

Un proyecto para el día de los muertos

Las ofrendas:

The Day of the Dead ofrenda, or altar, is a prehispanic tradition that has lasted throughout the years. It has become an integrated part of the Catholic religion in Mexico. Every year it becomes a bigger and bigger event, with school classes, government employees and artists throughout Mexico competing for the most creative and interesting ofrenda. Halloween is not a tradition in Mexico, and every year the Catholic church fights against the celebration and promotes the ofrendas for el día de los muertos. Ofrendas are made on November 1st for santos inocentes, children who have died, and on November 2nd for adults who have passed away.

Your project:

Your class will make an ofrenda for someone who has died. It can be personal, such as a classmate or teacher, or it can be impersonal, such as Elvis, Princess Diana, or Selena, for example. Once you decide as a group who you will honor with your ofrenda, you will need to design it.

Building your ofrenda:

Don't feel like you need to go out and buy these materials. Be creative and do the best you can with the resources you have at your school and at home. Find a place where you can set up your 3-tiered ofrenda. Ofrendas consist of the following:

1. The most important thing to put on your ofrenda is a photograph of the person to whom you are dedicating the ofrenda. The three tiered ofrenda is covered in "papel picado" which is brightly colored tissue paper with cut out designs. The paper can be either handmade or purchased. Three important colors are purple (for pain), white (for hope), and pink (for the celebration).
2. Candles are also placed all over the ofrenda (do not light them, please). Purple candles again are used to signify pain. Four candles need to be placed on the top level of the altar signifying the four cardinal points. The light from the candles will illuminate the way for the dead upon their return.
3. Three candy skulls are placed on the second level (if you can't find or make candy skulls, use decorated paper ones). These represent the Holy Trinity. A large skull is placed on the center of the third level. This represents the Giver of Life. All bad spirits must be whisked away and leave a clear path for the dead soul.
4. The Day of the Dead bread, pan de muerto, should be accompanied by fruit and candy placed on the altar. Pan de muerto is plain, round sweet bread sprinkled with white sugar and a crisscrossed bone shape on top. You can also add the person's favorite food(s).
5. A towel, soap and small bowl are put on the altar so that the returning spirit can wash its hands after its long trip. There is a pitcher of fresh water to quench its thirst and another beverage.
6. To decorate and leave a fragrance on the altar, the traditional cempasuchil flower (marigold) is placed around the other figures. Cempasuchil comes from the Nahuatl word cempoalxochitl, which means the flower with four hundred lives. The flower petals form a path for the spirits to bring them to their banquet. (Potpourri may be an idea, too...)