

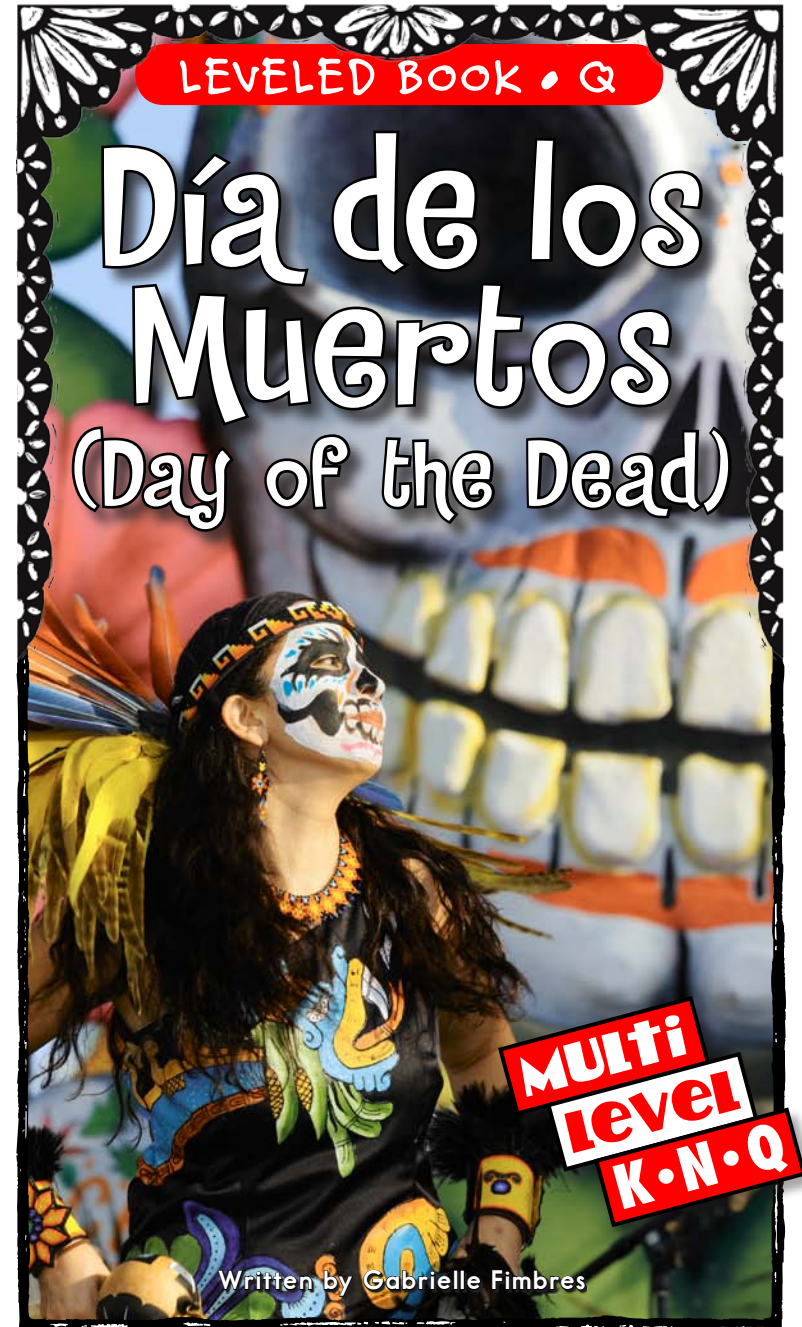
Día de los Muertos

A Reading A-Z Level Q Leveled Book
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Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)



Written by
Gabrielle
Fimbres

www.readinga-z.com

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Level Q Leveled Book
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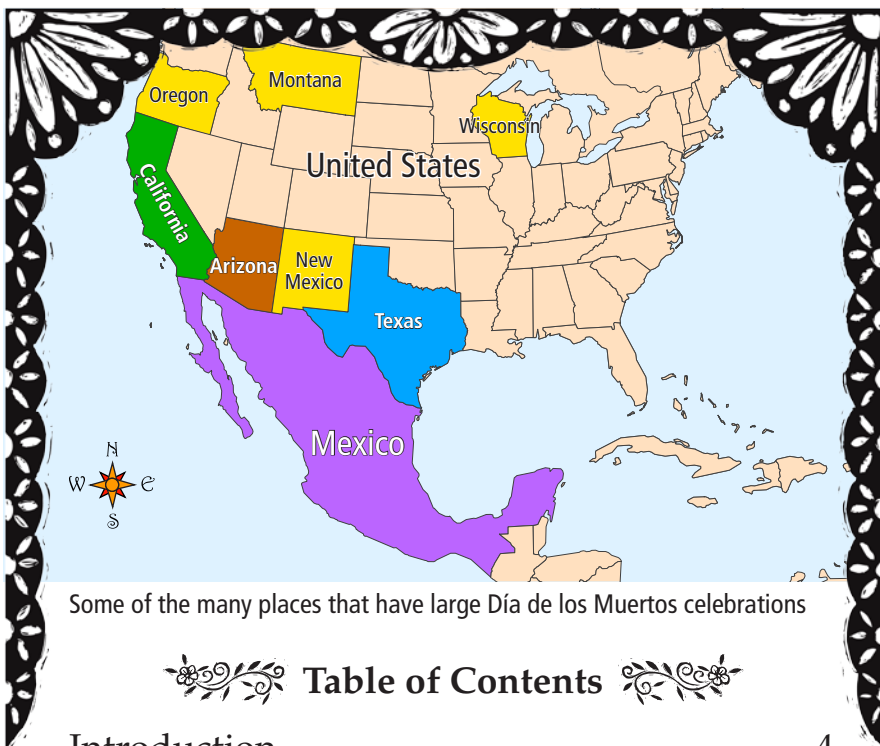
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Correlation

LEVEL Q

Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
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Some of the many places that have large Día de los Muertos celebrations

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People walk in a Day of the Dead parade in San Jose, California.

Introduction

Up ahead, a giant skull puppet floats high in the air. Skeletons dance in the street, drummers march, and children wear masks and glittery angel wings. People on stilts walk around and perform tricks. You ask a woman with a beautifully painted face what’s happening. She tells you that you are part of a special parade that **honors** friends and relatives who have died. You are part of a *Día de los Muertos* parade.

When and Where?

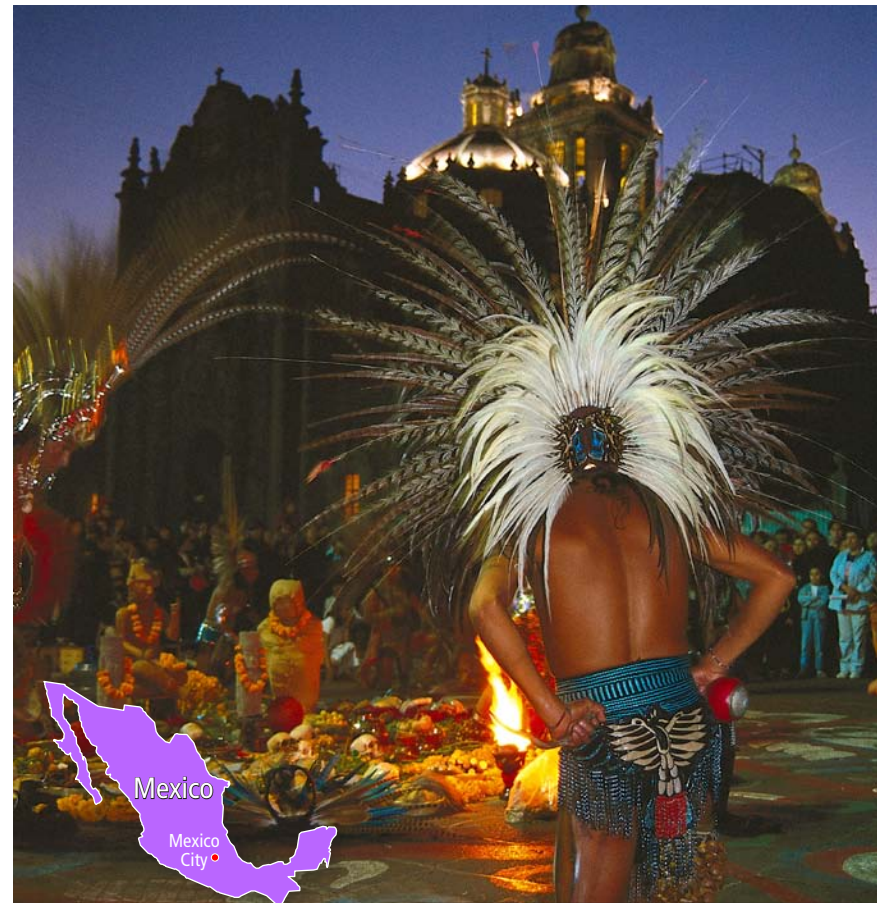
People in many parts of the world celebrate Día de los Muertos—or “Day of the Dead.” People in Mexico have celebrated some form of Día de los Muertos for thousands of

years. In the United States, people hold Day of the Dead parades and celebrations in many states, including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oregon, Montana, and Wisconsin.



A boy performs a traditional “scissors dance” for Día de los Muertos in Lima, Peru.

The dates for these celebrations vary, but they usually take place around November 1 and 2. Each of the celebrations honors people—and sometimes pets—who have died.



An Aztec dancer performs in Mexico City, Mexico.

Do You Know?

Before Europeans came to Mexico, Native Americans held harvest festivals every year around early November. During these festivals, which could last a month, people would often give offerings of food to their ancestors.



This drawing shows an Aztec harvest festival.

Is It Halloween?

With the time of year and the skulls and skeletons, Día de los Muertos might seem like Halloween—but the two holidays are different. Unlike Halloween, which is often about scaring people, Día de los Muertos is a time of happiness and joy, when some people in certain **cultures** believe the **spirits** of loved ones who have died are remembered, honored, and celebrated.



A family visits and decorates the grave of a loved one for Día de los Muertos in Mexico.



People walk in the Day of the Dead procession in San Francisco, California.

In the Day of the Dead **procession** in San Francisco, California, about 15,000 people carry candles and photos of loved ones who have died. Austin, Texas, celebrates with a grand procession and costume contest. In Tucson (TOO-sawn), Arizona, more than 30,000 people march in a parade. The best part about most of these parades is that anyone can participate.

Lidia's Día de los Muertos

As a little girl growing up in Mexico, Lidia Terán-Cooper celebrated Día de los Muertos every year. She and her family spent every November 2 at the **cemetery**. The family brought flowers and a picnic and told stories about relatives who had died. Musicians called *mariachis* played special songs in honor of the dead. Lidia and the other children danced and played all day at the cemetery.



Mariachis play in a cemetery for Día de los Muertos in Mexico.



One of the many puppets in the Tucson, Arizona, procession stands above the crowd.

Día de los Muertos was always a happy day for Lidia because she spent it remembering those she loved. Lidia lives in the United States now. She and her family march in the Tucson parade every year to honor their **ancestors**. Lidia wears a colorful Mexican dress that she sewed and a grinning skeleton mask. Walking in the parade reminds her of celebrating Día de los Muertos when she was a little girl.

Do You Know?

When they visit the cemetery, some people clean and decorate the graves of their loved ones. In parts of Mexico, people stay overnight in the cemetery. Families set out extra blankets and pillows so the spirits of their loved ones can rest. They might also set out bowls of water, soap, and towels for the spirits to wash up after their long journey.



The family that decorated this grave in Mexico left everything a spirit would need to clean up after a long journey.



These dancers show off their painted skull masks at the Day of the Dead parade in San Antonio, Texas.

In the days before the parade, Lidia makes special masks for children and adults to decorate. She shreds newspaper and soaks it in water. She mixes the wet newspaper with flour and glue to make a paper pulp. Lidia turns the paper pulp into masks. When the masks are dry, children and adults paint them to look like skeletons or other creatures. Some add sparkles and flowers to their masks, which they then wear in the parade.

Day of the Dead for Children

Some cities have a special Día de los Muertos celebration for children. Children decorate cardboard wings to wear in their special parade. They make loud noisemakers and learn circus tricks. They paint their faces and put on special costumes. Adults dressed up as angels on very tall stilts lead the children in their own parade.



Children wear different costumes as they walk in their special parade in Tucson, Arizona.



An altar decorated for a loved one in a family member's home

Other Traditions

Marching in a parade is just one way to remember loved ones who have died. Día de los Muertos has many old **traditions** that people take part in to honor the dead.

Altars

Some people build special **altars** in their homes to welcome the spirits of loved ones. Building an altar is an important part of Día de los Muertos. The beautiful altars are covered with fabric and decorated with photos of the person who has died. The altars might include a favorite piece of clothing that the loved one wore or an item he or she treasured.

The family places candles around the altars and lights them. They also make a special kind of bread called *pan de muertos*, or “bread of the dead.” Other delicious treats are offered to the spirits of relatives. Some favorite foods include candy or *tamales*, which are made from meat, chilies, and ground corn. A family may also leave a favorite juice or other drink on the altars. Spicy-smelling orange and yellow marigolds or other flowers, skeleton toys, and dolls decorate the altars.



An altar decorated with *pan de muertos* and other foods

Do You Know?

The scent of marigolds is traditionally believed to help the spirits of loved ones find their way home, which is why they are often placed on altars. Some people scatter marigold petals from the graves of their loved ones, through the cemetery, to the family's front door.



A family scatters marigold petals for the spirits to follow along a road in Mexico.

Sugar Skulls

Some people who celebrate Día de los Muertos make colorful sugar skulls every year. The skulls are made with white sugar that is pressed into molds. After the sugar skulls dry, people decorate them with colorful frosting. Children in Mexico and the United States love eating the sweet skulls.



Handmade sugar skulls are displayed at a market in Mexico.



The art for Día de los Muertos often shows skeletons and uses bright colors.



Art

Some artists paint colorful pictures of skeletons in honor of Día de los Muertos. Paintings show grinning skeletons dancing, playing guitars, and celebrating. The art is a way to celebrate friends and family members who have died.

Full of Life

Día de los Muertos offers many different ways for people to feel better after losing someone they love. Marching in a parade, decorating an altar, or painting a picture can help them remember the time they spent with that special person. The holiday is also a fun and creative way for people to honor the **generations** of ancestors who came before them. It's a holiday unlike any other, full of fun, costumes, life, masks, joy, memories, and love.



Children perform at a special Day of the Dead festival in Los Angeles, California.

Glossary

- altars** (*n.*) tables or other raised surfaces that are used for religious or spiritual purposes (p. 14)
- ancestors** (*n.*) family members from long ago (p. 10)
- cemetery** (*n.*) a place where dead people are buried (p. 9)
- cultures** (*n.*) the ideas and customs of certain groups of people (p. 7)
- generations** (*n.*) all the people or other animals who are born and live at about the same time (p. 19)
- honors** (*v.*) shows respect or thinks well of (p. 4)
- procession** (*n.*) a formal parade (p. 8)
- spirits** (*n.*) supernatural beings; souls or essences in some belief systems (p. 7)
- traditions** (*n.*) beliefs or customs that are passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 14)

