

**\*Courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History's Program of Latino History and Culture**

**LESSON PLAN A**

***Dia de los Muertos: Celebrating and Remembering***

**Objective:**

To demonstrate students different aspects of Dia de los Muertos and how it is celebrated in Latino communities in the United States and throughout Latin America

**Suggested Grade Level:** K-2

**Subjects:** Bilingual (English/Spanish) studies; Art

**National Standards: McRel History K-2\***

*Standard 7. Understands selected attributes and historical developments of societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.*

***Benchmarks for this standard:***

*Knows the holidays and ceremonies of different societies (e.g., Cinco de Mayo)*

*Understands the daily life, history, and beliefs of a country as reflected in dance, music, or the other art forms (such as paintings, sculptures, and masks)*

**Background:**

*Dia de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, is a celebration held in Mexico and in Central American countries where family members commemorate their ancestors in a way that is different from customs in the United States. This important holiday is held on November 1 and November 2. It is a holiday that mixes parts of Roman Catholicism with Native American traditions that pre-date the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas.

This holiday, which falls at the same time as Halloween, is different since it does not include such imagery as witches, black cats, or pumpkins. While Halloween is associated with costumes and trick-or-treating, *Dia de los Muertos* is more of a memorial type of holiday. Both holidays, however, do share a common visual connection with the presence of skeleton imagery throughout.

Families often set up offerings or altars called *ofrendas*, either at home or at the cemetery. Throughout the *Dia de los Muertos* will remember their ancestors by honoring their memory, by feasting on foods (such as *pan de muerto* or *calaveras de azucar*), and playing or singing the songs which were favored by their ancestors. Some *ofrendas* are also decorated with marigolds and *calaveras* made of papier-mache.

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\* Standards language adapted from Kendall, J., Marzano R.J. (2004) Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Available online at: [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

Many Latino families who have arrived in the United States have also brought these customs with them, and in many towns and cities with Latino communities, there are annual *Dia de los Muertos* celebrations.

### **Vocabulary:**

***calaveras***: colorful sculptures of skulls used during *Dia de los Muertos*. These are sometimes made from sugar or from papier-mache.

***Dia de los Muertos***: Day of the Dead. A celebration held in Latino communities and throughout Latin American on November 1 and 2.

***ofrenda(s)***: an offering, often in the form of an altar, used to honor ancestors and others during *Dia de los Muertos*.

***pan de muerto***: special rolls made in the shape of skulls.

### **Materials:**

- Computer with internet access and a printer
- Colors, colored pencils, or paints
- Arts and crafts materials, including glue, glitter, colored cardstock or construction paper
- Props from *Dia de los Muertos* kits (sugar skulls)

### **Procedure**

1. Use the computer to access the internet and search for images related to *Dia de los Muertos*, such as *ofrendas*, *pan de muerto*, and *calaveras*. Print these out and ask students to view them. Discuss with students the brief history and origins of *Dia de los Muertos*, and some of the traditions that is associated with this holiday. Also, describe to students where this celebration is held, both in other countries in Latin America as well as within Latino communities in the United States.
2. Ask students: What is Latin America, and where is it? Is it north or south of the United States? What languages are spoken there? Do you know anyone that is of Latino descent or who comes from Latin America?
3. Make the distinction between Halloween and *Dia de los Muertos*. Ask students on which day of the calendar this holiday occurs. Also ask them this question: Is *Dia de los Muertos* close to, or on, another holiday that also includes imagery such as skulls and skeletons?
4. Ask students to pass around the props from the *Dia de los Muertos* kits, and ask them to identify colors and materials. Prompt them by asking the following: What are these items

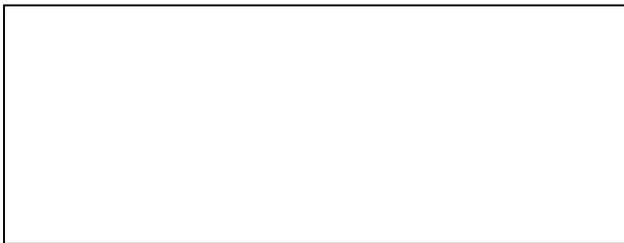
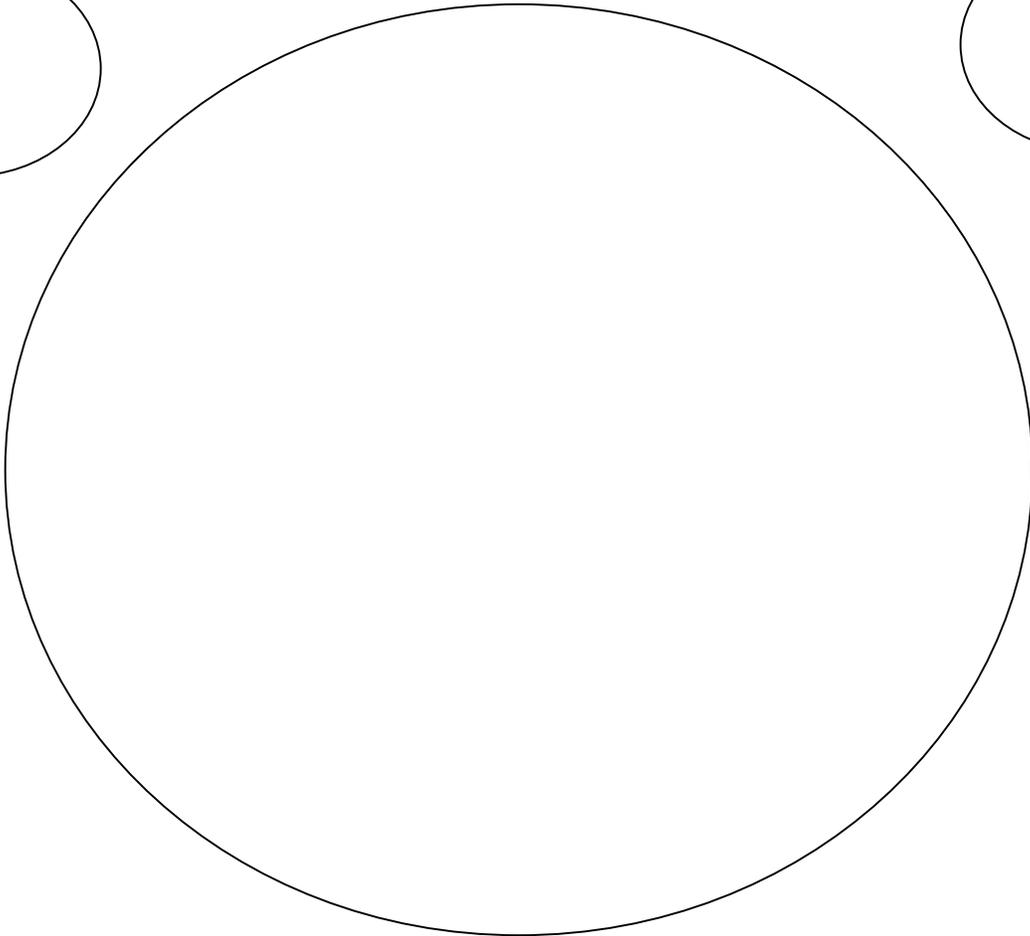
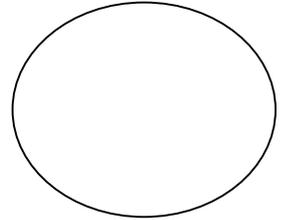
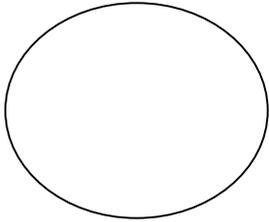
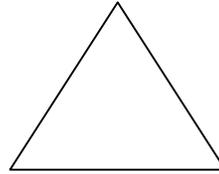
- made of? What colors can you see? Are these shiny or not? Do these items remind you of anything else you may have seen?
5. Print out the attached Art Activity sheet with shapes. Identify each shape with the students, and ask them to cut out each piece carefully. Students should arrange each piece on colored cardstock to have the pieces look like a *calavera*. Ask students to decorate their *calaveras* by coloring in the eyes and nose pieces, and by adding glitter in patterns such as those seen in the photos from internet, viewed earlier.
  6. Students may wish to write the name of an ancestor or other person to commemorate them during *Día de los Muertos*.
  7. Place the students' *calaveras* along the classroom and use as a decoration during *Día de los Muertos*. These *calaveras* can also be used to create an in-class *ofrenda*.

### **Assessment**

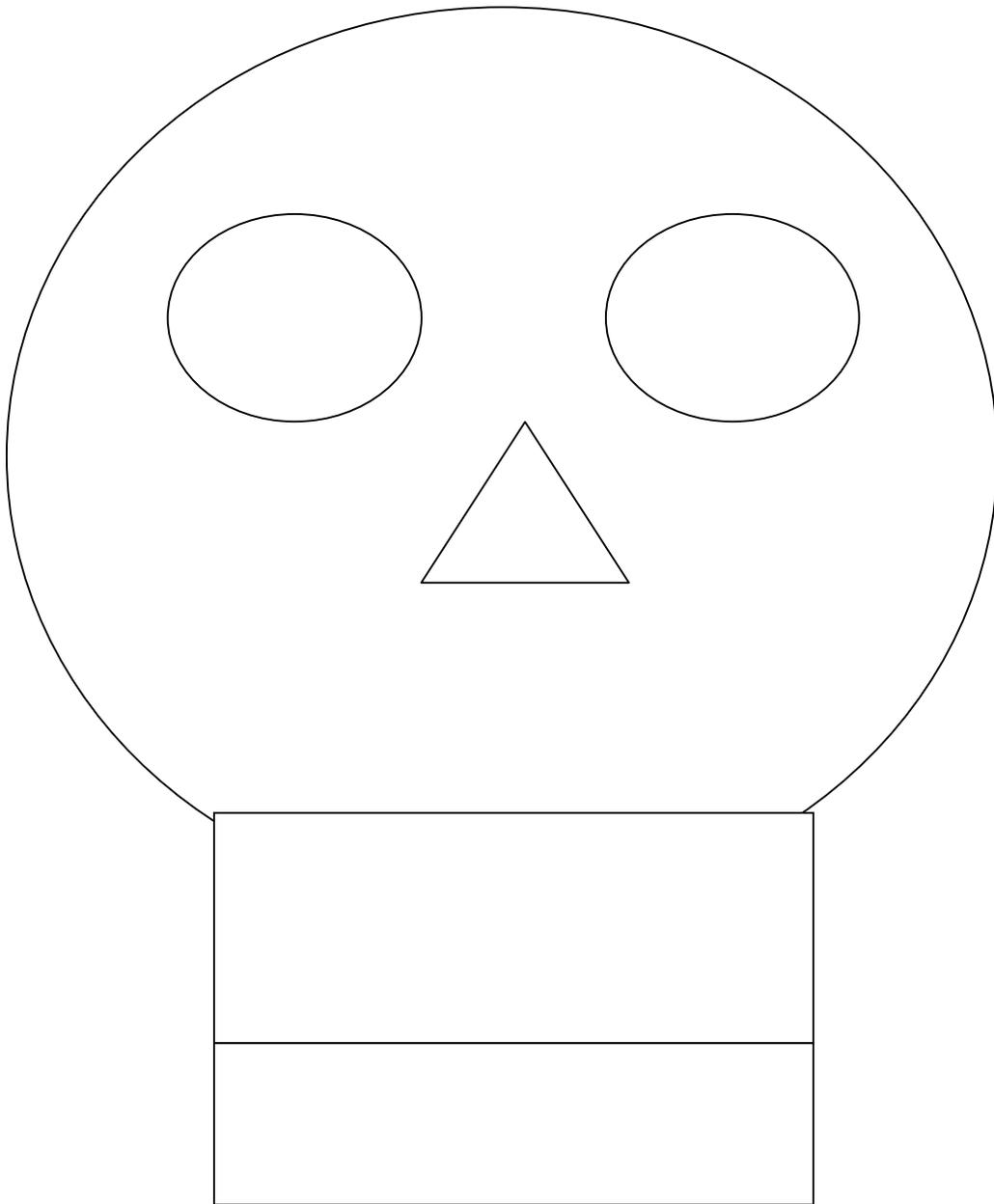
After this lesson, students should be familiar with the holiday, *Día de los Muertos*, celebrated by US Latinos and others in Latin America by reviewing its origins, some of its vocabulary, and by creating their own decorative (*calaveras*) from a series of simple shapes attached to this lesson plan.

**Art Activity:**

Make a *calavera* from these shapes!



**The calavera can be arranged to look like this:**





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