
Traditions On El Día De Los Muertos Festival

El Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, has been celebrated since colonial times and into the present time. It is a celebration which families come together to honor their deceased relatives. It's celebrated at the end of October and into the beginning of November. "At the outset, it should be made clear that the Day of the Dead is, at least in the contemporary era, an essentially Mexican term referring to the Mexican version of a pan-Roman Catholic holiday. Strictly speaking, the Day of the Dead-in Spanish, el Dia de Animas [Souls' Day] or el Dia de los Fieles Difuntos [the Day of the Faithful Deceased]-refers to All Souls' Day, which usually falls on November 2".

The celebration consists of colorful "carnavalesque-ritual performances" as well as artsy displays. "Decorated breads, paper cutouts, and plastic toys, most of them humorously playing on the theme of death, are evident everywhere. Sculpted sugar candies in the form of skulls, skeletons, and caskets suggest an almost irreverent, macabre confrontation with mortality". Family members clean and decorate the graves of their loved ones as well as leave items for their deceased loved ones to enjoy such as their favorite foods, flowers, and candles.

In class, we did a mini replica of what is usually traditionally done during this holiday for the deceased. I created an ofrenda, which is an offering or altar where food, candles, flowers, pictures and mementos are left for the deceased, for one of my youngest brothers, who was only 12 years old at the time. I created this ofrenda to honor this person because he lost his life too young. He would have been 14 this past January. Before this tragedy, I have not seen, spoken to, or had any type of communication with my brother since I was 13. I'm not as close to my father's kids as I am with my oldest sister, which is my mother's child. I wanted to honor him because life's too short and you'll never know when it'll be the last time you'll ever speak or see them again as well as to let him know that he isn't forgotten.

The four elements wind, water, fire, and earth, are traditionally used for an ofrenda. The water is to quench the thirst of the spirit, the candle is there for light, food which was grown from the earth, and papel picado, which is "punched paper" that surrounds the ofrenda to welcome the spirit back. In my ofrenda, I used different colors to incorporate the different elements. I used red for fire, blue for water, yellow for wind, and green for earth. I also incorporated flowers, gemstones, and sparkly glitter to as light to tie in with the element of fire. The brightness of the ofrenda and use of glitter represents how smart my brother was at a young age, he was academically smart, but also too smart for his own good.

The types of flowers that are usually included in an ofrenda cempasuchitls, which are yellow or orange marigolds placed around graves and altars.."About four o'clock in the morning family groups begin to wend their way to the cemetery, carrying arcos [decorated latticework displays] and other offerings of food, to take up their vigil by the graves of departed relatives. Again yellow marigolds are scattered over all graves and candles are lighted". These flowers are important because the petals from the flowers create a pathway as well as the color and smell attracts the spirits and guide them back home.

The types of gifts that I would include in my ofrenda is things that will remind him of his earlier

childhood when I was around. Things like his favorite foods and snacks, as well as his favorite toys and video games that he liked to play would be included as gifts for him. I would choose these gifts because it is something that he enjoyed and probably will still enjoy. The types of foods that would be on display would be snacks such as honey buns, chips, cookies, and brownies and meals such as macaroni and cheese and fried chicken as well as fruit punch. I associate these foods with him because as a younger kid, around the age of 7, he typically would not eat vegetables unless forced to and he also ate a lot of junk food and nothing nutritional.

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