

Cultures Intertwined: Halloween VS Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

written by Veronica Gonzalez-Smith

Growing up along the border, in El Paso, Texas—a small town separating the United States and México—we lived with the Mexican and American cultures intertwined. As kids, we traveled in and out of two worlds daily. The moment we left our *casitas* to go to school, we entered our American culture, holidays and traditions, but at home we had our own language, cultures and traditions. In the meantime, some of our Mexican culture was watered down or lost in translation. As mothers of two beautiful children, our hope is to keep some of the Mexican traditions alive, but it's taken some education on our part to consciously understand the differences. Halloween and Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a HUGE example of how our two worlds melted together. However, these two holidays are quite different.

Halloween is celebrated on October 31 and it's a day dedicated to dressing up, children and adults alike, and going out and receiving candy or attending some form of masquerade party. Churches have made an attempt to make it less ghoulish by having carnivals where children can take part in pumpkin carving, or face painting, all the while eating yummy food like corn on the cob, candied and caramel apples, and kettle corn. But the haunted house is always looming. The images used to portray Halloween are somewhat morbid in that it's usually characterized by ghouls, ghosts, witches, devils, and the like. But mothers try to make it less scary by having our children dress up as princesses or super heroes.

Día de los Muertos is a two day holiday celebrated on November 1 and 2. Día de los Muertos was originally designed to celebrate life by honoring the memory of the departed. On these days, families go to the cemetery and place beautiful flowers on the graves of their lost relatives; singing usually takes place and sometimes mariachis show up to serenade the dearly departed. It is believed that on these days the gates of heaven open up and children who have passed on come to Earth to visit on November 1, called Día de los Angelitos—the day of little angels. On November 2, the gates open up again and adults come down to visit, this day is called All Soul's Day.

Setting up an altar is part of the tradition and customs of Día de los Muertos. The altar will be created in a small corner of a room, probably the dining room. According to tradition, an altar can have candles, pictures of the deceased, flowers (usually marigolds), drinks and food. The belief is that any visiting souls may be hungry from their long journey and so the food and drink is for nourishment, in order to help them make their journey back. This is supposed to be a happy day, filled with eating, drinking and sitting around and telling stories of those being honored. This year we will honor my husband's father and grandparents as well as my grandparents who have since passed away. We hope to retell memories of them to our children and delight in the times we shared with them. Our hope is to keep the memory of them alive for both us and our children. We're not sure why the tradition was never passed onto us here in the United States, but since having found out the significance of this day, we have decided to take part in the holiday this year. We look forward to doing the following with our children:

- Creating a beautiful altar with lots of bright marigold flowers.
- Placing pictures of deceased loved ones on the altar.
- Making atole, champurrado, and persimmon margaritas to drink
- Making pumpkin empanadas with our children.
- Making mole, another family favorite.
- Placing candles on the altar.

Once all the preparations have been made, we can enjoy the evening by lighting the candles, and retelling stories of our deceased loved ones while we feast on mole, pan de muerto, drinks and pumpkin empanadas. My husband and I took the time today to go through all of our pictures of his father and all of our grandparents who have passed away. We talked about the feast and all the stories we can't wait to share with our children. We have decided to download songs they liked as well and have them playing while we retell stories to our children. I especially remember dancing in the kitchen with my grandmother, Jesusita. I remember her dancing with me to her favorite song, "Jesusita en Chihuahua;" we all remember this as one of her favorite songs. Although my sister and I live in two different states, she in Colorado and I in California, we have agreed to introduce this holiday and tradition to our respective husbands and children. No year like the present to begin anew. We are both thrilled to educate our children about traditions that are part of our culture. She will take part in Día de los Muertos with her two beautiful children and husband in Colorado and I with mine in California. We can't wait to share our mutual experiences, pictures and stories of the event.

Halloween has played a fun part in our families but now we are even more excited to introduce Día de los Muertos on November 2 with our families. It will be a beautiful way to honor our ancestors and share it with our children and spouses. The frightful visions we have of death shouldn't be so morbid, they can in fact be, pleasant and joyful.

Name: _____

Halloween vs. Día de los Muertos

Introductory Paragraph/Attention Grabber

Development-bridge

Thesis Statement:
helps control the ideas

Body Paragraph #

Subject 1

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

Subject 2

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

HALLOWEEN

Celebrated on
October 31st.

Origins: The old Irish,
Gaelic Samhain
(meaning summer's end),
a time to store food
supplies for the cold
months ahead.

Celebrates the end of
summer and the
coming of winter.

Harmful spirits
warded off by
frightening costumes
and masks.

Common symbol:
The jack-o'-lantern.

Images of evil, the
occult, magic, and
monsters.

Coincides with the
Christian All Saint's
Day on November 1st.

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

Celebrated on
November 1st and 2nd.

Origins: The Aztec
festival dedicated
to goddess
Mictecacihuatl,
Lady of the Dead.

Celebrates the life
and death of
ancestors, friends,
and family.

Encourages visits from
spirits of those who
have died and celebrates
their memory.

Common symbol:
The skull.

Images of cheerfully
decorated gravesites and
home altars with flowers
and traditional food.

Coincides with the
Catholic All Soul's
Day on November 2nd.

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assignment and

Body Paragraph #2 - Second aspect that is different or Subject 1 and Subject 2

Subject 1

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

Subject 2

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

Body Paragraph #3 (Optional) - Third aspect that is similar or different or Subject 1 and Subject 2
Subject 1

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

Subject 2

Detail 1: _____

Detail 2: _____

Conclusion: should accomplish three major goals:

1. Restate the main idea of your essay, or your thesis statement.
2. Summarize the three sub-points of your essay.
3. Leave the reader with an interesting final impression.

Summary of main points: _____

Evaluate the similarities/differences: _____

Restate the point/thesis: _____
