

Celebrating the Day of the Dead

THEME:	CULTURAL PRACTICES (VIEWS OF DEATH AND DYING)						
LANGUAGE:	SPANISH						
STANDARD(S):	COMMUNICATION	CULTURES	CONNECTIONS	COMPARISONS			
	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	3.2		4.2

Time Frame:

Three class sessions and a week for work on projects

Materials Needed:

- Celebrating the Day of the Dead video (Spanish and English)
- Quote from *El laberinto de soledad* by Octavio Paz (provided)
- Famous quotes on death/dying in Spanish (provided)
- Multitrait rubric for assessing performance on culminating projects (provided)

Description of Task:

Students are to view the video *Celebrating the Day of the Dead* as part of a thematic unit on views of death and dying within one's culture. Students are to reflect on their own culture's value and rituals relating to the topic and note similarities and differences of values, traditions, and rituals of the Mexican culture. The video is sometimes narrated in Spanish with English sub-titles, sometimes narrated in English and the various interviews are in Spanish.

Pre-viewing:

Students brainstorm symbols of death (e.g., skull and cross bones, skeletons, crosses, tombs, funeral sprays of flowers, etc.) Ideas can be noted on the board or in their notebooks. Ask students to write a sentence in English that summarizes their perception of death/dying as it is viewed in U.S. culture.

Level:

Intermediate-Mid/High

Purpose:

To compare and contrast U.S. and target culture rituals and views on death and dying.

Communicative

Function(s):

Personal: Clarifying one's ideas
Referential: Summarizing; Comparing and contrasting
Imaginative: Expanding ideas suggested by others

Language Structure(s):

Descriptive adjectives; present tense

Cultural Aspects:

Perspectives on death and dying

Modalities:

Listening
Speaking
Reading
Writing

NOTES

Engage the class in a discussion with questions such as: What does “El Día de los Muertos” mean? What are some expectations you have about commemorating or celebrating the Day of the Dead? Do we have a similar day(s) in U.S. culture? What kind of symbols are you expecting to see as part of the Day of the Dead as celebrated in Mexico? A student should be assigned as recorder to record the class’ ideas and predictions.

Viewing the video:

Students are asked to take notes of symbols, traditions, rituals, etc. related to death and dying that are prominent in the video. They can create an outline of the parts of the video or complete a partially constructed outline provided by the teacher. After viewing the video, they should look back at their notes and write a sentence (or short paragraph) summarizing Mexicans’ views of death/dying. Their summary should include specific examples from the video.

Post-viewing:

Self-reflection: Students are to reread the questions in the pre-viewing section and the ideas that were recorded and to compare the responses with their impressions after viewing the video. How have they changed?

Pair work: Students are to share in pairs and combine the symbols and rituals related to death and dying that the students noted while viewing the video. How do they compare to the symbols and rituals of U.S. culture? Pairs should also compare the summary sentences/paragraphs that were written (one summarizing U.S. views on death/dying and the other summarizing Mexicans’ views on death and dying as depicted in the video). Pairs then prepare to report to the whole class.

Large group: While pairs report to the class a large group comparison chart is constructed by the teacher or a student on butcher block paper or an overhead transparency.

Students see projected on an overhead a quote from *El laberinto de Soledad* by Octavio Paz:

“Para el habitante de Nueva York, Paris o Londres, la muerte es la palabra que jamás se pronuncia porque quema los labios. El mexicano, en cambio, la frecuente, la burla, la acaricia, duerme con ella, la festeja; es uno de sus juguetes favoritos y su amor más permanente.”

“To the resident of New York, Paris or London, the word Death is never pronounced because it burns the lips. Mexicans on the other hand, frequent it, caress it, they sleep with it, they celebrate it; it is one of their favorite games and their most permanent love.”

Students are to offer ideas of what it means, providing examples from the video to support their perspectives. The ideas can be noted and added to the comparison chart.

Pairs of students are assigned one of the attached quotes from the website “Frasas célebres relacionadas con la muerte” (copy provided). Each pair of students is to explain to the class how their quote provides further support for their understanding of Mexicans’ views of death and dying as reflected on the comparison chart.

Assessment:

Assessment of students’ comprehension of the video takes place informally during class discussion and post-viewing activities. In addition, the teacher can collect the summary sentences/paragraphs from individual students to determine whether they are beginning to construct an understanding of the different views on death and dying.

To assess students’ understanding of the different views of death and dying, the teacher may choose to assign a culminating activity such as the following.

Culminating Activity: Students are to demonstrate their understanding of differences between U.S. and Mexican views of death and dying by completing one of the following projects in pairs or small groups. They will have one week to work on the project in class and are expected to spend additional time working on the project outside of class.

- creation of a mural for the hallway or a prominent place in the school; the mural should include quotes, written descriptions, etc. or should be accompanied by a written reflection in Spanish that compares and contrasts U.S. and Mexican views of death and dying
- creation of a video clip for a Spanish I class to introduce them to Mexican views of death and dying in comparison to U.S. views; the video should include student interviews or narratives in Spanish
- creation of a collage and accompanying written reflection or dialogue poem in Spanish

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- a student-generated idea for a project (as approved by teacher)

Projects are to be assessed on the basis of their content, creativity, and language use (accuracy of present tense and descriptive words and phrases, emphasizing number and gender agreement). They must incorporate information that appears on the comparison chart generated by the class. A sample rubric for assessing the projects is provided.

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task to various levels:

For beginning levels: Just the video can be shared with beginning students. They can be asked to view the video and focus on images shown. All discussion can occur in English.

For advanced levels: All discussions can occur in Spanish. Students can be expected to demonstrate understanding at increasingly sophisticated levels.

Other extensions:

- Students can relate the pre-Columbian Indian view of death (cycles of life/nature recreating itself) to the view of death in their own culture. Poetry, music, and artwork relating to death/dying (represented by U.S. and target cultures) can be incorporated into the lesson.
- For French classrooms, a similar activity could be done with the theme of Mardi Gras. In German classrooms, Fasching or Karneval could be explored in a similar fashion.

Cultural extensions:

Students can explore Day of the Dead celebrations as reflected in a variety of Spanish-speaking cultures. How is the Mexican view different from/similar to views reflected in other Spanish speaking contexts? What historical factors may account for the differences?

References and Resources:

Celebrating the Day of the Dead. (1991). Video. (22 minutes; English and Spanish; \$39.90). Teacher's Discovery. (1-800-TEACHER)

Websites:

For information on the Day of the Dead:

<http://www.usc.edu/isd/loactions/ssh/boeckmann/Dead/index.html>

This site provides links to numerous other sites having information about the Day of the Dead in Mexico and the U.S. (books, journal articles, festivals, etc.).

<http://www.pixel.com.mx/> (Under construction as of January 2002.)

This site provides a brief introduction in Spanish to el Día de los Muertos and links to other sites (see attached pages).

For information on Octavio Paz:

<http://www.ur.mx/division/chepe/homepage/letras/PAZ.htm>

This site provides links to interviews, biographical information, and excerpts from Paz' literary works.

Reflections:

Multitrait Rubric for “Day of the Dead” Projects

	Cultural Understanding	Creativity	Language Control
4	Project reflects thorough comprehension of the cross-cultural comparison.	The project creatively integrates the drawings/images and text in a unified presentation.	Excellent control of language features; consistent accurate use of the present tense; descriptors have accurate gender and number agreement.
3	Project reflects good comprehension of the cross-cultural comparison.	The project shows some creative integration of drawings/images and text.	Good control of language features; mostly consistent accurate use of the present tense; descriptors have accurate gender and number agreement most of the time.
2	Project reflects some comprehension of the cross-cultural comparison, but it might reflect some misunderstanding.	The project shows adequate creative integration of drawings/images and text, but is somewhat lacking in creativity.	Adequate control of language features; present tense is not consistently accurate; descriptors don't have gender/number agreement consistently though errors don't inhibit comprehension.
1	Project does not consistently reflect comprehension of the cross-cultural comparison; it reflects some misunderstanding.	The project demonstrates an attempt to creatively integrate drawings/images and text.	Weak language control; frequent errors in present tense and agreement that at times obscure meaning.

Día de Muertos
2 de Noviembre



El día de los Fieles Difuntos es fecha especial para recordar a los seres queridos que han traspasado el umbral de lo desconocido. Mucho se habla sobre la vida en el más allá e incluso abundan testimonios de personas que han dejado de presentar signos vitales por varios minutos y han narrado sus experiencias en ese "extraño sueño" o, tal vez sea más acertado decir "en su breve muerte".

Nada sabemos los vivos sobre aquellas sensaciones, pero sí experimentamos lo que la muerte significa: duelo, dolor por la pérdida de un ser querido, una despedida... Y al paso del tiempo la resignación.

Sin embargo, en la cotidianidad del mexicano la muerte aparece salpicada de picardía, como si se olvidaran sus secuelas en tanto más lejos está de las vidas de cada uno. Son muestras de estas expresiones las que PixelNet ha preparado para compartir con los usuarios de Internet... Después de todo, suficientes duelos vivimos a lo largo de nuestra existencia como para todavía tomar muy en serio el Día de los Fieles Difuntos... ¿Por qué no darles a nuestros muertos el regalo de nuestra sonrisa, hoy, en su día?

FRASES CÉLEBRES

RELACIONADAS CON LA MUERTE

Círculo es la existencia, y mal hacemos cuando al querer medirla le asignamos la muerte y el sepulcro como extremos.

~ *Manuel Acuña*

La muerte no es más que un accidente de la vida universal; la inmortalidad la han inventado los hombres para consolarse de lo efímero de sus vidas.

~ *Doctor Atl*

Creo en lo importante de estar vivo y de ser un hombre de tiempo, de ceniza, que nace, crece y muere, o nace y muere.

~ *Homero Aridjis*

Los velorios son para el mexicano, en realidad, más que una ocasión de enfrentarse con un futuro inexorable, la oportunidad de holgar, murmurar y divertirse.

~ *María Elvira Bermúdez*

Vivos por breve tiempo, mis hermanos. Sólo por la muerte nos queremos.

~ *Rubén Bonifaz Nuño*

Frente a la proximidad de la muerte, la necesidad de amar se acrecienta. Muero cada día. No hay nada nuevo en ello.

~ *José Luis Cuevas*

Pero ahora ¿qué importa un año más en el tiempo de un muerto? Quisiera morir silenciosamente, sin dejar una huella, como muere una música lejana en un oído inatento.

~ *Carlos Díaz Dufío, hijo*

No le tengo miedo a la muerte, porque es una mujer.

~ *Emilio Fernández*

Yo no le tengo miedo a la muerte, pero sí al modo como he de morir. Quisiera hacerlo como Don Quijote, cuerdo y con el ánimo sosegado.

~ *Luis González Obregón*

Mientras más erótico se es, más se tiene la obsesión de la muerte. Erotismo y muerte van siempre de la mano.

~ *Hugo Gutiérrez Vega*

Los granos de trigo sepultados en tierra morirán, ya que la muerte es indispensable condición para renacer.

~ *Luis María Martínez*

Morir es nada cuando por la patria se muere.

~ *José María Morelos y Pavón*

Aunque sea jade: también se quiebra,
aunque sea oro, también se hiende,
y aun el plumaje de quetzal se desgarrar:
¡No por siempre en la tierra:
sólo breve tiempo aquí!

Como una pintura
Nos iremos borrando,
como una flor
hemos de secarnos
sobre la tierra,
cual ropaje de plumas
del quezal, del zacuán,
del azulejo, iremos pereciendo.

~ *Nezahualcōyotl*

Lloras a tus muertos con un desconsuelo tal, que no parece sino que tú eres eterno.
¿Quién no sabe en México seguimos al pie de la letra el precepto bíblico de alabar a los muertos? A los vivos los elogiamos cuando pueden darnos algo.

~ *Amado Nervo*

Hasta a la muerte la tratamos los mexicanos con empalago, la envolvemos como un tamal en las melosas hojas de elote del diminutivo. En los pueblos de México se junta la gente para rezar nueve noches por el alma del difuntito.

~ *Octavio Novaro*

Muero creyendo que he hecho por el servicio de mi país cuando he creído en conciencia que era bueno.

~ *Melchor Ocampo*

La muerte es intransferible, como la vida. La indiferencia del mexicano ante la muerte se nutre de su indiferencia ante la vida.

~ *Octavio Paz*

Ido el placer ¿la muerte a quién aterrera?

~ *Ignacio Ramírez*

La muerte es un acto infinitamente amoroso.

~ *José Revueltas*

Tu cadáver te ha alcanzado, no tengas cuidado.

~ *Jaime Sabines*

La vida es un paso a la muerte, nacimos para morir.

~ *Carlos Trouyet*

En tanto las lámparas estén en agonía, aún hay vida. Pero, como los místicos, interesa irse haciendo, con serenidad, a la idea de la muerte.

~ *Luis G. Urbina*

La muerte es el instante en que la mariposa escapa de la oruga; en nuestro cuerpo el alma está larvada y es la muerte quien le otorga el ser.

La vida y la muerte no son dos polos opuestos, sino dos estados conexos entre los cuales no todos los contactos cesan.

~ *José Vasconcelos*

La muerte toma siempre la forma de la alcoba que nos contiene.

~ *Xavier Villarrutia*

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