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**Dia De Los Muertos**

**What is Dia De Los Muertos?**

Despite the popularity of the animated movies “The Book of Life” and “Coco”, Dia De Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead remains one of the most misunderstood holidays in the United States. Its proximity to Halloween and use of decorative skulls and skeletons confuses outside observers who don’t know the history and intention behind the observance.

Dia De Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead is a very old Mexican tradition in which people take the time to remember their loved ones who have died. It is celebrated on November 1st and 2nd. It is not morbid nor does it glorify the macabre. Instead, this beautiful holiday gives people the opportunity to celebrate the lives of their friends and family who have passed away. For this reason, Dia De Los Muertos is both special and important to many Latin American people.

It’s also an opportunity to help children learn about the grieving process and how we can move beyond it to that bittersweet place of remembering people we’ve lost without sadness. This is a crucial developmental skill that children must learn and unfortunately, here in the United States, it is not one that is taught.

Historically, on Dia De Los Muertos family members will visit the gravestones and cemeteries and take care of the grass, lawns, and place flowers on family sites. Often times favorite foods, candles and other decorations are left behind as a gesture or offering for the deceased. Celebrations and traditions may vary, but in general they are very colorful and full of life, focusing on the remembrance and celebrations of good times. Marigold petals and flowers are often the centerpieces of various altars, as their scent is thought to be the most liked by the dead.

Those that celebrate Dia De Los Muertos will often paint their faces and bodies like skulls, to match their loved ones. Decorative skulls, or candy skulls, are bright and colorful. Each one is meant to represent a specific person in the afterlife, so rarely will a family have two of the same. Once in costume its very common for a town to hold a parade or celebration of life where everyone comes together, in hopes of reconnecting with those that have already passed on.

Dia De Los Muertos is a special holiday, one that was never meant to be scary or sad, but instead is a way for people to maintain the connections with their families. Today Dia De Los Muertos can be celebrated all over the country, but is especially important in areas with strong Latin ties.

