

The Remembering Day / El día de los muertos
By Pat Mora with illustrations by Robert Castilla

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Hardcover

\$17.95

Synopsis/Summary

As told by a young girl named Bella, the children's book by Pat Mora is an origin myth about how The Day of the Dead, or *El día de los muertos*, came to be. Mora weaves a story that emphasizes remembrance and relationships, rather than solely focusing on the loss of a loved one.

In the story, Bella lives in a small village in Mexico with her grandmother and, through delicate figurative language, we understand the value of their relationship and why it's necessary to remember Mamá Alma. A text rich with imagery, symbolism, foreshadowing, dialogue, and issues of life and death, this book is most recommended for the upper elementary and the middle grade levels.

Teaching Overview & Background Knowledge

The text is fertile ground for discussions on family, friendship, humanity, love, and nature. Additionally, it can be taught to help to students make connections between earth, nature, and our lives. It is best taught in the context of The Day of the Dead. It can also be taught in the context of a myths unit of study. The book is an exceptional example of purposeful dialogue and descriptive writing that appeals to the senses, although a difficult topic that calls for careful planning and developmental maturity.

Reading comprehension strategies (before, during, and after reading)

BEFORE

Consider a discussion based on the title and cover page. Have students notice the descriptions the cover illustration portrays and what it means for young readers. Together, make predictions about what the story may be about and invite some inferencing habits of mind.

DURING

Guide students to notice the figurative language and take notes of all the descriptive words that appeal to their senses. Use a board or display to make language arts visible for students, especially as one reads closely and asks questions to make inferences and meaning. Discuss why Mora writes such detailed descriptions and how storytelling influences the reader and interpretation. Additionally, have students focus on certain objects used in the story, and discuss what they symbolize as well as actions that foreshadow the ending.

Furthermore, because there is a moment of death, both calmly and peacefully presented, it would be important for the teacher to pause deliberately and allow students to process this experience and reflect on the loved ones in their lives. The text and lesson may lead students to

express emotions they have about the loss of their own loved ones, and it could lead to powerful classroom discussion with deliberate planning and scaffolding.

AFTER

After reading, plan to celebrate your own Remembering Day in your class, library or school. Students can follow the model described in the story and, together, build community by remembering loved ones. This welcome period for remembering is also a time to give thanks and honor others we love. An instruction activity like this one can guide teachers to learn more about their students, and students can learn more about each other and their loved ones.

Writing /Composition Prompts

Teachers can support a writing community by building trust and writing with their students, modeling writing habits of mind as well as metacognitive approaches that reflect reading and writing like a writer.

Ask students to create their own myth for a holiday they celebrate. The prompt: How did your favorite holiday begin?

Ask students to write a letter to Bella comforting her. The prompt: Write a letter to Bella and provide comfort through language.

Ask students to write a letter to Bella, congratulating her on teaching her village how to remember their loved ones and starting a contemporary national holiday. The prompt: Write a letter to Bella where you congratulate her on being a caring, attentive and responsible teacher to her village. Also, congratulate her on starting a contemporary holiday.

Ask students to describe a memory where they use imagery and symbolism modeled by the author. The prompt: Think of a vivid memory. Tell the story of that memory. Be sure to use writing that appeals to the senses by creating visuals and includes at least one symbol.

Vocabulary / Word Study

Cactus	Tuck
Carve	Pray
Nestle	Thatch
Shelter	Dart
Whirl	Reed
Hammock	Petals
Heaped	Bough

Discussion questions:

These discussion questions are to be used during the Reading Comprehension Strategies.

Before

Based on this title, what do you think this story will be about?

What hints about the story does the cover page reveal?
Based on the cover image, what might the setting of the story be?
Based on the cover image, how might you describe the characters?

During

What words create a picture for the reader?
What words appeal to your sense of smell, sound, or taste?
What images or actions symbolize an idea?
Is there anything on this page that gives us a hint of what might come in the future of the story?
***Some questions to ask during the discussion about death:
Has anyone here lost a loved one? How did it feel?
What do you miss about that person?
How can you relate to Bella's emotions?
How has someone made you feel better when you are sad?

Extensions

Teach this book in the context of other books about the death of a loved one. You can search for other Arte Público Press and Piñata Books titles such as *Letters from Heaven* by Lydia Gil. Guide students to read two-three books, including *The Remembering Day*. Discuss how these authors deal with death. Compare and contrast their styles and produce a written composition of that analysis.

Teach this text paired with other books by Pat Mora. Have students draw conclusions about the author's style of writing. Teach certain literary devices Mora consistently uses such as imagery, symbolism, and metaphor. Ask students to write Pat Mora a letter thanking her for writing her books.

Ask students to create a book trailer for *The Remembering Day*. They must include details from the story but not give away the ending.

Related Media

A source for book trailer samples: <http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/>

The National Association of School Psychologists, "Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators": <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/addressing-grief/addressing-grief-tips-for-teachers-and-administrators>

Pat Mora's children books: <http://www.patmora.com/books/for-children/>

Further Reading

Gil, Lydia. *Letters from Heaven*. Illus. Leonardo Mora. Houston: Piñata Books, 2014. Print.
Mora, Pat. *A Birthday Basket for Tia*. Illus. Cecily Lang. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997.
Mora, Pat. *Gracias- Thanks*. Illus. John Parra. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2009.

This instructional guide was prepared by Lorena Germán.

About the Author

Pat Mora, born in El Paso, Texas, is an award-winning poet and author of books for adults, teens, and children. Her awards include a Poetry Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Golden Kite Award, American Library Association Notable Book Awards, and honorary doctorates. A former teacher and university administrator, she is the founder of the family literacy initiative Children's Day, Book Day, El día de los niños / El día de los libros, (Día). The year-long commitment to linking all children to books, languages and cultures, and of sharing what Pat calls "bookjoy," culminates in celebrations across the country in April. Pat lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico and invites you to visit her at www.patmora.com.