

VIVA LA VIDA:

Celebrating Life through

Dia de los Muertos

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVE

Expand children's cultural understanding by celebrating Halloween and Dia de los Muertos with various cultural literacy activities including reading relevant culturally rich books, hands-on activities, take-home crafts, singing, writing activities, story-time, and dancing. The focus book is *Los Gatos Black on Halloween*, which uses clever rhyming and Spanish words to combine themes of Halloween and Dia de los Muertos. The blending of Halloween and Dia de los Muertos makes this book an excellent springboard to expand cultural literacy, and is well supported by the planned activities and supporting literature.

Approximate age group: 5-9 yr.

Goals:

1. Children will understand and appreciate some of the unique and similar aspects of different cultures' holidays.
2. Children will expand their cultural literacy through becoming familiar with Spanish words and numbers.
3. Valuing ones' memories of family and friends.

Objectives:

1. Children will learn about Dia de los Muertos, through stories and cultural literacy activities.
2. Children will learn Spanish words through reading (or being read to) *Los Gatos Black on Halloween*, and through various hands-on activities and crafts.
3. Children will be exposed to a Mexican folk dance through watching and learning a simple dance.
4. Children will become familiar with some traditional foods prepared around the holiday.
5. Through supporting literature, children will see some of the ways that cultures are similar, especially in honoring and remembering loved ones.

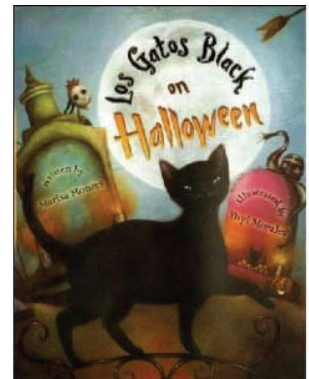
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FOCUS BOOK/ACTIVITY/SUPPORTING BOOKS

FOCUS BOOK SUMMARY:

The focus book for this programming is *Los Gatos Black on Halloween* by Marisa Montes, illustrated by Yuyi Morales. Follow a black cat through a Halloween evening celebration with witches, werewolves, skeletons, the undead, and more. Told in a sing-song poetic style and using some Spanish words, including a glossary at the back. Morales's lively and visually rich illustrations of creatures participating in a Halloween fiesta are sure to captivate children's imaginations, and introduces some unique aspects of Dia de Los Muertos.



LEAD-IN ACTIVITY: Loteria

“Loteria” is a popular game in Mexico (Naidoo p. 122), a game that Americans know as Bingo. This Bingo board will have creatures from *Los Gatos Black on Halloween*. The board should have 9-16 squares each with a picture of a character or Spanish word in the book: bruja, calabaza, gato, luna. Instructors have the same picture, but larger. They will hold it up and call out the Spanish name: “Gato!” and the child would cover the image of a cat with a chip. This is an enjoyable game that will familiarize children with Spanish words from the book through visual clues.

SUPPORTING BOOKS:

The following books support the programming for *Los Gatos Black on Halloween* through elaborating on such themes as: Dia de los Muertos history and customs, celebrations, overcoming fears, and honoring loved ones who’ve died. In keeping with *Los Gatos Black on Halloween* combining two cultures’ holidays, Halloween and Dia de los Muertos, some of these books also support that cross-cultural theme.

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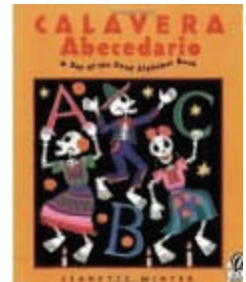
SUPPORTING BOOKS

Behind the Mask by Yangsook Choi A boy honors his grandfather and overcomes a fearful memory by wearing the costume and mask that the old man used in his youth as a dancer in Korea. Kimin dances for his fellow trick-or-treaters and they join in. His friends, dressed in various American costumes, all participate in an American version of “Talchum,” a traditional Korean mask dance. By “being his grandfather” for Halloween, Kimin reconnects with the love and affection he had for his grandfather, and shares his memories with his friends.

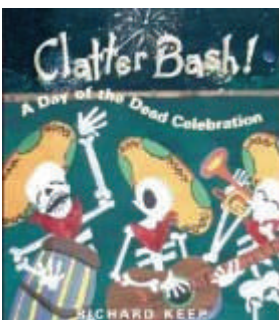


Calavera Abecedario : A Day of the Dead Alphabet Book by Jeanette Winter.

A colorful traditional Mexican art inspired illustration of Don Pedro preparing for Dia de los Muertos with his sons Enrique, Felipe, and Miguel. The narrative lapses to when the boys are themselves fathers and have their children helping with holiday preparations, reinforcing the importance of continuity and custom. After a brief introduction to the fiesta preparation the Calaveras perform a dance that illustrates the alphabet along with Spanish words that start with each letter.



Clatter Bash by Richard Keep.



Suitable for a young group, this colorful book features skeletons, done in a style that evokes papel picado, the Mexican paper-cutting art. As the sky deeps from a beautiful pink, through purple dusk, into night, we see the skeletons under the ground dressing in their finery, while their living visitors above ground leave gifts. Once the visitors leave, the skeletons come out and – PARTY!

Meaningful cultural symbols are present, such as Monarch Butterflies, displays of papel picado, and an altar. One of the more significant aspects of this book is the portrayal of child skeletons, dressed in smocks and baseball caps, but their presence is joyful. There is no narrative, but a series of short Spanish, English, and onomatopoeic phrases, making this book ideal for children’s participation.

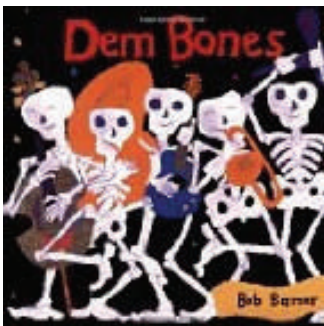
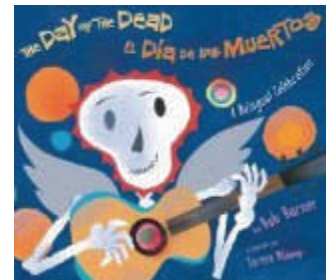
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SUPPORTING BOOKS

The Day of the Dead / El Dia de los Muertos. A Bilingual Celebration by Bob Barner, translated by Teresa Mlawer.

An excellent introduction to el Dia de Los Muertos for younger children, this vibrantly illustrated book contains simple English rhymes translated into Spanish. Smiling Calaveras dance and play music as they accompany two children throughout their day while they celebrate the traditions of their ancestors. Holiday foods and concepts are introduced. The last two pages contain more in-depth information about the holiday to share with older children or adapt for the youngest. According to the end notes, the skeleton characters were inspired by those of Mexican artist Jose Guadalupe Posada.



Dem Bones by Bob Barner. Using a classic African American spiritual as a point of departure, Dem Bones offers a clever and visually entertaining anatomy lesson. Jaunty members of a skeleton band dance across the pages, strumming guitars, blowing horns and expressing bits of information about bones through singing an African spiritual about how the bones connect to each other. The particular bone being described is highlighted in red on the skeleton, making it clear to the audience which bone is being referred to. Bright festive Halloween colors prevail and Barner's cut- and torn-paper collages are captivating and amusing for young audiences.



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SUPPORTING BOOKS

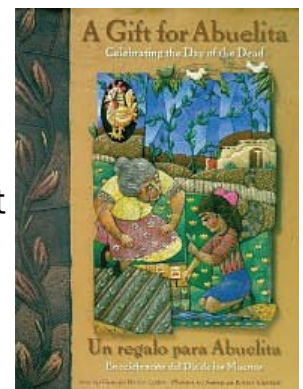
Ghost Wings by Barbara Joosse. Illustrated by Giselle Potter

A touching story about a young girl's close relationship with her grandmother, and coping with her loss. Her grandmother takes her to the Magic Circle, a place in the Mexican forest where monarch butterflies go before flying north. There her grandmother tells her that the butterflies carry the souls of the old ones, and the old ones never really leave. When her grandmother dies the girl struggles with the loss until Los Dias de los Muertos, when she is comforted by traditional rituals and sees the monarch butterflies again. Contains a glossary of Spanish words, a summary of Dia de los Muertos, and the significance of monarch butterflies.



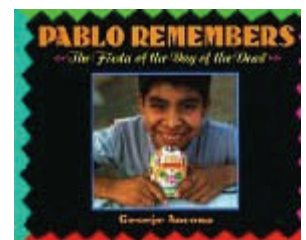
A Gift for Abuelita / Un regalo para Abuelita by Nancy Luenn, illustrations by Robert Chapman.

A tender recounting of the loving relationship between Rosita and her Abuelita, this bilingual book shows how the “cord of love”, explained metaphorically by braided yarn and Pan de Muertos, cannot be broken, even by death. After Abuelita's death, Rosita waits for her physical manifestation on El Dia los Muertos and is worried she will not come. She is assured by Mama and Papa that Abuelita will find her, and at the end of the book is enveloped by Abuelita's love.



Pablo Remembers : The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead by George Ancona.

An introduction to Dia de los Muertos through young Pablo and his family's preparations for the Dia de los Muertos celebration. Many colorful photographs accompany the informative text in English and some Spanish. Children will see the market where Pablo's family get the ingredients for the festivities, preparation of different foods, like tortilla, tamales and mole, the process of creating a children's and adult's ofrenda (altar), and finally the traditional activities at the church and cemetery.



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TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do the Spanish words in the book mean?

This will be determined through reading through the book and looking carefully at the pictures. The Loteria game will have already familiarized children who don't know Spanish with the words, so they will have the opportunity to use their memory. Write down the words in large letters on a board. If possible, have props like stuffed animals, puppets, witches hats, sombreros, etc., to hold up and pass around so that children are not only learning by looking at the pictures but also by touching objects.

2. Who knows what Dia de los Muertos is?

Invite children who celebrate or know about the holiday to share their knowledge. Tell the main points of the holiday, including honoring/celebrating deceased loved ones in a joyous manner with family and friends, creating an altar, telling stories, singing, dancing, and visiting the cemetery where loved ones are buried. Also discuss brief history of the holiday, that it is a blending of Aztec and Catholic traditions, and that depending on the Latino country, traditions vary.

(First Hands-On Activity may occur here: Calaveras Poems)

3. What are some of the similarities and differences between Halloween and Dia de los Muertos?

4. Does anyone celebrate both holidays? Does anyone celebrate a different holiday that remembers loved ones? Tell us about it! What sorts of activities do you do. Do you dress up? What do you eat? Do you sing? Do you go somewhere special?



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ACTIVITIES

1. Calaveras Poems for Kids on Dia de los Muertos:

Funny stories about the dead are a highlight of this holiday. Parents and kids can share anecdotes and turn them into short poems. Cut out tombstone shapes from construction paper and write them down together. You might want to remember deceased grandparents or family pets. Done with sensitivity, it can be a constructive way to talk about any recent loss your family has suffered.

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/5738694/day_of_the_dead_activities_for_kids.html?cat=25

2. Create a skeleton:

Divide children into groups, depending on how many, and have each group make a skeleton. Name the bones in Spanish/English, assemble skeleton.

- Supplies: cardboard, paper, glue, fat black marker, hole punch, zip ties.

A sample skeleton pattern (skull, torso, arms, legs) can be found in *Day of the Dead Crafts* .

3. Create an altar.

Supplies needed: crates to create different levels, fabric to cover the crates, paper flowers, reverse glass painting frames, decorate with tombstone poems. Let parents know in advance that children are encouraged to bring objects to add to the altar (for example, a picture of a pet they lost, a picture of a grandparent). Decorate area around altar with skeletons made in previous craft.

4. Make a traditional food.

- Involve older children in the process to help assemble and bake. For a quick food craft, Pan de Muertos may be made from refrigerated pre-packaged biscuit dough. The children can shape the biscuits into skeleton bones (with a knob on each end), or with help, braid rolled out pieces into a Pan de Meurtos. Bread may also be added to altar.

(More ideas for food at the end of programming guide).

5. **Dancing troupe to perform a Dia de los Muertos dance in costume:** Local dance troupe in holiday costumes performs a dance. Teach children a simple dance and encourage them to wear their calaca mask while they dance. Suggested book reading: *Behind the Mask*. Introduce an aspect of Korean culture. Remark on how this book blends Korean culture with Halloween, just as Los Gatos Black on Halloween does.

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TAKE-HOME ACTIVITIES

1. **Calaca Masks:** A Calaca is a skull or skeleton figure commonly used as decoration during Dia de los Muertos. A Calaca mask is a fun craft for kids to make, and can be worn during a dance or parade, or for Halloween trick-or-treating!

Instructions and supplies:

Supplies:

paper mache mask from craft store

acrylic craft paint

decoupage medium

white glitter

tongue depressor

- plastic tiara (optional)

rhinestones

hot glue (krazy glue may be used in place of hot glue)

Instructions:

1. Paint the mask with one color as a base coat. Use contrasting colors for accents. Let dry.
2. Brush on a coat of decoupage medium over the painted mask, and pour on the white glitter. Tap away excess.
3. Hot glue the handle to the bottom of the back of the mask.
4. Hot glue the tiara on top.
5. Hot glue rhinestones as desired.

Read more:

http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/articles/dead-crafts_sugarmaks.html

Simplified Mask #2

A simple way to make a mask is to buy a cheap plastic one. Cover it with a layer of papier-mache, and repaint it. From *Masks*, by Meryl Doney.

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TAKE-HOME ACTIVITIES / SONG

2. Reverse glass painting

Supplies:

1 small frame

Acrylic paints in assorted colors (most importantly, black and white)

Thin, liner paintbrush

Directions:

Take apart the components of the frame. Set the piece of glass on a flat surface. Using the liner brush and black paint, draw a skull on the glass. Let dry. Now paint on flowers and other decorations and let dry. Paint the entire face with white paint. Let dry and put the frame back together.

Read more:

http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/articles/dead-crafts_glasspainting.html#ixzz1MSTEuRBs

3. Skeletons, masks, and altar ideas.

Arquette, Kerry, Zocchi, Andrea, and Jerry Vigil. *Day of the Dead Crafts: More than 24 Projects that Celebrate Dia de los Muertos*. Wiley: New York. 2008.

SONG/RHYMES ACTIVITY



1. Read *Dem Bones* to the kids and teach them the African spiritual. Sing along! You can use the skeletons the children have already made as a prop for the song.

2. Sing songs from *Diez deditos* by Jose-Luis Orozco. The song ten little fingers & other play rhymes and action songs from Latin America.

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WEBSITES/OTHER NON-PRINT MEDIA

1. TeachingBooks.net section for Los Gatos Black on Halloween.

<http://www.teachingbooks.net/titleidsearch.cgi?id=9685>

2. Yuyi Morales website: www.yuyimorales.com

3. Wisconsin Public Television video on Dia de los Muertos <http://video.wpt2.org/video/1754214903/>

4. Glossary of words associated with Day of the Dead

<http://bit.ly/kA97Kp>

5. Information on Jose Guadalupe Posada, printmaker, famous for his Calaveras images.

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/articles/dead-history3.html>

<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/enews/2009/october/insider.html>

6. Links for crafts, recipes, customs, and historical facts about El dia de Los Muertos. Oracle Think Quest- Articles by Students for Students [http://](http://library.thinkquest.org/trio/TTQ03066/links.html)

library.thinkquest.org/trio/TTQ03066/links.html

7. Orozco, J.L. (Performer). (1995). *Fiestas* [Medium of recording: CD] Berkeley, CA: Arcoiris.

Arranged by Jose-Luis Orozco. A children's CD containing songs of Latino holidays, including "Dia de los muertos".

8. Diez Deditos/Ten Little Fingers. Arranged by Jose Luis Orozco. Arcoiris Records. 2004.

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WEBSITES/OTHER NON-PRINT MEDIA

9. Clip art skull <http://www.leehansen.com/clipart/Holidays/Halloween/pages/day-of-dead-skull.htm>

10. Additional craft/food resources

-Bone shaped pretzels: <http://epi.us/WuIGC>

-Recipe for Pan de Muertos: <http://bit.ly/kYwTf2>

-Non-food skull craft: <http://bit.ly/mz1Lnf>

-Sugar skull craft: <http://bit.ly/cslEWI>

-Skull necklace: <http://bit.ly/9VRUJj>



11. Yuyi Morales explains Dia de los Muertos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2rOFe8TTEA>

12. How to make Pan de Muerto;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIA2Nzq5BRw>

13. A video of children's altars:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5vs3RcYAyg>



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Choi, Yangsook. *Behind the Mask*. Frances Foster Books: New York. 2006.

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Joose, Barbara M. and Giselle Potter. *Ghost Wings*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, CA. 2001.

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