



Day of the Dead – Halloween

Subjects Social Studies, Holidays, Halloween, Art

Grades 4-7

Brief Description

Using guided class discussion, students will discover some of the traditions behind Halloween and learn how this festival is celebrated in a different culture. They will compare a Canadian celebration of Halloween with a Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos).

This activity introduces students to the idea of rituals as social and cultural tools that help families deal with rites of passage such as the death of a loved one.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Be able to describe how Halloween is celebrated in their community
- Be able to define their own concepts of Halloween
- Recognize a diversity of cultural traditions and cultural expressions
- Consider how festivals and celebrations help us deal with stressful life passages
- Consider alternatives to consumerism

Keywords

Halloween, Day of the Dead, Día de los Muertos, culture, Mexico, ritual, death, rite of passage

Materials Needed

- access to the *¡Hola Canada! The Latin-American Collections at the Simon Fraser University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology* web site
- projector
- white board or flip chart

Lesson

Have students describe how they celebrate Halloween in their family, neighbourhood and community and discuss in class.

Write down the main attributes of Halloween on the board in a chart as they arise in the discussion. After you have written a couple of attributes, ask a student to write the rest while you concentrate on guiding the discussion. Be sure you and the student leave room for a column on the right.

For example:

HALLOWEEN	
Scary costumes	
Candy	
Pumpkins	
Candles	
Celebrated on streets and homes	
and so on. . .	

View the web site video 'Day of the Dead – El Dia de los Muertos'.

Have students describe the main attributes of the celebration of the Day of the Dead depicted in the video, writing them on the corresponding line in the column on the right. The columns will be a little different and may not have a corresponding attribute in the other column.

HALLOWEEN	EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS
Scary costumes	Skeleton costumes
Candy	Sugar skulls
Pumpkins	
Candles	Candles
Celebrated on streets and homes	Celebrated in cemeteries and homes
and so on. . .	

Have them discuss the similarities and differences between the two holidays. You may use the questions below to prompt discussion, or develop your own questions.

Discussion questions:

What solar event happens near the end of October? (The vernal equinox)

Why might a ritual having to do with the dead occur at this time of year? (There are many reasons, but it may have to do with the autumn being a time when annual plants die and leaves fall from deciduous trees. As the year is dying, the time when the day and the night are equal is symbolically a time when the dead and the living (the night and the day) are equal and may communicate.)

Why are sweets part of the ritual?

Why are candles part of the ritual?

The Day of the Dead, Día de los Muertos, is more personal than the Canadian Halloween. Mexican families gather in the cemetery and celebrate by the graves of their loved ones, including them in the festivities. How would Halloween be different if we included our family's dead, if we had a personal connection with the dead we remember at Halloween?

Halloween has become a major consumer event in Canada, with sales of costumes, candy and party supplies. As we have seen, people in some cultures celebrate with hand-made candy and costumes, hand-made flowers and home-baked foods. Would it be possible for us to do the same in our culture? Some people screen out home-made candies as a part of Halloween safety precautions. If we made our events more family-centered, would this still be a problem?

Evaluation

Note which students participate actively in the discussion, and which contribute creative ideas to the chart and discussion. Teachers may want to informally quiz students the next day about the basic concepts of the Day of the Dead and Halloween.

Related Lesson Plans

Day of the Dead - Sugar Skulls

Day of the Dead - Make a Remembrance Table