

Nombre \_\_\_\_\_

Clase \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

### Recordar (Remembering)

We have been talking about *el Día de los Muertos*, a holiday in Mexico. It is a holiday that remembers the dead. Make lists comparing the two celebrations. Think of at least **five things** that you know about how Mexicans celebrate *El Día de los Muertos* and at least **five things** that you know about how some people remember the dead in the U.S. You should be able to think of at least **three things** that both have in common. Use this chart to write a paragraph below.

**Hint:** Use all your senses. What would you see, smell, hear, touch, and taste?

México	Both	U.S.A.

*El Día de los Muertos*



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# El Día de los Muertos

by **Carlos Miller**

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

More than 500 years ago, when the Spanish Conquistadors<sup>1</sup> landed in what is now Mexico, they encountered natives practicing a ritual that seemed to mock death.

It was a ritual the indigenous people had been practicing at least 3,000 years. A ritual the Spaniards would try unsuccessfully to eradicate<sup>2</sup>.

A ritual known today as Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead.

The ritual is celebrated in Mexico and certain parts of the United States, including the Valley.

Celebrations are held each year in Mesa, Chandler, Guadalupe and at Arizona State University. Although the ritual has since been merged with Catholic theology, it still maintains the basic principles of the Aztec ritual, such as the use of skulls.

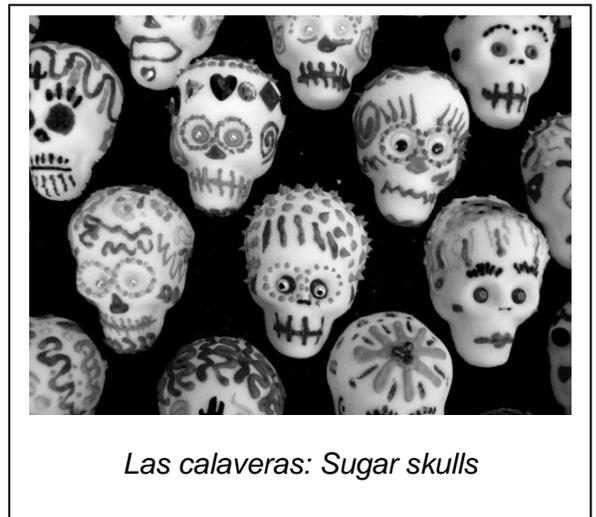
Today, people don<sup>3</sup> wooden skull masks called *calacas* and dance in honor of their deceased relatives. The wooden skulls are also placed on altars that are dedicated to the dead. Sugar skulls, made with the names of the dead person on the forehead, are eaten by a relative or friend, according to Mary J. Adrade, who has written three books on the ritual<sup>4</sup>.

The Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations kept skulls as trophies and displayed them during the ritual. The skulls were used to symbolize death and rebirth.

The skulls were used to honor the dead, whom the Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations believed came back to visit during the month long ritual.

Unlike the Spaniards, who viewed death as the end of life, the natives viewed it as the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake.

However, the Spaniards considered the ritual to be sacrilegious<sup>5</sup>. They perceived the indigenous people to be barbaric and pagan.



*Las calaveras: Sugar skulls*

<sup>1</sup> **Conquistadors:** The Spanish who came to the New World and took over the civilizations that were there.

<sup>2</sup> **eradicate:** To get rid of or forbid something.

<sup>3</sup> **don:** Another word for “put on” or “wear.”

<sup>4</sup> **ritual:** A ritual is an action or ceremony that has a special meaning.

<sup>5</sup> **sacrilegious:** Scandalous and offensive to their religion.

In their attempts to convert them to Catholicism, the Spaniards tried to kill the ritual. But like the old Aztec spirits, the ritual refused to die.

To make the ritual more Christian, the Spaniards moved it so it coincided with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (Nov. 1 and 2), which is when it is celebrated today.

Previously it fell on the ninth month of the Aztec Solar Calendar, approximately the beginning of August, and was celebrated for the entire month. Festivities were presided over by the goddess Mictecacihuatl. The goddess, known as "Lady of the Dead," was believed to have died at birth, Andrade said.

Today, Day of the Dead is celebrated in Mexico and in certain parts of the United States and Central America.

"It's celebrated differently depending on where you go," Gonzalez said.

In rural<sup>6</sup> Mexico, people visit the cemetery where their loved ones are buried. They decorate gravesites with marigold flowers and candles. They bring toys for dead children and bottles of tequila to adults. They sit on picnic blankets next to gravesites and eat the favorite food of their loved ones.

In Guadalupe, the ritual is celebrated much like it is in rural Mexico. "Here the people spend the day in the cemetery," said Esther Cota, the parish secretary at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. "The graves are decorated real pretty by the people."

In Mesa, the ritual has evolved to include other cultures, said Zarco Guerrero, a Mesa artist.

"Last year, we had Native Americans and African-Americans doing their own dances," he said. "They all want the opportunity to honor their dead."

In the United States and in Mexico's larger cities, families build altars in their homes, dedicating them to the dead. They surround these altars with flowers, food and pictures of the deceased. They light candles and place them next to the altar.

"We honor them by transforming the room into an altar," Guerrero said. "We offer incense, flowers. We play their favorite music, make their favorite food."

At Guerrero's house, the altar is not only dedicated to friends and family members who have died, but to others as well.

"We pay homage to the Mexicans killed in auto accidents while being smuggled across the border," he said. "And more recently, we've been honoring the memories of those killed in Columbine."



*This altar is to remember a deceased family member, with candles, sugar skulls,*

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<sup>6</sup> **rural:** Country area (not in the city.)