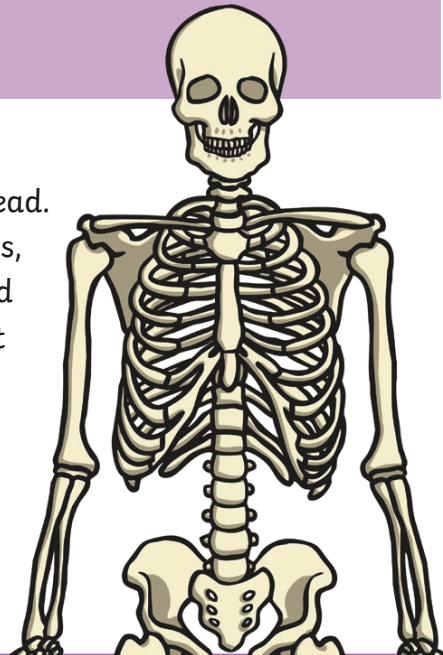


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Day of the Dead Questions

1. In which continents is Day of the Dead celebrated?

2. In paragraph 1, what does the word 'sombre' mean?

3. Name two things you might find on an ofrenda.

4. Look at the title 'Pan de Muertos'. If this means Bread of the Dead, which word means 'bread'?

5. In the first paragraph of the 'Soul Attraction' section, why has the author used brackets after the word candles?

6. What are calacas used for?

7. Can you find any things that are the same between Day of the Dead and Halloween? (which happens at the same time in the UK)

8. Find the first paragraph in the 'Ofrendas' section. Why has the author used a colon in this paragraph?
