

Culture Lesson Plan

Though this lesson focuses on culture, we think it important to state that culture should be the context for all examples in class; if students have a fill-in-the-blank activity to practice verb conjugation, the sentences surrounding the blank should reinforce the culture lessons. Our lesson is based on the idea of using a product to access more complex concepts and characteristics of culture.

It is assumed that this is the first culture lesson of a novice language class. Therefore, this lesson is presented in both Spanish and English, likely weighted more toward use of English. Because we are discussing weighty, abstract topics, the cognitive burden is on processing the ideas and synthesizing answers, rather than decoding the language. As the class progresses, more of the culture lessons will be conducted in Spanish. In this initial encounter with the target culture, we really want the students to grasp what it means to study another culture from a perspective of understanding and compassion, rather than from a perspective of foreignness and otherness.

This lesson merely scratches the surface of the complexity of Día de Muertos. Later lessons will include further explanation of the topics the teacher introduces in this lesson.

Level: Novice

Lesson length: 50 minutes

Objectives:

- To introduce students to culture study, generally, through Mexican culture, specifically.
- At the end of this lesson, students will:
 - know that perspectives on many concepts vary based on culture
 - have been introduced to new vocabulary
 - have been introduced to information about México's Día de Muertos

Materials:

- Overhead projector
- Projection screen
- Spanish class blog and websites
- Deck of cards with students' names

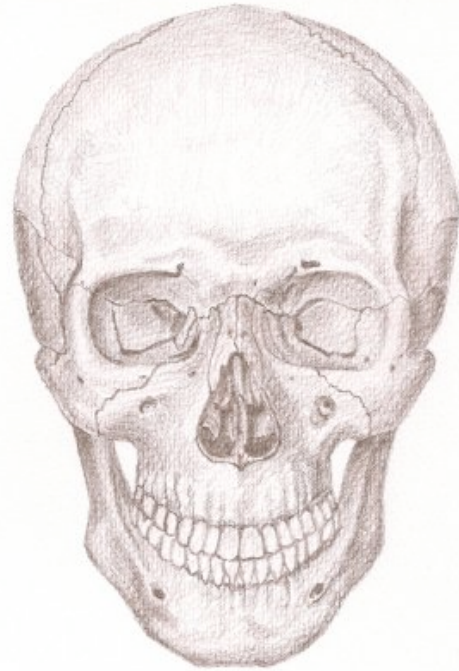
Activities:

- Paso 1 – Introduction and Discussion
- Paso 2 – Mexican culture
- Paso 3 – Teacher explanation
 - Culture (general)
 - Basic concepts in Mexican culture
- Paso 4 – Homework assignment explained, groups assigned

Paso 1: Introduction and Discussion

The image of a skull is projected for the class to see. The teacher leads a discussion by asking the students about the picture. Questions can include:

- What is this image?
- What do skulls represent [to you]?
- What emotions do you associate with skulls?
- What emotions do you associate with death?
- How do you observe the death of a family member or friend? What do you wear? Where do you go? What do you do? What type of atmosphere is there at a funeral? How do people behave?



Paso 2: Next the teacher projects an image of a Mexican *calavera* and continues the discussion with questions such as the following:



- Look at these skulls; do they make you respond the same way the other picture did? Why or why not? Is it because they are colorful or because of their size?
- What would you say if I told you they were candy? What would you think about eating a candy skull? What if the candy skull had your name on it?
- These are *calaveras* from México; what do they make you think about the Mexican perspective on skulls and death? Is it different from your own perspective on skulls and death? Does it make you happy, sad, uncomfortable, etc.?

Paso 3: Teacher explanation:

It is important to realize that different cultures can think about concepts (as complex as death and dying or as simple as what it means to be polite) from completely different perspectives. It is important to understand these perspectives because they affect how you use the language with

a native speaker and how he/she may react. Certain topics or situations can make this type of knowledge highly important.

During this unit, we will discuss the popular Mexican holiday Día de Muertos in order to understand some major parts of Mexican culture. Our main topics will be:

- The origins and history of Día de Muertos
 - The Spanish conquest of México
 - Aztec beliefs and Catholicism
- How Día de Muertos is celebrated today (including customs, products, and attitudes)
- The Mexican attitude toward death

When the Spaniards conquered Spain, they tried to replace the indigenous Aztecs' beliefs and customs with their own Christian customs. However, though they wanted to replace the Aztecs' beliefs entirely with Christian doctrine, they did not; instead, the indigenous people kept both their traditions and those of the Spaniards. Día de Muertos came from this type of mixture of culture.

Paso 4: Teacher divides students into groups using a stack of cards with their names on them. Students will work in these groups for the first homework project, which is posted on the blog. The teacher explains the assignment and explains that it will be on the blog.

The students will be looking up information on some items used in celebrations of day of the dead. Each lesson, one of the groups will present what they found on their topic. The teacher will explain part of culture associated with this item (i.e., talk about Aztec mythology behind the journey the dead make back to earth from Mictlán when a group presents *pan de muertos* because the bread is placed on the altar to nourish the soul after the long journey).