

Name: _____

Day of the Dead

By Olivia Mendoza

Many people are sad or scared when they think of death. But the Day of the Dead isn't sad or scary. It's a happy time to remember and celebrate those we love who have passed away!

Although the Day of the Dead (or *Día de los Muertos* in Spanish) mostly began in Mexico, no one knows its exact origins. Some parts of it come from the Aztecs, some from Spain, and some from other European countries. Many countries celebrate it today, usually from November 1 to November 2.

Most families celebrate by visiting cemeteries and setting up altars, called *ofrendas*, in their homes. These altars are made with pictures of the dead and items that belonged to them. Families place gifts of food and drinks. They

also place candles and flowers, especially marigolds. The souls of the dead are said to be able to visit the living on these days. The marigolds' bright petals and strong scent are supposed to help attract and guide the spirits.

The Day of the Dead is really a celebration of life, and how life and death exist together. People use skull decorations and paint their faces

like skulls. They make skull-shaped candies and eat *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead), which often has bone-shaped toppings. They write lighthearted or



An *ofrenda* is an altar of offerings made by loved ones of the dead.



funny poems and stories for their loved ones—both living and dead—that have to do with death. They dress up, play music, and dance. The visiting spirits of the dead are the guests of honor at these lively parties. Families are excited to remember their loved ones and have their spirits celebrating alongside them.

The way people celebrate the Day of the Dead and the days they celebrate it on depend on where they live. Someone in a big city might have a parade, while someone in the countryside might only have a small *ofrenda*. And someone in Mexico might celebrate differently than someone in the United States or the Philippines. But one thing is always the same: death is not something to be sad or scared about on the Day of the Dead!



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1. When is the Day of the Dead usually celebrated?

2. According to the text, what are at least two countries where people celebrate the Day of the Dead?

3. Which of the following is **not** a traditional way to celebrate?

- a. making and eating skull candies
- b. praying to the spirits of the dead at altars and cemeteries
- c. trying to scare friends and family with ghost stories
- d. dressing up, including with skull makeup

4. Reread the following sentence from the article.

The visiting spirits of the dead are the guests of honor at these lively parties.

In your own words, what does it mean to be a guest of honor?

5. Why do you think we don't know the exact origins of the Day of the Dead?

6. Circle all items commonly offered at an *ofrenda*.

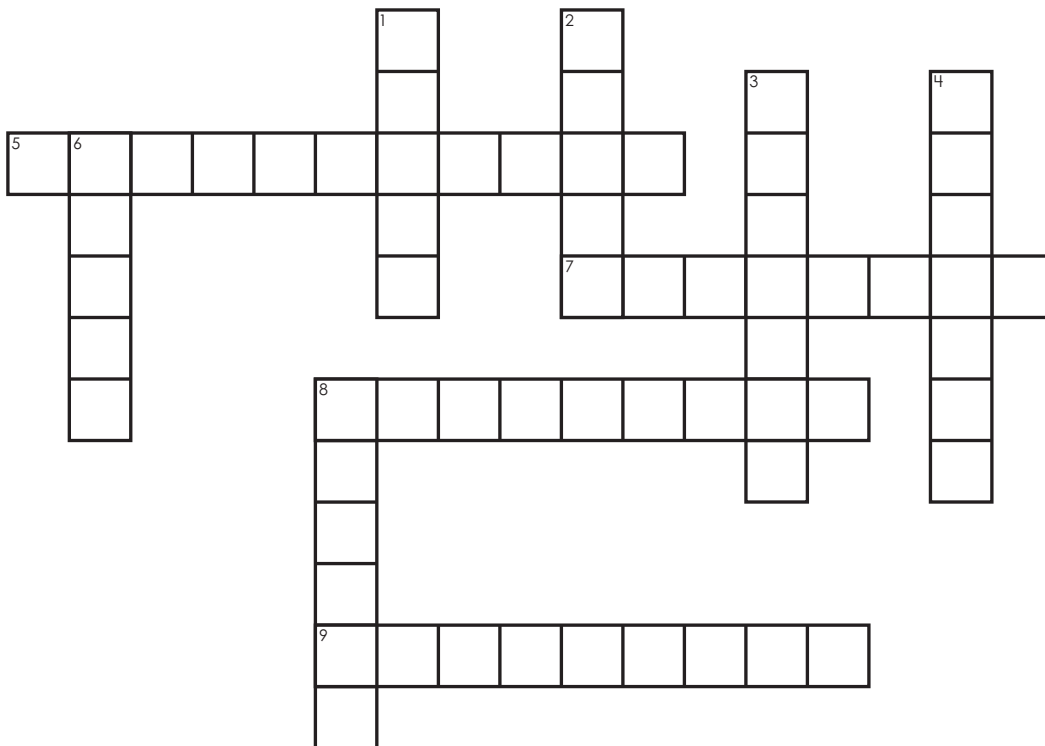
food and drink pumpkins marigold petals pictures of the dead

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Complete the crossword puzzle using words from the article. Ignore spaces or punctuation.



Down

1. the head bone
2. empire at its strongest from the 1300s to the early 1500s; would become Mexico
3. a home altar with offerings to the dead
4. to draw attention and interest
6. a platform or table used for offerings and worship
8. the main country that celebrates the Day of the Dead

Across

5. sweet bread often decorated with bone shapes
7. a place where the dead are buried
8. bright orange and yellow flowers with a strong scent
9. to honor; to hold festivities for

ANSWER KEY

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1. When is the Day of the Dead usually celebrated?

November 1 to November 2

2. According to the text, what are at least two countries where people celebrate the Day of the Dead?

Accept any two: Mexico, Spain, the United States, the Philippines

3. Which of the following is **not** a traditional way to celebrate?

- a. making and eating skull candies
- b. praying to the spirits of the dead at altars and cemeteries
- c. trying to scare friends and family with ghost stories**
- d. dressing up, including with skull makeup

4. Reread the following sentence from the article.

The visiting spirits of the dead are the guests of honor at these lively parties.

In your own words, what does it mean to be a guest of honor?

Answers will vary. An example is: It means you're the most important person at the party.

5. Why do you think we don't know the exact origins of the Day of the Dead?

Answers will vary.

6. Circle all items commonly offered at an *ofrenda*.

food and drink

pumpkins

marigold petals

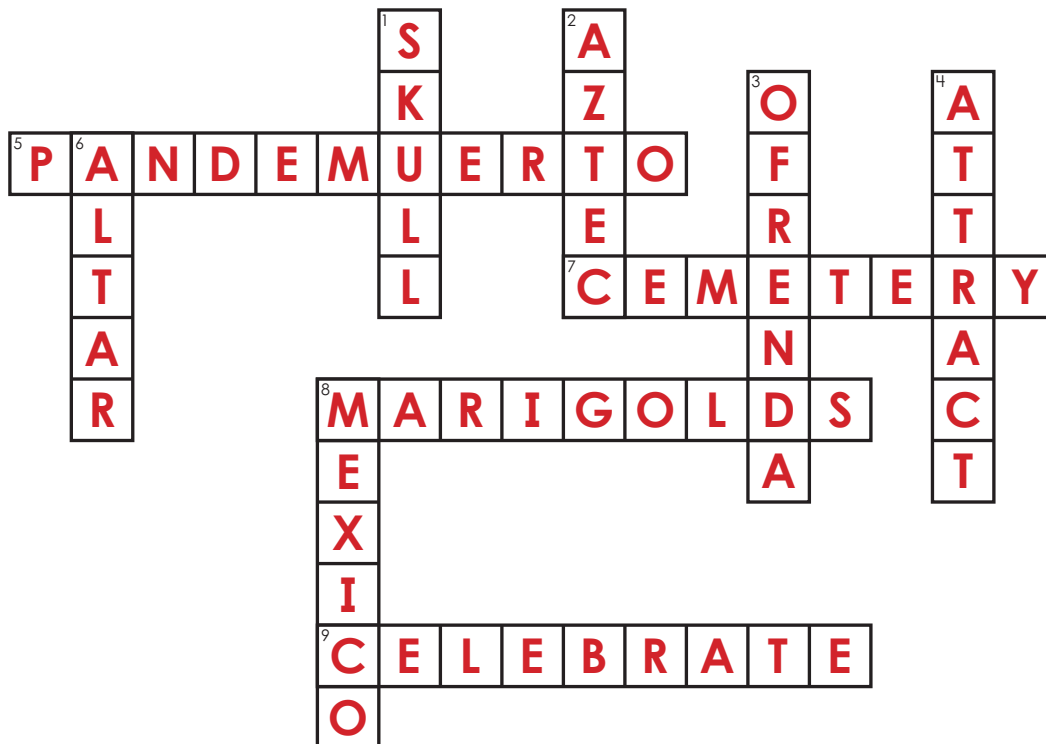
pictures of the dead

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