



A lesson for introducing young people to the Mexican tradition of Día de los Muertos as well as facilitating a discussion about the concept of the soul and a link to the Episcopal tradition of the Feast of All Saints

Time Required	Age Group
Flexible; 45 minutes if watching movie ahead of time, 2.5 hours if watching movie together	Approximately 3rd through 8th grades

### Lesson Plan

Time	Activity
5 min.	Icebreaker
35 min.	Discussion
5 min.	Closing Prayer
*note	There are optional activities for furthering this lesson. See end of packet.

### The Primary Objective

Objective	Means
Learn about Día de los Muertos, the concept of the soul, cultural appreciation vs. appropriation, and the Episcopal tradition of the Feast of All Saints	Guided group discussion  Independent journaling worksheet

## Guide for Lesson Facilitator

### Icebreaker (5 minutes)

Who was your favorite character in *Coco*? Why?

### Discussion (35 minutes)

**Explain:** Día de los Muertos is a traditional fiesta in honor of the deceased that is celebrated in Mexico and other parts of Latin America on Nov. 1 and 2. The holiday is celebrated through ritual observations like constructing altars, *ofrendas*, filled with offerings to the dead and decorating family gravesites to commune with the dead. Day of the Dead is also commemorated through vivacious fiestas in which communities gather in town plazas and community centers to celebrate by dancing, playing music, feasting, drinking and masquerading as death.<sup>1</sup>

**Ask:** How was Día de los Muertos celebrated in the movie?

What different elements of the celebration did you notice?

How did the characters in the movie help you understand the importance of Día de los Muertos?

**Slides:** Share the Google Slides presentation “Coco lesson plan slides” [slide 1]

[Slide 2]

**Ask:** What does Miguel notice about the people in the Land of the Dead? How is their appearance different from his?

**Explain:** To show the difference between a physical body and a soul, the animators of *Coco* chose to represent the souls of dead people as skeletons. This gives us an easy way to see which characters are still alive and which are dead. This is also why it’s hard for Miguel to blend in once he’s in the Land of the Dead.

**Ask:** Let’s talk about what we know about human souls. What is your soul? How would you describe people’s souls?

**Explain:** It can be hard to describe what a soul is, right? Something the animators of *Coco* have helped us do is picture our soul as something different from our physical bodies.

[Slide 3]

**Ask:** Once Miguel disguises himself as a soul, what does he learn in the Land of the Dead?

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<sup>1</sup> [pbs.org](http://pbs.org)

[Slide 4]

**Explain:** Many Latin@ cultures have Ofrendas in their home year round. Ofrendas are always visible and create opportunities to ask about members on the altar. Ofrendas are all different and represent unique Latin@ cultures. The most important element is having a picture of our loved ones who are no longer with us. Some place boxes to elevate the pictures, creating a division between heaven and earth. Flowers such as marigolds, candles, and religious symbols are also placed on the home altar. Ofrendas are about maintaining a connection with our ancestors. By dedicating altars with their pictures, their memories remain alive.

**Ask:** Why is it so important for people to be included on an *ofrenda*?  
How was the Rivera family's *ofrenda* important to the plot of *Coco*?

[Slide 5]

**Explain:** Now we will talk a bit about the Episcopal tradition of the Feast of All Saints. Before we do that, it's important to learn the difference between *appreciating* another culture and *appropriating* another culture. (read slide 5, allowing time to answer clarifying questions)

[Slide 6]

**Explain:** Let's start our discussion of the Feast of All Saints by thinking about people we want to remember. Use the worksheet to collect some thoughts about the people you'd like to remember. (Give students a few minutes to complete the worksheet)

[Slide 7]

**Explain:** While some saints are Saints with a capital S, like St. Luke or St. George, people can also be saints with a lowercase s. People who live their lives for God and do good works are also saints.

[Slide 8]

**Explain:** While you may notice similarities between Día de los Muertos and the Feast of All Saints, they are different holidays from different traditions.

### **Closing Prayer** (5 minutes)

Today we celebrate the lives of the saints,  
who inspire, surround, and support us  
on our journey through faith.  
Help us to join their friendship and fellowship,  
learn from their love, follow in their footsteps,  
and lead holy lives that shine the light of Jesus.  
Let us also remember all who have died:  
whose souls are safe in your eternal love. Amen.

from *Common Prayer for Children and Families*

**For Further Study**

Visit an *ofrenda* near you. St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge hosts an *ofrenda*.

Study the hymn "I sing a song of the saints of God" in the Hymnal 1982, #293. Talk about the different people listed as saints: a soldier, a queen, etc., and how these people may have lived as saints of God during their time on Earth. They make for a fun costume idea, too, with each kid dressing as a different saint from the song!

Miguel's town in the movie is the town of Santa Cecilia, patron saint of music. Study St. Cecilia and learn more about her life.

*Miguel and the Grand Harmony* by Matt de la Peña is a beautiful storybook about music and its importance. Read and discuss together.