

# Day of the Dead

## Visual Art: Lesson 1, Day of the Dead

### INTRODUCTION: INDIGENOUS AND SPANISH HISTORY

The celebration of death is a ritual the indigenous people had been practicing over 3,000 years. Through-out the years and history these rituals have modified to reflect the powers imposed, waves of migration and new costumes adapted. Today Day of the Dead is the holiday celebrated in Mexico, traditionally in Michoacán and Oaxaca. Day of the Dead has expanded to the United States and now it is celebrated in other parts of the world.



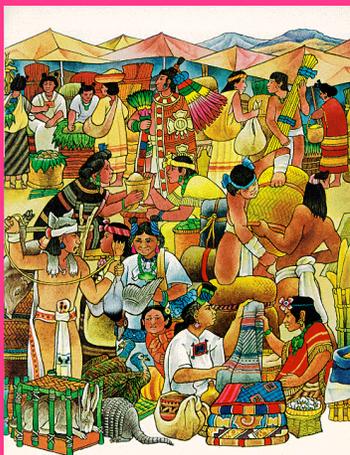
Due to the Spanish colonization of Mexico in 1510 during the Spanish colonization of Mexico, rituals were unsuccessfully eradicated. For example a church that was built by forced labor by the Indians, had sculptures of deities and/or built atop a pyramid or ceremonial ground for the indigenous. Previously 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. As a way of remolding the indigenous belief system, Spaniards changed the August celebration to All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day on Nov. 1 and 2. Day of the Dead today is a merger of the indigenous beliefs and Catholicism.

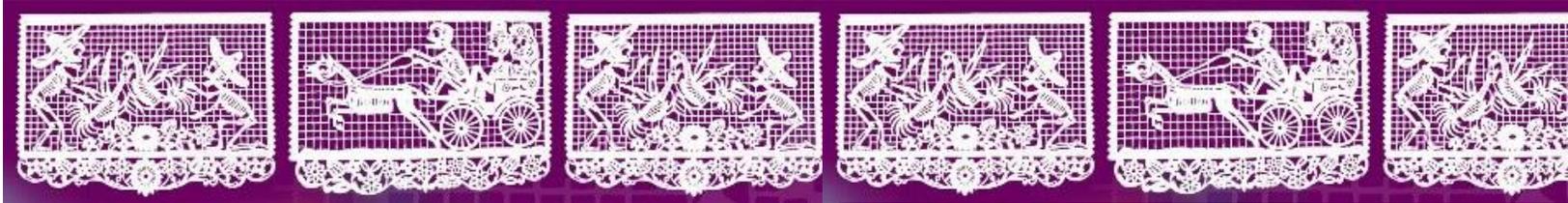
### PREPARATION

Preparation starts as soon as Day of the Dead ends the year before. Families year round prepare with their genre of art. Families make candles, papel picado, calaveras-skulls; made of sugar, wood, paper mache, barro tin etc. paper flowers, arches for the tombs and alters. Traditionally generations of families dedicate their lives to mastering their art form. Open air mercados sale the festive decorations and food.

### OFRENDAS

November 1 and 2 are the days the ofrendas are set at the altars in their loved ones home. It is believed that the spirits of those departed come to visit the living and partake of the festivities prepared just for them. Noche de muertos is a joyous occasion; it is a time to remember the life and love that our loved ones contributed to our lives. The community procession in the early morning of November 1 commences the official vigil for the dearly departed. The procession leads to the cemetery where a visual dream is awaiting. Imagine thousands and thousands of candles, what seems floating in the air. The candles surround the tombs and in the hands of the visitors. The cemetery is on hills and the glowing light is infinite. People are talking, eating and strumming the guitar to the departed favorite melody. The graves are washed and prepared for decoration with zempazuchtl, fruit, bread, candles, toys for kids and the favorite food of the departed. For the living, there is traditional food like rice and beans, mole con pollo and tortas.





Mexicans believe their ancestors return and enjoy the essence. Traditional foods will vary according to region, state and indigenous people in Mexico.

## DEATH

Death is a celebration to Mexicans. It is a continuation into the next life. Death is not something to be feared but a remembrance to celebrate and live your best life. Calaveras are a symbol of life to Mexicans as well. People are walking talking skeletons. Mexican children are taught at a very young age that skeletons are fun and whimsical. Sugar skulls are given to friends with their name on the forehead of the edible treat. It is a way of wishing your friend a long and abundant life.

Octavio Paz on Death, "The Mexican is familiar with death. (He) jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it. It is one of his favorite toys and most steadfast love."

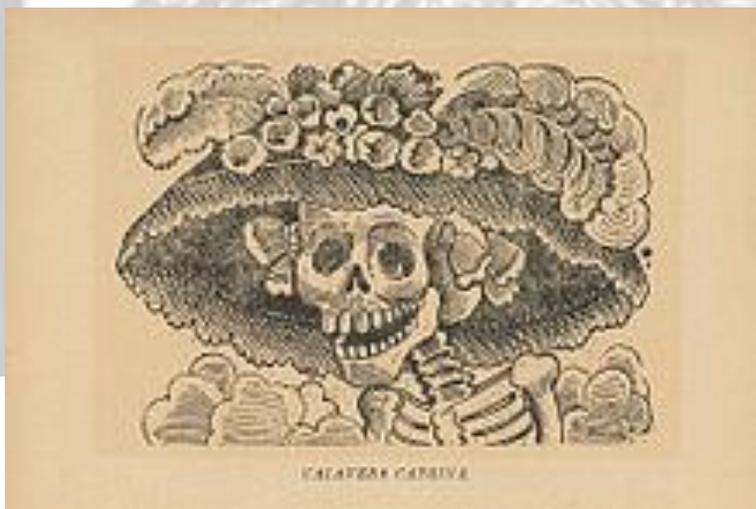


## ALTAR

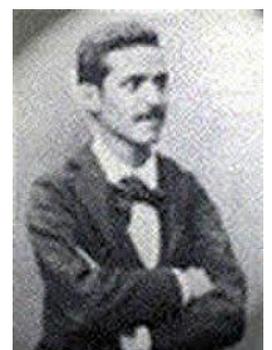
Altars are the way of celebrating loved ones who have died by remembering them. Families gather bright orange zempazucht, long thick candles, pictures of loved ones, papel picado, fruit, pan de muerto and Calaveras. Traditionally the altar is made in a shape of a pyramid to represent the indigenous side of the holiday. A photo of the honoree is placed at the top.

The traditions in big cities in Mexico and the United States the celebration differs. Families and cemeteries where the body of the loved ones lays are far away. In this case the altars and nichos becomes more important. In San Francisco California for example there are community altars; where anyone can place a photograph, flowers or candles for their loved ones. A procession starts in the Mission District and leads up to Mission Street. Cultures from all over the world dress like La Catrina and El Catrin. Carry photos of their loved ones with a candle. Up to 5,000 attend this procession!

## JOSE GUADALUPE POSADA-LA CATRINA

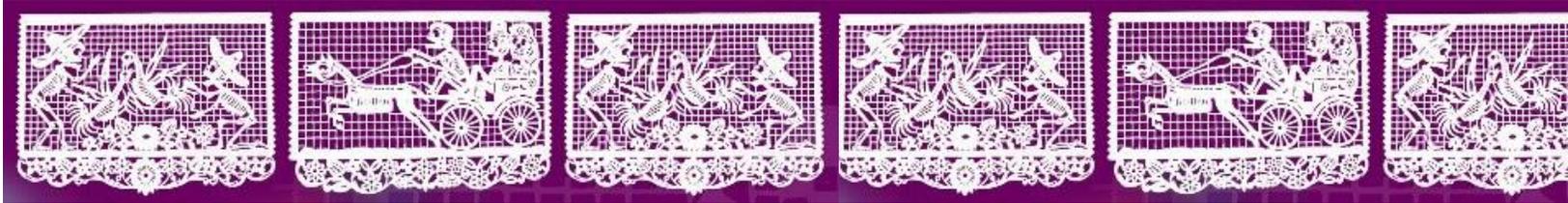


Jose Guadalupe Posada was a lithographer and print maker in Mexico. In 1910 he created the iconic La Catrina; a fancy lady skeleton that represented the elite in Mexico. The message portrayed by Posada, death is the great neutralizing force. Regardless of status or wealth we all end up in the same hole under the same dirt. Diego Rivera the great Mexican muralist was greatly influenced by Posada. La Catrina held the hand of a young Diego in the mural, Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park. La Catrina has become an important symbol of Day of the Dead. For further reading please refer to the SF Gate Article La Catrina: Mexico's Grande Dame of Death, By Christine DelSol



## **La Catrina by Jose Guadalupe Posada**





Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park  
Sueno de una tarde dominical en la Alemeda Central  
Fresco 1947-1948

The Mural weights seven tons; measuring 50 ft. long by 13 ft. high  
Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City  
(originally in the Hotel del Prado on Alameda Park; the building was pulled down after being damaged in the earthquake of 1985)



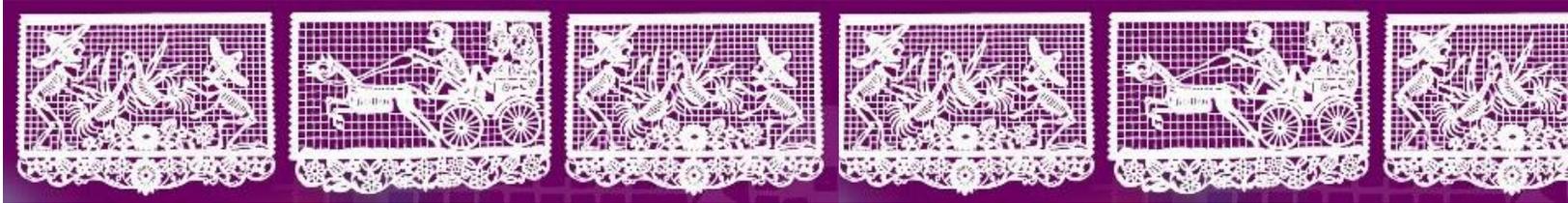
### DIEGO RIVERA

Diego Rivera, born December 8, 1886, in Guanajuato, Mexico, Painter, muralist, advocate for the rights of the working class Mexican and indigenous people of the land. Now thought to be one of the leading artists of the twentieth century, Rivera began drawing as a child. He studied art at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts while in his teens and then traveled to Europe to live and work on his art. He had some success as a Cubist painter, but the course of world events would strongly change the style and subject of his work. Inspired by the political ideals of the Mexican Revolution (1914-15) and the Russian Revolution (1917), Rivera wanted to make art that reflected the lives of the working class and native peoples of Mexico.

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

- For students to understand what is Day of the Dead and how it is celebrated in Mexico.
- For students to gain a greater appreciation for someone who has passed away and remember their life in celebration.
- For students to understand the differences between Halloween and Day of the Dead.
- For students to understand the history behind La Catrina and her creator, Jose Guadalupe Posada.
- For Students to gain greater Day of the Dead vocabulary in Spanish.
- For students to understand that it is possible to visit celebrations taking place every year in Utah and in Mexico.
- For students to understand that Day of the Dead is not a scary holiday. It is a celebration of life.





### ACTIVITY:

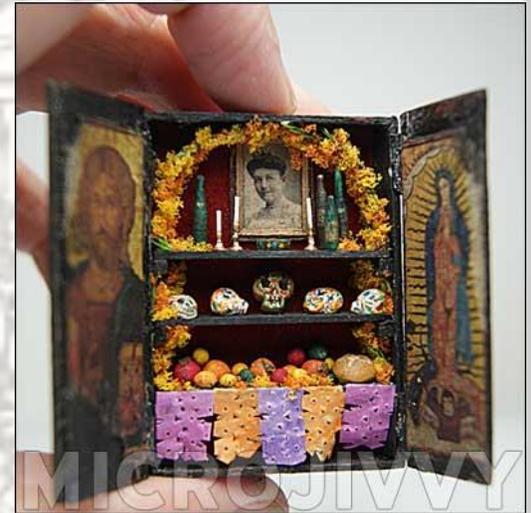
- **Las Cajitas**-small decorated boxes to keep mini treasures.
- **Nichos**-miniture alters created from a shoe box, created for a someone who has died
- Please refer to example pages attached
- **Please have students write their first and last name on the back, grade and room number.** Art will be placed in the gallery at the Utah Cultural Celebration Center during the exhibit and returned to students thereafter.

**LAS CAJITAS** Las Cajitas-Little Boxes are small boxes made out of a match box. Traditional images of Frida Kahlo, La Catrina, skeletons or other Day of the Dead Images are displayed on or in the box and decorated with glitter, gems, sequence and/or tissue paper. Other materials may be used.

### HOW TO MAKE LAS CAJITAS

Students will create their own Cajita (s). Use the materials listed and the examples. Each teacher will use their own methodology according to their class structure.

1. Empty the matches and discard in a safe place away from children.
2. Cover the box in glue, only a light coat is needed.
3. Measure a piece of tissue paper to cover the entire outside of the box. Leaving the sliding portion of the box open.
4. The outside of the box may be cut to create a door effect or flaps.
5. Choose an image that is cut down to the size of the box. Place a thin coat of glue on the box and position the image.
6. Decorate with glitter, gems, sequence or other materials.
7. The example to the right is of a cajita with an miniature alter inside!



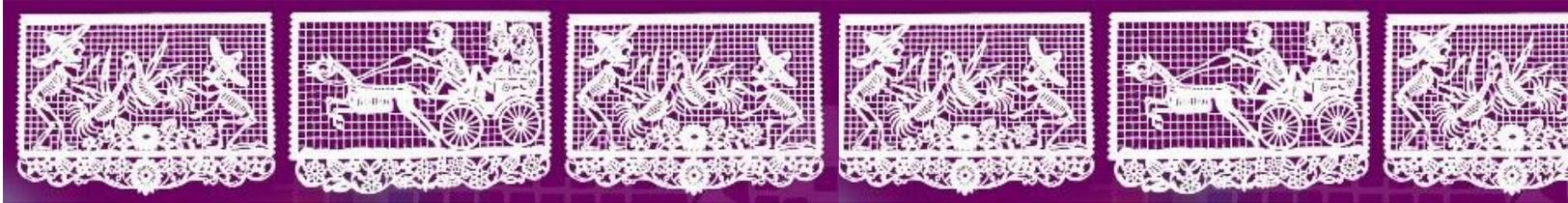
### NICHO

A nicho is a miniature alter. Nichos are an example of a developing art to fit the needs of a changing society. As waves of migration take people away from their loved ones, there is still a need and desire to remember those who have passed away. Since many Mexicanas are in the United States it is very difficult to travel back for Day of the Dead. Therefore, many families have ofrendas year round at home or Nichos. These are whimsical and artistic miniature alters for the loved ones who have passed away.

### HOW TO MAKE A NICHO

Students will create their own Nicho. Use the materials listed and the example. Have the students think of a person they would like to dedicate their nicho to. This could be a close relative, friend or famous figure. Examples: Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, The Beatles, Elvis, Senator Pete Suzao from Utah, Niel Armstrong the





astronaut. There are many historical figures that may be used. Ask the students how will they show the person they are remembering? Will they draw a picture, bring a picture from home. (Make sure the picture is a copy, not an only original.) The students will also create the outside of the nicho using the lid. They can cut and design the lids as their creativity leads them. Have students sketch a drawing of their nicho as it will look inside and the outside.

### **HOW TO MAKE A NICHU**

Students will create their own Nicho. Use the materials listed and the example. Have the students think of a person they would like to dedicate their nicho to. This could be a close relative, friend or famous figure. Examples: Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, The Beatles, Elvis, Senator Pete Suzao from Utah, Niel Armstrong the astronaut. There are many historical figures that may be used. Ask the students how will they show the person they are remembering? Will they draw a picture, bring a picture from home. (Make sure the picture is a copy, not an only original.) The students will also create the outside of the nicho using the lid. They can cut and design the lids as their creativity leads them. Have students sketch a drawing of their nicho as it will look inside and the outside.

1. Cover a shoe box bottom in construction paper. Inside and out
2. Cut the lid according to artistic choice, creating a base or an arch. Let students get creative!
3. Using Day of the Dead images or others designs, pastels or paint create the inner background walls.
4. Students may also cut papel picado from tissue paper and place over the construction paper.
5. Students may create ofrendas with clay, tissue paper and/ or drawings.
6. For tissue paper sculptures: roll up balls of clay and “mold” into the desired shape to create the ofrenda pieces.
7. Students will bring pictures of their loved one or a historical figure to cut and paste onto their nicho
8. Have students create dimension with height by making a pyramid, table or other design to display their ofrenda
9. Any art materials may be used to decorate the inside and outside of the nicho
10. **Please place their first and last name on the back, grade and room number.**
11. To find images of a historical figure, google search: “pictures of elvis” (example)**OTHER RECOURCES**
  - **RECIPES:** Please see attached
  - **POEMS:** Please see attached
  - **SF GATE ARTICLE:** La Catrina: Mexico’s Gramde Dame of Death, By Christine DelSol
  - **CLASS ASSESSMENT:** Please fill out class assessment form by each student and teacher.
  - **Links:** [www.dayofthedead.com](http://www.dayofthedead.com) Maria Andrade is a leader in the Day of the Dead community!

[www.thinkquest.org](http://www.thinkquest.org) Great site for historical on Aztecs and Day of the Dead and Student Quiz on available.



**DAY OF THE DEAD EVENTS IN UTAH:** please visit local website

**Thanksgiving Point**

**Utah Cultural Celebration Center**

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