

Mexican Culture in Yonkers

To the student: This question is based on the accompanying documents. It has been created in order to test your ability to work with historical documents. Some of these documents have been edited for the purposes of this question. As you analyze the documents, try to understand the source of the document and any point of view that is presented in the document.

Historical context: Mexicans are the fastest-growing group of Latinos in Yonkers, numbering 7,294 in the 2000 Census. Mexican Americans have a very rich cultural and historical heritage that they bring with them when they immigrate.

Task: Using information from the following documents and your own knowledge of history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you to accomplish the assignment given in Part B, in which you will be asked to use your knowledge of Mexican culture to create a cultural artifact.

PART A Short-Answer Questions

Directions: Read and analyze the documents and answer the short-answer questions in the space provided. Prepare for the reading of the documents by studying the vocabulary definitions that are given before each document.

Document 1



Photos by Ricky Flores/The Journal News

Aurelia Fernandez of Yonkers fills an altar with marigolds yesterday at the Pelham Arts Center in Pelham as part of the Mexican tradition of El Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, the culmination of a three-day celebration of the lives of dead loved ones.

Document 1: Photo by Ricky Flores. The Journal News November 3, 2002. Clipping courtesy of Aurelia Fernandez.

Document 1 Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the name of the Mexican tradition that is being celebrated in the photograph?

2. What does the tradition celebrate? _____

Document 2



The holiday celebrates the belief that death is part of life and uses brightly colored skulls and skeletons as part of the festivities.

Document 2: Photo by Ricky Flores. The Journal News, November 3, 2002. Clipping courtesy of Aurelia Fernandez.

Document 2 Short-Answer Questions

1. According to the caption, what belief does El Día de los Muertos celebrate?

Document 3

Vocabulary

Sprucing: Decorating, making neat and clean.

Sumptuous: Delicious, lavish.

Profusely: In great numbers.

Amulets: Something carried or worn as a charm or a religious symbol.

Commemoration: Memorial, celebration to keep in memory.

Fatalism: Believe that all will share the same fate (i.e., death), submission to fate.

“Generalizing broadly, the day's activities consist of visits by families to the graves of their close kin. At the gravesites family members engage in **sprucing** up the gravesite, decorating it with flowers, setting out and enjoying a picnic, and interacting socially with other family and community members who gather at the cemetery. Families remember the departed by telling stories about them. The meals prepared for these picnics are **sumptuous**, usually featuring meat dishes in spicy sauces, a special egg-batter bread, cookies, chocolate, and sugary confections in a variety of animal or skull shapes. Gravesites or family altars are **profusely** decorated with flowers (primarily large, bright flowers such as marigolds and chrysanthemums), and adorned with religious **amulets** and (in smaller villages) with offerings of food, cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Because of this warm social environment, the colorful setting, and the abundance of food, drink and good company this **commemoration** of the dead has pleasant overtones for most observers, in spite of the open **fatalism** exhibited by all participants, whose festive interaction with living and dead in an important social ritual is a way of recognizing the cycle of life and death that is human existence.”

Document 3: Excerpt from Salvador, Ricardo J. “What Do Mexicans Celebrate on the Day of the Dead?” Online article. <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/muertos.html>.

Document 3 Short-Answer Questions

1. What are three things families do during day of the dead celebration?

a. _____

b. _____

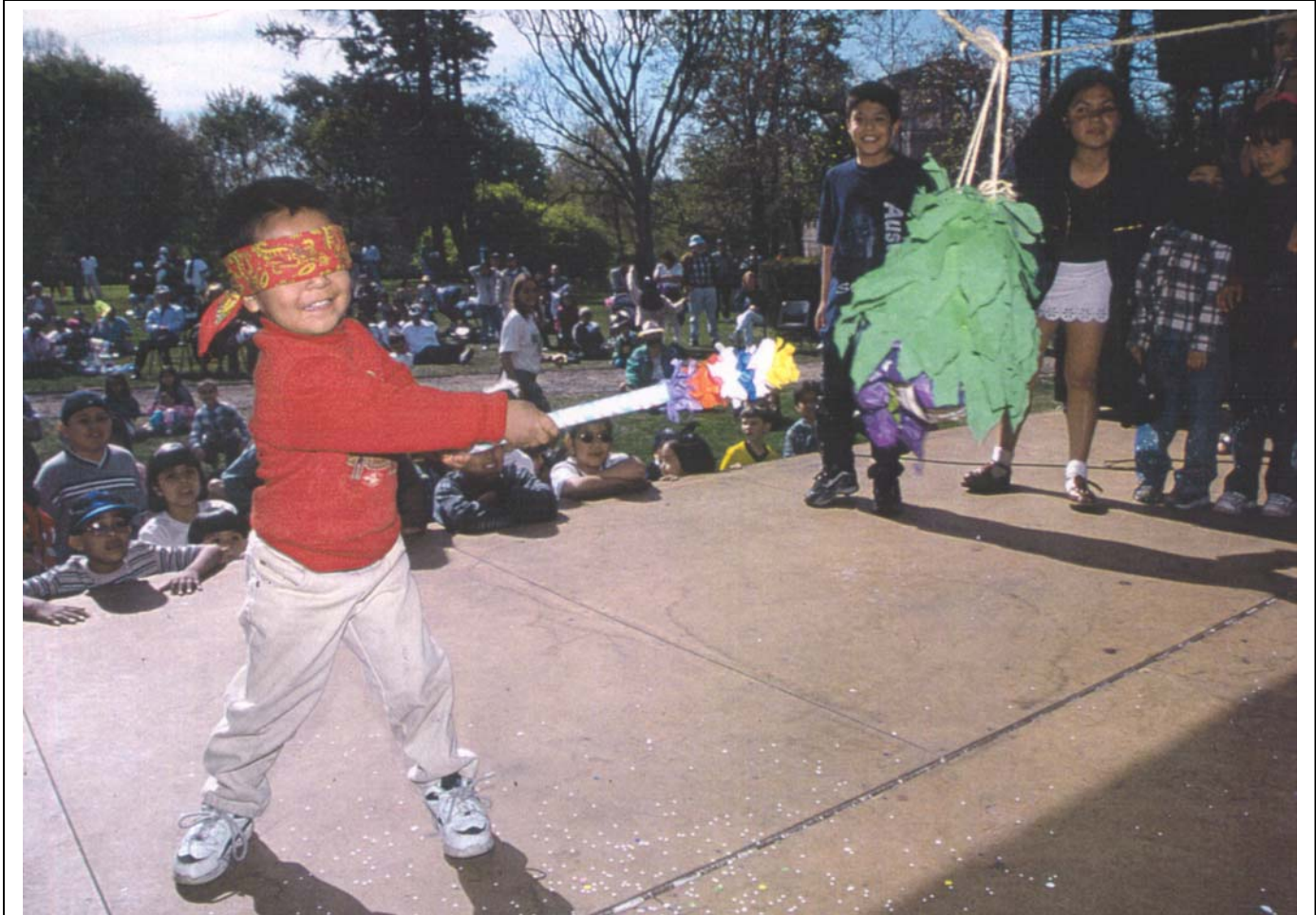
c. _____

2. What does this important social ritual recognize? _____

Document 4

Vocabulary:

Piñata: Colorful paper container filled with small candies or treats.



Document 4: Photograph of boy hitting a piñata. As printed in *The Journal News*, August 10, 2002. Photo courtesy of Aurelia Fernandez.

Document 4 Short-Answer Question:

1. What is the boy in the photograph doing? _____

Document 5

Vocabulary

Militia: Military force of citizens defending their home.

Patriot: One who loves his country and protects its interests.

Expelled: Driven out.

The holiday of Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) is celebrated to remember the victory that occurred at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. The Mexican-American War, 1846-48, and the Mexican Civil War of 1858 had destroyed the country's economy, and Mexico had gone heavily into debt to Spain, France and England. When they became unable to make loan payments, Emperor Napoleon of France used the debt as an excuse to add Mexico to its empire. French soldiers invaded through the Gulf of Mexico with the plan to march to Mexico City and install Napoleon's relative, Archduke Maximilian of Austria, as ruler of Mexico.

Mexicans quickly organized resistance to the invasion, with a small army of about 4,500 led by General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin. The **militia** was poorly armed and outnumbered, but in spite of this they defeated the French army and halted the invasion at Puebla. The victory gave hope and pride to the Mexican **patriot** movement, and is still celebrated today by the Cinco de Mayo holiday.

Napoleon continued his invasion and was able to establish Maximilian as ruler a year after Seguin's victory. With the assistance of the United States, the French were finally **expelled** from Mexico in 1867.

Document 5: Escobar, Deborah. "Cinco de Mayo," February 20, 2003.

Document 5 Short-Answer Questions

1. What victory does Cinco de Mayo celebrate? _____

2. Why does this victory have so much importance to Mexicans from Puebla?

Document 7

Vocabulary

Ensemble: Group of musicians performing together.

Genre: Style.

Quintessential: Purest form, model example.

MARIACHI

(1) A specific type of Mexican musical group or **ensemble** (2) An individual musician in a mariachi group (synonym: mariachero). (3) An adjective denoting a **genre** or style related to the mariachi, e.g., mariachi music, mariachi trumpet. Since the 1930s, the mariachi has been widely considered the **quintessential** Mexican folk-derived musical ensemble, and has become an institution symbolic of Mexican music and culture. Mariachi groups are currently found throughout the Americas and in Europe.

Document 7: Clark, Jonathan D. Entry on the word mariachi from The Latino Encyclopedia. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1996.

Document 7 Short-Answer Question

1. What is a mariachi group?

Document 8

Vocabulary

Amnesty: Pardon, freedom. In this case, a program that gives legal recognition to undocumented immigrants.

After winning a court order to conduct a popular religious and cultural event through the streets of New York City, more than 2,000 Mexicans turned out in the predawn hours Dec. 12 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on West 14th Street to honor their patroness and take a step toward making a mark in their adopted country.

Some participants said the Antorcha Guadalupana run, held for the first time last year, is a way for Mexican immigrants to gain acceptance in New York, as the St. Patrick's and Columbus parades have given Irish and Italian newcomers a sense of identity and belonging.

Dressed in white sweatsuits imprinted with images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and waving Mexican flags and signs calling for a general amnesty for undocumented immigrants, participants in the torch relay set off at intervals in parish groups with police escorts to form a chain of runners stretching from Seventh to Third avenues along 14th Street. They jogged to parish churches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn in imitation of an annual Mexican festival, in which runners carry torches from their hometowns to the shrine of Guadalupe outside Mexico City in time for the feast day. It is an exercise of religious devotion and cultural cohesiveness.

"This represents the biggest holiday in Mexico. We want to keep this going here," said Alfredo Perez, 26, one of 10 brothers and sisters who carried the torch for St. Cecilia's parish in East Harlem.

The torches were blessed by Auxiliary Bishop Patrick J. Sheridan, vicar general, after prayers to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spanish by Mexican Bishop Alejo Zavala of Tlapa Guerrero.

"This is a large expression of the faith of a great people," Bishop Sheridan told CNY. "It is especially good to see so many young people who will carry on this tradition."

Bishop Zavala celebrated Mass that evening in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Mass also was celebrated when runners arrived at the parish churches throughout the city.

The torch run commemorates the appearance of Mary in 1531 to a Mexican peasant, Blessed Juan Diego, and the miraculous appearance on his shawl (tilma) of an image of the Virgin which is still on display in the Guadalupe shrine. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of the Americas...

Document 8: Excerpt from Caulfield, Brian. "Show of Faith," December 16, 1999. CNY Feature Story. Online. Internet. <http://www.cny.org/archive/ft/ft121699.htm>.

Document 8 Short-Answer Questions

1. What Mexican religious belief does the torch run commemorate?

2. In the second paragraph of the article, what hope is expressed?

3. What was asked for in the signs of many of the participants?

PART B:

Using information from at least five of the above documents, and your own knowledge, design a flyer for a workshop on Mexican American culture. The flyer must give information on at least two Mexican cultural celebrations and refer to at least one Mexican folk art tradition. You must also state within the flyer, why Mexican Americans it is important for Mexican Americans to celebrate their cultural heritage.