

**Title:** The Legend of Cerro de la Silla in Monterrey, Mexico  
Día de los Muertos Ofrendas

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**Subject:** Social Studies

**Grade:** 5<sup>th</sup>

**Project Summary:** These are two cross-categorical curriculum units that involve critical thinking, social studies, research, and language arts.

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## **The Legend of Cerro de la Silla in Monterrey, Mexico**

**Time:** This activity will take six 60-minute class periods.

**Objective:** Students will understand myths, and construct a myth to explain the presence of a landform in Monterrey, Mexico.

### **North Carolina Grade 5 Standards, English Language Arts:**

**1.03** Increase reading and writing vocabulary through:

wide reading; word study; word reference materials; content area study; writing process elements; writing as a tool; debate; discussions; seminars; examining the author's craft.

**2.02** Interact with the text before, during, and after reading, listening, and viewing by: making predictions; formulating questions; supporting answers from textual information, previous experience, and/or other sources; drawing on personal, literary, and cultural understandings; seeking additional information; making connections with previous experiences, information, and ideas.

**3.01** Respond to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes by: analyzing word choice and content; examining reasons for a character's actions, taking into account the situation and basic motivation of the character; creating and presenting a product that effectively demonstrates a personal response to a selection or experience; examining alternative perspectives; evaluating the differences among genres; examining relationships among characters; making and evaluating inferences and conclusions about characters, events, and themes.

**Day 1:**

Introduce myths to the class. Students should understand myths and legends are traditional stories told orally from generation to generation in an attempt to entertain, or explain a phenomenon of nature.

Explain to students that a lack of scientific knowledge led to many myths and legends. For example, a lack of understanding of thunder led to the creation of Zeus by the Greeks. Make sure students understand myths often were intended to explain the unexplained, and often resulted in gods or the rewarding or punishment of beings for their deeds. For example, many Native American tales explain the physical structure of animals as a result of that animal's character flaws or virtues.

Read the myth of Ha Long Bay to the students, and emphasize how the myth explains the existence of local landforms in terms of mythical creatures descending to protect the people of Viet Nam.

Read The Creation of the Sun and the Moon from *The Flayed God*.

**Sources:**

Markman, Roberta H., and Markman, Peter T. *The Flayed God: The Mythology of Mesoamerica*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

*Ha Long – Bay of the Descending Dragon*. VietScape. 5 December 2009.  
<http://www.vietscape.com/travel/halong/>

**Day 2:**

Read The Creation of the World from *The Flayed God*.

Examine the terrain of Monterrey, Mexico.

Introduce El Cerro de la Silla (Saddle Hill) to the students. This is the most recognizable landform of Monterrey, Mexico. The hill, which overlooks Monterrey from the nearby town of Guadalupe, is said to look like the saddle of a horse.



Photo of El Cerro de la Silla by Eugene Wheeler.

Using Google maps, have students draw a terrain map of Monterrey, so they can see it is surrounded by mountains on three sides of the city.

**Day 3:**

Students should work in pairs to write the myth of Cerro de la Silla. Why does this mountain look like a saddle? Why does it overlook the city of Monterrey? Pairs of students should work together to create a stick-figure comic strip as their brainstorming project. They need to produce a complete story explaining the existence and importance of Cerro de la Silla.

**Day 4:**

Students should transform their brainstorming comic strip into a one-page myth. The writing should be organized in paragraphs, and should fully elaborate on the main ideas established during the previous day's brainstorming process.

**Day 5:**

Students should transfer their myth to poster paper, and illustrate it.

**Day 6:**

Students should share, compare, and contrast the myths they created in the classroom. What are the common elements among the myths?

## **Día de los Muertos Ofrenda**

**Time:** This project will take nine 60-minute class periods to complete.

### **North Carolina Grade 5 Standards, Social Studies:**

**3.06** Compare and contrast the roles various religious and ethnic groups have played in the development of the United States with those of Canada, Mexico, and selected countries of Central America.

**3.07** Describe art, music, and craft forms in the United States and compare them to various art forms in Canada, Mexico, and selected countries of Central America.

### **Day 1:**

Read aloud *A True Book: Halloween*, while the students take notes.

After the read-aloud, students should realize the present-day Halloween celebration in the United States can be traced back to the Celts more than 2,500 years ago, and is the result of the movement of people and ideas from country to country.

The main points they should take away:

- October 31 was the last day of the Celtic year—this day marked the end of summer and the beginning of winter.
- It was believed that the spirits of dead relatives visited on this night.
- Scary costumes and masks were used to scare away bad spirits.
- To make the Celtic tradition more Christian, November 1 was named “All Hallows Day.”
- November 2 was “All Soul’s Day,” a day to honor the souls of the dead.
- The Celts and English would travel from house to house on November 2 asking for food and money for one of the gods—this led to trick-or-treating.

Source:

Rau, Dana Meachen. *A True Book: Halloween*. New York: Children’s Press, 2001.

### **Day 2:**

Read aloud *El Día de los Muertos* while the students take notes.

The main points they should take away:

- Celebrated in Mexico on November 1 and 2.
- Families go to cemeteries to remember loved ones.
- It is a day of happiness and remembrance.
- Yellow marigolds are used because the Aztecs thought yellow was a special color for the spirits.
- Families carry favorite foods, drinks, and music of deceased loved ones to the cemetery.

Source:

Wade, Mary Dodson. *El Día de los Muertos*. New York: Children's Press, 2002.

### **Day 3:**

Discuss Día de los Muertos ofrendas. Show the students the elements of a traditional ofrenda at the Smithsonian Latino Center's Theater of the Dead.

The main ideas students should understand for the ofrenda:

- The four elements are essential.
- Water is for the spirit's thirst.
- Fire is represented by candles.
- Wind is represented by papel picado.
- Earth is represented by food: usually pan de muertos and other foods the deceased person liked.
- Other elements typically included: yellow flowers, a photograph of the person, representations of the person's life, likes, accomplishments, and music.

Source:

*Smithsonian Latino Center's Theater of the Dead*. Smithsonian Latino Center. 5 December 2009. <http://latino.si.edu/DayoftheDead/>

### **Day 4:**

Students should work in groups and use their notes on Halloween and Día de los Muertos to create a Venn Diagram comparing the two holidays.

After each group has completed a Venn Diagram, the groups should work to compile their ideas onto one large Venn Diagram that will be displayed in the classroom for the duration of the project.

### **Days 5 and 6:**

Assign groups of students a famous Mexican to research. Possibilities are: Felipe Calderón, Porfirio Díaz, Benito Juárez, Frida Kahlo, Octavio Paz, Diego Rivera, Emiliano Zapato.

Students should research the life and accomplishments of their assigned Mexican. Instead of composing a written report, the group will construct an ofrenda to represent physically the life of their subject.

Provide each student with a small refrigerator box (or some similar box) in which they will construct their ofrenda research project.

The remaining time should be given for the students to research their subject.

**Days 7 and 8:**

These two days will be used for the groups of students to translate their notes on their famous Mexican into physical representations for their ofrenda. They should make sure to include the four essential elements of earth, wind, water, and fire, and also to include major life events and accomplishments in the ofrenda.

**Day 9:**

The project should culminate with the sharing and celebrating of the completed ofrendas.