



# DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

Between the 31st of October and the 2nd of November every year, Mexicans get together and celebrate one of the most colourful festivals in the world calendar. Dia de los Muertos (*Day of the Dead*) is a way for people to remember their friends and relatives who have passed away.

## It's different from Halloween

Whereas Halloween celebrates the spooky and macabre and plays on people's fear of death, the Day of the Dead is life-affirming. Instead of fearing death, Mexicans respect and pay homage to their relatives.

You won't find a single monster costume during the festival; people prefer to decorate objects and themselves with bright colours and vivid patterns.

## It's very old

The origins of Dia de los Muertos can be traced back to 1000AD. The Toltec Mexicans believed in respecting the dead and celebrated their return to the land of the living once a year. The Aztecs were the first tribe to create a formal celebration in their calendar; it fell in around the time of August and lasted for a month.

## The days are important

At midnight on the 31st of October (going into the 1st of November), children build an altar to invite the spirits of dead children to return to be with their family. This is often done alongside the families of the deceased. Food and toys are placed on the altar for the child's spirit (*angelitos*). The 1st of November is known as Dia de los Angelitos (*day of the little angels*).

From midnight on the 1st of November, the spirits of deceased adults are said to return to visit their friends and family. Offerings of food and alcohol are made, and the party goes on long into the next morning. It is a time of celebration, not mourning; music is played, and happy memories are retold.

The final celebrations are held around noon on the 2nd of November. People dress up as calaca

(skeletons) with painted faces and parade through the streets. Sugar skulls are painted in vivid colours, with large black eyes and bright flowers and patterns. This is the day when most people visit cemeteries and decorate the graves with gifts. Marigold flowers are commonly used as they are said to be the flower of the dead.

## Street festivals are relatively new

Until 2015, Mexico City didn't have a large parade to celebrate the Day of the Dead. However, the filmmakers of the James Bond films included one in the 2015 film, *Spectre*, and suddenly tourists started flocking to the city to see it. Wanting to promote Mexican history, the authorities decided to oblige and now hold an enormous parade filled with colour and music.

It's not just Mexico.

The origins of Dia de los Muertos may have originated with early Mexican tribes, but it isn't only celebrated there. It is widely celebrated all over the world. Many religious communities celebrate All Souls Day or All Saints Day at the same time as the Day of the Dead. These are also days for people to remember the dead and welcome their souls back for a day.



## SUMMARY FOCUS

1. How is the Day of the Dead different to Halloween?
2. Give one way that the festival is different now to when the Aztecs celebrated it.
3. Summarise why each day of the festival is important
4. Why does Mexico City had a Day of the Dead parade?
5. How is the Day of the Dead similar to All Souls Day?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

Why are marigold flowers important?

**V**

Write a definition for "macabre".

**I**

Why are stories of happy memories told during the celebrations?

**R**

Which Mexican tribe is believed to have been the first to celebrate the dead?

**P**

Using the information in the text, draw and decorate a sugar skull.

Answers:

1. It celebrates the dead, it remembers deceased family members, it isn't macabre or spooky, there is no fear/scaring, there are no monster costumes (don't accept no dressing up)
2. It is in November not August/it lasts 3 days not a month
3. 31st Oct/1st Nov is for celebrating the spirits of the children  
1st Nov/2nd Nov is for celebrating the spirits of adults  
2nd Nov afternoon if for visiting the graves
4. To promote Mexican history to tourists
5. They both celebrate the dead/they are both on the same days

R: They are the flower of the dead

V: Having a grim or scary atmosphere because of death

I: To help people celebrate the good times rather than feel sad that somebody has died

R: Toltec (do not accept Aztec)

P: Look for designs that understand the use of colour, bright flowers and patterns