

ACTIVITY

1. Before Visiting the Museum, read the following articles that describe how Day of the Dead is celebrated in present day Mexico and the United States.
2. Contrast how each country influences the other, and how this holiday blurs the boundaries between both countries' appropriation of this celebration.
3. Discussion Questions:
 - *What are some of the differences between Halloween and Day of the Dead?*
 - *What are some of the reasons why Halloween is becoming more popular in Mexico?*
 - *Is the same happening to Day of the Dead in the US, why or why not?*

ARTICLE: "Valley family takes yearly tradition seriously"

By Carlos Miller

The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/history/history2.html>

Every year in November, the Guerrero house in Mesa comes alive with the souls of dead people.

One soul belongs to Zarco Guerrero's mother, who died in 1970. Another belongs to Carmen Guerrero's mother, who died in 1994.

Still another belongs to Selena, the Mexican pop singer who was murdered in 1995. And another belongs to Cesar Chavez, the Mexican civil rights activist who died in 1993.

The Guerreros welcome these souls each year on Nov. 2 with altars, candles and photographs in their home. That is when they celebrate Día de los Muertos, a pre-Columbian holiday believed to have originated in Mexico 3,000 years ago. Known in the United States as Day of the Dead, the holiday has been gaining popularity in the United States since the 1970s.

"It's an opportunity to honor our ancestors and share their memories with our children," said Zarco, a 48-year-old Mesa artist who has been celebrating Day of the Dead for 25 years.

advertisement

Click here to find out more!

The most important altar in the house sits in the living room. It is dedicated to the mothers of Zarco and Carmen Guerrero, the grandmothers of their three children.

"Our children didn't know their grandmothers," he said. "But they will always have the memory of their grandmothers with them."

About a month prior to the Day of the Dead, Zarco, Carmen and their children - Quetzal, 18, Tizoc, 11, and Zarina, 9 - pull photographs of the grandmothers out of the closet. They place the photographs, along with skulls and candles, on the altar. Zarco and Carmen pass down stories about the grandmothers to their children.

"And on Day of the Dead, we light incense and place it on the altar," he said.

Zarco also makes calacas, costumes of grinning skeletons that are worn each year during Mesa's Day of the Dead celebration, held this year in Pioneer Park on Nov. 5.

"When the calacas dance, they take children by the hand," he said. "They are not dancing like the Grim Reaper, who are meant to scare children" on Halloween.

The holiday is an acceptance of death, which is inevitable, Zarco said.

"Life is a dance with death," he said. "We dance with death every moment of our lives. We are susceptible to death by accidents, random acts of violence, sickness."

This acceptance of death was passed down from the Aztecs, who believed the souls of dead people would visit with their family during the summer. That was when the original Day of the Dead ritual was celebrated and it lasted a month.

When the Spaniards arrived, they tried to eradicate the ritual, but eventually gave up and moved it so it would coincide with All Saint's Day.

"For us, it goes beyond folklore or wives' tales," Zarco said. "It's something that was handed down to us from our forefathers. It's something we take seriously."

But it is also something they can laugh at, which is what the holiday is all about, he said.

"Rather than fear death, we laugh at it," he said. "There's a very definite element of humor in Day of the Dead."

And this element of humor is passed down to the children, who are taught not to fear death, Guerrero said.

This tradition may seem foreign to people in the United States, but it has also gained popularity, Guerrero said.

"In the U.S., we don't have a cultural mechanism in which we deal with death," he said. "People bury their dead and then they're gone. In Mexico, it goes beyond that."

That is why he believes the Day of the Dead celebration has spread into other cultures. For the past few years during the Mesa celebration in Pioneer Park, Zarco has noted that Asians, Blacks and Native Americans have been attending with more frequency.

"This is something that we do not hoard," he said. "Culture is constantly changing."

But he also fears that the tradition will be affected by commercialism, like Cinco de Mayo has.

ARTICLE: "The Day of the Ghouls vs. the Day of the Dead"

By JULIA PRESTON

Published: New York Times November 2, 1996

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B02E3DB1638F931A35752C1A960958260>

As dusk fell and shadows began to creep, the streets were suddenly filled with unearthly creatures, running in packs.

There were ghouls, skeletons, devils, vampire princesses and corpses returned from the dead. Even Death himself appeared, dressed in a gray hooded cassock and carrying not exactly a scythe but a cardboard machete.

It was Halloween, but not in any American town. On Thursday night children in droves in the capital and Mexico's other big cities donned spooky costumes and went house to house asking for candy. A distinctly American version of Halloween, with jack-o'-lanterns, candy corn, Batman and Morticia, is rapidly catching on in Mexico, a country with its own powerful traditions for celebrating the Day of the Dead.

The American Halloween and the colorful rituals taking place in cemeteries throughout Mexico today, All Saints' Day, and on Saturday, All Souls' Day, have the same roots, at least in part. In the ninth century the Christian church declared All Saints' Day, in effect recognizing the pagan festivals celebrating the harvest and honoring the dead. Just as European settlers brought the tradition to the United States, the Spanish spread it in Mexico.

But in this country the European practice melded with the beliefs of the Aztecs and other indigenous peoples for whom Death was an intimate and enthralling spiritual being. Modern Mexicans observe the Day of the Dead by decorating graves and communing with deceased loved ones in rites that mourn the survivors' loss but also celebrate the continuing closeness of the living and the dead.

By contrast, Halloween, on the eve of All Saints' Day of All Hallows, is the night of Death's dark side, when monsters and bloodsuckers and the souls that found no rest run free.

In Mexico, the custom is catching on mainly because it's fun.

"It's pure candy!" said Erica Jasmin Sanchez, a 6-year-old scarlet devil with horns and a pointed tail who was carrying a skull full of cookies and caramels.

Children in big groups flock through the capital's well-to-do neighborhoods, lining up in crowds to receive treats from whoever will open their front door. In Mexico City, since everyone is disguised in a costume, Halloween is a once-a-year opportunity for poor children to go begging for treats at the homes of the rich without being chased away by security guards.

"Give me my Halloween!" they cry, using the English term. Sometimes the "trick" part of the routine is maintained as well, with children carrying markers or paint to write vengeful graffiti on the houses where no goodies are given.

The horticultural ancestors of the big orange pumpkin that Americans carve with scary faces were Mexican. Nowadays Mexico grows squashes in hundreds of colors and shapes, but not many pumpkins, so to meet Halloween demand they must be imported from the United States. Many Mexicans choose plastic pumpkins instead.

Mexico's turn to Halloween began two decades ago and boomed as the country's economic and political opening produced an explosion of trade and travel across the border with the United States. Like many United States cultural exports, Halloween in Mexico is a major marketing event.

A Wal-Mart superstore in a northern suburb of Mexico City set aside floor space for a mock graveyard where costumes and candies are displayed above half-open coffins inhabited by blood-spattered mummies.

"Let me explain this as a Mexican," said Alvaro Alonso, the deputy store manager. "This is really new for us. It is not one of our fiestas. But Halloween is a concept that is definitely growing."

Wal-Mart's Halloween sales have increased for the last three years despite a deep recession in Mexico.

But Mr. Alonso said the trend was controversial among Mexican consumers. Wal-Mart's suggestion box was filled today with comments from customers demanding to know why the salespeople were

ARTICLE: "The Day of the Ghouls vs. the Day of the Dead"

By JULIA PRESTON

Published: New York Times November 2, 1996

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B02E3DB1638F931A35752C1A960958260>

dressed up like witches in a store in the center of Mexico.

"Halloween is costumes and candy," said Mariana Villareal, a top buyer at the store. "The Day of the Dead is more a matter of the heart."

Some intellectuals agree that Halloween is an offense against Mexican nationalism.

"This is cultural pollution," the Mexican novelist Homero Aridjis said. "In these hard times I call upon Mexicans to leave aside all those Anglo-Saxon witches and ghosts and keep their money to buy bread and flowers to honor their dead."

But the gleeful children in the streets on Thursday night were not concerned about the national origins of the game.

"This comes from the United States, but we can take culture from wherever we want," said Guillermo Morales, a 15-year-old phantom.

Some Mexican children had decided that Halloween was already theirs.

"I like it because it is a tradition of the Mexicans," said the white-eyed, black-lipped Adriana Alicia Garcia, 12. "We go out every year and ask for candies to fill up our skulls."

To judge from the crowds thronging cemeteries here today, Mexicans are adding a Halloween tradition without abandoning the older one. Many parents who accompanied their children on Thursday night said they would be out today making altars and adorning graves.

At the Dolores cemetery, there were reminders of the deep emotions engaged by the Day of the Dead. A young mother, Lucia Mena de Acevedo, wove a blanket of red roses to lay on the tomb of her daughter Mireya, who died of liver disease last year when she was 7. Siblings and cousins sat by quietly.

"We want her to know that we will always keep the flowers fresh for her," Mrs. Acevedo said, fighting tears. She let her two other children go out on Thursday night to ask for candy, to let them feel that life is moving on after their sister's death.

"But we are in Mexico," Mrs. Acevedo said. "We don't call it Halloween."