We design these lessons to be adaptable and flexible to your students and your life. You can do “A Little Taste” in 30-45 minutes, or you can use the extension activities and make the projects and activities listed last over several lessons or even weeks. The lessons are meant to be interdisciplinary, covering many subject areas at once. Students of all ages can use these materials, with pre-writers able to draw or verbally share responses.

If desired, you could extend these lessons into a project-based learning unit of study, where students tackle a real world problem and create solutions. The learning happens in the process of getting to the presentation of the solution, and students often find it more meaningful when they are investigating a topic of their choice.

For a deeper look at the topic, “A Big Bite” offers extension ideas for learners who are able to read, write, and think on a higher level.
Driving Questions: What is the celebration Dia de los Muertos? How does this holiday honor and recognize ancestors?

A Little Taste

Resource List

Background Information (also linked within lesson)
• “Oaxaca: The Day of the Dead”, video https://vimeo.com/91766761
• “Day of the Dead”, article National Geographic Kids https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/celebrations/day-of-the-dead/
• Dia de los Muertos, picture book by Roseanne Greenfield Thong, https://bookshop.org/books/dia-de-los-muertos-9780807515662/9780807515662
• Dia de los Muertos, picture book video read-along https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xsbgFKoutM

Optional Extensions
• Mexican Bread of the Dead Recipe, Mexico in my Kitchen https://www.mexicoinmykitchen.com/pan-de-muerto-mexican-bread-of-dead/
• How to Make Mexican Papel Picado: Festive Decorations https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo5nkPbAcMc
• Uncle Monarch and the Day of the Dead, picture book by Nancy Luenn
• Uncle Monarch and the Day of the Dead, video read aloud, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNHq_WN35Fs
• Day of the Dead and Monarch Butterflies, video clip, PBS https://www.pbs.org/video/day-dead-and-monarch-butterflies-b2j4hz/

Conceptual Knowledge - What Do You Want Them to Know?
1. Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is a holiday that is celebrated mostly in Mexico but also in many other Latinx families in other parts of the world, including in the U.S.
2. It is celebrated from October 31 through November 2nd, so it overlaps with Halloween in date, but is different in that it is a joyful celebration of those who have died, recognizing that death is a part of life.
3. The celebration incorporates specific food, art, music, decorations, and imagery.
Key Vocabulary

- **offrenda** - offering; a collection of objects placed on a display altar for Dia de los Muertos
- **calacas** - skeleton figurines
- **calaveras/calaveras de azucar** - skulls/sugar skulls

Cross-Curricular Links

- Social Science, Spanish, Fine Art, Language Arts

Project Idea/Scenario

Students will create cultural artifacts related to Dia de los Muertos that reflect their understanding of the cultural significance of the holiday.

Plan the Process: What Will the Students Do?

Learn about Dia de los Muertos, and create their own **offrendas** or other projects that celebrate the lives of those who have died.

Warm-up Activity - Activating Background Knowledge

- Draw items associated with different holidays and have students guess the associated holiday (a tree for Christmas, a menorah for Hanukkah, a heart for Valentine's Day).
- Finish by drawing a picture of a skeleton, and see what responses the students give. If only Halloween is given as an answer, explain that there is a holiday that is celebrated by many people where skeletons are used to celebrate and not to scare. If a student guesses Dia de los Muertos, ask what they know about the holiday already and then establish that they will be learning more about the celebration and creating their own celebration incorporating many of the different elements.

Sequence/Procedure

1. Take notes while reading the story or watching the video read aloud *Dia de los Muertos* -- draw and write. Use colored pencils or crayons to take and draw the notes; Dia de los Muertos is a colorful celebration and the notes should reflect that.
2. Explain project idea, that students will get to create their own **offrenda** or other celebration of an ancestor. Watch the video *Oaxaca: Day of the Dead* and draw impressions of the celebration to add to notes.
3. Identify the main elements of an offrenda or any offering to the dead. Students should identify the use of food, music, specific decorations, and what preparations are made beforehand. For further information or to identify specifics, students can also refer to the photo essay from National Geographic Kids.
4. Students will need to gather materials to prepare for their own ofrenda or parade. Before preparing any food or other perishables, students should choose someone from their family (a person or a pet) who has died that they could recognize and honor during Dia de los Muertos. Students can also select a famous historical figure.
   a. Plan what items to put to honor this person or animal that would be the best representations, and gather the non-perishable materials first. Create labels or written explanations of what items were included; use calavera template on page 7 of lesson plan to list and describe items.
   b. Gather or make perishable elements last (flowers, food).
5. Share the project while enjoying any of the recipes from Frightful Fiesta. Discuss what recipes from Frightful Fiesta are the most likely to be seen in a traditional fiesta for Dia de los Muertos.

Possible Creations
1. Create an ofrenda with physical gifts, photos, food, and decorations that reflect the character and interests of the deceased person.
2. Design a parade costume or decorate a sugar skull to honor a particular ancestor. (Keep in mind that the most respectful way to do this is to draw out designs, versus wearing a costume or painting your own face, unless the student identifies culturally as Latinx.)
3. Create an ofrenda for a historical figure; students will likely need to do some research to determine the foods and other items that would be important to include.

Extensions
1. Bake *pan de muerto* for an ofrenda and create *papel picado* that could be strung up behind an ofrenda or for a fiesta. Explore and experiment with what shapes and images can be created through cutting the tissue paper.
2. Read *Pablo Remembers*, and discuss how the photos affect your understanding of the holiday. Create a photo journal of your own Dia de los Muertos celebration.
3. Read *Uncle Monarch and the Day of the Dead* and watch the short PBS clip about the monarch butterfly migration to Mexico. Draw a map of the butterfly migration.
**Driving Questions:** How did Dia de los Muertos become a more recognized and known holiday outside of Mexico? What different forms of art contributed to a more widespread celebration of the holiday?

### A Big Bite

**Resources**

- “Day of the Dead”, History article, [https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead](https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead)
- *Coco*, Disney film
- *The Book of Life*, film by 20th Century Fox
- “José Guadalupe Posada: Skulls, Skeletons and Macabre Mischief”, essay with illustrations from [Illustration Chronicles](https://illustrationchronicles.com/Jose-Guadalupe-Posada-Skulls-Skeletons-and-Macabre-Mischief)
- Calveras Literarias, worksheet guide, Education.com, [https://www.education.com/worksheet/article/calaveras-literarias/](https://www.education.com/worksheet/article/calaveras-literarias/)

**Project Idea/Scenario**

Students will explore how only recently Dia de los Muertos became a more known holiday outside of its native Mexico, and write about the influence of José Guadalupe Posada.

**Sequence/Procedure**

1. Have students think about what imagery they connect with Dia de los Muertos. Where do these images come from? Students may guess that Coco brought the most attention to the holiday, but explain that a specific style of calavera first came to be associated with the holiday because of the work of one artist.
2. Read *History article “Day of the Dead”*. Discuss what different events or media brought more attention to the holiday (growing population of Mexicans in the U.S, different films, and the establishment of Dia de los Muertos as a UNESCO recognized event). Identify the artist José Guadalupe Posada mentioned in the article as the main focus of the lesson.
3. Read *Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calavera*. What different types of calaveras are shown in the book? How was Posada’s work seen by so many? Discuss if Posada’s view of calaveras and his role as an artist changed over time.
4. Select a project that illustrates how influential Posada was in creating calavera art for Dia de los Muertos that has come to define the holiday.
Possible Creations

1. Watch *The Book of Life* or *Coco*. What influences of José Guadalupe Posada can be found in the movie? Write about the specific elements in the films that make the skeletons friendly and accessible, from art to music, and what influences of Posada can be found in the film.

2. Write a calavera poem; these poems are meant to make fun of death or put a humorous spin on dying. Use [this worksheet](#) as a guide to create a calavera poem, and use the calavera handout on page 7 to decorate and write your poem around.

3. Using Diego Rivera’s work “Sueno de una tarde domincal en la Alameda Central” as inspiration, think about other works of art where La Calavera Catrina could be featured. Insert her into a different piece of art (use [this list of great paintings for inspiration](#)), and write an explanation of how including her in other art changes the meaning of the piece of art.