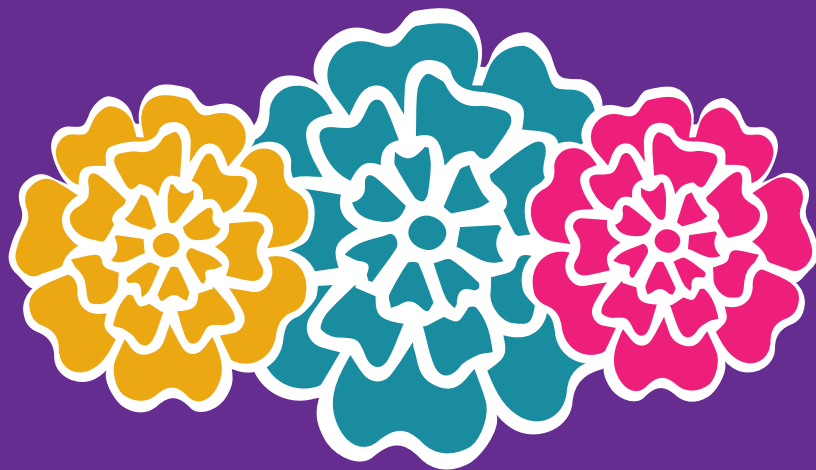


**CALAVERITAS
Y DIABLITOS**
DIA DE LOS MUERTOS






Día de los Muertos
2022

..... Save the Dates

 **Oct. 13th**
Noche de Mole

 **Oct. 17th**
Altar Tours Begin

 **Oct. 22nd**
Youth Celebration

 **Nov. 2nd**
Procession

INTRODUCTION

In 1994, a group of residents from Sherman Heights, a predominantly Mexican-American community in one of San Diego's historic neighborhoods, approached their local community center to request a space to create altars in honor of their deceased loved ones during Día de los Muertos. Many of the residents were recent immigrants who were raised with the tradition of visiting cemeteries with their families to decorate the graves of their loved ones. Since then, the Sherman Heights Community Center has commemorated this tradition. In 2022, we celebrate our "28th Annual Día de Muertos" as we continue to embrace, honor, and cultivate an appreciation for Mexican-American, Latino and Chicano culture in the region.

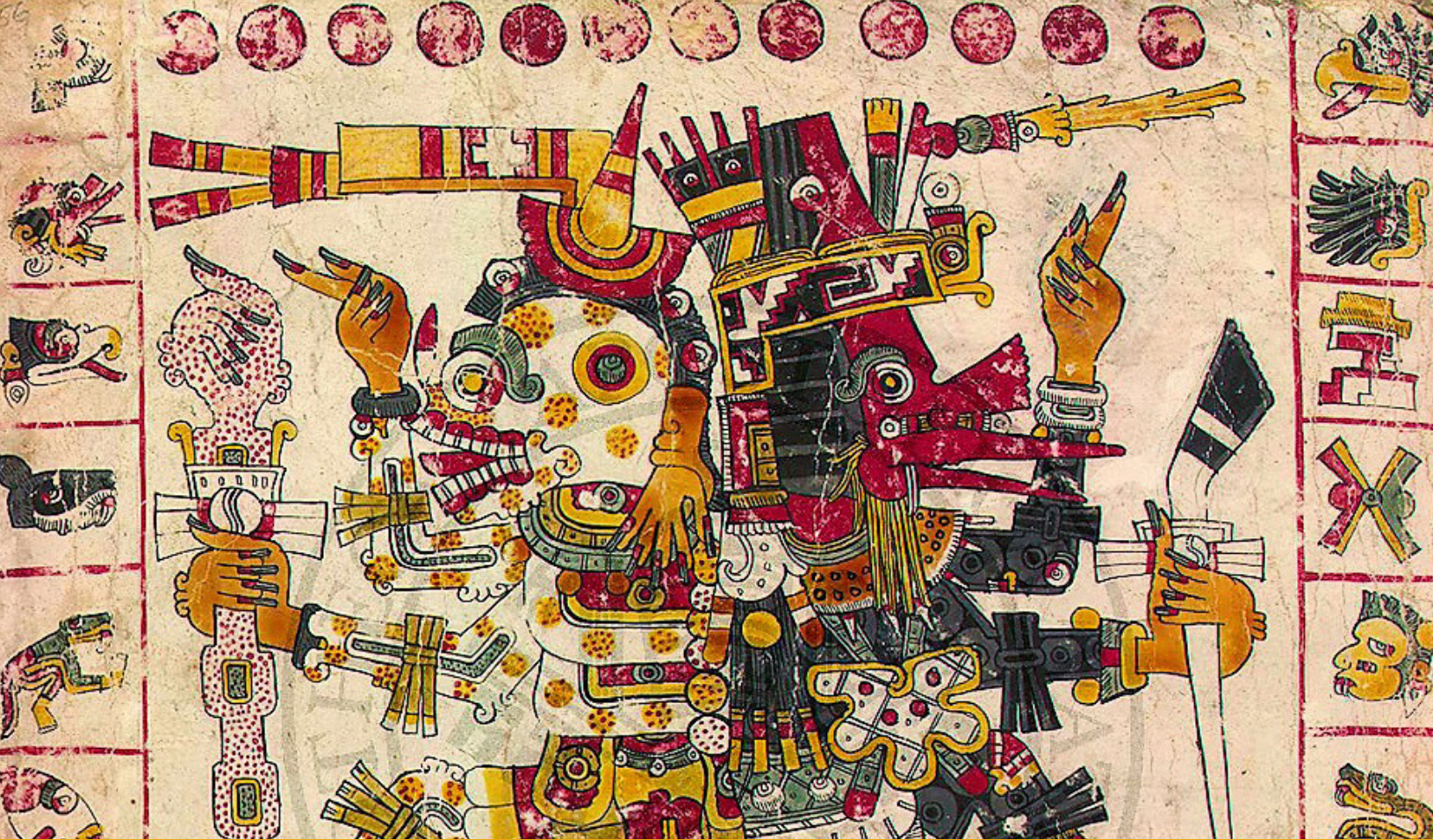
The "**Calaveritas y Diablitos**" activity guide is a fun and informative resource for families, educators and the general public interested in learning more about Día de los Muertos from a historical, educational, and craft-based perspective. The guide includes a concise explanation of the tradition's mesoamerican history and how it is observed in the US, a brief history of how the celebration began at the Sherman Heights Community Center, a description of a Día de los Muertos altar, several family-friendly activities, and additional resources for further learning and enjoyment.

OBJECTIVES

- To gain a deeper understanding of *Día de los Muertos*' history & significance
- Cultural heritage preservation
- Familiarity with key elements in a *Día de los Muertos* altar
- Hands-on exploration of different craft & culinary practices
- Personal reflection & awareness for dealing with loss & death

ACTIVITIES

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Calaveritas de Azúcar (craft activity) | > Download PDF |
| Sugar Skull Mini Piñata (craft activity) | > Download PDF |
| Miniature Food Sculptures (craft activity) | > Download PDF |
| Coco Movie Inspired Dinner (culinary activity) | > Go to activity now |
| Papel Picado (video tutorial) | > Go to video now |
| Pan de Muerto (video tutorial) | > Go to video now |
| La Catrina Altar Talk (video) | > Go to video now |
| 2020 Ofrenda de Muertos (video) | > Go to video now |
| 2021 Día de los Muertos Celebration | > Go to video now |



HISTORY

Mesoamerica and Conquest

The *Día de los Muertos* tradition dates back over one thousand years to mesoamerica (modern-day Mexico and northern Central America.) Through excavations, archeological findings, structures, texts, and contemporary native practices, we have gleaned an understanding of mesoamerican rituals, religious concepts, cosmology, and ideas relating to death and the afterlife.

The origins of *Día de los Muertos* are rooted in the belief that when humans depart the physical world, most souls would embark on a journey to the underworld. For example, for the Mexica the underworld was known as *Mictlan*, for the Mayan as *Xibalba*, for the Zapotec as *Lyobaa*, and for the Mixtec as *Mitla*. While on the journey to the underworld, the souls would come back once a year to visit the living who would greet them with food and company.

With the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas in 1492 and in the period that followed the 1521 conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, native beliefs and practices began a transformative process led by the Spanish crown. The transformation included the conversion of indigenous people into catholicism. Some of the ways the conversions took place were through the incorporation of native rituals into catholicism, in some cases the effort included the building catholic churches on top of indigenous ceremonial grounds and the elimination of sacred texts. Although in many cases this effort was confronted with an active resistance from non-Europeans, it also resulted in the fusion of indigenous practices with catholic beliefs, *Día de los Muertos* is an example of this. The indigenous

tradition of a yearly communion with the dead was then incorporated into catholic observances of All Saints' Day and Souls' Day, when on November 2nd the departed are commemorated. As a result, *Día de los Muertos* is representative of native traditions and catholic practices associated with death and remembrance.

Día de los Muertos in the US

The 1960s and 70s were marked by civil rights movements, antiwar protests and political unrest, not just in the US but also in Latin American, Europe and Asia. In this context, the Chicano Movement emerged as an effort that confronted structural and systemic racism, advocated for farm workers' rights and improved access to education, resisted pressures to assimilate to Anglo-American society and encouraged cultural revitalization, while addressing additional issues of great importance to this community. "Chicanos engaged in political and cultural media work that included literature, theater, music, and visual art meant to tell the collective histories of their people."¹ For many in the Chicano Movement art and culture were important resources to educate, challenge dominant social norms, and promote autonomy and self-determination.

The Chicano Movement made possible a new chosen identity for the people of Mexican/Latin descent living in the US. Adoption of a Chicano/a identity conveyed political empowerment and a sense of pride in being of indigenous descent among other things. In this social, political, and cultural context Chicanos began to celebrate *Día de los Muertos* in the US. The first two documented US celebrations inside art spaces took place in 1972: one in Los Angeles at Self Help Graphics, a community-based visual arts center located in East L.A. and the other at La Galería de la Raza, a Chicano art gallery in San Francisco.² Both of these celebrations and their continuation and growth over the years have played a very important role in raising awareness for the tradition in the US. US celebrations have also taken a unique character, expanding the way *Día de Los Muertos* is traditionally observed. For example, in the US the celebration may include *danza azteca* (a pre-Columbian style of ceremonial dancing that incorporates various indigenous music and dance traditions), political statements of importance to Chicano communities, lowriders, craft workshops, and contemporary art installations.³

Día de los Muertos at the Sherman Heights Community Center

In 1994, Señor Sandoval, a Sherman Heights resident who grew up in Oaxaca and was known in the community for growing cempasuchil flowers in his yard, approached then SHCC director, Estela Rubalcaba and requested a place to build an altar. Like Señor Sandoval, many community members had grown up with the tradition of observing *Día de los Muertos* visiting cemeteries and decorating the graves of their loved ones in anticipation of a night vigil that occurs from November 1st to the 2nd. Without easy access to the graves sites of their loved ones, residents found in the Sherman Heights Community Center a place to continue this practice in a communal setting. With two altars downstairs in front of the main office, and six altars upstairs in the ballroom, the tradition began.

¹Marchi, Regina. (2010). Chicano Art as Alternative Media: Its Influence on US Popular Culture (and Beyond). *The International Journal of the Arts in Society* 4(5), 447-464. Retrieved from doi:10.7282/T3X63K9R

²Rutgers pg. 450

³Rutgers, 453

Señor Sandoval also encouraged Rubalcaba to reach out to schools and invite students to visit and learn about the tradition, and so students began to tour the center, and the community began to share their knowledge with the new generation. Grandmothers started to teach the tradition to their grandchildren and incoming residents began to learn the tradition from their neighbors and build altars of their own. At first, the altars reflected the traditions of altar building in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guanajuato, and Michoacán. With the support of residents and community members, more and more families were invited to participate. Each year, the number of families involved grew and with it the diversity in individual interpretations and the people and causes they honored. Migrant families from Central America began to make altars for their family members, Rosa Parks was honored the year she passed away, so were Japanese-American and Jewish families that once lived in Sherman Heights. Altars in honor of pop culture icons like Michael Jackson and Selena marked the importance of these icons in people's lives. An altar that honors the many lost lives at the border is a yearly ofrenda, as is an altar in honor of the Homeboys and Homegirls from Sherman.

Día de los Muertos at the Sherman Heights Community Center continues to be an effort led by community members to safeguard and preserve a beloved ancestral tradition. The tradition allows the community to rejoice in the living memory of those with whom we shared our life on this earth. In Mexico we celebrate in the panteones and the campo santos, in Sherman, we celebrate in the neighborhood.



Altar by Calpulli Mexihca

TRADITION

Observance

Día de los Muertos is a tradition founded in a belief that the spirits of ancestors visit the living between October 31- November 2nd. On November 2nd, the event culminates with a nocturnal vigil at home, grave-sites and/or cemeteries. In preparation for the vigil, families create an *ofrenda* (offering) to honor and welcome the visit of their loved ones who have passed away. *Ofrendas* often include the deceased's favorite foods, drinks, personal belongings, Catholic iconography, as well as several important objects specific to *Día de los Muertos* tradition.

***Ofrenda* objects and symbolism**

A traditional *ofrenda* includes a specific set of objects, some of the objects allude to one of four elements (wind, fire, water and earth), others to the craft practices associated with the syncretic nature of the tradition, as well as to personal details about the person(s) being honored. Regional variations and personal interpretations of the *ofrenda* and its elements are also valid forms of commemorating this time-honored tradition.



Calaveritas de Azúcar:

sugar skulls represent the deceased as well as the pleasures of life. They are made in a variety of sizes, colorfully decorated and some cases even include the names of those who have passed away. You can now also find them made of chocolate and decorated with a variety of seeds and nuts.



Earth:

cempasúchil (marigold) flowers have been associated with death since pre-conquest times.⁴ Flowers are also often a symbol of the fragility of life.



Fire:

light often symbolizes an increased awareness. Candles are placed on the ofrenda to help light the way of the spirits to their respective altar.



Copal:

incense holders burning the resin of the *copal* tree. Burning *copal* dates back to mesoamerican ceremonial traditions, when it was thought to link the living with the deceased. The aromatic smoke also evokes a sense of mystery.



Food:

the soul's favorite dishes, snacks and drinks are prepared in time for the visit.



Water:

water is essential to life and also it symbolizes purification.

⁴Servicio de Información Agroalimentaria y Pesquera. "La Flor De Cempasúchil, Un Ícono De México." Gob.mx, www.gob.mx/siap/articulos/la-flor-de-cempasuchil-un-icono-de-mexico?idiom=es.

⁵Montúfar López, Aurora. "Copal, Humo Aromático De Tradición Ritual Mesoamericana." *Arqueología Mexicana*, 2 Feb. 2017, arqueologiamexicana.mx/mexico-antiguo/copal-humo-aromatico-de-tradicion-ritual-mesoamericana.

**Xoloitzcuintle:**

The inclusion of a *Xoloitzcuintle* (Mexican hairless dog) or dog images and or sculptures in general reference to the mesoamerican belief that dogs served as guides to the underworld.

**Mementos:**

personal belongings are important reminders of the people being honored, the objects are also thought to bring joy to the spirits during their visit. For the spirits of children who have passed away, toys are often included in the altar.

**Pan de muerto:**

"bread of the dead" usually takes a round shape with decorative bone forms on top. The anthropomorphic aspect of the bread is also reminiscent of sacrificial offerings.

**Wind:**

The lightness of the *papel picado* "punched paper" makes the air movement more noticeable, making reference to its corresponding element, wind. The paper also serves as a decorative element.

**Salt:**

represents the purification of life. In addition to a plate with salt, people may also include a cross made of salt on the floor.

**Catholic iconography:**

images of saints, rosaries, crosses, and small religious sculptures are also often incorporated into the altars.

VOCABULARY

Calavera: Spanish word for skull and or skeleton. *Calaveritas* (diminutive form of calavera) is an affectionate way to call calaveras.

Cempasuchil: marigold flower associated with death since pre-conquest times.

Copal: the resin of the *copal* tree burned as incense during special ceremonies.

Día de los Muertos: Mexican holiday involving the gathering of family and friends between October 31- November 2nd to remember the lives of the deceased.

Diablitos: Spanish word for little devils.

Mesoamerica: the geographic areas comprising modern-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, where between 1500 B.C.-1521 many civilizations flourished sharing similar cultural characteristics including a diet of squash, beans and maize, a ballgame, a 260 day calendar, and a complex pantheon of deities.

Ofrenda: an altar created for Día de los Muertos.

Papel Picado: tissue paper banners with cutout designs.

Pan de muerto: bread baked during Día de los Muertos.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FILMS

[Coco](#)

The story of a 12-year-old boy named Miguel who is accidentally transported to the Land of the Dead, where he seeks the help of his deceased musician great-great-grandfather to return him to his family among the living and to reverse his family's ban on music.

[¡Que Viva Mexico!](#)

A film project begun in 1930 by the Russian avant-garde director Sergei Eisenstein. The film portrays Mexican culture and politics from pre-Conquest civilization to the Mexican revolution.

[Macario](#)

A poor woodcutter and family man, Macario, is obsessed with ending his hunger and hides in the woods to enjoy one filling meal, only to meet a series of mystical visitors and befriend Death himself. A late classic of the Golden Age of Mexican film and a major touchstone for magical realism in Latin American cinema, Macario achieved international acclaim and was the first Mexican feature film nominated for the Academy Award.

Roberto Gavaldón, 1960

[La Ofrenda](#)

In the guise of a documentary, a comparative study of Mexican and Chicano celebrations in remembrance of the dead on the first and second of November each year.

Lourdes Portillo, 1988.

[Pedro Linares: Folk Artists](#)

Documentary on Mexican folk artist Pedro Linares who won international recognition for his papier-mache skeletal figures called calaveras.

Judith Bronowski, 1975

[Self Help Graphics & Art's Día de los Muertos Legacy Told Through Prints](#)

A film examines how Self Help Graphics & Art has become emblematic of the Day of the Dead Celebration in Los Angeles through their yearly commemorative limited-edition fine art serigraph.

KCET, Execute Producer Juan Devis, 2019

BOOKS/ARTICLES

[Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras](#)

by Duncan Tonatiuh
Funny Bones tells the story of how the amusing *calaveras*—skeletons performing various everyday or festive activities—came to be.

[General History of the Things of New Spain by Bernardino de Sahagún](#)

16th century ethnographic research study in Mesoamerica by the Spanish Franciscan friar.

[Jose Guadalupe Posada](#), by various authors.
Early 19th century Mexican political lithographer who used relief printing to produce popular illustrations. His broadsheet featuring skulls and skeletons have had a long-lasting influence on Day of the Dead iconography.

La Catrina: A bilingual book of emotions

by Patty Rodriguez and Ariana Stein

Inspired by one of the most recognized symbols of *Día De los Muertos*, this book introduces little ones to emotional expressions teaching them to recognize feelings.

Popol Vuh, documentation by friar Francisco Ximénez

Sacred text recounting the mythology and history of the *K'iche'* people, one of the Maya peoples.

The Spirit of Chicano Park / El espíritu del Parque Chicano

written by Beatrice Zamora, pictures by Maira Meza

The Spirit of Chicano Park / El espíritu del Parque Chicano depicts the historic takeover of a small piece of land located under the Coronado Bridge in San Diego, California. This historical fiction children's book tells the dynamic story of the people of Logan Heights and world famous Chicano Park. It is bilingual in English and Spanish and includes short biographies of several community champions.

Foodie Moovies

Family-friendly movie inspired dinner menus and discussion activities. The movie *Coco* will be showcased for the month of October.

WEBSITES

Sherman Height Community Center

Community center where people of all ages gather and receive needed services in the heart of their own community of Sherman Heights. Year-round programming includes: Youth and Senior Programming, Arts & Culture festivities, Adult English as a Second Language classes, Health & Wellness Programs, Food Distributions, and neighborhood beautification projects. The Sherman Heights Community Center is best known for its annual *Día de los Muertos* festivities.

Chicano Park

Chicano Park is a National Historic Landmark located in Barrio Logan, a predominantly Chicano, Mexican American and migrant community in San Diego. The park is home to the country's largest collection of outdoor murals, as well as various sculptures and earthworks dedicated to the cultural heritage of the community. The park was founded in 1970 as a result of a community *Take Over* of the land.

Centro Cultural de la Raza

The Centro Cultural de la Raza is a non-profit organization with the specific mission to create, preserve, promote and educate about Chicano, Mexicano, Native American and Latino art and culture. It is located in Balboa Park in San Diego, California. The cultural center supports and encourages the creative expression "of the indigenous cultures of the Americas." It is currently a member of the American Alliance of Museums.



**SHERMAN
HEIGHTS
COMMUNITY
CENTER**

2258 Island Ave
San Diego, CA 92102
(619) 232-0421
ShermanHeightsCC.org

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28th Annual Día de los Muertos 2022

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