

Celebrating Life Beyond Death: Mexico's Day of the Dead

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Introduction

“Stories help us listen to each other. I think, in the deepest sense, they’re like envoys or messengers for peace. Because that’s the way we learn to warm into appreciation for ideas that are different from our own. I think that’s the only way we’re going to make a peaceful world.”ⁱ – Wendy Erd

We all have a story to tell, and it is our hope that at least some part of our individual stories will live on when we are gone. I plan on exploring with my seventh grade students Hispanic beliefs around death and dealing with loss using authentic literature in the target language, Spanish. Students will investigate the celebration of Dia De Los Muertos in Mexico, the United States, and other Spanish-speaking countries. As a culminating activity, each student will create an ofrenda (altar) honoring a loved one whom they have lost. In order to complete the ofrenda, the student will need to research the honoree by interviewing family members and friends for information, representations, and offerings to be included. Students’ ofrendas will be included in gallery walk for the larger school community.

Background

I currently teach at John Dickinson High School in Wilmington, Delaware in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, which has been in existence for one year. The middle school is located within the high school building in a wing of its own and was created as an extension to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme for grades 11 and 12. The Diploma Programme was initiated at Dickinson five years prior to the inception of the Middle Years Programme (MYP). MYP was implemented to encourage students more students to participate in the Diploma Programme. In its first year, MYP included grades six, seven, and eight and this year will be expanding to include grade nine and the following year, grade ten will be added. A continuous sixth through twelfth grade International Baccalaureate Programme will be established at Dickinson. Our Middle Years Programme will be doubling in size this coming school year growing from about 90 students to close to the maximum of 300.

Students must apply to participate in MYP. To be eligible, students must be on grade level in both Reading and Math, must be motivated, and have a teacher recommendation. The first year of MYP, being last year, I taught both Spanish and French; French 1A

(Grade 6), French 1 (Grade 7), Spanish 1A (Grade 6), and Spanish 1 (Grades 7 and 8). Due to expansion, this I will be teaching only Spanish; Spanish 1A (Grade 6), Spanish 1B (Grade 7), Spanish 1 (Grade 7 & 8), Spanish 2 (Grade 8) and instead of meeting the students for ninety minutes every other day as I did last year, we will meet for forty-five minutes every day.

Rationale

Open-mindedness is one of the ten attributes included in the IB Learner Profile. “IB students have a deep understanding of various cultures and views, bringing an appreciation of new views to both their academic study and their involvement in local and wider communities. Their international mindedness complements the missions of the best tertiary institutions.”ⁱⁱ Our school population is fairly diverse but the students typically have a shallow understanding of various cultures not only close to home, but also around the world. They need opportunities to immerse themselves culturally in order to appreciate the similarities in our human experiences that on the surface appear to be seemingly different. My plan is to use authentic Spanish texts and realia to present students with opportunities to immerse themselves in the Hispanic celebration of Día de los Muertos. It is my hope to incorporate authentic target language literature into this unit so that students can experience Día de los Muertos through the personal experiences of native speakers as told in their native tongue. Authentic literature exposes students to culture through the experiences of the author/speaker because the words the writer uses refer to common experience, expressing facts, ideas or events referring to certain knowledge about the world that others share. Words also reflect the storyteller’s beliefs, attitudes, and point of view and those of her/his culture.ⁱⁱⁱ According to Claire Kramsch who wrote *Language and Culture*, “Language expresses cultural reality.”^{iv} Through this unit, my students will experience the Hispanic culture and relate it to their own.

I am focused on three goals in the creation of this unit. First, I would like for my students gain a cultural appreciation and understanding of a tradition celebrated by not only our American (North, Central, and South) neighbors, but also celebrated by some of their classmates and community members.

Second, I would like for the students to be risk-takers in their approach to learning. Delving into this topic in the target language for first and second year students of the language will seem quite daunting and almost impossible initially. It is my hope, using scaffolding, embedded readings, drama, and various other TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) techniques, that the students will explore the topic in depth, spurring them on to make deeper cultural connections.

Third, I would like to create this as an interdisciplinary unit working with two or more other seventh grade teachers. The IB MYP requires one interdisciplinary unit per year. Three colleagues, myself included, all of whom are current DTI fellows and teach in the

Dickinson Middle Years Programme have decided to create a unit about Día de los Muertos, One colleague is a fellow in the Artistic Impressions seminar while two of us are participating in this seminar. Allen F. Repko, an expert on interdisciplinary instruction, “asserts that interdisciplinary instruction fosters advances in cognitive ability.”^v According to the AP College Board, interdisciplinary learning is “real-world learning, not isolated educational experiences, allows more opportunities for students to connect new learning with what they know and are interested in, provides more ways for students to learn and demonstrate their skills and understandings, highlights students strengths; builds confidence to overcome challenges learning new/difficult concepts, and encourages students to become personally invested in their work (since they are given the privilege and responsibility of making choices about what and how they learn and demonstrate their learning).”^{vi} Using personal histories in ELA, Día de los Muertos and similar holidays dealing with cultural beliefs about death in the target language, and using drama to explore the history of celebration in Social Studies, this interdisciplinary unit will foster a rich understanding of culture.

Unit Overview

It is my goal to design a unit in which students will use the target language, Spanish, to express their understanding of the celebration of Día de los Muertos and similar cultural celebrations and beliefs dealing with loss. Students will investigate the origin of Día de los Muertos in Mexico, how it has evolved through time and how the Mexican beliefs about death and life have influenced this celebration. They will explore similar beliefs about life and death in other Hispanic cultures and like cultural celebrations surrounding death. To conclude the unit, each student will design and create an ofrenda, an altar, to remember and honor a deceased family member or friend, or students may design and create an ofrenda about themselves as created by a loved one or family member in the year 2116. This will require each student to complete some research about the honoree by interviewing family members and friends, and collecting items for the ofrenda that represent the life of the honoree. Each ofrenda will be accompanied by a written tributo (tribute), describing the honoree physically, discussing the honoree’s likes and dislikes, explaining the relationship of the honoree to the writer, and including a special memory about the honoree along with any other pertinent information. All written material included in the ofrenda must be in the target language. Students will display and present their ofrendas to their classmates and the larger school community in a Día de los Muertos celebration.

Objectives

This unit will be based on two IB MYP Objectives, one Delaware World-Readiness Standard for Learning Languages, and one Common Core ELA Standard. I will focus on IB Language Acquisition Objective Criterion C: Comprehending Written Text requiring the student to understand information and engage with the text by supporting opinion and

personal response with evidence from the text. I will also evaluate Criterion D: Communicating in Written Form which expects the student to organize and express thoughts, feelings, ideas, opinions and information in writing, write for specific purposes, and develop accuracy when writing in the target language. The Delaware World Readiness Standard for Learning Languages is Standard 1.3 Presentational Communication: Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers or viewers. The Common Core English Standard is Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy. CCRA.R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Concepts

Ritual

David Cortesi, the author of *Secular Wholeness* defines ritual as “any activity that we perform at least as much for its *symbolic and emotional value* as for its practical value. We perform a ritual because the act in itself has meaning, or because doing it make us feel better about ourselves, or both.” Rituals are an important part of ours lives: families celebrate birthdays; many of us have attended a wedding or have celebrated the graduation of a friend or relative from high school or college. This conceptual portion of the unit will require the students to reflect on the following questions. What traditions do your family have? What rituals are associated with those traditions?

Rituals exist to mark milestones in our lives and because they are a living part of our culture they can adapt and change; we can even create new ones.^{vii} Honoring the dead is ritualistically common across cultures of the world. This close study of rituals surrounding death will lead to the discussion of the following question. What are some of the many cultural beliefs about death and the rituals that accompany them?

Death

The Mexican view of death is quite different than ours in the United States. The Mexican culture views death as a social process not just a biological one. As Kelli Swazey stated in her TED Talk, *Life Doesn't End With Death*, “We in the U. S. base our decisions about life on the meanings and definitions we ascribe to death.”^{viii} Mexicans see death as a part of the greater human story.

In the celebration of Día de los Muertos family members ritually display what the deceased loved one's presence has meant for their lives. They recount the honoree's life narrative, weaving his/her story into their community making his/her story their story. The deceased's story goes on long after his body does.^{ix}

Ofrenda

An ofrenda is an altar created by family members to honor a deceased loved one. The ofrenda is an integral part of the Día de los Muertos celebration and students will be asked to create an ofrenda in this unit. In our culture we really do not have anything that resembles an ofrenda other than in churches where the altar serves as a sacred table used to offer up a sacrifice such as the bread and wine. The practice in our culture closest to an ofrenda might be the photo boards and slides shows featuring the deceased that are displayed at funeral home visitations and memorial services. Many times at these events items of the loved one are displayed such as awards or honors bestowed upon the deceased when he or she was living, favorite items of the deceased, or something representing what the person liked to do; i.e., a fishing pole. Since honoring a deceased loved one long after they are gone by creating an altar would seem rather foreign to middle school students this concept needs to be introduced and explored with care.

Mexican History

In order to understand the current practice of Día de los Muertos, students need to understand the origins of the holiday.

Mesoamerica

The Olmec, Mayans, Aztec and Toltec peoples make up the societies of Mesoamerica. They lived in the area of Central Mexico to modern day Honduras. They inhabited this area thousands of years before the Spanish arrived. The Mesoamerican people shared common a belief about death. These indigenous groups buried their dead beneath their houses to keep their loved ones near in order to venerate them. The dead were greatly respected as they were seen as intermediaries between realms. This ritual eventually evolved into the celebration of Día de los Muertos.

Mestizaje

The Spanish word mestizaje does not easily translate into English. Its meaning and significance have been debated for centuries since colonization by European powers began. Its simplest definition is "mixing." ^x This mixing of the indigenous people with their Spanish conquerors and the blending of their two cultures took place over nearly 300 years, from the arrival of the Spanish in Mesoamerica in the early 1500s until Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1810.

The Spanish themselves were a diverse people with regionally distinct cultures, some of which were influenced by the Islamic Empire that ruled most of the country for over

800 years. Much of the technology the Spanish used to navigate to the New World had Arabic roots.

Many of the present day Latin American religious practices have evolved from the blending of indigenous practices with the Spanish Catholic ones. Día de los Muertos is a perfect example of this. Investigating the ritual practices of death of both the Mesoamericans and the Spanish will help the student understand the blending of the practices and the evolution of the Day of the Dead.

Establishing a National Identity

In the early 1900s, nearly 100 years after Mexico gained independence from Spain, the government, in an attempt to unite the country whose citizens were dissatisfied with their political leaders, declared Día de los Muertos a national holiday. Each city and town of Mexico celebrates this national holiday with its own traditions and customs. Students will have the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences of the traditions and customs of the holiday.

Teaching Strategies

Vocabulary

In reading the novel *Tumba* the students will be exposed to a large amount of new vocabulary. In order to prepare them, before delving into each chapter I will use a Knowledge Rating Scale to conduct a knowledge rating of the significant vocabulary in the chapter. I will use a rating scale that is Spanish to English since the language of the novel is Spanish. Students will be given a list of words from the chapter and will be asked to rate how well they know each one. Rating scales help students activate prior knowledge and make them aware of the new vocabulary, exposing them to it before engaging it in context. Having students identify the vocabulary terms with which they are unfamiliar helps the teacher to be able to better prepare them to engage with the information presented in each chapter. The students will be better prepared to read, listen to, discuss and write about the text. In using formative assessments like rating scales, the teacher is better able to assess the students' prior knowledge. The Knowledge Rating Scale is a graphic organizer that contains each new vocabulary term in Spanish for that chapter. The rating categories included are "Have No Clue," "Have Seen It or Heard It," "I Think It Means," "Know It Well," and "Definition."

Before beginning each chapter, the chapter vocabulary will be pre-taught. This will be done to help the students understand what they are reading and to ensure that they understand the discussions that we are having in the classroom about what they are reading, especially when unfamiliar and new vocabulary is being used. For the actual vocabulary instruction the students will use a different graphic organizer to write the term

in Spanish, the definition/meaning in English, write a sentence in Spanish using the term or draw an example. The vocabulary chart will be revisited throughout the unit as students refine their understanding of the vocabulary.^{xi}

Close Reading

The Delaware Department of Education - World Languages current focus is connecting proficiency and the Common Core State Standards for ELA with a focus on Reading and Writing. Close reading is a technique used to teach students to carefully study a piece of writing by reading it several times, each time looking for a different bit of information. The process can begin with a pre-reading question, or a “hook” with the teacher asking the class a question or providing some background information. Then the teacher will have the students identify the text feature of the reading. The first reading is done aloud by the teacher as students follow along circling any words they do not know and annotating any sentence(s) or paragraph(s) they do not understand with a question mark. After the first reading, using a graphic organizer for learning and reflection, students will write a Learning/About statement, a statement telling about what they just read, a brief summary. The students complete the second reading independently. As the students read, they underline details in the text that support their Learning/About statements. Next, the students, using the same graphic organizer from the first read, write a reflection. The reflection can be questions they still have about the text, predictions, or a personal connection that they have to that particular part of the story. With a shoulder partner, each student discusses the details they selected from the text and how they support their Learning/About statement. Reflections are also shared. The teacher then conducts a whole class discussion regarding the details of the text in order to check for understanding. In addition, the teacher addresses student questions about the reading. This discussion is followed up with a series of text dependent questions. Students work through these questions in pairs. The teacher continues the close process with a whole class discussion of the questions and the text in order to check for accuracy.^{xii}

CAFE – Check for Understanding

CAFE consists of learning strategies to check for students’ Comprehension (I understand what I read), Accuracy (I can read the words), Fluency (I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read), and Expanded lists the various strategies. The teaching strategies are used to assess the students’ understanding of a concept, determine if the students can transfer the lesson objectives to a new situation, emphasize the key points of the lesson, or extend the lesson’s content. The strategy used is usually brief and is typically used as a formative assessment, helping the instructor to determine a course of action for the learning activities that will be implemented in the near future.^{xiii}

Activity 1: Perceptions of Different Holiday Celebrations

The first activity was designed as a hook to get the students to engage with the main themes that will be covered throughout the unit. This activity consists of three parts: Access Prior Knowledge, Introduce Día de los Muertos, and Novel Study. The Essential Question for this activity is, “Why should we learn about the traditions of other cultures and what knowledge can we gain from that about our own traditions?”

Introduction

Step 1: Access Prior Knowledge – Discussion of Holidays

To assess what the students already know I will present the students with questions in the target language like “What celebrations are there in your family?” “Are you nervous during Halloween or another celebration?” “Is it possible to communicate with spirits?”^{xiv} Students will record their responses on paper. I anticipate that some students will mention birthday, Christmas and Thanksgiving celebrations. Some students will admit to being nervous or frightened about Halloween, but very few will think it is possible to communicate with spirits.

Students then share their responses with a shoulder partner. Then I will direct a whole class discussion related to the questions. I suggest conducting a class poll related to questions two through five and having the students create bar graph or a pie chart of the results. This will give students visual data indicating the similar opinions and experiences of classmates.

Step 2: Introduce Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

The next part of this lesson will extend and refine student understanding of Día de los Muertos through the use of a video. This type of media works well in my curriculum as a large percentage of my students acquire information visually, from charts, illustrations, photographs and videos. Before reading the novel *Tumba*, I suggest using photographs or a video to introduce the celebration of Día de los Muertos to provide the students some context. There is a colorful and informative animated short video on *You Tube* titled “Día de los Muertos” that illustrates a young Mexican girl’s experience with the holiday.^{xv} Using visuals, such as videos and pictures, is especially helpful for students with special needs as they help these students to acquire background knowledge and put the elements of the lesson into context. After watching the video, or as students look at photographs, I will ask questions in the target language such as “What activities are there?” “What decorations did you observe?” “Is the celebrations happy or sad? Why?” and “Did you like the video?”^{xvi}

Step 3: Novel Study

For the purpose of this unit, I suggest dividing the of the novel *Tumba* by Mira Canion into three parts by theme: Theme 1 – Fear, chapters 1-3; Theme 2 – Curiosity, chapters 4-7; and Theme 3 – Acceptance, chapter 8-10. These themes are based on the protagonist’s journey through the story. It is my hope that my students take “journey” through their perception of the holiday, similar to the main character, Alex.

Theme 1 – Fear

Vocabulary – Access Prior Knowledge

To get the lesson started I will provide each student with a knowledge rating scale chart, prior to any instruction of the terms. The chart will have a listed twenty or so vocabulary words from the text to read. My students will rate themselves on their level of familiarity with each term by placing a check in a column under one of the following headings; Have No Clue, Have Seen or Heard It, Know It Well. I will instruct the students to provide the English meaning of the word in the column labeled Definition if they know a word on the list well. If a student has seen or heard a vocabulary term from the list I will direct them to write an educated guess as the meaning of the word in the column labeled I Think It Means. It is important to encourage them to be honest, as their responses will determine how much time will be devoted to the instruction of each vocabulary term.

Vocabulary – Direct Instruction

After the students reflect on their knowledge of the chapter vocabulary, I will use a vocabulary chart made up of two columns, one with the vocabulary terms and the other with their English meanings, to clearly teach the vocabulary. Using this chart makes certain that all students have the needed vocabulary to participate in class discussions and chapter activities. Students use the definitions to complete a graphic organizer with the vocabulary terms in the target language by writing a definition or meaning of the word in English, writing a sentence in the target language using the term in context, and sketching the vocabulary word. Initially I will instruct the students to complete each section of the graphic organizer for every term with the end goal in mind of each student determining which option; definition, sentence, or sketch is the most effective tool for him/her to learn and remember the vocabulary.

Close Reading

As the students prepare to read the text I will explain to them that they will be using a strategy called Close Reading, working both independently and collaboratively to closely analyze the text. I will further explain that they will be reading the text a couple of times, each time focusing on a different aspect of it. I suggest that within this theme, the text to

be read be divided into three separate readings. In my opinion, the most logical division is by chapter. The first read of the first section, is read aloud by the teacher. Students follow along circling any words they do not know and annotating any text they do not understand with a question mark. After this first read students use a graphic organizer, a one page paper divided in half with the first half labeled *Learning* and the other half labeled *Reflection*, to write a Learning/About statement, a brief summary.

The second reading is reading with purpose. Students read independently underlining details in the text that support their learning statements. Using the above graphic organizer, students reflect upon what they just read. I will explain to the students that the reflection can be questions they still have about the text, predictions, or a personal connect that they have to that particular part of the story. With a shoulder partner, each student discusses the details they selected from the text and how they support their Learning/About statement. Reflections are also shared. I will then conducts a whole class discussion regarding the details of the text in order to check for understanding. In addition, I will address student questions about the reading.

The next step in the close process is a series of text dependent questions. I will model for the students the process of answering these questions by working through the first question with them. First, re-read the section of text. Next, take notes. Then discuss the question with a partner. Finally, write your best possible answer using all of the information that you have gathered to the question.

To end the close reading process I will lead a whole class discussion of the questions and the text in order to check for accuracy. As with chapter 1, the close reading process will be practiced when reading chapters 2 and 3 with the text dependent questions being chapter specific.

Check for Understanding

This check for understanding can be used to assess students' comprehension of the text. Divide the class into groups that have as many students as there actors in the chapter. A director role could be included if needed. Each group assigns character roles to each of its members. Then, read the story aloud as each group acts it out simultaneously. There are many small groups acting out the chapter at the same time rather than having a small group of actors at the front of the class. If one group has an awesome performance, stop the action and have that group re-do the scene. This is a great way to get everyone involved.^{xviii} It can be used as a quick and easy formative assessment.

Theme 2 – Curiosity

Vocabulary

In order to provide consistency throughout unit, I will use the same procedures for accessing prior knowledge and direct instruction of vocabulary as in the previous lesson with the exception of the completion of a graphic organizer for vocabulary definitions. Instead of using the graphic organizer I will have students create digital flashcards using a website like Quizlet. On sites such as Quizlet students can create their personalized study stack of vocabulary terms allowing the students to be active participants in the learning process. Digital media works well in my curriculum because of it has multisensory appeal and will engage my visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

Close Reading

I will employ the same close reading processes used in the previous lesson to maintain consistency. Within this theme I suggest dividing the text into four different readings. In my opinion, the most logical division is by chapter.

Check for Understanding

To assess the students' understanding of Alex's journey thus far from fear of Día de los Muertos to curiosity about it, I will have students create storyboard of events to date in the story. I suggest using one frame for each chapter that was read with an extra frame to be used to predict what will happen next in the story. I will encourage students review and reflect upon their learning statements and reflections from the close readings to help them in the creation of their storyboards. In accessing the storyboard, in each frame, I will look an illustration of the main idea for that chapter along with some supporting details.

Theme 3 – Acceptance

For the sake of continuity the same procedures for the instruction of vocabulary and close reading will be followed as in the previous two lessons. This will provide structure and routine within the lessons. Within the instruction of vocabulary for this lesson I will give my students the two options for recording the definitions; they may choose between using a graphic organizer like the one used in the first lesson, Theme 1, or they may create digital flashcards as used in second lesson, Theme 2. In providing my students this choice, they are able to choose the strategy that works best with their learning style(s) and will therefore be more engaged in the lesson.

Check for Understanding – Venn Diagram

I will have the students complete a Venn diagram comparing themselves to the main character of the story, Alex. To be certain that students understand how to complete a Venn diagram I will model comparing myself to the character in the story of Alex's grandmother. I hope to see the following information included in the students' Venn

diagrams; likes and dislikes, personality traits, family members, nationalities and/or location, school information (classes, schedule, etc.), and friends.

As an extension of this activity I could have the students use the information included in their diagrams in a writing assessment comparing themselves to Alex or another character in the book.

Activity 2: The Components and Purpose of an Ofrenda

This second activity was designed as a hook to get the students to engage with the main themes that will be covered throughout the unit. This activity consists of two parts: Access Prior Knowledge, and Infographic Study. The Essential Questions for this activity are the following; “What are the components of an ofrenda and what purpose(s) do they serve?” and “How do other cultures view death?”

Step 1: Access Prior Knowledge – Discussion of Death

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, the activities and discussion for this activity will be conducted in English. To assess what the students already know I will ask the students to reflect upon their experience(s) with death and/or how we as a culture handle the loss of a loved one. I will have them write their reflections. I expect responses like “*I have not experienced death,*” “*Losing a loved one is sad,*” or “*We cry and have a funeral.*” Students then share their responses with a shoulder partner. I will conduct a whole class discussion about this topic inviting students to share their reflections, which I will record on chart paper with the title Death in Our Culture. Hopefully as students share more students will feel comfortable enough to open up and share.

Once we have exhausted the conversation about our experiences with death as a culture we will turn our focus back to the book of *Tumba*. I will ask the students to reflect upon how the family of Alex dealt with death and the loss of a loved one. Once again, I will have them write their reflections and then share them with a shoulder partner. We will have an entire class discussion, which I anticipate will be more interactive than the previous discussion due to the lack of emotional attachment. I will record students’ reflections/observations on another sheet of chart paper titled Death in Hispanic Cultures.

Upon completing our reflections, I will direct the students to compare the observations listed on each of the chart papers and as part of a whole class discussion I will write on a third piece of chart paper all of the similarities noted by the students. It is my hope that they will observe more similarities than differences in how our culture and Hispanic cultures experience death: for example, many family members in the United States visit the graves of their loved ones and bring flowers or grave blankets to lay on them. In

Mexico, family members visit the graves of their loved ones during the Day of the Dead celebration and bring flowers and other items to adorn the gravesites.

As an extension of this activity I could have the students use the information from our discussions in a writing assessment comparing how death is experienced in our culture to how it is experienced in Hispanic cultures.

Step 2: Infographic Study – The Anatomy of an Ofrenda

After indentifying and reflecting upon the similarities in expression of the loss of a loved in Hispanic cultures and our culture, we will turn our focus to a key element in Hispanic cultures of this expression of loss and central element in the celebration of Día de los Muertos, the ofrenda.

Vocabulary

Students will have had exposure to some vocabulary associated with an ofrenda when reading *Tumba*. When delving into the anatomy of an ofrenda knowledge of specific vocabulary will be needed. To introduce this vocabulary I will use the same learning strategy and procedures from Activity 1: Step 3 - Novel Study; Vocabulary – Access Prior Knowledge. The vocabulary that I will introduce is from the infographic Ofrenda de Muertos ^{xviii} of which we will be doing a close read.

Close Reading

As the students prepare to read the infographic I will remind them that we will once again be using the Close Reading strategy, working both independently and collaboratively to closely analyze the text. I will further remind them that they will be reading the text a couple of times, each time focusing on a different aspect of it. The same strategy and procedures will be followed as in Activity 1: Step 3 – Novel Study; Close Reading. My goal in using this strategy with the infographic is that the students learn about the elements of the ofrenda, their significances, and how they are used to honor and remember deceased loved ones. I want them to understand that Día de los Muertos is a sacred celebration in which people of Hispanic cultures welcome back the memory and spirits of loved ones who are still an important part of their lives even though they are not physically present. Even though the holiday may appear very strange and scary initially, it is my hope that through learning and reflection my students will realize that many of the elements and practices included in the celebration of this holiday are very similar to what we, in our culture, include in our rituals of honoring the dead.

Check for Understanding – Text Dependent Questions

I will provide the students with images of actual ofrendas from various sources such as the internet, newspaper articles, photographs taken at Día de los Muertos exhibits, and books about the holiday. I will instruct the students to study and observe the image they receive. Next, using Google Docs, each student is to write, in the target language, three text dependent questions about their ofrenda. I will review with them what a text dependent question is and provide examples of previously used text dependent questions before they begin writing. After questions are written, I will instruct the students to share the image they received and their questions with one other student, whom I have identified, and me. The student receiving the image and questions will then answer the questions in the target language and share the completed document with the student who wrote the questions and me. Ideally, the student writing the questions should be able to identify specific elements in the pictured ofrenda and form simple written questions in the target language to illicit a specific answer from another student. The student answering the question should be able to recognize/understand the language used in the question well enough to write a simple answer.

Activity 3: Creating an Ofrenda

The Essential Question for this final activity is, “How does honoring our ancestors affect the way we live?”

To conclude the unit, each student will design and create an ofrenda, an altar, to remember and honor a deceased family member or friend, or students may design and create an ofrenda about themselves as created by a loved one or family member in the year 2116. The essential question for this final activity is, “How does honoring our ancestors affect the way we live?” This culminating activity will require each student to complete some research about the honoree by interviewing family members and friends, and collecting items for the ofrenda that represent the life of the honoree. Each ofrenda will be accompanied by a written tributo (tribute), describing the honoree physically, discussing the honoree’s likes and dislikes, explaining the relationship of the honoree to the writer, and including a special memory about the honoree along with any other pertinent information. All written material included in the ofrenda must be in the target language. I will provide students with a packet containing the following information about this project; a letter addressed to both the student and their parent(s), a detailed explanation of the project requirements along with helpful vocabulary and phrases in the target language, and the rubric. Students will display and present their ofrendas to their classmates and the larger school community in a Día de los Muertos celebration.

Appendix A: Standards

This unit will implement a Delaware World Readiness Standard for Learning Languages and a Common Core English Standard. The Delaware World Readiness Standard for Learning Languages, Standard 3.1, states, “Learners present information, concepts, and

ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers or viewers.” This standard is addressed in the culminating activity of the unit, the creating and presentation of an ofrenda with a written tribute. The Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R1 states “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.” This standard is addressed in the close reading within each theme of the novel *Tumba* and the check for understanding activities entailing the use of evidence from the text and class discussions at the end of each lesson.

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