“Day of the Dead” Research Guide

By Joshua Snyder

For Ken Orenic

Summary: The Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday celebration of honoring spirits of dead people who come to visit the physical world on October 31—children come on November 1st and adults on the 2nd. It’s origins are a Christian-indigenous mix, with roots in Catholicism and Mesoamerican religions. Activities include Mass and feasts at graveyards. The day is similar to the Euro-American Halloween in aesthetics but has a different emphasis. Images of loved ones are often venerated juxtaposed next to saints and divine beings. Holiday-related images became political satire motifs in some cases. It’s a way for people to celebrate cultural identity and maintain their heritage while away from their ancestral homeland.

Search terms: Search terms are words and phrases that help you think about your topic in different ways, and they help you in your research. The list below are some search term ideas that can narrow or broaden your research. You can get it to get your brainstorm on and for putting on search boxes in database search engines.

Mexico

America

United States

Politics

Religion

Spiritualism

Catholicism

Food

Art

Culture

Aztec

Cartoons

Tattoos

Family

Relatives

Syncretism

Subversion

Colonialism

CODL Databases

* JSTOR
  + Stanley Brandes, “Sugar, Colonialism, and Death: On the Origins of Mexico's Day of the Dead”. | <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179316>
    - *Provides an historical overview of religious practices and connects with social identity currently.*
  + Stanley Brandes, “The Day of the Dead, Halloween, and the Quest for Mexican National Identity”. | <http://www.jstor.org/stable/541045>
    - *Good for comparing the traditional Mexican holiday with the European spiritualism we have in America today and how each element forms cultural identity.*
  + Betty Brown, “Vive tu Recuerdo: Living Traditions in the Mexican Days of the Dead”. | <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3335859>
    - *A type of catalogue for activities and beliefs regarding the holiday*
  + Olivia Cadaval, ‘"The Taking of the Renwick": The Celebration of the Day of the Dead and the Latino Community in Washington, D. C.’ | <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814391>
    - *A place study good for comparing practices and ideas in one location in the United States with another location in the Americas (which would require another source).*
  + Neal Krause, Elena Bastida, “Exploring the Interface between Religion and Contact with the Dead among Older Mexican Americans”. | <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25593769>
    - *Study of a specific demographic regarding necro-communication; good for dialogue with Day of the Dead practices.*
* Project MUSE
  + Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska, “"Secret language" in oral and graphic form: religious-Magic Discourse in Aztec speeches and manuscripts” | [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/oral_tradition/v025/25.2.d-browska.html)
    - *Although the title doesn’t name the celebration, this study includes the Day of the Dead by engaging with ways cultures preserve tradition, and may provide prototypes from ancient civilizations for current practices*
  + Pamela Bastante and Brenton Dickieson, “Nuestra Señora de las Sombras: the enigmatic identity of Santa Muerte” | [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_the_southwest/v055/55.4.bastante.html)
    - *This article discusses quasi-divine Santa Muerte, a prominent figure in Day of the Dead spiritualism*
  + Linda Greenberg, “Learning from the dead: wounds, women, and activism in Cherríe Moraga’s *Heroes and saints*” | [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/melus/v034/34.1.greenberg.html)
    - *Analyzing a play, Greenburg discusses the way persons used images of death to communicate rebellion against oppression from colonial, economic, and sexist forms; although not explicitly naming the holiday, this is a concrete example of public experience of death and identity formation*
  + Regina Marchi, “Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations” | [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_american_folklore/v126/126.501.marchi.html)
    - *Arguments concerning multiple celebrations in various locations and comparing them to what the author considers “authentic”.*
  + Carleen D. Sanchez, “The apotheosis of Frida and Ché: secular saints and fetishized commodities” | [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_religion_and_popular_culture/v024/24.2.sanchez.html)
    - *Frida, a figure representing pre-European Central America, often features in Day of the Dead iconography, and Che represents modern struggles for liberty; this is good for seeing how icons of national identity such as these are turned into objects for profit, and how that change damages cultural identity*

CODL Physical Materials

1. Stanley Brandes, *Skulls to the living, bread to the dead: the day of the dead in Mexico and beyond* |  
    <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/64208213>
   1. *This provides a history and coverage of practices, including art and spiritualism, of the holy day, in Mexico and other countries*
2. Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloë Sayer, *The skeleton at the feast: the Day of the Dead in Mexico* |  
   <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/25177425>
   1. *This is an overview of the holy day’s history and is exclusive to Mexico*
3. Janet Esser, *Behind the mask in Mexico* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/17295550>
   1. *This focuses on the costumes used in Mexico to show the holiday activities and its history*
4. John Greenleigh, *The days of the dead: Mexico's Festival of Communion with the Departed* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/38030302>
   1. *Greenleigh expounds the identity Mexicans cultivate by keeping close relationships with dead community members.*
5. Carol Gnojewski, *Day of the Dead: a Latino celebration of family and life* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/55086013>
   1. *This exposition includes practices, a little history, and is demonstrates how pan-national identity is built with the celebration in the Latin@ community*
6. Shawn D Haley, *Day of the Dead: when two worlds meet in Oaxaca* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/52269678>
   1. *Haley studies the people in Oaxaca and shows their beliefs about the world, moving into their practices of the Day of the Dead, demonstrating the relationship that the people in Oaxaca have with dead community members through time.*
7. Jack Santino, *Halloween and other festivals of death and life* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/28549780>
   1. *Santino compares the religious beliefs and common practices of Halloween with the Day of the Dead, regardless of location or ethnic group.*
8. John Lynch, *New worlds : a religious history of Latin America* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/757838308>
   1. *Lynch provides a history of Latin America’s religious phenomena, which is more broad than most of these sources but a bit more focused than Roof’s book.*
9. Regina M Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA : the migration and transformation of a cultural phenomenon* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/17295550>
   1. *A cultural and historical exposition that shows how immigration of Latin Americans keep their identity in a foreign nation through practicing the Day of the Dead*
10. Wade Roof, *Contemporary American religion* | <http://cod.worldcat.org/oclc/38030302>
    1. *Roof provides an overarching summary of major American religious beliefs and practices; very introductory but can help give a basic idea of each religion for comparison*

Websites

* “Day of the Dead Educational Activity Guide,” Mexic-Arte Museum, accessed 29 September 2014, <http://www.mexic-artemuseum.org/images/uploads/education/Day_of_Dead_Guide.pdf>
  + *Provides a short curriculum of activities and sources for educating children about the Day*
* “The Day of the Dead ofrenda: a heartfelt work of art,” accessed 29 September 2014, <http://www.inside-mexico.com/ofrenda.htm>
  + *Exposition of a particular popular traditional object of religious significance created just before and for the Day*
* “Dia de los Muertos,” National Geographic, accessed 29 September 2014, <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/dia-de-los-muertos/?ar_a=1>
  + *A good introduction to the history and practices of the Day of the Dead.*
* “Calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada,” Political Domain Review, accessed 29 September 2014, <http://publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-calaveras-of-jose-guadalupe-posada/>
  + *Demonstrates how religious symbolism became a powerful tool in the hands of an artist to make political statements—a case study of one artist*
* Gerald Erichsen, “Day of the Dead honors the deceased: holiday’s focus different than Halloween’s,” *About Education*, accessed 29 September 2014, <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html>
  + *Provides a brief overview of the differences between Halloween and Day of the Dead, focusing on family member relationships.*
* “A Mexican Day of the Dead party,” Fine Cooking, accessed 29 September 2014, <http://www.finecooking.com/menus/day-of-the-dead.aspx>
  + *Gives a menu with traditional cuisine.*
* Regina Marchi, “Altar images: US Day of the Dead as political communication,” PhD dissertation, University of Claifornia, San Diego, 2005, eScholarship University of California, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8574v2sk#page-1>
  + *Concerned with only the US, Marchi shows how Day of the Dead images play a political role in a community*
* Mexican Sugar Skull | <http://www.mexicansugarskull.com>
  + Focusing on one Day of the Dead candy image, this website is dedicated to the holiday’s art and food tradition

Collection Development

* Jorge Alderete, *Day of the Dead: El Dia de Los Muertos*, Korero: Chicago, 2011. | <http://www.ipgbook.com/the-day-of-the-dead-products-9781907621017.php?page_id=32&pid=KOR>
* Mary J. Andrade, *Through the Eyes of the Soul, Day of the Dead in Mexico – Michoacan*. 1996. | <http://www.dayofthedead.com/through-the-eyes-of-the-soul-day-of-the-dead-in-mexico-michoacan>
* Mary Andrade, *The Vigil of the Little Angels” in P’urhepecha and Spanish -* Special Edition | [dayofthedead.com](http://www.dayofthedead.com/the-vigil-of-the-little-angels-in-p-urhepecha-and-spanish-special-edition)
* Phil Cushway, *Art of the dead* | <http://www.amazon.com/Art-Dead-Phil-Cushway/dp/1593765029>