



El Día de los Muertos

**Goals 2000 - Partnerships for
Educating Colorado Students**

**In Partnership with the Denver Public Schools
and the Metropolitan State College of Denver**

El Alma de la Raza Project

El Día de los Muertos

Unit Concepts

- Understand purpose of El Día de los Muertos as a tradition
- Compare/contrast El Día de los Muertos and Halloween
- The components of El Día de los Muertos: altar, food, ofrendas, cemetery

Standards Addressed by This Unit

Reading and Writing

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

Students use appropriate technologies to extend comprehension and communication skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW7)

Mathematics

Students use a variety of tools and techniques to measure, apply the results in problem-solving situations, and communicate the reasoning used in solving these problems. (M5)

History

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H6)

Geography

Students know how to use and construct maps and other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places, and environments. (G1)

Art

Students know and apply visual art materials, tools, techniques, and processes. (ART3)

Students relate the visual arts to various historical and cultural traditions. (ART4)

Introduction

El Día de los Muertos is an important celebration in Mexico that is slowly making its way up north into the Southwestern United States. It began as a month-long Aztec celebration of the dead. When the Spaniards arrived they wanted to convert the Aztecs to Catholicism and so they began to celebrate *El Día de los Muertos* on November 2nd, All Hallows' Eve. It is similar to Memorial Day in remembering the dead, but otherwise it is very different, more festive like Halloween. It is believed that the dead come back briefly to celebrate with their loved ones. Altars are built to honor the dead. Grave sites are visited. In some areas of Mexico people dress up as skeletons and parade in the street.

Implementation Guidelines

This unit is written for the primary grades, specifically for first grade. This unit should be taught the last two or three weeks of October just prior to or during *El Día de los Muertos*. A kitchen of some sort is important for Lesson 4. A computer with Internet access is needed for the extended lesson. A color printer would be nice to print out some of the photographs found on the Internet. It is important to take your time with the writing process pieces. The process is just as important as the product. The sharing of the writing process pieces is also very important. Sharing validates the work it took to complete the project.

Instructional Materials and Resources

The following books and resources are required for implementing this unit as written.

- Lesson 1 *The Day of the Dead* by Tony Johnston and Jeanette Winter, *Days of the Dead* by Kathryn Lasky, or any other book that introduces *El Día de los Muertos*
- Lesson 3 Cooking utensils, stove, and oven
- Lesson 6 Computer with Internet access
- Lesson 7 Overhead of North American continent map, overhead projector

Lesson Summary

- Lesson 1 Introduction of *El Día de los Muertos*
Use of KWL chart to introduce *El Día de los Muertos*.
- Lesson 2 *Calaveras*
Skulls are an important symbol of *El Día de los Muertos*. Make your own in this lesson.
- Lesson 3 *Pan de los Muertos*
This bread is a celebratory food eaten on this holiday.
- Lesson 4 Class book of *El Día de los Muertos*
Class-made book of *El Día de los Muertos* modeling the writing process.
- Lesson 5 Comparison of *El Día de los Muertos* and Halloween
Use a Venn Diagram to compare two closely related holidays.
- Lesson 6 Net Surfing
(Extended) Gathering and evaluating information on the Internet.
- Lesson 7 Locating Mexico on a Map
(Extended) Finding Mexico relative to the United States.

Lesson 1: Introduction to El Día de los Muertos

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read and understand a variety of materials. (RW1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students make connections between prior knowledge and what they need to know about a topic before reading about it.

Students use information from their reading to increase vocabulary and language usage.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will increase their vocabulary regarding *El Día de los Muertos*.

SPECIFICS

El Día de los Muertos is a holiday in Mexico that celebrates the return of the spirits of the dead to this world. There are many traditions such as the *ofrendas*, which are offerings of things the person liked while alive, and altars that are set up to honor the dead. Many of the things the dead person liked are placed on the altar such as foods, drinks, toys, and games. A picture of the dead person is also placed on the altar. The graves are cleaned and adorned with marigolds, the traditional flower of death in Mexico.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

KWL

Read aloud

Direct interaction

Determining importance in text

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

The teacher should prepare a KWL chart and lead a classroom discussion on what is known and what would like to be learned about *El Día de los Muertos*. The chart should stay up throughout the unit so that it can be referred to frequently and added to. Students may also make and keep their own copy.

ACTIVITIES

Fill in, as a group, what you know about *El Día de los Muertos*. Then the teacher reads *Day of the Dead* while stopping to discuss (confirm or correct) anything that was on the chart. Add or delete from the chart during future lessons as your knowledge about this holiday increases.

Lesson 1 (cont.)

VOCABULARY

<i>calaveras de azucar</i>	Sugar skulls
<i>pan de muertos</i>	Bread of the dead
<i>zempasúchil</i> (marigold)	Flower that represents the dead in Mexico
<i>mole</i>	Chocolate and chile sauce
<i>papá</i>	Dad
<i>mamá</i>	Mom
<i>tamales</i>	Meat and chile or raisins inside of corn meal wrapped in a corn husk

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Day of the Dead by Tony Johnston and Jeanette Winter

Days of the Dead by Kathryn Lasky

KWL Chart on chart or butcher paper

markers

reproduced copies of Lesson 1 Worksheet

ASSESSMENT

Students begin completing KWL chart under “What I Learned” and can add and revise other parts of chart as the unit continues.

Lesson 2: Calaveras

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students know and apply visual art materials, tools, techniques, and processes. (ART3)

Students relate the visual arts to various historical and cultural traditions. (ART4)

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will create a work of art.

Students will discuss the significance of a *calavera* for *El Día de los Muertos*.

SPECIFICS

Skulls are a tradition for *El Día de los Muertos*. Generally, they are made of sugar and decorated beautifully. They are given to the children as treats. To have one's name on it makes it a special gift. This activity can be completed over two days or one afternoon.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Student directed

Group discussion

Direct interaction

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Have a sample *calavera* prepared to show students. If the children are not ready to draw their own *calaveras* have some prepared in advance for them to trace.

ACTIVITIES

Teacher will discuss the significance of *calaveras*. After the teacher shows you the sample of a *calavera*, design one for somebody important to you (relative or friend). You can make several and attach them to a paper plate to make a mobile.

VOCABULARY

calaveras

Skulls used in celebration of *El Día de los Muertos*

Lesson 2 (cont.)

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

paper
paper plates
pencils
crayons or markers
glue
yarn

ASSESSMENT

Students complete *calaveras* and discuss their cultural significance when asked. Students are able to identify what artistic tools they used.

Lesson 3: Pan de los Muertos

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students use a variety of tools and techniques to measure, apply the results in problem-solving situations, and communicate the reasoning used in solving these problems. (M5)

Students know and apply visual art materials, tools, techniques, and processes. (ART3)

BENCHMARK(S)

Student will understand and apply the attributes of linear dimensions, capacity, weight, mass, time, temperature, perimeter, area, volume, and angle measurement in problem-solving situations.

Students will identify and experiment with materials, tools, techniques, and processes.

Students will use materials tools, techniques, and processes to make a work of art.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will make a loaf of *Pan de los Muertos*.

SPECIFICS

Pan de los Muertos (bread of the dead) is a bread eaten on *El Día de los Muertos*. It can be baked at home but is usually bought at a bakery. It can be purchased at a Mexican bakery at the end of October or the first or second day of November.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Measuring

Predicting

Shared reading

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Have students split up into two groups. In advance, have each group bring in one or two items needed to make the bread. Write the recipe on chart paper. Have all ingredients and utensils ready. An oven or toaster oven will be needed as well as a stove top or burner. It would be best to use your school's cafeteria if possible.

ACTIVITIES

Follow instruction on recipe to make dough. When dough is ready, mold into your own loaf of *Pan de los Muertos* and bake according to the directions.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

recipe

ingredients (see recipe on following page)

ASSESSMENT

Bread should resemble bones and taste good!

Pan de los Muertos

Ingredients:

¼ c. milk	2 eggs
¼ c. margarine or butter cut up	3 c. all purpose flour
¼ c. sugar	½ tsp. anise seed
½ tsp. salt	¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 pkg. active dry yeast	2 tsp. sugar
¼ c. very warm water	

Directions:

1. Boil milk.
2. Remove from heat and stir in butter, ¼ c. sugar, and salt.
3. Mix yeast and very warm water in a large bowl until the yeast dissolves. Let stand five minutes then add milk mixture.
4. Separate egg. (Save white for later.)
5. Mix egg yolk and yeast and flour. Mix well until dough forms into a ball.
6. Place the dough in the center of a floured pastry board or work surface and knead until smooth.
7. Return to large bowl and cover with dish towel. Let rise in warm place for 90 minutes.
8. Grease a baking sheet and preheat the oven to 350 degrees while the dough rises.
9. Knead dough again on floured surface and divide the dough into fourths. Set one fourth aside.
10. Roll the remaining 3 pieces into "ropes." On greased baking sheet, pinch 3 rope ends together and braid. Finish by pinching ends together on opposite side.
11. Divide the remaining dough in half and form 2 "bones." Cross and lay them on top of the braided loaf.
12. Cover bread with dish towel and let rise for 30 minutes.
13. In a bowl, mix together anise seed, cinnamon, and 2 teaspoons sugar.
14. In another bowl, beat egg white lightly.
15. After 30 minutes are up, brush top of bread with egg white and sprinkle with sugar mixture, except on cross bones. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Lesson 4: Class Book of El Día de los Muertos

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students write and speak using formal grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (RW3)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will write and speak for a variety of purposes.

Students will write and speak to peers, teachers, and the community.

Students will plan, draft, revise, proofread, edit, and publish written communications.

Students will use the most appropriate method, handwriting or word processing, to produce a product that is legible.

Students will recognize, understand, and use formal grammar in speaking and writing.

Students will apply formal usage in speaking and writing.

Students will demonstrate correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will write a class story about the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos*.

SPECIFICS

The children will be making a class book about what they know regarding *El Día de los Muertos* as you guide them through the writing process. This activity will take several days to a week.

Use the attached Writing Process Chart to guide you.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Shared writing

Language experience

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Read as much as you can to the students prior to the shared writing. There are some books and a video listed in the Resources/Materials section. The extended lesson using the Internet would be a good place to start if you have access. Be ready to cut up the story and glue the pages to construction paper. Number the pages as you hand them out. It helps in reassembling. Try to have one page for each student to illustrate, including the title page.

ACTIVITIES

Recalling what you know about *El Día de los Muertos*, you will be writing a class book about this special tradition in Mexico. You will begin with a plan for your writing. In this plan you will include your topic, audience, and plan. This plan can be a sketch or a list. The you will proceed to write your draft. You will then revise, edit, publish, illustrate, and share with your intended audience. See writing process guide attached.

Lesson 4 (cont.)

VOCABULARY

plan	Student plans writing using topic, audience, and plan as a guide
draft	Student puts ideas down on paper following plan
revise	Student checks writing and asks: Does it make sense? Does it need more information?
edit	Student proofreads
publish	Student completes final copy using appropriate means: writing or word publishing
share	Student shares piece with intended audience

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Pablo Recuerda: La Fiesta del Día de los Muertos by Jorge Ancona Díaz

Day of the Dead: A Mexican-American Celebration by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith

Day of the Dead by Tony Johnston and Jeanette Winter

Days of the Dead by Kathryn Lasky

The Spirit of Tío Fernando by Janice Levy

Celebrating the Day of the Dead (video). Produced by Alfonso Olvera, Victor Quiroca, and May Herz

chart paper

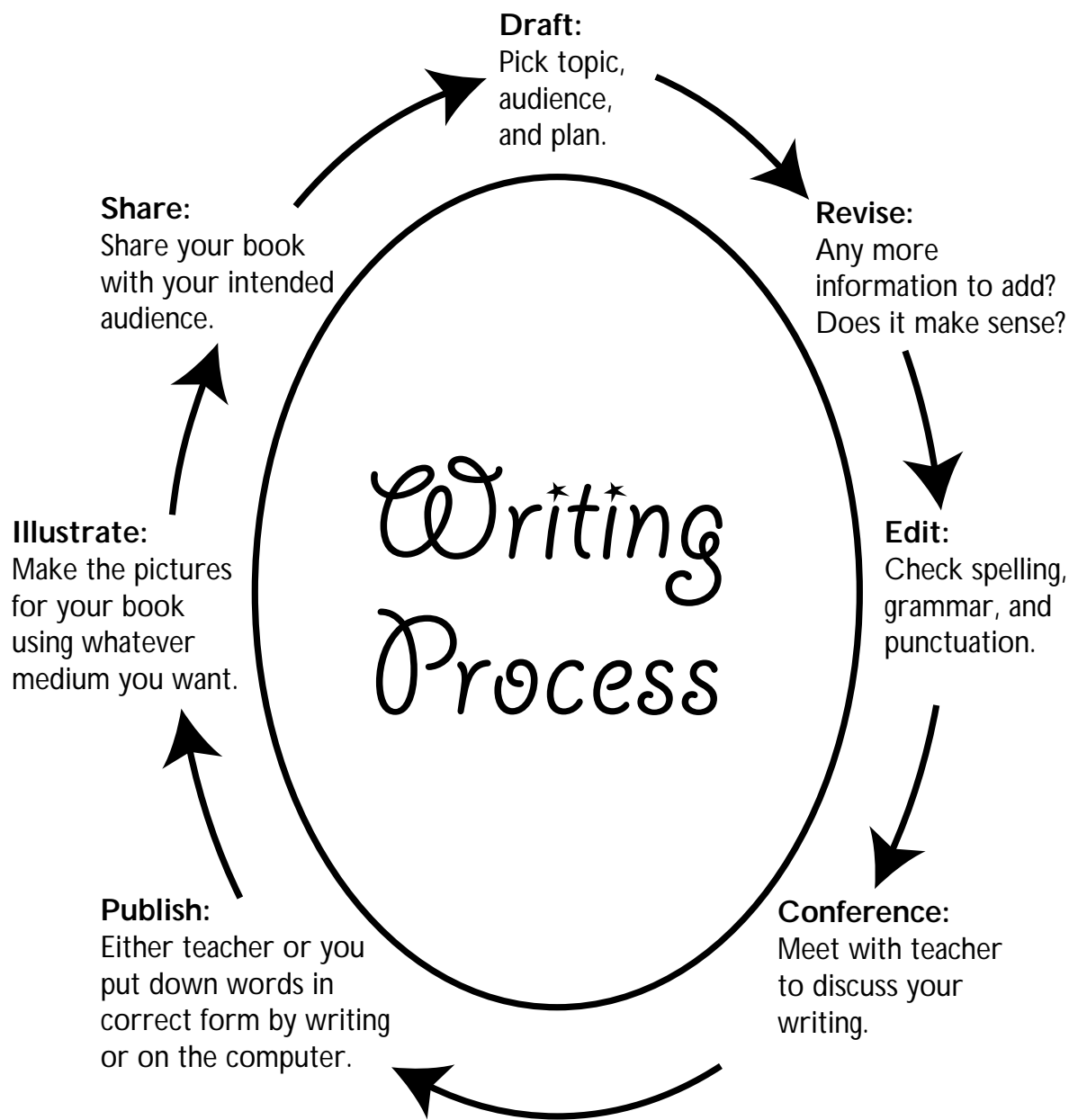
markers

construction paper

binding clip or materials to bind the book

ASSESSMENT

Students discuss the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* and share book with intended audience.



Lesson 5: Comparison of El Día de los Muertos to Halloween

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences. (RW2)

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW4)

Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. (H6)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will write and speak for a variety of purposes.

Students will make predictions, analyze, draw conclusions, and discriminate between fact and opinion in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Students will recognize, express, and defend points of view orally and in writing.

Students know how societies have been affected by religions and philosophies.

Students know how various forms of expression reflect religious and philosophical ideas.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will identify important aspects of *El Día de los Muertos* in comparison to Halloween to demonstrate knowledge acquired.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Venn Diagram

Class discussion

Small group instruction

ACTIVITIES

Students will complete a Venn Diagram in small groups comparing/contrasting *El Día de los Muertos* with Halloween. Another Venn Diagram can also be done comparing/contrasting *El Día de los Muertos* with Memorial Day.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

teacher-produced Venn Diagram on chart paper, one for each group
markers

ASSESSMENT

Participation, completeness, and accuracy of Venn Diagram(s).

Lesson 6 (Extended): Net Surfing

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources. (RW5)

Students use appropriate technologies to extend comprehension and communication skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. (RW7)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students will select relevant material for reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

understand the structure, organization, and use of various media, reference, and technological sources as they select information for their reading, writing, and speaking purposes.

Students will paraphrase, summarize, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information.

Students use appropriate technology to increase literacy through a variety of formats.

Students use appropriate technology to access, process, and communicate information for a variety of purposes.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will use the World Wide Web to obtain more information on *El Día de los Muertos*.

SPECIFICS

The World Wide Web offers many opportunities to increase understandings of *El Día de los Muertos*. There are many web sites which have photographs of the happenings in Mexico and the southwestern United States.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Teacher guided use of World Web Web

Small group instruction

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Students need to be familiar with the parts of the computer. The Web needs to be explained as a source of information that may or may not be correct. Students should be introduced to the idea of evaluating information for accuracy. You may want to do this lesson with students who have some previous computer use. It would be wise to have a trusted adult, such as a para, take small groups of students for this lesson.

ACTIVITIES

Now that you know about *El Día de los Muertos*, try to find additional information on the Web to support and extend your knowledge. Your teacher will have some sites for you to visit. Once you are done and have printed out some information or pictures, put it all together in the form of a collage to hang up in the classroom.

Lesson 6 (cont.)

VOCABULARY

WWW	World Wide Web
web site	site of information

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Some web sites to try:

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/>
Some photographs; describes food, altar, customs

<http://daphne.palomar.edu/muertos/>
Bilingual site detailing *El Día de los Muertos*

http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/muertos.html
Details and photographs

<http://www.latinolink.com/life/10291dea.htm>
Description of the preparation for *El Día de los Muertos*

<http://biz.rtd.com/plaza/elfuturo/muertos.html>
Narrative of *El Día de los Muertos*

ASSESSMENT

Student will understand World Wide Web and be able to tell you what a web site is. Student will know it is necessary to evaluate the information found there for accuracy.

Lesson 7: Locating Mexico on a Map

What will students be learning?

STANDARD(S)

Students know how to use and construct maps and other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places, and environments. (G1)

BENCHMARK(S)

Students develop knowledge of Earth to locate people, places, and environments.

OBJECTIVE(S)

Students will locate Mexico on a map of North America.

Students will be able to describe where Mexico is relative to the United States.

What will be done to help students learn this?

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Teacher directed

PRELIMINARY LESSON PREPARATION

Teach compass directions in preparation for map reading. You may want to prepare an overhead to make it easier for the students to follow along or obtain a big map or large globe.

ACTIVITIES

Using the map provided by the teacher, find Mexico and color it green. Find the United States and color it red. Color all of the oceans blue.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

Map of North American continent

overhead of map if possible

overhead projector

crayons

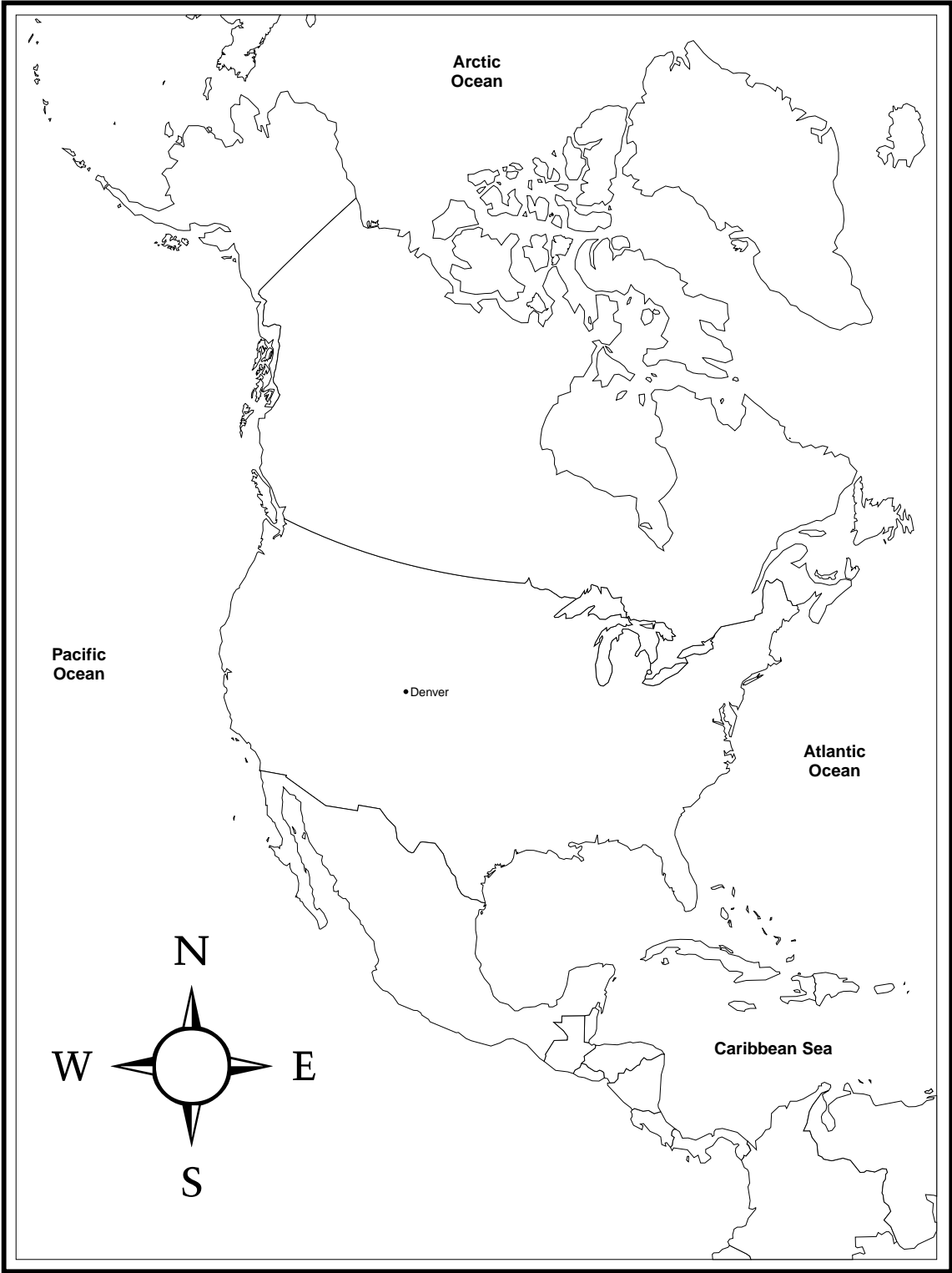
Vis-a-vis markers

ASSESSMENT

Student will be able to identify United States and Mexico on a map of North American continent.

Map of North America

Name _____ Date _____



Unit Assessment

How will students demonstrate proficiency?

PERFORMANCE TASK

Following the writing process, write a book about your own traditions that are similar to or different from the traditions of *El Día de los Muertos*. You will then share your book with your intended audience. Remember that the writing process was modeled in a previous lesson and needs to be followed. Conference with the teacher when needed. You need to conference with the teacher prior to publishing so you can make sure the final draft is correct and ready to copy.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Independent writing

Planning

Conferencing

SCORING RUBRIC:

4. Followed writing process completely and independently; detailed, rich, sequential story; shared with audience
3. Followed writing process completely with some help; detailed, sequential story; shared with audience
2. Followed writing process completely with help; sequential story; shared with audience
1. Followed writing process incompletely; incomplete story; not shared with audience

Annotated Bibliography

Ancona Díaz, Jorge. *Pablo Recuerda: La Fiesta del Día de los Muertos*. New York: Lothrop. Lee & Shepard Books, 1993.

Grades K–3. A young boy and his family make ornate preparations to honor the spirits of the dead during a three-day celebration of *El Día de los Muertos*.

Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer. *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991.

Adult. A complete history of The Day of the Dead, including interviews with people from various regions of Mexico.

Celebrating the Day of the Dead, 1992 (video). Produced by Alfonso Olvera, Victor Quiroca, and May Herz. Madera, CA: Madera Cinevideo.

Doney, Meryl. *World Crafts: Festivals*. Danbury, CT: Franklin Watts, 1996.

Grades K–5. One art activity in the whole book. Nice photographs.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Day of the Dead: A Mexican-American Celebration*. New York: Holiday House, 1994.

Grades 1–5. Very detailed; good information.

Johnston, Tony and Jeanette Winter. *Day of the Dead*. Singapore: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997.

Grades K–3. Nicely describes this holiday. Good drawings.

Kindersly, Anabel. *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Grades K–5. Describes customs and traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* and includes rich photographs.

Lasky, Kathryn. *Days of the Dead*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1994.

Grades 1–5. Good photographs and text is interesting.

Levy, Janice. *The Spirit of Tío Fernando*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 1995.

Grades 1–5. Realistic fiction in English and Spanish. Nicely describes holiday from a boy's perspective.

Salinas, Bobbi. *Indo-Hispanic Folk Art Traditions II*. Piñata Publications, 1988.

Adult. Good information for the teacher.

Sayer, Chloe. *The Mexican Day of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1990.

Adult. An anthology of the Day of the Dead in Mexico. Good information for the teacher.

About the Author

Patricia Hurrieta was born in El Paso, Texas and moved to Denver, Colorado when she was seven years old. She graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School, which is in the Denver Public Schools. While in high school she spent six weeks in Mexico as an exchange student.

Patricia graduated from Metropolitan State College of Denver with a bachelors degree in behavioral science and minors in elementary and bilingual/ multicultural education. After a year and a half as a paraprofessional, Patricia decided to pursue her education full-time . After graduating, she became a teacher in 1993. That spring she began her pursuit of a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in reading and writing. Her degree was conferred in the fall of 1997 from the University of Colorado at Denver.

Patricia continues to work with first graders in a bilingual classroom as she has done for the past five years.