

CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

Lesson Plan

Seeing Symbols

Lesson Plan for *Day of the Dead*
Grade 3

Objective

To help students identify common symbols and practices related to Day of the Dead based on a text read aloud, and to practice finding those symbols in a video.

Things Needed

- *Day of the Dead* book
- Access to the “Day of the Dead” web page on the Pop! website:
<https://popbooksonline.com/cultural-celebrations/day-of-the-dead>

Before the Activity

Read *Day of the Dead* out loud as a class. Open the “Day of the Dead” web page in your internet browser and pull up the “Explore Links” tab. Click on the link called “An Animated Journey to the Land of the Dead.” The video can also be found here:

<https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/dia-de-los-muertos-an-animated-journey-to-the-land-of-the-dead>

Activity

Day of the Dead is a holiday where people celebrate and remember their loved ones who have died. Some people believe these departed loved ones return to Earth. As part of this holiday, people decorate gravesites and make altars in their homes called ofrendas. Ask the students the following questions to review some of the holiday’s other symbols:

- What do people often dress up as for Day of the Dead? (Answer: They dress as brightly colored skeletons.)
- What did the ancient Aztecs do to help the dead make their final journey? (Answer: They left out food and tools for their loved ones.)
- What do people often put at the top of their family’s ofrenda? (Answer: pictures of departed loved ones)



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- What do people often put at the bottom of the ofrenda? (Answer: the loved ones' favorite foods and drinks)
- What common items on ofrendas symbolize Earth, water, wind, and fire? (Answer: candles, water, paper banners, and food)
- What type of flowers are often placed on ofrendas? (Answer: marigold flowers)
- What do the strips on Day of the Dead bread represent? (Answer: They represent bones.)
- What symbols of Day of the Dead remind people that death is a natural part of life? (Answer: skeletons and sugar skulls)
- What do monarch butterflies represent? (Answer: In some beliefs, the butterflies are the spirits of people's dead ancestors.)

Next, have students watch “An Animated Journey to the Land of the Dead” and answer the following questions:

- What Day of the Dead symbols did you notice in the short film? (Possible Answers: colorful paper banners, marigolds, colorful skulls with big smiles, candles, food, etc.)
- What other symbols or decorations did the film include? (Possible Answers: balloons, a piñata, etc.)

Evaluation

Were students able to answer the questions about Day of the Dead symbols from the book?
Were they able to identify those symbols in the short film?

Standards

This lesson plan may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational texts, grade 3 (RI 3.7, 3.9).



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