

Ofrenda Box Project for the Day of the Dead

Ages: K–12,
adaptable for different grades

Teacher and Classroom Prep:

- Tell students about the project and encourage them to bring in a copy of a small photo, or email one to print out, of a person or pet who has passed away (it is okay if they died before the student was born).
- Create a finished example and/or print photos of project examples.
- Print out or prep images of the Day of the Dead, including photos of ofrendas.

Materials:

- **Small boxes** (such as wooden ones from a dollar store, cigar boxes, cardboard boxes, or metal tins)
- **Small copies of photos students bring in or email you to print**
- **Paper and drawing tools**
- **Hot glue gun/glue/glue dots** (depending on materials chosen)

Encouraged but optional:

- **Small trinkets, miniature foods, small clay beads, etc.** (found on Amazon)
- **Beads, sequins, or small fake or dried flowers**
- **Scraps of fabric, ribbon, tissue paper, etc**

About 5–10 minutes, one or two days BEFORE working on the project

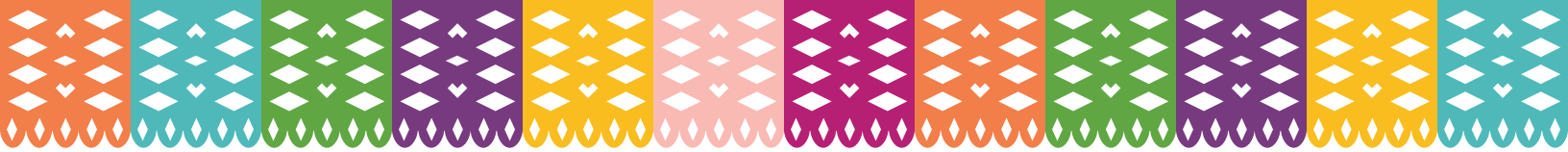
Intro/Discussion:

- **Ask students what they know about the Day of the Dead/Día de Los Muertos.** If necessary, use the Spanish words as clues.
- **Give them more information, if needed, about the history of this Mexican holiday,** e.g., show video/photos. “Day of the Dead comes from a blend of Spanish and Mexican indigenous traditions. It is widely celebrated in Mexico, and different areas celebrate differently. It is a time to learn about your family’s past, remember those who have died, and honor them. This may be done by having parties, sharing stories, eating the favorite foods of lost ones, dressing up, having parades, and making altars or ofrendas. This encourages families to grieve and connect in beautiful, positive ways. According to ancient Aztec beliefs, the souls of loved ones can follow the scent of marigolds back to the family for Día de los Muertos, and marigolds are still used for this purpose today.”
- **Being mindful of the topic’s sensitivity,** ask students what their family does to remember and pay tribute to friends or family who have died. They might want to share about a special pet. If they are comfortable, students can choose to share with the group or write about it. You could also share as a good way to start.
- **Explain that they will make their own mini ofrenda to honor someone.** They should think about who they want to make it for—it could be for a family friend, a pet, a relative, or a grandparent they may not remember.

Homework

Student Homework/Think Time:

- Tell students to bring in a small copy of the photo of whom they chose, or they can email it to you for printing. Print these out small enough to fit into their boxes.
- If they have other items small enough to put in their mini ofrenda, something that reminds them of their lost loved one (e.g., a ticket stub, stone, shell, dog treat, etc.), they could put it in. They may need to ask families for help.
- Encourage students to talk to families about memories.



5 minutes

Observation time:

- Show students photos of real ofrendas
- Explain: "Some people create an altar to honor their lost loved ones. This is sometimes done in other cultures and can look very different. For the Day of the Dead, this altar is called an ofrenda and often includes various traditional objects."
- Ask the students: "What do you notice on these ofrendas?" Guide them through what objects you tend to see in all the ofrendas: candles, marigolds, sugar skulls, photographs of people who have passed away, offerings of food, water, and other drinks (these are favorites of the deceased), special bread (pan de muerto), objects that belonged to the deceased, or things they would like, and skeletons (comical or pretty skeletons, not scary ones).
- Show them the supplies available to decorate their mini ofrendas.

15–20 minutes

Creation time:

- Allow students to choose a box and paint it or glue fabric or paper onto the background. As this dries, they can choose other objects to add to their ofrenda box.
- You may need to give out a set number of each item depending on the number of students vs supplies.
- They could select beads, miniature skulls, ribbons, miniature foods, etc.
- They could draw small items or select from the included drawings and cut them out to use as collages.
- Once backgrounds are dry, have them arrange their items and their photograph.
- Students can attach the items with glue dots, glue sticks, or hot glue, depending on the item.
- Tissue paper can make small marigolds and/or little paper picado banners (Mexican cut-paper garlands).
- Encourage students to create an interesting and balanced composition with the small space and even the sides or top of the box.
- Students can construct layers by gluing a very small piece of cardboard or something to the box and then attaching the item to the cardboard so it adds more dimension.
- Encourage them to problem solve and make their ofrenda unique.
- Students may want to include the name of their lost loved one somewhere in or on the box.

5–15 minutes

Reflection time:

- Students may share their ofrendas with the class or break into small groups and take turns sharing their mini ofrendas.
- Encourage students to be respectful, kind listeners. This is a valuable life skill, and students may be sensitive about sharing. If possible, include this step; it's an important part of this project and Day of the Dead.

Questions:

- *Who did you choose to honor with your ofrenda?*
- *Is this someone you remember or learned about from family stories?*
- *What items did you include for them, and why did you choose them?*
- *Do you want to share any other stories about this person or pet?*
- *Why is it important to listen to others share memories?*