October 26, 2020

Hola! My name is Liz (she/her), I was born and raised in Ecuador and currently live in Beaverton, OR. I’m an Equity Ambassador for the PCC Multicultural Center (@rockcreekmc) and this week I’ll be taking over the museum Instagram to show you the history, tradition and celebration of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).

I think there is a universal concept of Día de los Muertos that focuses on something we all have to deal with throughout our lives; death. And I think especially in our western world, where we avoid talking about death and we fear it so much, there is a lot to learn from this holiday. Death and loss are painful, but they are also natural parts of life. By honoring loved ones who have passed, we not only celebrate their lives, but also learn to deeply cherish our own. Life is fleeting, and we all step into the great unknown eventually. Instead of fearing it, Día de los Muertos encourages us to embrace death and come to understanding it as simply another part of life. ☯️
October 27, 2020

Hola again! It’s Liz from the @rockcreekmc. The Rock Creek Multicultural Center organizes different events that welcome all students from various cultural backgrounds and their communities. We support and learn from each other through activities like setting up an altar for Día de los Muertos.

Today, I’m showing you these pictures from previous years of Altares set up by the MC and we will get into the history of this beautiful, colorful holiday.

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The historical roots of this celebration go back to the pre-Hispanic cultures of Meso-America of the indigenous people, especially the Nahua (Aztecs, Mayans, Toltecas, Tlaxcaltec, Chichimec, Tecpanec) and others native to Mexico. Indigenous people believed that souls did not die, that they continued living in Mictlán (Place of Death) a special place for them to finally rest. Today due to Spanish “conquistadors” and Catholicism Día de los Muertos is celebrated much different. On Dia de los Muertos, tradition holds that the dead return to earth to visit their living relatives. It is believed that although these relatives can't see them, they can surely feel them. This night is an important feast and evocation. It is a time when family members share memorable stories that evoke the lives of their ancestors. Offerings and altars are created to welcome and commemorate the dead. Cempasúchil (Marigolds) and incense are offered in abundance because it is believed their aromatic scents guide the dead to the place where the feast is being held. A profusion of candles dispels the darkness just as the souls are being illuminated from the shadows of death. Altars are created with photos, mementos, fruit, pan de muertos (bread), and other favorite things of the ancestors being welcomed and honored.

It is said that on November 1st (Todos los Santos) the children who have passed come to visit and celebrate as angelitos. On the following day, November 2nd (Fieles Difuntos), it's the adults turn to show up for the festivities.
October 28, 2020
Hola again! Liz from the @rockcreekmc here! Today I'll be going a little more in depth about what an Altar for Día de los Muertos is and if you were thinking about putting one together for your loved ones, here's what you'll need!

The holiday's indigenous, millennia-old origin has been transformed and molded by centuries of Catholic and regional influence. But there is a commonality which ties everything together, especially when it comes time to build the altar. Day of the Dead altars are made as a way of remembering and honoring deceased friends and family. The altars help guide the spirits back to the land of the living on the Noche de Muertos on the night of November 1st and 2nd. Incense, flowers, candles, clothes, and food are left out to lead the dead to the altar and their waiting families, who spend the night in the graveyard singing, playing music, eating, drinking, and remembering.

I have created these posters with the most essential elements in a traditional "Altar de Día de Muertos." But I'll leave a list below with some of the other elements that can also be found on an altar.

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The Entrance: The Day of the Dead altar is usually built on multiple levels, with some extravagant, community-built versions reaching a story high. But the most common altars are divided into three sections: the ground-level entrance called la entrada, a mid-tier section with a table of offerings, and the highest level representing heaven, where photos of the dead are hung alongside images of favorite saints. The entrance of the altar is built to welcome and guide souls to their altars.

Dyed Sawdust Carpet: Elaborate, hand-designed patterns of colorful sawdust will sometimes line the entryway of the altar, serving as a path for the dead.

Calaveritas  
(sugar skulls)  
Sugar skulls represent death through sweetness and nostalgia. They also represent the people who have passed and who are receiving offerings at the altar. Their names are often written on the skulls forehead.

Velas  
(candles)  
Candles are lit to welcome the spirits back to their altars.

Fotos de los difuntos  
(photos of the deceased)  
A framed photo of the dead person to whom the altar is dedicated so that they can remember their journey in life.
Incense: Copal resin is burned to purify the souls of the spirits.

White Cross: Originates as a way to signify the four cardinal directions and Christianity.

Soap and Water: The soap, a basin of water and a towel help the spirits of the dead bathe and keep clean while they are back on earth. Pitchers of water are also left so the spirits can quench their thirst after a presumably long journey back home from the afterlife.
The Aztec Origins of Día de los Muertos

This holiday originated over 3000 years ago with the Aztec empire. When the Aztecs had begun this tradition, they weren't remembering loved ones who passed, but they were worshiping the queen of the underworld and protector of the dead.

This Aztec queen was Mictecacihuatl, “Lady of the Dead,” Queen of Mictlan. According to Aztec legend, Mictecacihuatl was sacrificed as an infant and placed in the underworld to become the wife of Mictlāntēcutli, the king of the underworld. In the underworld, her role was to watch over the bones of past lives, which would be used to create new life in the living world. However, in order for the bones to be able to create new life, they needed to be stolen from Mictecacihuatl to be brought to the living world. As their protector, part of her own life would be carried with the stolen bones. Even after the bones were stolen, she would continue her duty to protect them by returning to the living world every year to make sure the bones were being properly taken care of. When the time came for her to return to the living world, the Aztecs celebrated Mictecacihuatl's return with death festivals and traditional dances, to honor her for her protection of the bones that created life and to seek protection for those who died.

When the Spanish came, they changed the lives of the indigenous peoples wherever they went, from taking land for the Spanish throne to converting people to Catholicism. Many traditions changed, including those of Día de Los Muertos. The Aztecs laid out offerings for the King and Queen of the Underworld for the whole month of August, and the Spanish were the first outsiders to witness this honoring of Mictecacihuatl by the Aztecs. Not long after the Spanish exposure to this festival, the Spanish combined the Aztec tradition with Catholicism. Syncretism, the blending of Spanish and indigenous beliefs and practices, combined the Aztec traditions of Día de Los Muertos with the Spanish traditions of All Saint’s Day and All Souls Day.
October 9, 2020
Hola again, Liz from the @rockcreekmc here!
El Día de los Muertos throughout Latin America
In my previous posts we’ve learned mostly how Día de los muertos is celebrated in Mexico. Today, I want to show you how other countries in Latin America celebrate this holiday.

Bolivia (Photos 1 and 2)
According to Bolivians beliefs, death is not the end of life, but part of it. Therefore, when someone dies it is said that this person departed, as if they went on a journey. Bolivians believe that during the Day of All Saints the “ajayus” (spirits) return from the mountains bringing with them fertility. The feast of the dead coincides with the beginning of the planting season in the altiplano (highlands). For the celebration, Bolivian families prepare an altar known as "apxata" that has candles, flowers, sweets and fruits. In addition, the "tantawawa", a human-shaped bread representing the deceased.

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Guatemala (Photos 3, 4 and 5)

In Guatemala, the Day of All Saints is a special time to share with family. Among its main traditions is the consumption of "fiambre", a dish of Mayan origin that mixes cold meats of Spanish origin and vegetables of the region. Another of its traditions is the flight of giant papalotes (kites) in cemeteries. According to the legend, the kites prevent evil spirits from disturbing the good souls who visit the world of the living.
October 31, 2020
Hello everyone, today is my last post for this Instagram takeover so I wanted to make it special✨. Like I mentioned in my introduction post, I was born and raised in Ecuador 🇪🇨. So today I'll be showing you my country's tradition for Día de los Muertos, which we actually call Día de los Difuntos (deceased). The pictures you are viewing here were sent to me from very close family friends, and believe me when I tell you my mouth has been watering the whole time ❤️.

On November 2, we commemorate Día de los Difuntos, a national holiday. On the days surrounding the holiday some families, and large groups of extended families, make their way to cemeteries throughout the country, bringing flowers and food to decorate their loved ones' graves. But our biggest and most important tradition on this holiday is the making of our famous Colada Morada and Guaguas de Pan.

At this time of year in the Andes, a wild berry called mortiño (Vaccinium floribundum or Andean blueberry) comes into fruit in the highland. We make the most of this succulent, dark berry to make a very special drink, only prepared at this time: colada morada. It's a tasty, thick, hot beverage (some people prefer it cold), cooked with mortiño, strawberries, black corn flour, small pieces of pineapple and babaco (Andean papaya), herbs and spices such as ishpingo (Ocotea quixos). Colada Morada is a delicious drink, traditionally accompanied by guaguas de pan (literally ‘bread or dough babies), bread baked in the shape of a doll and decorated with icing and colourful toppings, and sometimes filled with marmalade or dulce de leche. Guagua (pronounced wa-wa) is the onomatopoeic Kichwa word for child. Kichwa is the native language of our indigenous people.

The drink and the bread are full of symbolism: the colada symbolizes the blood of the dead in the minds of the people, and guaguas represent the body.

The @rockcreekmc and I want to thank you so much for taking the time to read and learn a bit more about this beautiful holiday celebration.

-Liz