



## **Nota cultural**

### ***El Día de los Muertos***



A holiday dating to ancient times, *El Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead, actually takes place over two days: November 1st and 2nd in Mexico.

Altars are constructed for the dead and laden with *ofrendas* (offerings). These items are usually things that the dead person would have liked. The idea is to celebrate and remember the life of the dead person. People often gather in cemeteries and bring marigold flowers since they are thought to attract the departed souls.

Skulls made of sugar, sweet bread made to look like a skull and skeleton figurines of all sizes are all part of this ancient holiday.

"It is significant that a country as sorrowful as ours should have so many and such joyous fiestas. Their frequency, their brilliance, and excitement, the enthusiasm with which we take part, all suggest that without them we would explode... The word *death* is not pronounced in New York, in Paris, in London, because it burns the lips. The Mexican, in contrast, celebrates it; it is one of his favorite



toys and his most steadfast love. True, there is perhaps as much to fear in his attitude as in that of others, but at least death is not hidden away."

Octavio Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*; trans. Lysander Kemp (London: Penguin Press, 1967).

### **Reflection on the Reading: Read the *Nota cultural* selection and then answer the following questions.**

What do you think about this holiday and how Mexicans have two days a year to celebrate death? What are some of the things you learned from the reading? What are *ofrendas*? Think of a close friend or relative of yours (living or not living). If you were to make an *ofrenda* for that person, what would you put on it? How would you say the United States generally tends to view death? What are your personal views on death?