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## **Latino Culture in My Life: A Closer Look at Latino Families and their Traditions, Holidays, and Celebrations**

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### **Introduction**

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As a first grade teacher at John C. Daniels Dual Language School, I am part of a unique community that helps Spanish dominant students stay connected to their culture by teaching them in their native language. The research behind this school model supports the thinking that students best acquire literacy skills in a second language after establishing such a foundation in their native language. Our community also works hard to create an environment that celebrates both Spanish and English languages, cultures, families, and values. This helps all our students not only learn about each others' cultures, but also embrace their own culture and feel proud of it.

Our school population consists of about 50% Spanish dominant students and 50% English dominant students. In grades K and 1, students are taught to read first in their native language, but spend time in their second language during math, science, and social studies blocks. In grade 2 and up, students receive all instruction in both languages, rotating between two classrooms and a pair of teachers who work very closely to plan for up to 50 students. Both languages are respected equally and our school is full of literature, movies, and "conversation" in Spanish and English. All students, no matter which of the two languages they speak, are made to feel accepted, comfortable, and respected.

I am always looking for ways to better help my students connect to their culture, while also giving them new information to aid in that understanding. As part of our first grade curriculum, we spend a lot of time learning about communities, as well as holidays and celebrations unique to different groups of people. It is through these studies that I hope to mesh this new curriculum unit, focusing on Latino holidays, traditions and celebrations.

## My Students

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Working in a dual language schools creates a unique daily schedule in my classroom. Throughout the day, I teach (exclusively in English) three different groupings of children, with quite a range of academic ability and English-language proficiency. During the literacy block, I instruct only English dominant students. I teach a mixed group of English dominant and Spanish dominant students during math. However, at the end of the day, I have a 45-60 minute block of time during which I only instruct the Spanish dominant students. The objectives for this time frame focus on the development of English oral language skills, vocabulary and content understanding in the areas of science and social studies. Although my Spanish dominant students are not formally instructed to read in English (they receive their literacy instruction in Spanish), I do use big books and "read alouds" to begin to expose my students to aspects of reading in English.

For this unit, I will be specifically addressing those Spanish dominant students during the last part of the day. Thus, many of our lessons will focus on developing new vocabulary, English oral language skills, beginning literacy skills (in English) and social studies. Art and music will also be used as well, as these are great strategies for helping second-language learners.

## Objectives

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This unit will help my first grade Spanish dominant students find new ways to connect to their cultures by teaching them more about Latino holidays, traditions, and celebrations. Students will be encouraged to take a closer look at how and what they celebrate at home, and through various lessons, I will provide my students with the background as to how these holidays and traditions came to be. Because Latino cultures are also unique in themselves, I hope to expose students to different celebrations that they might not be aware of in order to increase their understanding. I plan to use various pieces of fiction and non-fiction children's literature to aid in their understanding. Students will also play games, sing songs, and make crafts to learn more about these celebrations.

More specifically, I intend for this unit to:

- Have students reflect on their own family values and traditions, and begin to understand and express why these things are important to them.
- Increase the oral language/vocabulary of my Spanish dominant students.
- Increase the confidence of my Spanish dominant students when speaking English and responding in class.
- Build a feeling of unity among the students, while also recognizing the difference within their culture.
- Increase my students' understanding of Latino holidays and celebrations (how they are celebrated and why).
- Have students experience aspects of these holidays through art, music, and food.

I will begin this unit by having students take a closer look at the Latino family unit - more specifically, their family unit - to see what their families value, how they celebrate, and what traditions make their families unique. Although there are numerous holidays and celebrations in Latino cultures that I could discuss with my students, I have chosen to focus on five main celebrations: Day of the Dead, Christmas, Three Kings Day, Easter, and Cinco de Mayo/Puerto Rican Day.

The first lessons of the unit, which focus on students' families, will take place at the beginning of the year, when we are all getting to know one another (and to coincide with Hispanic Heritage Month). However, the remaining lessons will take place throughout the year, at the time the holiday occurs. This will help to make them more meaningful for my students.

## Examples of Strategies

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While working with second language learners over the past four years, I have learned many important strategies to use with them in order to increase their understanding and make the information accessible to all students with varying levels of English proficiency. The following is a list of some of the main strategies I intend to apply:

- Authentic Literature with Vivid Illustrations - Books are always a fabulous jumping off point for any lesson, but can be especially helpful for second language learners. Great illustrations help students to connect with what is being read and also draw students into the lesson, as opposed to just telling them the information. Students can also practice English oral language skills when asked to describe what they see in a picture. This allows for new vocabulary to be discussed as well.
- Picture Cards/Symbols - For the same reason illustrations help to clarify information, I use picture cards and symbols often to show students what is being discussed and to involve more reluctant students in the lesson (they can come up and hold the card, sort it, etc...). It is also helpful to write the word under the picture so students have other reminders about what the picture shows. Symbols can help to trigger connections and remind students about what was discussed.
- Gestures/ Total Physical Response (TPR) - This is a great strategy to help students connect to the meaning of the information and remember what it is they just learned, and also addresses those bodily-kinesthetic learners. For example, maybe when referring to a sport the family plays, one could make the motions of the game (like swinging a bat) while saying the word. Having the students do this as well makes the word accessible to those who did not know it before.
- Types of Questions - Depending on what level of English acquisition each student has determines the type of question that he/she may be able to answer. For example, a student with strong English skills may be able to answer a "why" or "how" questions and used varied vocabulary. A student with limited English skills, however, may only be able to answer a "yes" or "no" question. Rephrasing the same question makes it possible for all students to participate.
- Cooperative Groups - Grouping students with different levels of English acquisition together is a great technique because those who have little knowledge of English get the support of the

students with the strong knowledge, and can translate if needed as well.

- Modeling - Teacher modeling will happen a lot in this unit, and involves the teacher demonstrating exactly what it is that students are expected to do themselves. This is a good strategy for all students, as it gives them an example, so expectations are very clear.
- Art and Music - Songs and fingerplays are a great way to help second language learners receive information - they are fun, lively, and make remembering things easier. Art is a good way for my students to express themselves when they are not yet ready to write in English.

Many of these strategies are not only good practice in any classroom, but are part of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, which supports second language learners and is used in my school.

## Latino Families

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As a jumping off point for the unit, students will first be asked to take a closer look at what makes their families unique. That is, students will consider, who is in their family, what they like to do together, how they celebrate, what they eat, and what is important to them. It seems easy to sometimes lump all Latinos into one broad category and characterize all family units in the same way. However, my students come from a variety of different countries (such as Puerto Rico, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, and other South American countries) and although their families may share some similarities, they each have their own values, traditions, and history. Thus, as students begin looking more closely at their families, I hope to not only highlight what is the same, but also recognize how each culture has things that make it unique.

### Family Values

I hope to kick off this unit by having my students first turn to their own families to get the sense that most families celebrate in some way, and/or have traditions and values. Although most Latino families will certainly share some of these same traditions and celebrations, there are also aspects of each family that make them unique. Overall, I want my students to be able to express in some way (through speaking/drawing/writing) some information about their family, and perhaps recognize something that their family does that may be traditionally Latino.

The book *Family Pictures*, by Carmen Lomas Garza, is a perfect way to help my students see different things that Latino families (and non-Latino families) may do together. Each page, written in English and Spanish depicts a memory of the author - something she remembers doing as a little girl growing up as a Mexican American. Some of the events she remembers are traditionally Mexican/Hispanic, while others could have

happened within any family. For example, in one illustration, the little girl is shown helping her family make tamales, a traditional Mexican dish made from cornmeal mash and rolled in corn husks. In another picture however, she is shown eating watermelon on the front porch with her family on a hot summer night.

As I read this book aloud, I will ask my students to describe what they are seeing and what they notice about the family. This will help students to practice their English oral language skills and also perhaps learn some new vocabulary words pertaining to families. Students will also be encouraged to share any connections they have made to the descriptions - that is, have they done any of those same things? Next, as a model for my students, I will share with them a family portrait that I have drawn. I will describe to them who is in the picture, how they are related to me, and why they are special. In the same format as the book *Family Pictures* , I will also share with them two or three pictures I have drawn showing my family and I engaging in an activity (could be a celebration or just doing something together). I will describe to them what is happening and reinforce that all families have things they do together - some the same as others, some unique.

My students will then be given a take-home project to complete with their families. Keeping in mind my drawings and the illustrations in the book, students will first draw a picture of the people in their family, and they will then draw a few more pages of their "book" to show some things that their families like to do. Students will not be expected to write a description, but rather will get a chance to share this information orally in front of the class during the next few days. I will offer support in using English to describe the pictures, and also ask questions to elicit full descriptions (such as who is that in your family, what do you like to do with them, what are you doing in this picture, when do you do this, etc...).

As a group, we will also look for any similarities among the families and/or activities and make a list of these on chart paper. For example, if several students have large, extended families, or celebrate a holiday in a similar way, this will be recorded. Just as the similarities are noted, however, I will also take the time to orally note when students' families are doing something that is unique and emphasize that even though we have many activities that we share, we do other things differently too.

### **Latino Holidays and Celebrations**

The previous lesson will take place towards the beginning of the year when students are still getting to know one another and learning about their classmates. This will help to set up an understanding community and also prepare students to talk more deeply about their culture in the future. The following lessons will focus on specific holidays celebrated in various Hispanic countries, and again, will be spread out across the academic year.

Although not all students may celebrate the holidays that will be covered, I am hoping to expose them to some new things they may have not heard of before and give those students who are familiar with them a chance to share this information. This will aid in our understanding of each other.

It is important to note that when thinking about these holidays, their origins must be considered. In *The Latino Holiday Book* , Valerie Menard notes that "Latino holidays have three main origins: culture, history, and religion" (XV). Many of these holidays have their roots in the Catholic religion, and although not all Latinos are Catholic, the religious influences are strong and can certainly be felt (XV). Historic origins come from several different places, depending upon which holiday we are speaking about (that is, is it a Mexican celebration? PuertoRican? etc...). Mexican holidays contain influences of both Indian (Aztecs, Mayan, Olman) and Spanish. In her book *Fiesta* , Elizabeth Silverthorne notes that the Aztecs "held many celebrations, featuring pageants, flower offerings, and singing and dancing" (13). The invading Spanish allowed the Indians to keep many of

these celebration traditions, as they found them to be beautiful. People would often dress up with elaborate decorations and perform before decorated arches (14-15).

Because I want parents to be very involved in the implementation of this unit (and also aware of what their children will be learning about), I will be sending home a letter describing the objectives of the unit and the holidays and celebrations that will be covered. I will be sure to make clear to parents that although some of these holidays do indeed have strong religious roots, our discussions of these holidays will not dwell on the religious aspect. My unit is certainly not designed to impose any religious beliefs on my students, but rather to give them an understanding of the origins of the holidays, and to emphasize that some people believe these things, while others do not. Although I do not anticipate any problems with parents, I do feel it necessary to make it clear beforehand what I intend to teach. This will give parents the opportunity to talk to me if they have any questions or concerns.

### **Day of the Dead/Día de Los Muertos**

The Day of the Dead, a traditionally Mexican holiday celebrated on October 31st-November 2nd, is all too often confused with Halloween celebrated in the U.S. Although these holidays do share a similar timeframe and common themes, the roots of the holidays are different. According to Valerie Menard in *The Latino Holiday Book*, this holiday originated as "native populations attempted to assimilate the teachings of the Catholic priests with their own religious rites...(it) was started by the Mexican native tribes as a means of continuing their belief in the circle of life in which death plays a part and is not to be feared" (109-110). This notion of not fearing death, surrounds this holiday, and people take the time to remember those loved ones who have passed on, and the life they had with them, and to celebrate the eternal life that their loved ones are now living (110). This is quite different from the themes that surround Halloween, which often evoke frightening images of the dead and a fear of those spirits who have passed on.

Traditionally, families who celebrate the Day of the Dead will honor those loved ones who have passed on by visiting cemeteries and making offerings to those spirits. It is most certainly a celebration. Families buy or make whimsical skeletons (calaveras) to eat or play with, make pan de muerto (bread of the dead), build an ofrenda (altar) in their home and decorate it with items their deceased relatives liked, and visit family. This helps to take the fear away from death and celebrate the life that their loved ones were now living (Menard 112-113). The roots of this tradition date back hundreds of years to the Aztecs. They believed that death was a "release from the greater trials and challenges encountered in life" (Menard 115). They also believed the spirits had the power to return to Earth, so they held a celebration to try and reunite with the dead (Menard 115).

There are several traditional rituals that take place during the three-day festival of the Day of the Dead. I plan to use the book *Pablo Remembers*, by George Ancona as a way to show my students what traditionally happens at this time. Ancona uses photographs to document how one family prepares and celebrates this event. The vivid pictures and descriptions illustrate the events, food, and decorations of this festival. While reading excerpts, I will encourage my students to orally notice and describe what they are seeing and to make connections to their own lives, noting if they also participate in such traditions. I will model how to use a T-chart graphic organizer, which is used for comparison, in order to show an event from the Day of the Dead celebration, versus the way each individual student celebrates this time. Students will draw two different pictures, and I will talk individually with each student as they work, encouraging them to describe what they drew and tell me if it is the same or different.

In a subsequent lesson, I will then refer back to Ancona's book to point out specific vocabulary words related

to the holiday. What is especially great about this book is that it uses both English and Spanish to describe the items used on this holiday. This will help make the information accessible to most students and also allow them to learn new vocabulary in English while connecting it to the Spanish word. Picture cards with the words in both languages will be used to emphasize the important elements of the holiday. Specifically, these are the points that I want the children to understand (Vocabulary words are in bold print):

- Day of the Dead is a celebration of those who are **deceased** and some people believe that their **spirits** come back on this day. It is a day to be happy and remember those loved ones who are now living a better life in the spirit world.
- Children participate in this holiday by helping their parents with the preparations, such as **cooking** , **decorating** , and **shopping** (Ancona 8-23).
- **Pan de Muerto (Bread of the Dead)** is a traditional round bread made to celebrate the day. It can be decorated with icing, sometimes in the shape of a skull, or even baked to look like a deceased loved one (Silverthorne 33).
- **Candy skulls** decorated with icing , are also eaten by children (Ancona 16).
- Children drink **hot chocolate** over the holiday (Ancona 23).
- **Calaveras** , or whimsical **skeletons** , decorate the streets and houses. The skeletons are not meant to be scary however, like on Halloween. Rather they are depicted doing silly things in order to represent life and help people to face their fears associated with death and skeletons. According to Menard, the "calavera is still very much attached to the soul of the person who walked in it while alive and whose memory lives in the minds of relatives and friends (112).
- Families pay tribute to their deceased loved ones by building an **ofrenda** , or **altar** . They decorate the table with fruit, candy, pan de muerto, candles, calaveras, and **marigolds** , the flower of the dead. They may also put photos of their loved ones on the table and other objects that were meaningful to those family members. This encourages the spirits of the other world to come back and join the family for the evening (Ancona 30-31).
- Families visit one another and bring items to place on each other's ofrendas (Ancona 36).
- On All Soul's Day, families go to **church** and visit the cemetery to clean the tombs of their deceased family members. They decorate the **graves** and then have a picnic in the cemetery. It is not a time to mourn - rather, people **sing** , eat, **laugh** , play games, and **celebrate** . They stay all day and remember the good times they had with their loved ones (Anocona 41).

After we discuss the holiday and the important terms associated with it, my students will be given a chance to share if and how they celebrate this holiday. If they do celebrate Halloween, they will certainly be encouraged to describe this as well.

Next, I will read *Beto and the Bone Dance*, by Gina Freschet. This is a fiction story about a boy who is celebrating the Day of the Dead with his family and has a run in with some funny calaveras. It helps to show that the calaveras are not supposed to be scary, but again, make us laugh. Students will also be given the chance to make their own calavera, using black paper and Q-tips to form the bones of the skeleton. They will be encouraged to decorate the skeleton and dress it up with paper, felt, and glitter. They should depict their skeleton doing something funny or performing an everyday task. Another activity my students may enjoy is making marigolds out of tissue paper. These flowers are the traditional "flower of the dead," but my students can be encouraged to give them to a loved one. We will wrap this study up with a celebration, where students will get a chance to drink hot chocolate and eat pan de muerto.

### **Christmas/La Navidad and Three Kings Day/Día de Los Reyes**

For many people, the month of December quickly conjures up images of joy, celebration, family, peace, and giving. This is true for members of many different religions and cultures, and certainly includes many Latinos as well. For them, however, the spirit does not diminish on December 26th. Rather, Latinos commonly celebrate until January 6th - Three Kings' Day - when they honor the three kings who traveled to see Jesus and brought gifts to him after his birth (Silverthorne 25). Actually, for many Puerto Rican families, Three Kings' Day is celebrated more than Christmas day. Both holidays, however, carry strong religious traditions and focus on family and spiritual aspects (Menard 140-141).

Most of the traditions surrounding the Christmas celebration in Latino families focus on Christian beliefs. For example, according to Lila Perl in her book *Pi-atas and Paper Flowers*, beginning on December 16th, families in Puerto Rico and Mexico participate in a "posada," which literally translated means "inn." Each evening, groups of people walk from house to house, symbolizing the journey of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay. The groups ask the neighbors to be let in by singing songs or reciting poems. Eventually, their plea is answered and they are let in to enjoy a celebration with food and drink (79-80). On Christmas Eve, families set up nativity scenes (nacimiento) with small replicas of Mary, Joseph, and farm animals in anticipation of the birth of Jesus (84). Often, families will also go to church late at night, and then return home to eat (86).

Christmas Day is also filled with religious spirit, as family members recognize the birth of Jesus by laying him in their nativity scene (84).

It would also not be uncommon to see Latino families celebrating after posada processions or on Christmas Eve by eating various refreshments, swinging at a pi-ata, decorating a Christmas tree, and wrapping gifts for loved ones (Silverthorne 23-25). Other Latino families make luminaries, which are lit candles inside paper bags. They line sidewalks and streets with them to remember the long journey taken by Mary and Joseph. Some Latinos reenact the story of Jesus' birth during a special play (Menard 145-147).

Because Christmas is meaningful for many people (especially Latinos), and because many families have their own traditions, I want to start off the study of this holiday by asking students to take home a poster, which they will decorate in order to show how they celebrate during this time (students who do not celebrate Christmas can either share the holiday they do celebrate, or something special they do with their family in their winter time). Students will be encouraged to post pictures and use decorations to really represent how they celebrate. By asking parents to help as well, it will provide a good opportunity for them to talk with their children and discuss their traditions, as well as reasons why they celebrate this way. As students bring in their posters, they will be asked to share and I will use various questions to elicit information from them. In my explanation of some of the background of the holiday, I will mention the religious aspects in terms like "some people believe this is what happened, that is why they do this - to remember those events." I will be sure to



emphasize that not all people celebrate like this or believe in these same things, but many Latino families do.

Because I am working with second language learners, there are several new vocabulary words that I want to familiarize them with. Again, picture cards with the words in English and Spanish will be used as reference over the course of this study. These are listed below, in conjunction with some important points I want to cover:

- Latino families often participate in **posadas** , which means **inns** (a place to stay over, like a hotel). Some people believe Mary and Joseph walked around looking for a place to stay before Jesus was born. To remember their journey, Latinos will reenact the journey, asking neighbors for shelter through song. When they arrived at the right house, they would be invited in to a big **celebration** (Silverthorne 23-24).
- The posada can be seen as similar as the U.S. tradition of Christmas **caroling** , where groups of people walk door to door singing Christmas carols.
- On **Christmas Eve** , Latino families often create a **nativity scene** or **nacimiento** , depicting Mary and Joseph in the stable before the birth of Jesus. They also go to **church** to celebrate these beliefs and then come home to eat a big **meal** (Perl 84).
- During this meal, families in Mexico often make **tamales** - corn meal wrapped in corn husks (Perl 84).
- On Christmas Day, Latinos will often visit friends and family and exchange gifts, and also spend the day celebrating (Perl 86).
- The **poinsettia** , or **la flor de nochebuena** , is a traditional Christmas flower that came from Mexico. Today many families, especially in the U.S., use the flower for decoration around Christmas time (Menard 138).
- Many Latinos celebrate **Three Kings Day** on January 6th, and this day is looked at as more important than Christmas. It is the day that some believe three wise men came to visit baby Jesus and give him gifts (Perl 17-18).
- Latino children will leave their **shoes** out for the Three Kings to fill with candy and **gifts** . They are sure to leave **grass** in their shoes for the **camels** that travel with the Kings as well (Perl 17-18).
- On Three Kings' Day, families celebrate and eat a special **cake** shaped like a **crown** . There are special gifts baked inside the cake as well (Perl 17-18).

Before discussing Three Kings' Day, I would like to have a Christmas celebration with my students to give them a taste of what a Latino celebration might be like. I will start by reading the book *Too Many Tamales* by

Gary Soto. This fiction story takes place on Christmas Eve and shows the tradition of making tamales. If possible, I will invite any parents who are familiar with making tamales to come in and cook with us or bring in tamales for us to try. Families will also be invited to bring in other traditional food items that they might serve on Christmas Eve. It will also be fun for students to experience a sort of "posada" mixed with Christmas caroling. Beforehand, I can involve other teachers and have them allow us to walk to their classroom and sing Christmas carols. When we get to one designated classroom, we will be invited in and this is where we can continue our festivities. At another point, I will also bring in a real poinsettia to show the class and have them use English words to describe it. Students will be invited to paint their own poinsettia.

After students come back from winter break, we can dive right into Three Kings' Day. Again, this day is very important in the Latino culture, and for many Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans, it is a bigger celebration than Christmas. Hundreds of years ago, Catholic priests stressed its importance to indigenous people throughout Latin America (Menard 158). As mentioned in *The Latino Holiday Book*, "over the centuries, Latinos, especially Puerto Rican and Cuban families, have maintained the celebration of the Epiphany, or El Día de Los Reyes...a second, more substantial round of gifts is given on this day, symbolizing the gifts given to the infant Jesus by the three kings, or magi" (154). The epiphany celebration is a National Holiday in Puerto Rico (Menard 159).

There is also an epiphany tradition that is very similar to the U.S. tradition of Santa Claus. On the evening of January 5th, children lay out their shoes filled with grass for the Three Kings' camels. It is said that while the children are sleeping, the Three Kings come, and while the camels eat the grass, the Kings leave candy and presents for the children. Later in the day on January 6th, there is again feasting and celebrating, and of course, the eating of the Three Kings cake - a crown shaped cake with small gifts baked inside (Perl 17-18).

Those students who do participate in Three Kings' Day will again be asked to share what they do. We can read *The Night We Almost Saw the Three Kings* by Zaida Padilla to get a better sense of what children do that night. In order to share in the experience, my students will be given a shoebox to decorate in anticipation of receiving a small gift after Three Kings' Day. We will also be sure to try the Three Kings' cake and retrieve the small gifts inside.

## **Easter**

Easter is deeply rooted in Christian beliefs and is an important time for many Latinos. It is their belief that at this time, Christ was resurrected from the dead. Although this can be a solemn time, Latinos do have traditions that evoke fun and laughter. These revolve around the egg, as do so many U.S. Easter celebrations. The use of the egg at Easter time dates back thousands of years (Menard 11-13). According to Edythe Preet in Menard's *The Latino Holiday Book*, "in the first days of Christianity, no animal-derived foods could be eaten during Lent, especially eggs...It became a tradition to break the long egg fast Easter morning with an egg feast" (13). The tradition of decorating eggs also has a long history - through Christianity, it has been passed on to many countries, originating in Eastern Europe (Menard 15).

Latinos and other Christians will often begin celebrating the Easter season during Lent, which starts 40 days before Easter. Lent is a time of sacrifice, when Latinos think about the suffering of Jesus. During Holy Week (Semana Santa), the final week of Lent, many Latino countries hold processions, reenacting the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion (Perl 28). On Easter, Latinos celebrate Jesus' rise from the dead and usually attend church. Families enjoy a big meal, and children enjoy decorating eggs (Winchester 9).

Latinos use eggs, called cascarones, to make Easter more of a celebration. This tradition - of stuffing hollowed eggs with confetti and cracking them over the heads of friends and family members - is also an old one.

Although the symbolism is not clear (it may represent the cracking open of Christ's tomb) the event is fun. Eggs are hollowed out, dried for weeks, and then dyed bright colors. A small hole in the end allows paper confetti to be stuffed inside. It is sealed with tissue paper and used at an Easter gathering to smash in someone's hair (Menard 16-17).

There are several points and vocabulary words I want my students to learn as we cover this holiday:

- In the weeks leading up to Easter, Latinos have many **parades** and celebrations called **Carnival**.
- The week before Easter, known as **Semana Santa (Holy Week)**, is a time for solemn processions (Silverthorne 28-29).
- Eggs are a **symbol** of new **life** and **hope** - in all cultures (Menard 16).
- The **tradition** of using eggs at Easter is very old, and in many countries, people **decorate** eggs at this time.
- Latinos make Easter a celebration by making **cascarones - hollowed eggs , dyed ,** and filled with **confetti** for **breaking** over the heads of others (Menard 15-17).

I will start this holiday study by bringing in eggs to show my students. I will ask the children to think about what they know about eggs, when they are used, and what their characteristics are. I will then put students into groups of three, with varying levels of English proficiency in each group. Student will be given a graphic organizer (bubble chart) and asked to work as a group to draw and write what they know about eggs. We will then gather again as a group and discuss what students have come up with. If the students do not recognize this on their own, I will bring the discussion to the Easter holiday and talk about how many people use eggs on Easter.

The next day, to help my students understand better the symbolism of the egg,, I will tell my students that many people think of the egg as a symbol for life and hope. To help them understand this better, my students will be told that hope is when we think about something that we want to happen and wish it to be so. It is also a strong belief in something. Each student will be given a paper with a space to make a picture of something they hope for or have a strong belief in. I will model this by telling them something that I hope for and then drawing an example of it on the paper. Students will complete the paper and use it to share orally something that they too hope for.

Before students leave for the Easter holiday, I will be sure to ask them to share their Easter holiday traditions. I will then bring out a cascaron and demonstrate how to use it by smashing it on my assistant's head! If students are familiar with this tradition, they can certainly share. If not, I will explain that in many Mexican families, this is how they decorate their eggs and what they do with them for fun. Students will of course be given a chance to make their own cascarones. I will give them pre-hollowed eggs and picture instruction cards. They will work in small groups to fill some eggs, and when they are dried, they can crack them on each others' heads!

## Cinco de Mayo/Puerto Rican Day

Although these events do not occur on the same day, I thought it would be best to address them around the same time (spring) since many of my students are either from Mexico or Puerto Rico, and since both of these days celebrate the culture of those places (Menard 20, 46). Both celebrations are also widely known in the U.S., and this will give my students a chance to understand the meaning behind them. Every year at my school, we also have an International Day, on which we celebrate the many different cultures represented in our school, and the world in general. It would be great to plan the celebration around this time, and as students are learning more about these Latino celebrations, we can also include any other cultures represented in our class in the celebration as well. This will be a wonderful culmination to our year-long look at Latino culture, holidays, and celebrations.

Cinco de Mayo, which takes place on May 5th, is a misunderstood holiday. According to Menard in *The Latino Holiday Book*, many people believe that this day is in recognition of Mexico's independence from Spain. This, however, is not true - Mexico's independence is celebrated on September 16th. Rather, Cinco de Mayo is a day when Mexicans remember an important battle in Mexico's history. In 1862, a small Mexican army was led to victory over a much larger French army. This was due to the determination of the group, especially the "ni-os heroes" - boys who died fighting the French in Mexico City. Today, the holiday commemorates the courage and quick thinking of the Mexican people (21). Cinco de Mayo became a more popular cultural celebration in the 1960's and 1970's, when civil rights movements inspired Mexicans to recognize their history and culture. May 5th was chosen because it marked the end

of the school year, and the perfect time to stage a large celebration (24-25).

This holiday is most often celebrated by Mexican Americans, and many cities and towns plan large celebrations each year. At any of these events, one would be likely to see Mexican folk dancers, hear mariachi bands playing, eat traditional Mexican food, and drink margaritas. Families spend time together playing games and making paper flowers. In the U.S., Cinco de Mayo has been very commercialized, but for many Latinos, it is still an important day to recognize their culture (Menard 28).

National Puerto Rican Day is celebrated on the second Sunday in June and is marked by an enormous parade in New York City and other areas of the country as well, including Connecticut, where its location alternates each year between New Haven and Hartford. It too is a celebration of the Puerto Rican culture, and recognizes the millions of Puerto Ricans living in the United States today - especially in New York City. The first parade was held in 1957, and grew larger and larger as the years passed. Today, it also represents people from other cultures as well. There is music, dancing, floats, food, and of course, many Puerto Rican flags (Menard 46-47).

There are several key points and vocabulary words that I want my students to come away with. Picture cards with vocabulary words will be used:

- **Cinco de Mayo** is in commemoration of a **battle** between Mexico and the French. Even though Mexico's army was small, they were **courageous** and **intelligent**, and were able to defeat the French army.
- Today, Mexican Americans celebrate on May 5th. They **remember** the battle and have a **fiesta/party** to celebrate their culture - the **food, music, games,** and **families** (Menard 21-28)
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- **Puerto Rican Day** is held on the second Sunday in June. On this day, Puerto Ricans celebrate

their culture as well and remember the **island** where they came from, even if they live on the mainland U.S.

- Puerto Ricans celebrate this day by having a big **parade** . There are **floats, food, and flags** , all representative of Puerto Rico. **Other cultures** are also recognized in the parade.
- Puerto Ricans serve traditional food like **arroz con gandules ( rice and peas )** , and **tostones ( fried plantains )** (Menard 46-47).
- Latinos often celebrate with a **pi-ata** - a container made of paper-mache or clay and filled with candy and small presents. The pi-ata can be made into many different shapes and is suspended by a **string** . **Blindfolded** children are given a stick or a bat with which they try to **hit** and **break** the pi-ata, releasing the candy for everyone. Pi-atas are a common sight at many Latino celebrations (Silverthorne 24).

In anticipation of our cultural/international day celebration, I will have my students each bring in something that represents a piece of their culture. This could be a food item, flag, piece of clothing, picture, or artifact - anything that the students feel shows about their culture. I will model an example by bringing in an item from Ireland. Students will then get a chance to each share and describe the item, and how it represents their culture. We will then look at flags from the various countries represented in our class, especially the Latino countries. Students will be invited to decorate their respective flags and talk about the designs/colors/meaning of the flag. Students will also work in small groups and use paper-mache, a balloon, tissue paper, and string to make their own pi-ata. (Silverthorne 26-27). These will be filled with treats in anticipation of our celebration.

On International Day, students will be invited to march in a school parade, with each student representing their respective countries by carrying a flag. After the parade, we will have a celebration, where parents will be invited to bring in traditional foods representing the various cultures. We will be sure to serve arroz con gandules, and tostones. We will play mariachi music while we celebrate. The pi-atas will be strung and broken open for the students to enjoy their treats. Another great idea would be to invite local high schoolers with various cultural backgrounds to come in and share with the students their traditions, celebrations, and food. High school clubs (such as the Spanish club) would be a valuable resource as well.

## Sample Lessons

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### Lesson 1 - Tell Us About Your Family

Objectives: Students will...

- Listen to the story *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza as it is read aloud in English.

- Respond in English to teacher prompted questions about the events in the book
- Create their own "Family Pictures" book by talking with family members and drawing pictures.
- Share parts of their book/family traditions with the class orally in English.

#### Materials:

- Book - *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza
- Construction paper
- Crayons, markers, glue, glitter, art supplies, etc... (for students to borrow at home)
- Picture cue cards (family, holiday, celebration)

#### Procedure:

1. The lesson will begin with the teacher telling the students that they are all going to get to know each other better by learning more about their families and what they like to do with their families and what/how they celebrate. The teacher can use picture cards of a family, a party, and holidays to help students with limited English understand this introduction.
2. Next the teacher introduces the book *Family Pictures*, by Carmen Lomas Garza and tells the students that this book was written by a Mexican girl and she is remembering things she did with her family growing up in Texas.
3. The teacher will then direct students to their purpose for reading: to recognize what the little girl does with her family and to notice if they do any of the same things.
4. The teacher then reads the book aloud, stopping at each page to have students describe (in English) what they see in the picture. The teacher can also direct students to specific parts of the picture by asking questions and varying the level of questions depending on the level of English proficiency of the individual students. Students will also be asked to share if they have done the same things, or to describe something that they have done with their family.
5. The teacher will then share a few pictures that she has made that depict her doing something with her family (a mix of ordinary events and events special to her family depicting a celebration or tradition). She will orally describe what is happening in each and model how she thought of what to draw and how she made the picture.
6. Students will then be given paper and art supplies and asked to go home and talk with family members about how they like to spend their time together. A note in Spanish and English will go home to parents with directions for the project. Students are to complete at least 3 pages of their "Family Picture" book and bring to school by week's end.

7. As students finish their books, each will be invited up front to share what they drew in their pictures. Depending on levels of English, students will be asked various questions to help them describe what is happening. The teacher will also encourage students to recognize when they do things that are the same or different and that each family is unique and special.

8. The teacher will close the lesson by telling students that they are going to be learning more about their own families and also about other Latino families and how they celebrate and spend their time together.

## **Lesson 2 - Three Kings' Day**

Objectives: Students will...

- Listen to the story *The Night We Almost Saw the Three Kings* by Zaida Padilla describe what they see, and respond to teacher prompted questions.
- Understand why many Latinos celebrate Three Kings' Day.
- Share if and how they celebrate Three Kings' Day orally in English with the class.
- Creatively decorate a shoe box for Three Kings' Day by drawing pictures representative of their own family celebrations on the box.

Materials:

- Book - *The Night We Almost Saw the Three Kings* , by Zaida Padilla
- Shoeboxes (1 per child)
- Craft straw/grass
- Art supplies for decorating box
- Candy, small toys/treats
- Picture cue cards (shoebox, camels, grass, three kings, candy, toys)

Procedure:

1. The teacher begins the lesson by giving an introduction to the book *The Night We Almost Saw the Three Kings* by Zaida Padilla. She should tell students that the children in this book are trying to stay up late to see the Three Kings and that we will be reading to find out if they do.
2. The teacher then reads the book aloud, stopping to have the students tell what is happening in the pictures and answering questions that the teacher asks.
3. Students are then asked to share if they celebrate Three Kings' Day and if they do, how do they celebrate.
4. The teacher can then use the picture cue cards to explain to students that in many Latino families, the children believe the Three Kings come to visit them and leave treats inside their shoes while they are sleeping.
5. The students will then be invited to decorate a shoebox with pictures of their family and/or things that represent the Three Kings if they celebrate that holiday.
6. The students can then fill their boxes with straw, which is traditionally put in the shoe for the camels.
7. Students will take turns filling their friend's boxes with treats or cards. They can then check their own shoebox to look for their own treats as well.

### **Lesson 3 - The Incredible Egg**

Objectives: Students will...

- Discuss their own Easter traditions and share with classmates if and how they celebrate this holiday.
- Describe the characteristics of the egg in English
- Work cooperatively within a small group and use English to communicate with group members.

Materials:

- Several hard boiled eggs and raw eggs (about 1 of each per three children)
- Several small bowls



- Large bubble chart organizer for whole class
- Picture cue cards (egg, basket, rabbit, round, crack, wet, yolk, white, smooth, slippery)
- Graphic organizer paper (bubble chart)

Procedure:

1. The teacher will begin the lesson by holding up an egg and asking students to share when they usually see and use eggs. The teacher will encourage students to think about the holiday that is usually associated with eggs. Picture cards will be used for support as needed.
2. Then, the teacher will ask the students to think about words that could describe the eggs. Students will be broken into groups of three, with a high, middle, and low English proficiency student in each group.
3. Students will be given a bubble chart and asked to work as a group to write/draw characteristics of the egg on the chart. The teacher and assistant will support each group by asking questions that encourage students to respond with descriptive words.
4. Students will be encouraged to pick the eggs up and feel them, supporting each other as they think of how to describe the eggs.
5. Students will be allowed to crack open the hard-boiled egg and examine the inside and describe what they see. Then, an adult will crack the raw egg into a bowl and students will observe what they see as well.
6. After the groups are finished, students will gather again as a class and discuss their findings. These can be charted on a class bubble chart paper and students will be encouraged to share their findings in English.
7. The picture cue cards can be used to help illustrate some of the adjectives.

## Bibliography for Children

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Ada, Alma Flor. (2002). *I Love Saturdays y domingos* . New York: Atheneum Books. This story shows how a little girl spends her time with her American and Latino grandparents in unique and similar ways and illustrates how different cultures all radiate love.

Ancona, George. (1993). *Pablo Remembers* . New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books. This story documents the Day of the Dead celebration through the eyes of a young boy, Pablo. It has beautiful illustrations and is a great way to show what happens during this holiday.

Freschet, Gina. (2001). *Beto and the Bone Dance* . New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. This is a fun fiction story about a Latino boy and his encounter with some funny calaveras during their Day of the Dead celebration.

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Grande Tabor, Nancy Maria. (2004). *Celebrations* . Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing Inc. This book compared various American and Mexican holidays, but emphasizes the importance of embracing all cultures and celebrations.

Padilla, Zaida. (2004). *The Night We Almost Saw the Three Kings* . Long Beach, NY: Libros Publishers. This is the story of two girls who are determined to see the Three Kings by staying up all night.

Soto, Gary. (1993). *Too Many Tamales* . New York: C.P. Putnam's Sons. This is a fiction story of three children who help their mother make tamales for their Christmas dinner. Unfortunately, one of the girls loses her mother's ring in the process and the children decide to eat all the tamales in order to find it.

## Bibliography for Teachers

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El Boricua. (2006). *A Puerto Rican Christmas* . Retrieved April 1, 2006 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.elboricua.com/pr\\_christmas.html](http://www.elboricua.com/pr_christmas.html). This is a website with specific information about the traditions and festivities that surround a Latino Christmas celebration.

Electronic Gourmet Guide Inc. (1996). *Pan de Muerto, Bread of the Dead* . Retrieved July 5, 2006 from the World Wide Web: <http://globalgourmet.com/food/egg/egg1096/panmuert.html>. This website provides a recipe for Pan de Muerto, a traditional bread eaten on the Day of the Dead.

Graber, Karen Hursh. (2006). *Mexican Hot...or Not: Rosca de Reyes, Three Kings Sweet Bread* . Retrieved July 5, 2006 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/recipes/puebla/kgreyesbread.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/recipes/puebla/kgreyesbread.html). This website provides a recipes for Rosca de Reyes, a crown-shaped sweet bread eaten on Three Kings' Day. The bread is usually baked with a small doll inside, representing baby Jesus.

Kalman, Bobbie. (1993). *Mexico, the People* . New York: Crabtree Publishing Company. This book gives some general information about the people of Mexico, including family life, clothing, religion, holidays, and education.

Menard, Valerie. (2000). *The Latino Holiday Book* . New York: Marlowe and Company. This is a great resource for anyone looking to learn about the history and traditions surrounding many Latino holidays. It is easy to read and includes recipes and directions for crafts.

Palfrey, Dale Hoyt. (1999). *Papel Picado* . Retrieved April 9, 2006 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/dpalfrey/dppapelpicado.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/dpalfrey/dppapelpicado.html). This website gives information about the Mexican art of papel picado - paper cutting. This art form is used for holidays and celebrations.

Palfrey, Dale Hoyt. (1995). *The Day of the Dead* . Retrieved April 1, 2006 from the World Wide Web: [http://mexconnect.com/mex\\_/muertos.html](http://mexconnect.com/mex_/muertos.html). This is another web resource with more information about the Day of the Dead celebrations, including what is eaten, how homes are decorated, and what families do together.

Perl, Lila. (1983). *Pi-atas and Paper Flowers* . New York: Clarion Books. This is a bilingual book with information on the history of many Latino holidays and the current traditions as well.

Sanna, Ellyn. (2006). *Latino Folklore and Culture* . Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers Inc. This is a great book for those looking for more information about Latino culture include male and female identity, family life, and folklore.

Silverthorne, Elizabeth. (1992). *Fiesta! Mexico's Great Celebrations* . Brookfield CT: The Millbrook Press. This book focuses on Mexican celebrations, is divided by seasons, and includes recipes and instructions for making crafts/projects for several holidays.

Skogrand, Linda., Hatch, Daniel., and Singh, Arcana. (2005). *Understanding Latino Families; Implications for Family Education* . Retrieved April 1, 2006 from the World Wide Web: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/Latino02-7-05.pdf>. This website contains general information about the Latino family unit including religion, gender roles, and education.

Winchester, Faith. (1996). *Hispanic Holidays* . Mankato, MN: Capstone Press. A short book with general information about several Hispanic holidays - good for quick reference about current practices and directions to make cascarones.

## Appendix I - Implementing District Standards

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### Content Standards - Reading

- Students will use prior knowledge to connect previous experience to material being read.
- Students will create representations (visual, written, technological, musical, artistic, etc...) that reflect upon selections read, tell a story, provide information, have a point of view, or demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of our multicultural heritage.

### Content Standards - Social Studies (Diversity)

- Students will read, view, and listen to multiple sources that reflect the diversity of culture.
- Students will compare their home/neighborhood with homes/neighborhoods in different parts of

the world.

- Students will compare different holidays, traditions, and celebrations around the world.

#### Content Standard - Social Development and Health

- Students will understand the need for sharing and cooperation in a group
- Students will respect each others' right to speak.
- Students will communicate verbally and non-verbally in a group.
- Students will be aware of the importance of listening and will practice good listening skills.
- Students will understand what they can share with others and why it is important to share.

#### Content Standard - English as a Second Language

- Students will express interests and opinions using appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Students will initiate conversations and share ideas on a variety of topics.
- Students will use a wide range of vocabulary when speaking, reading, and writing.
- Students will extend comprehension by asking questions or requesting clarification.
- Students will respond to, interpret and analyze reading from newspaper, magazines, textbooks, student works, and electronic media orally and/or in writing.
- Students will share their ideas, experiences, and points of view with those from different cultures.

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