

What is an ofrenda and its significance?

Dia de los Muertos/Day of the Dead

November 1-November 2

Significance of each day: A blend of Catholicism and ancient Mexican/Aztec cultural practices.

Indigenous peoples of Mexico (Purepecha, Nahua, Totonac and Otomí)

- Oct 31 is Souls of Children Day
- Nov 1st is All Saints Day
- Nov 2nd is All Souls Day

Ofrendas: Altars or offerings include and decorations with objects; displays of the departed's favorite food and drinks, as well as ornamental, personal belongings, flowers, candles and pictures of loved ones. Ofrenda acknowledges that the soul lives beyond the body of the deceased and is mobile between heaven, hell, and purgatory. Altars vary greatly, depending on village and regional traditions.

Three Tiers of the Ofrenda: The top tier is set to identify who is being invited to the altar.

The second tier is used to encourage the dead to feel welcomed and comfortable; will find favorite foods like pan de muertos, the third tier is set up so that the returning dead can refresh themselves upon arrival at the altar; water, candles, cleansing copal incense are lit, which is said to ward away evil spirits. copal incense is a aromatic tree resin.

Calavera: Calavera is Spanish for "skull", in Mexico there is a tradition of art illustrating skeletons in Mexico. The Nahua speaking peoples of pre-Columbian Mexico saw the skull as a symbol of life - not death. The name of each departed is written on a sugar skull. The names of the living are also written on these treats to introduce children to the idea of death in an atmosphere of joyful celebration. These sugar skulls are eaten, and the living come to associate pleasant sensations with the sadness of death.

Cepazuchitl (Aztec Marigolds): Marigolds was the symbolic flower of death for the Aztecs, because once it is cut, it dies very quickly. While orange and yellow marigolds are the main flowers, magenta terciopelo (ruby coxcombs) and nube (baby's breath) are also traditionally displayed. Candles and fresh marigold flowers are placed on the altar to light and guide the way of the souls to the altar. Paths are marked with flower petals showing the departed souls the way to the altar.

Copal: Tree resin is used as incense and is a symbolic transformation of the physical to the supernatural, associated with the death of the soul returning to the ofrenda.

Papel Picado "perforated paper": Decorative art made by cutting elaborate designs into sheets of tissue paper which plays an important role in preparing the altar for visits from the dead.

Pan de Muerto: Bread for the Dead" a rich and sweet coffee bread baked in shares of skulls and human figures.

Dishes: Traditional dishes, such as chicken in red or black mole sprinkled with sesame seeds; tortillas, tamales made from ground corn; soft drinks or aguardiente ("white-lightning" liquor), tequila and always a glass of water. It is believed that the returning souls are thirsty after a long journey. Water is also believed to be a main support of life.

Sources & photos:

<http://dayofthedeadnyc.org/meaning-of-the-day-of-the-dead/>

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