Festival of Remembrance

Una Celebración del Día de los Muertos: Music for Mexico’s Day of the Dead

"El Mezcal y francachela de todas las calaveras" (Happy dance and wild party of all the skeletons).

—José Guadalupe Posada.
The Sonoma Country Day School: 
Día de los Muertos Altar

The Sonoma Country Day School altar (known as an ofrenda in Spanish) features décor created in Spanish and art classes by students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Younger students made colorful tissue paper flowers, paper butterflies, sugar skulls, clay skeletons, and the special bread known as Pan de Muertos, which was baked in the school's outdoor pizza oven.

Older students contributed bright cut-paper designs, tin can candle holders, and colorful paintings of skulls. They have also shared photos of family members who have died. Seventh and eighth graders were asked to consider their own legacies, and have written how they would like to be remembered in thoughtful essays. Some of the marigolds and vegetables are from the school's garden.

El Día de los Muertos is an excellent opportunity for our students to learn about another culture. The ritual, which honors loved ones who have died, encompasses symbolism and a host of cultural traditions that are both touching and interesting. The four elements associated with the altar—fire, water, earth, and air—are represented by the candles, the jug of water, flowers and clay, and cut paper. Crafts were also made by hand using ingredients and supplies easily found in the homes in Mexico.

We invite guests to write the names and sentiments about their departed loved ones on the paper butterflies we have supplied and leave them on our altar. Some believe the butterflies will carry the messages to the dead.

SCDS offers a progressive, values-based education in grades K-8 focusing not only on academics, music, fine arts, world language, and environmental science, but also on philanthropy, ethics, cultural literacy, social responsibility, and leadership skills—essential tools for twenty-first century citizenship.

Listening For A Change: 
Oral History Project

To enrich the Festival of Remembrance Día de los Muertos concert, students at Luther Burbank Elementary School in Santa Rosa and the nonprofit Listening for a Change worked together to interview, record, and photograph Mexican American family and community members. The families/friends had wisdom to share about their life experiences as well as wisdom of remembered deceased relatives whose own voices the children will never hear.

Digital photographs and audio interview excerpts are displayed for concert guests in the lobby. Viewers will have a special opportunity to hear multiple community stories. Each story is a gift.

Included in the photo/interview montage are reflections shared by the students after they conducted classroom interviews. The entire class helped create questions and a panel of student interviewers relayed the inquiries to each guest.

We are especially appreciative to Luther Burbank Elementary School principal Patricia Turner and teacher Ross Hause for their support and hard work to help make this interview project a reality. With a student body made up of 80 percent English language learners, the children and their families have much to learn and much to teach.

Listening for a Change's school curriculum Essence of Acceptance was the foundation for teaching the children how to conduct oral histories. Lessons included learning how to ask open-ended questions, creating follow-up questions, using appropriate body language, asking questions from safe-to-sensitive, etc. Phyllis Rosenfield, Executive Director, worked closely with the teachers and students to bring this curriculum to Luther Burbank Elementary School.

From "La calavera de Cupido" (Calavera of Cupid) by José Guadalupe Posada.