

## The Days of the Dead / Los Dias de los Muertos The Migration of the Monarch Butterflies

### Spanish Vocabulary Words with English Translations

Angelitos - those that die in innocence, usually children

Arco - arches form a door for the dead to enter. They are built with a wooden frame and cross supports so the structure can be mounted into the ground. These are usually decorated with marigold flowers

Azúcar - sugar

Bienvenido – welcome

Calabaza - pumpkin

Calaveras –skulls (either sugar skulls or written verses given to friends or relatives)

Calaveras de azucar - sugar skulls)

Cempasúchil – Marigolds (also known as the flower of the dead)

Chile – Chili peppers

Flor de Muertos – flower of the dead

Flores – flowers

Hacienda – a large estate or plantation often involved in farming or ranching. Traditionally, it is built in a U shape around a central plaza or garden. The architecture shows Spanish influence

Jose Posada – famous political cartoonist and engraver from the 1800s

La Danza de los Viejitos – Dance of the Old Men (Pátzcuaro)

La Noche de Muertos - The Night of the Dead

Los Muertos – the three days comprising the Days of the Dead (Oct. 31, Nov. 1, Nov. 2)

Manzanas - apples

Mariposa - butterfly

Migración – migration

Monarcas Mariposa – Monarch Butterflies

Montanas – mountains

Naranjas - oranges

Ofrenda - Day of the Dead food displayed for honoring the dead

Orugas – caterpillars

Pan de muerto - Bread of the Dead

Renta de Caballos – rent horses

Silencio - Silence

The Days of the Dead refers to a sequence of three days:

Oct. 31 – La Noche de Muertos (Night of the Dead)

Nov. 1 – Special Catholic mass in observance of all the saints

Nov. 2 – Special Catholic mass in honor of the souls in Purgatory

Oct. 31 is the most important of the three days by popular custom rather than by church doctrine. In Oaxaca, Mexico, these three days are simply referred to as "Los Muertos." The customs surrounding the Days of the Dead in Mexico will vary according to location.

#### Historical Context for the Days of the Dead:

The Aztecs in Mexico were known for their sacrifice rituals where they led victims to the tops of pyramids and cut out their hearts to appease their gods. Skulls from those sacrificed were saved by the warriors and hung in racks and homes as a sign of prestige. For Aztecs, sacrifice was necessary to keep order – to assure that rain came, to keep the sun on its course, to ensure transitions between rulers and seasons, etc.

As part of burial ritual, the Aztecs made an amaranth seed dough figurine in the shape of a human figure that they ate during burial ceremonies. They later divided up the dough among themselves and ate it. Dough images honored specific classes of people based on how they died (in childbirth, in war, by drowning, etc.). They offered the dead food and sang and drank in their honor. Food and drink were an important part of funeral rituals. The Spanish tried to eradicate these Aztec practices when they came, but were largely unsuccessful. The popularity of pan de muerto (bread of the dead) and eating calaveras (sugar skulls) today in Mexico is derived from Aztec rituals. Treats made with amaranth seed today can also be traced back to the time of the Aztecs.

The arrival of the Spanish brought war as the Aztecs and other civilizations fought the Spanish conquest. The Spanish also brought foreign disease against which the Aztecs had no immunity. The enormous loss of life and suffering in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries made the Day of the Dead even more important and elaborate as a way of remembering their dead. During this time, the Spanish also introduced sugar to Mexico, setting up sugar plantations. Sugar influenced the culinary practices in Mexico and sugar began to be used in religious rituals and in honoring their ancestors. The Spanish tried to eradicate the celebration of the Day of Dead resulting in resistant from the Mexicans and making this holiday even more important as a form of resistance.

In the 1700s, a friar wrote an account of the Mexican ofrenda. He described the thousands of figurines made of sugar paste called "ofrenda" which were sold and offered to the boys and girls in friends' houses when visiting neighbors and friends. An array of molded sugar figurines and sweet breads were made and sold. Sugar, however, was the principal ingredient out of which the skulls, cadavers, and caskets were made.

The Spanish tried to diminish or stop the popular the celebration of the dead. At times, the celebrations were so loud and raucous that the state threatened to ban them. They considered their celebrations to be a threat to civil authorities and scandalous. This only increased the importance of this celebration as a means of resistance against the Spanish.

The Mexican Revolution, which resulted in a separation from Spain in 1821, brought a sense of freedom of the press to newspapers in Mexico. Despite the end of the Spanish rule, political confusion created a long period of political instability. Many Mexicans felt dissatisfied with their Mexican leaders during this time of political instability. The first illustrated newspaper was called the El Calavera (The Skull). It often satirized politics through verse and drawings. Jose Guadalupe Posada, a trained printer and engraver, drew lively and humorous skeletons called "calaveras" in the newspaper that satirized politicians and captured the dissatisfaction that many Mexicans felt with their leaders during this time. The editions featuring the calaveras were printed for the Days of the Dead editions. His skeletons were depicted dancing, cycling, drinking, eating, and grinning. They were successful not only because they captured the prevailing political mood, but also because of the humor they provided and their cultural fit with the Mexican celebration of the Days of the Dead. Posada's skeletons had a major lasting influence on Mexican folk art and traditional gallery art because of their popularity. For many reasons, skeleton art forms developed as a part of Mexican culture and art. These included political circumstances, the observance of special Catholic masses on Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> honoring the dead, as a means of resistance to Spanish rule, the influence of the press, commercial success and interests, and as a historical connection to Pre-Columbian Mexican history as well.

During the late 1800s, Mexico borrowed extensively from European culture and fashion. From 1863-1867, the French invaded and occupied Mexico furthering Mexican interest in European culture, especially French culture. The upper classes sent their children to French universities, copied French fashion, and showed a preference for European tastes such as opera houses that were built during this time. Despite this trend, many Mexican artists, continued to create art in their native style, however. Jose Posada's calaveras and engravings satirized the popular French fashions of the elite and became famous as cultural icons against European influence. His skeleton engravings satirizing European dress became famous and are still popular and evident in Mexico today.

By 1910, most of the land in Mexico was owned by a very small number of wealthy families that owned most of the wealth and had amassed huge plantations. Rebels and landless peasants ran attacks against wealthy landowners from the north and the south of Mexico. The 1910 civil war ended

the vast class distinctions between whites, Indians, and Mestizos. Before, the gap between the rich and poor was vast in terms of wealth and rights. Mexico now had a new constitution that separated church and state and guaranteed rights to all Mexicans and workers. The nation went through an artistic rebirth after the civil war of 1910, turning away from European influence and turning instead to their native traditions and art for their national identity. This brought a renewed artistic rebirth to the country and a new sense of national identity that extolled Mexican traditions, folk art, their pre-Columbian past and pride in their Mexican customs including the customs surrounding the Days of the Dead.

### Celebrating the Days of the Dead Today

The Days of the Dead emphasize family ties and provide a way of staying in touch with ancestors, family and friends. At home, an altar is prepared for the departed, putting out food and drink, artistically arranged, that the dead liked when living and would enjoy when their spirit returns. This is called an "ofrenda." It is not expected that the dead will be able to eat the food, but they will enjoy the aromas of their food. The altar and food is on open view for anyone that comes to visit the family. The food for the graveside ofrendas is transported in containers for the family vigil. The ofrenda is considered sacred at both locations.

There is a strong secular side to the Days of the Dead as well. Today, pan de muerto and sugar skulls with people's names written on them can be purchased in shops and from street vendors. The sugar skulls can also be made in chocolate. They are often exchanged as gifts with neighbors and friends. Pan de muerto representing females or males is also prevalent from vendors during this time.

Characteristics of a Days of the Dead display and skeleton art:

1. Usually it is ephemeral art (non-durable).
2. It is seasonal art only and not used with funerals.\*
3. It is designed for play and amusement and thus secular in nature.
4. It is commercial and found in marketplaces during this time.
5. It is humorous and playful art that can have moving parts (it never mocks the real dead).
6. It is exchanged as gifts with living people.
7. It is often small, light, transportable art that fits in one's hand.
8. It will be used to decorate shops.

Typical gifts include the following:

1. Sugar skull calaveras purchased with people's names on them from stores or from street vendors.
2. Pan de muerto made in a soft spongy dough shaped in a skeleton form representing males or females.
3. Skeleton toys either naked or clothed holding an object such as musical instrument
4. Skeleton masks
5. Skeleton sculpture
6. Written calaveras. They are usually satirical, mocking a person's weaknesses through gentle teasing and can take the following forms:
  - a. Short written verse given to friends or relatives about them using humor and teasing (these can include poetic epitaphs)
  - b. political cartoons of famous people
  - c. literary calavera written in rhyme and quatrains usually 4-12 lines, but can be several pages in length
  - d. poetic epitaph mocking a living person in fun
  - e. calavera contests held by newspapers, publishing the best

(\* Mexicans would never give candy skulls or write a calavera to a friend when a family member or person dies. There is no humor or playfulness in the event of a death or during a burial.)

Some outside Mexico misinterpret the celebration of the Days of the Dead. Mexicans are not obsessed with death despite the prevalence of this theme in folk art. Instead political, historical, religious, and commercial circumstances gave rise to the crafts and candy that are sold and seen in supermarket displays, galleries, and shops. The Mexican celebration of the Days of Dead can also be viewed as an expression of their wisdom or philosophy in terms of recognizing our inevitable fate. They are not as squeamish about the subject of death in contrast to many cultures.

The Days of the Dead are a festive time of ritual when the living remember and lovingly honor their relatives that have passed away. It is a special time in Mexico when graveyards are decorated, altars are placed in homes honoring the dead, and visiting family takes place. Special care is given to cleaning up the cemetery plots of deceased family members. Families bring picnic baskets of food and cleaning supplies to weed around the grave, scrub the headstone and decorate. Once they are finished they will eat together and later light a candle for the dead when night falls. On Oct. 31, cemeteries will be full of families to honor their deceased. All night long the families will stay awake to be with the dead, sharing stories about the deceased. Vendors may also be present selling food or marigolds. It is a festive time when the church bells toll and whole towns

may be present in the cemeteries. The Days of the Dead celebration will vary widely according to regional customs in each area.

This unique Mexican holiday is a blend of pre-Columbian rituals with Spanish or Catholic customs as they merged together, each adapting new traditions to their own culture. It is mostly a private time to celebrate, but also has a community aspect to it as this will be a time to visit others and exchange calaveras. This holiday is focused on the family. Mothers will teach their children how to clean and decorate the graves of their deceased family members in preparation for later taking care of their parents when they die.

Within the homes, family reunions take place and the dead are honored. It is a time of cleaning and preparation. The favorite food and drink of the dead is placed on an altar or table so their returning spirits can enjoy the aroma of the food that they loved. Photographs of the dead may also be displayed along with religious statues, candles, and prayer beads. A path of marigold petals, also known as the flower of the dead, leads the dead from their graves to the homes. Later, the family will eat the food that they prepared for their departed relatives.

#### Celebration Features:

1. The first Mass takes place at dawn in the village cemetery.
2. The home altars start on Oct. 31.
3. The godparents are responsible for preparing an "arco" for a child or innocent one (sexually innocent) that dies in their memory. This is carried to the parents' home. The arco is transported to the cemetery on Nov. 1 and will stay there through November.
4. Fruit, flowers, food, and candles are placed around the gravesite.
5. Young men in the village are given the duty of ringing the church bell throughout the Night of the Dead. They also have the right to walk through the village asking for "el doble" (food, money, firewood, etc.).
6. Cempasuchil flowers (yellow-orange marigolds), which bloom in the fall in Mexico, are used to adorn the graves and create a path to the altars to guide the departed to their altars. The bright color of these flowers and their petals help lead the dead to their homes and graves. These flowers are also used to adorn arches at the graves that form a door for the dead to enter. The significance of the cempasuchil flower goes back to the time of the Aztecs. Cempasuchil flowers were used by the Aztecs to adorn altars and remember the dead. Their yellow-orange color also represented the sun for the Aztecs.
7. Pan de Muertos (bread of the dead), a sweet egg bread flavored usually with cinnamon or anise, is often placed on altars. The bread is shaped into skeletons with strips of dough used to represent bones.

8. Fruit is commonly placed on the altars. Calabaz en Tacha (sweet pumpkin) is an example of a traditional dish with spice that may be prepared for an altar.

In 1971, the government began promoting the Days of the Dead to attract tourism. Celebration of the Days of the Dead became more organized in some areas with performers and stages set up. Villagers are now hired as performers and outside performers are also brought in to dance, act, and provide music. Some of the altars have changed from being somber to being bright and ornate to attract tourists. The Days of the Dead are now promoted as a unique national expression of Mexican culture and distinctiveness.

Halloween has also crept into the culture. Plastic pumpkins and costumes can be purchased in some areas of Mexico. Halloween costumes in stores are limited to five themes for children: witches, ghosts, devils, skeletons, and vampires. Adults do not dress up for Halloween. The poor do not dress up either, but ask for their "Jalouin" (Halloween), meaning a coin or two collected using a battered box or container to collect their money. Some Mexicans object strongly to the presence of Halloween costumes and customs in Mexico, an American custom that they feel dilutes their own customs. Some murals and signs can be seen in Mexico stating "No Al Halloween" (No to Halloween) or "Conserva T Tradicione (Conserve your cultural Traditions)."

American TV has influenced Mexican children and some see Halloween as a symbol of gringo imperialism. The government has also shown resistance to the invasion of American culture that Halloween represents. They offer prizes for the altars, making the holiday more of a community event than a private family tradition. Altars with foreign objects such as jack-o-lanterns, however, are disqualified.

In the United States, the celebration of the Days of the Dead is usually viewed as a time to honor cultural diversity. This custom is celebrated heavily in the American southwest as a result. Celebrations of the Days of the Dead in the U.S. tend to emphasize ethnic and community affiliation and customs vary from city to city.

Despite the presence of Halloween in some areas of Mexico and the change that tourism has brought, the Days of the Dead have come to symbolize Mexican national identity. The celebration of the holiday has become more popular and important in Mexican society despite Mexicans living longer. The celebration has also spread over a wider area of Mexico and amongst more social classes. The holidays emphasize family ties in Mexico. It is also a time when friends can tease and visit one another.

## The Migration of the Monarch Butterflies and the Days of the Dead

For centuries, millions of Monarch butterflies have migrated from Canada to central Mexico arriving around the Days of the Dead every year (Oct. 31 – Nov. 2). As a result, a religious and spiritual significance is attached to the returning Monarch butterflies in Mexico. They are viewed by many as the souls of their deceased relatives returning to visit during this religious time.

Although the Mexican people were long aware of the migration of the butterflies, the scientific community did not learn of their presence until 1976. This was a major discovery for them. The Monarch butterflies travel thousands of miles from Canada and the United States to Mexico every fall to winter in the mountains of central Mexico in Michoacan. In the spring, the Monarchs will migrate back from Mexico, traveling to different parts of the United States and as far as Canada. Georgia is part of the flight path of the Monarch butterflies in the fall and spring. The presence of the Monarch butterflies in central Mexico from fall to spring is a part of the identity of central Mexico and a source of cultural pride. The butterflies are found on license plates, as a theme in paintings, in sculpture, and on pottery. A prominent soccer team from central Mexico, Las Monarcas, is named after the butterflies that live in this region from October through April. Depictions of the butterflies in Aztec murals, monuments, and carvings also suggest that they valued butterflies. Their god of infant mortality was a clawed butterfly. The discovery of the migration in 1976 has brought more tourists to central Mexico to view the butterflies, furthering the presence of the monarch butterflies in folk art due to commercial interests in tourism as well.

The monarch butterfly, which is seen in many states in the United States, including Georgia, has also suffered a decline in population. Monarch butterflies are dependent on one host plant, the milkweed plant, to lay their eggs and feed their young caterpillars. The milkweed plant population has declined in the United States due to pesticides, agriculture, and land development. Millions of Monarch butterflies migrate every fall from Canada and the United States to Mexico to spend their winters in Mexico at specific sites in the mountains of Central Mexico that are protected preservation sites by the Mexican government. The monarch butterfly migration is considered one of the greatest migrations in nature. Illegal logging in central Mexico has destroyed parts of their winter habitat, however, reducing the Monarch butterfly population significantly.

### **Vocabulary List for Students studying Spanish**

Directions: This list is intended as an aide to help students viewing the PowerPoint presentation "Los Dias de Los Muertos y Las Mariposas Monarcas." The PowerPoint presentation shows some words, phrases, and sentences in Spanish. Students can use this list to write down definitions of words that are unfamiliar to them. This will help them in completing the crossword puzzle.



# Los Días de los Muertos y Las Mariposas Monarcas

## Vocabulary List

Angelitos –

Naranjas –

Arco –

Ofrenda –

Azúcar –

Orugas –

Bienvenido –

Montañas –

Calabaza -

Pan de muerto –

Calaveras –

Renta de Caballos –

Calaveras de azúcar –

Silencio -

Cempasúchil –

Chile –

Flor de Muertos –

Flores –

Hacienda –

Jose Posada –

La Danza de los Viejitos –

La Noche de Muertos

Los Muertos –

Manzanas –

Mariposa –

Migración –

Monarcas Mariposa –