

Welcome to *Ofrendas*!

The study module *Ofrendas* brings to life the custom of remembering and honoring the deceased by celebrating the Day of the Dead. A lively song, a video interview, and an Essay of Images embrace the The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st century. These standards are comprised by the 5 C's: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. It is through these concepts of connectedness with people and life that *Ofrendas* teaches students how to honor the past and care for the future.

I hope you find these comments and suggestions helpful as you adapt the study module to your own curriculum, teaching style, and students' needs.

Technical note:

QuickTime is required for the sound files on this site. Download free at <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/> The QT sound files are compressed and should load quickly.

Part I *Ofrenda*, the song

Music is the perfect format to give life to a concept! *Ofrendas* (Offering) by Pedro Guerra is a traditional story about the death of a loved one. The singer lyrically depicts placing items on the altar so that the spirit of a beloved will return for a celebration of life.

Students mirror the journey of Pedro Guerra's *Ofrenda* by listening for comprehension first and then using visual hints to assist them in learning about new cultural traditions.

Classroom activities:

1. I have my students do a quick vocabulary recall drill in which one student explains the word in Spanish (without using the actual word) and the other tries to recall the word described.
2. This is followed by a class discussion about the meaning of the song, the significance of the items on the altar, who the deceased person might be, and speculation about the relationship between the person left behind and the deceased.

Online activities:

1. [El Día de los Muertos en Calderón](#)
2. [El Día de los Muertos en Oaxaca](#)

Students learn about the unique traditions of Ecuador and Mexico in this two-part story. The story uses the present tense to describe various activities: gatherings with family members, decorating altars and tombstones, cooking delicious foods, giving gifts, and offering prayers for the departed. Cultural material is embedded in the story line and clarified through the use of pop-up windows that provide students with more information as they progress through the story. For example, students learn the importance of the four elements on the altar and the meanings of different colors. Students can also compare an incorrect answer to the correct one in this self-grading activity.

3. Mi altar virtual

Students describe the items they can envision on their own or another's altar. altar (or on a real or imaginary friend's altar). This ties in nicely with verbs like *gustar*, *encantar*, *fascinar*, and *interesar* to explain the significance of the items. For example, a student might reflect, "Yo quiero un béisbol en mi altar porque me encanta jugar al béisbol." The collage might give students ideas for personal items they want on their own altar. It may be helpful to explain that contents of the altar would depend upon the personalities and activities of the individual.

Part II Entrevista en el Cementerio de San Diego,

This video interview with a professor in the Cemetery of San Diego offers additional information about the Day of the Dead customs in Ecuador. As with the song, *Ofrendas*, students are asked to watch the video first without subtitles for overall comprehension and then again with subtitles. The drag down menu with vocabulary from the interview should help with unfamiliar words.

Technical Note:

There are four versions of the interview. Please select the quality and size that are most suitable for your connection.

Classroom activities:

1. I like role reversal situations in class because they foster direct student-to-student communication. The students break up into small groups for a couple of minutes to come up with two good questions to ask their classmates. The goal is communication so any interesting question is good. ¿De qué color es el vestido de la profesora? is just as good as ¿Por qué no puede tener un mausoleo una familia pobre?

2. This is an oral variation of *Mi altar virtual*. Students compare items on the altars and make a list of their favorites on the board. This is a perfect setup to practice verbs like *gustar* with *le/les* and the name of the person. For example, the teacher begins by saying, "¿A quién le gusta esquiar?" Someone in the class will hopefully respond "A Julio le gusta esquiar." If the wrong person is guessed, then there can be a bit of drama as another student answers, "¿Ridículo! A Marta le gusta esquiar." And so on. In my experience it is a challenge to reinforce that construction, but this works.

Online activities:

1. **Oral Comprehension Questions**

Students hear a series of eight questions about the content of the oral interview and write answers that can be submitted to the teacher. This activity addresses listening and writing skills and can be assigned as homework or completed in a computer lab. Pair work for this activity simulates discussion and interaction as students agree on an answer and submit their work.

2. **Nichos and an Obituary**

A "nicho" refers to the niche or cavity in a cemetery wall in which a coffin is placed. Here you see a virtual wall of nichos that I created with my favorite

nicho photos taken on a trip to Ecuador in 2004. It's fun to point out that a famous general's nicho is on the same wall with a simple wooden coffin and near another adorned with a coke bottle full of dead flowers. Another fascinating detail is a sign from the cemetery office requesting payment immediately so the body won't be exhumed.

Pop up windows provide details of the nicho. Students pick a nicho and write an obituary for that deceased person. A list of 12 questions encourages creative reporting. A dictionary and links to rules for the preterite and imperfect tenses are provided.

Part III *Un ensayo de imágenes*

The illustrated interview with Pedro Guerra is the heart and soul of this study module. Through words and images, the traditional interpretation of the Day of the Dead unfolds into a global entreaty for hope, dignity, and peace in world. Guerra explains that as a singer-songwriter he symbolically places his offering of music on his altar in the hope that all people will respect and value each other and their uniqueness. In this spirit I offer you my Essay of Images using the text from Guerra's interview.

The text of the interview is accompanied by one or more images. An arrow appears to the right of the image(s) when they have finished loading. Students may prefer to wait until all the images for a sentence have loaded and then focus on the text. Students can return to an image and the corresponding text at any point by selecting it on the menu bar below.

***I highly recommend that students do the pre-reading activity below before doing Part III, *Un ensayo de imágenes*.

Online activities:

1) Pre-reading activity

It is hoped that by reading and listening to the full text of the interview first that students will familiarize themselves with new vocabulary and thereby maximize exposure to the thoughtful combination of the images and text.

2. Un poema de imágenes

Inspired by one of the images on this page from the Ensayo de imágenes page a student will write a creative five line poem following certain grammatical guidelines. This suggestion could easily be adapted to other concepts. For example, all five lines could be past participles, verb forms, adjectives, or nouns.

3. Online review of present subjunctive:

It would be appropriate to do this section after the Ensayo de imagenes to review noun clauses with doubt, emotion, and influence, or the infinitive. Vocabulary and content from the interview with Guerra are reused in this page. This is a scored exercise and hints are given for the use of the subjunctive and indicative.

Classroom activities:

1. After watching the video students select an image and text that resonates with them and discuss them. For example, a student might choose the series of joyful images of children playing that is in sharp contrast to children living on the street. Students envision what a day on the street might be like. (Ojalá que pueda encontrar comida hoy. Dudo que vaya a la escuela con otros chicos. ¿Hay alguien en el mundo que me quiera?) Or they could describe a utopian world. (En mi mundo perfecto todos se quieren. No hay discriminación.)

Saludos a todos,

Barbara

June 2004

© All Rights Reserved