

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

## Day of the Dead



The Day of the Dead, or *Día de los Muertos* in Spanish, is a holiday celebrated in Mexico on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November. It is a joyful holiday in which people take time to remember family members and friends who have died. According to tradition, the souls (spirits) of the dead return to visit their loved ones during *Día de los Muertos*.

People visit the graves of dead relatives, tidy them up and decorate them. Marigolds are a customary decoration because the flower (called the flower of the dead) is believed to attract ghosts. People sometimes bring a picnic supper to eat at the cemetery and to share (as food offerings) with their dead relatives.

Some families also build a small altar (or shrine) for the dead in their homes with offerings of food and drink. These almost always include a special sweet bread called *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead). Sometimes, people will even leave a washbasin and towel out so that the dead can clean up before they eat. The altar, called an *ofrenda*, is decorated with flowers, candles, paper cut-outs, and pictures of the dead.

The symbol of the Day of the Dead is the skull, or *calavera*. People wear skull masks called *calacas* and eat skull-shaped sugar candies.

The skulls represent death, but they are not meant to be scary. Some of them are beautifully decorated. The decorations represent the beautiful lives of those who have died.

Just as Halloween grew out of the pagan holiday of Samhain, the Day of the Dead has its origins in the traditional festivals of the Maya and Aztec people, who lived in Mexico before the Spanish arrived.

The Aztec ruled over a huge empire centered at what is now Mexico City. The Aztec were pagans and had many different gods. Every year, beginning in August, they held a two month long festival in honor of Mictecacihuatl, their goddess of the dead. The Aztec believed that during the festival, the dead from the afterworld returned to mingle with the living.

When the Spanish arrived in the New World, they brought Christianity with them. Once the Spanish had conquered the Aztec, the customs and practices of the old Aztec festival became part of the Christian holiday of All Saints, which falls on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The result is the Mexican *Día de los Muertos*.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was the author's purpose in writing this article? (What was she trying to do?)

2. What is the main idea of the final (last) three paragraphs?

3. What is the symbol of *Día de los Muertos*?

What does it represent?

What do the decorations that people put on it represent?

4. What are some things that people do on *Día de los Muertos*?

5. Who were the Aztec people?

What happened to them?