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## The Mexican Day Of The Dead Festival

The Day of the Dead celebration traces its roots to 2,500 to 3,000 years ago to a tradition from pre-Colombian culture (Brandes, 1998). It is also known as Dia de los Muertos, which is Day of the Dead in Spanish. It was dedicated to the Lady of the Dead, known as La Calaveras Catrina. This festival is also a way for family members to honor the dead and is celebrated throughout a period of three days with each having their own name. October 31st is called All Eves' Day, November 1st is called All Saints' Day, and November 2nd is called All Souls' Day (Brandes, 1998). Each date has a major significance and the reasoning to why they celebrate it on that day. For example, October 31st is when it is believed that deceased children will come back to Earth and visit family members. November 1st is when deceased adults will come back to Earth and November 2nd is when the family members pilgrim to the deceased's grave and adorn it with traditional and symbolic food. The food includes bread, known as pan de muerto, sugar skulls, known as calaveras de azucar, candied pumpkin, known as calabaza en dulce, tamales, and many other favorite foods of the deceased (Republic, 2016). Instead of mourning for the death of the loved ones, the Day of the Dead festival are for families to celebrate and welcome the deceased back to Earth.

There are many reasons to why the Day of the Dead festival began spreading worldwide. Some of the reasons include colonization of other countries and the immigration of the indigenous people to other countries and practicing it. In addition, the Day of the Dead is celebrated with a humorous attitude rather than a somber atmosphere because the family members celebrates the life of the deceased (Brandes, 1998). Furthermore, the festival is used to honor the dead by welcoming them back to Earth with gifts and their favorite foods. Those who celebrate this festival believe that the three dates are when deceased family members and loved ones will return back to earth for one day to spend it with their loved ones (Brandes, 1998). There is also an altar decorated with food, sugar skulls, and many other items that are meaningful to the person. However, there are differences to how each culture celebrates their version of the Day of the Dead. For the Patzcuaro, the godparents of the deceased child would set an altar at the parent's house and decorate it rather than the parents (Carrasco, 2006). They would leave pan de muerto, a rosary, candles, a cross, fruits, and candy. Furthermore, there are cultures where children would dress up in costumes, similar to Halloween, and ask people for money or candy (Carrasco, 2006). They believe that giving items away will bring them good luck and fortune.

Some of the symbolic uses of food for the Day of the Dead celebration includes bread, known as pan de muertos, sugar skulls, known as calaveras de azucar, candied pumpkin, known as calabaza en dulce, and tamales. Pan de muerto is one of the most essential foods connected to the festival (Brandes, 1998). It is sweet bread that is round and sprinkled with either sesame seeds or sugar. It has a circle on top with sticks running down the edges. The sticks represents bones and there are usually four to eight sticks per bread. The bones represent the circle of life and is usually sprinkled with some type of topping. In addition, bread may also have a symbolic and religious meaning because bread represents the body of Christ (Johnston & Winter, 2000). Furthermore, it is said the pan de muerto signifies the dead. It is eaten on Dais de Muerto either at the gravesite or at the altar of the deceased. When the baker is making pan de muerto, it is a tradition that he or she will wear decorated bands on the wrist. It is believed that the decorated bands will protect the baker from burns from the oven or stove (Johnston & Winter, 2000). There

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are many variations to this pan de muerto due to modern world immigration and globalization. Many people input their own recipes and style with the existing recipes to create their own special type of pan de muerto.

Sugar skulls, also known as calaveras de azucar, symbolize life and death. These sugar skulls are exhibited on walls called tzompantli (Brandes, 1998). Many families do not eat these skulls but rather leave them on the altar as an offering to the deceased. However, some families may make edible ones using chocolate and decorate it with candy. A maker will spend around four to six months per year preparing these skulls and are usually focused on aesthetics rather than edibility. The decorations on the skulls include feathers, foil, beads, and occasionally sombreros. Furthermore, some of these sugar skulls are actually made with clay. They are often colorful and very aesthetics with beads representing their eyes. These skulls are created for children or as offerings as a sign of respect for the dead. The family will write the deceased's name on the temple with icing and place it on the altar or gravesite. There are now many variations to sugar skulls due to immigration and globalization because many cultures incorporate the design of sugar skulls. As the Day of the Dead celebration comes closer, there are many blankets, lottery ticket scratchers, cups, bowls, and other items with a picture of the sugar skull.

Candied pumpkin, also known as calabaza en dulce and tamales are also very common food that has symbolic meaning for the Day of the Dead festival. Families make hundreds of tamales at once and are very labor intensive. It is usually made with the entire family together so they work together and spend quality time together. Candied pumpkin is a popular dish with the festival and is cooked until it is soft and jellified. Families then add their own personal favorite toppings on the candied pumpkin such as cinnamon or sugar.

There are many changes for the Day of the Dead celebration due to immigration and globalization. Many cultures celebrate and honor their dead, similar to the Day of the Dead festival. Each culture are different but practice similar activities. For example, the Chinese celebrate Qingming festival and the Koreans celebrate the Chuseok festival (Carrasco, 2006). However, like stated before, each individual culture is different but practice similar activities. For the Korean's Chuseok festival, they have a feast to celebrate a good harvest and honor their dead, similar to the Mexican's Day of the Dead festival. Furthermore, in Europe, the Day of the Dead coincides with the All Saints' Eve, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day. In Latin America, the families keep the skull of the deceased and adorn it with flowers and pray to them for protection (Carrasco, 2006). The United States is unique to the Day of the Dead festival, especially when immigrants migrate to the United States and they bring their culture and practices with them. The day of the dead festival is a national holiday in Mexico but it is not in the United States. Instead, Mexican communities come together and celebrate it. This brings new culture into the United States and allow other cultures to experience it and may even take parts back and implement it to their own cultures.

The Mexican Day of the Dead festival honors and celebrates the deceased family members and loved ones. It is a three day festival and is believed that the deceased children comes back to Earth the first day and deceased adults come back on the second day. The third day is when the family decorate the deceased's gravesite or altar with pan de muerto, sugar skulls, and other favorite dishes. There are many cultures that are similar to the Day of the Dead festival that honors the deceased, but they are each unique and specific to their own culture and traditions.

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