

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 Conquistadors¹ 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 eradicate².

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 don³ 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 ritual⁴.

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 sacrilegious⁵. They perceived the indigenous people to be barbaric and pagan.



Las calaveras: Sugar skulls

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

² **eradicate:** To get rid of or forbid something.

³ **don:** Another word for “put on” or “wear.”

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

⁵ **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 rural⁶ 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,

⁶ **rural:** Country area (not in the city.)

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



Edmodo in our Class – Spanish with Señora Kennedy

- We will be using an online program in our class this year through www.edmodo.com. It is a social network, much like facebook, but it is designed with education in mind. We have a page specifically set up for just our class, that only our class can post on and access.
- Edmodo is a great place for us to share our ideas and thoughts regarding our class in your life and start a discussion with your classmates.
- Some homework assignments will be posted to Edmodo. Read the directions carefully for each assignment. Watch or read any attachments to the assignment. Click on “Turn-in” and then type your assignment in the box provided. Afterwards, click “Turn-in” again. If you wish to spend some time on an assignment or want to use special formatting not available in the chat box, type your response into MSword and work on it, and then cut and paste the assignment into the Edmodo turn-in page.
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- You can access Edmodo with a computer at home or at school, or there is a free app for iPhones and android phones: m.edmobile.com
- Remember that is the online version of class. Inappropriate posting of any kind will result in discipline referrals.
- To make your account:
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 4. Write your full name with no spaces as your Username
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 6. Write your first name and last name where asked.
 7. Click “Sign-up!”

If you already use Edmodo for another class, you only have to click the “join” button above your classes on the left, and then enter the group code for your class.

Nombre _____ Fecha _____

A) Vocabulario Útil

Look up the following vocabulary to prepare for the reading.

Español	Type of word	English
1) Lucha Libre	<i>noun (sport)</i>	
2) luchador	<i>noun (person/profession)</i>	
3) máscara	<i>noun</i>	
4) tío	<i>noun (family)</i>	
5) sobrino	<i>noun (family)</i>	
6) fuerte	<i>adjective</i>	

B) Escuchar y Leer

Read and listen to the following description. Fill in missing information as needed, using words from the Word bank.

DOS REYES MISTERIOSOS

En México hay un deporte popular que se _____ **Lucha Libre**. Los participantes se llaman **luchadores**. Los luchadores llevan **máscaras**.



Un luchador famoso se llama **El Rey Misterio Sr.** Su _____ actual es Miguel Ángel López Díaz. Su _____ es el 8 de enero de 1948. Tiene 65 _____. Es de México.

El **sobrino** del Rey Misterio se llama Óscar Gutiérrez. Es **El Rey Misterio Jr.** Es luchador profesional también⁷. Su cumpleaños es el 11 de _____ de 1974. _____ de California. Tiene _____ años. Es fuerte ___ famoso. Está entreñado por⁸ su **tío**.



⁷ también: also/too

⁸ está entreñado por: He is trained by...

C) Frases Útiles

Connect each Spanish phrase with its English translation, and write the correct letter next to each phrase.

1. ___ His/Her name is...
2. ___ His/her birthday is...
3. ___ He/She is _ years old.
4. ___ He/She is from ___.
5. ___ He/She is...

A. Es...
B. Es de...
C. Se llama...
D. Tiene... años.
E. Su cumpleaños es...

D) Escribir

Describe your favorite athlete (or an athlete you know) in Spanish. Use the phrases above and the text of Dos Reyes Misterios, along with other words you know.
