



Growing up in a traditional Mexican-American household, I have celebrated many Day of the Dead (Dia De Los Muertos). Throughout the three day festivity, I have been able to savor various traditional Mexican food: tamales, pozole, and mole sauce. But the celebration holds a more profound significance than the food. Every celebration, I became more interested in learning about the meaning of the different decorations around the altar, particularly the candles (veladoras). My artifact is a candle (veladora), a cylinder-shaped object that holds so much meaning for me and my family. This artifact is a visual representation of many different cultures people hold, for me, it represents my traditional Mexican culture. As numerous people immigrate to the US, their religion follows them. Candles are part of many different religions and it symbolizes different things.

In my culture, we celebrate the Day of the Dead by setting up an altar in my aunt's home. We bring in framed photos of our loved ones who have passed away and their favorite treats. We decorate the altar with orange flowers around, the orange is believed to guide the spirit of our loved ones. My cousin's death was very sad for my family and I. The year we set up an altar and put her framed photo in the table was one of the hardest for me. I was close to my

little cousin and when I found out the news about her death, I couldn't believe it. When we lit up her candle in my aunt's apartment, it brought back all of the memories of her. It brought me back to the day where we ate spaghetti at her home and laughed at the silliest thing; her telling me that she had a cracked tooth because a mouse ate it. The candle helped me remember her sweet little smile, it served as a reminder that her spirit was with us. The *Chicago Tribune* states that nowadays the candle is used as a beacon for memorials and vigils. In my case, the candle has been a key part of celebrating my cousin's memory and continuing our tradition during the Day of the Dead. "Hispanic Trending" shows that candles often have prayers and images of Jesus, the Virgin of Guadalupe or any of myriad Catholic saints. The candles seen in my picture, have the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe because Our Lady of Guadalupe holds a special place in our religious life.

There are candles with different leaders/people of religious authority. One of them is Pancho Villa. He was a Mexican revolutionary general. The National Museum of American History describes Pancho Villa as one of the most recognizable leaders of the Mexico Revolution. Pancho Villa was able to lead this civil war which lasted from 1910-1921. The war was fought to curb U.S. corporate interests and to redistribute agricultural lands, especially for indigenous communities. Candles have different purposes, but one of the most important is to remember the people who brought good into our lives. Pancho Villa serves as an example of a leader who brought the Mexican community together. In many religious settings in the United States, the candle is used. In religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, candles are a big part of their practice. The "Role of Candles in Religions" says, "Jews around the world light ritual candles during Hanukkah, during which a nine-branched candelabrum is lit on eight successive nights to commemorate the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Some Hindus occasionally use candles as altar offerings as part of daily puja, or ritual practices. Buddhists place candles before shrines or statues of the Buddha as a sign of respect, often alongside offerings of food or drink." These are some of the ways candles are used in religious environments. Most candles are used to praise the culture of religion. Candles represent honorable people and cultures.

In the United States, we are so caught up with many responsibilities and often don't have time to think about anything. As I learned more about my culture and the meanings of different traditions, I learned to appreciate the little things because they hold the most meaning. I never

knew that a candle was a symbol of culture and religion. The United States is a country with people who come from different backgrounds, and a candle represents something different for all.

**Sources Used:**

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