

LEVELED BOOK • M

# Día for María

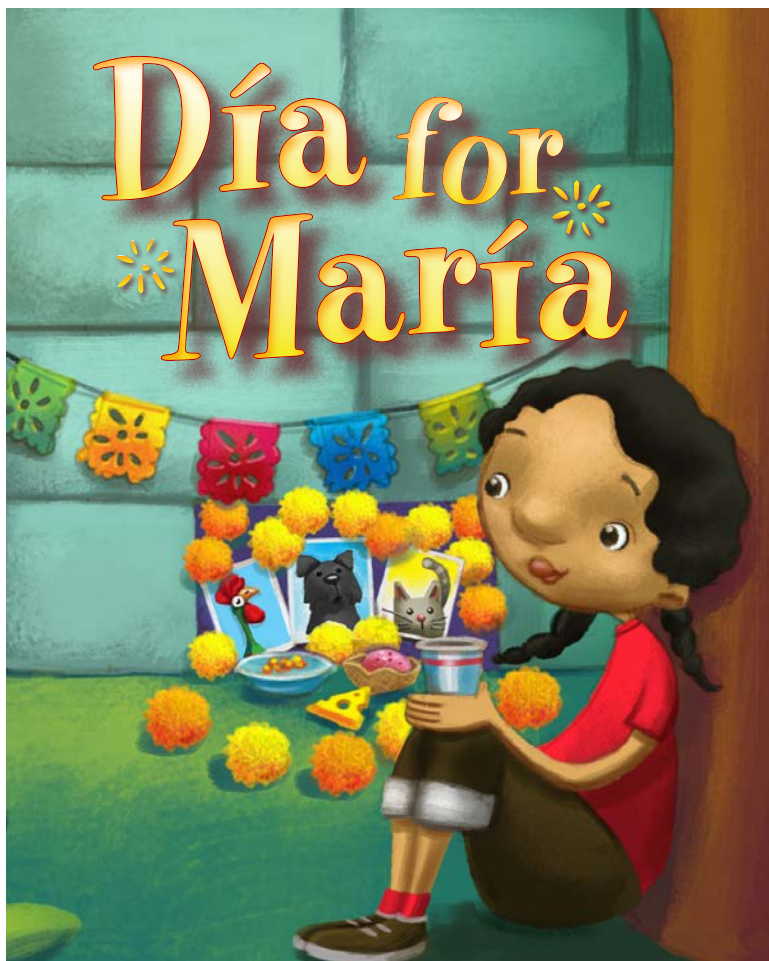


**Multi  
level  
J•M•P**

Written by Katherine Follett  
Illustrated by Carolina Farías

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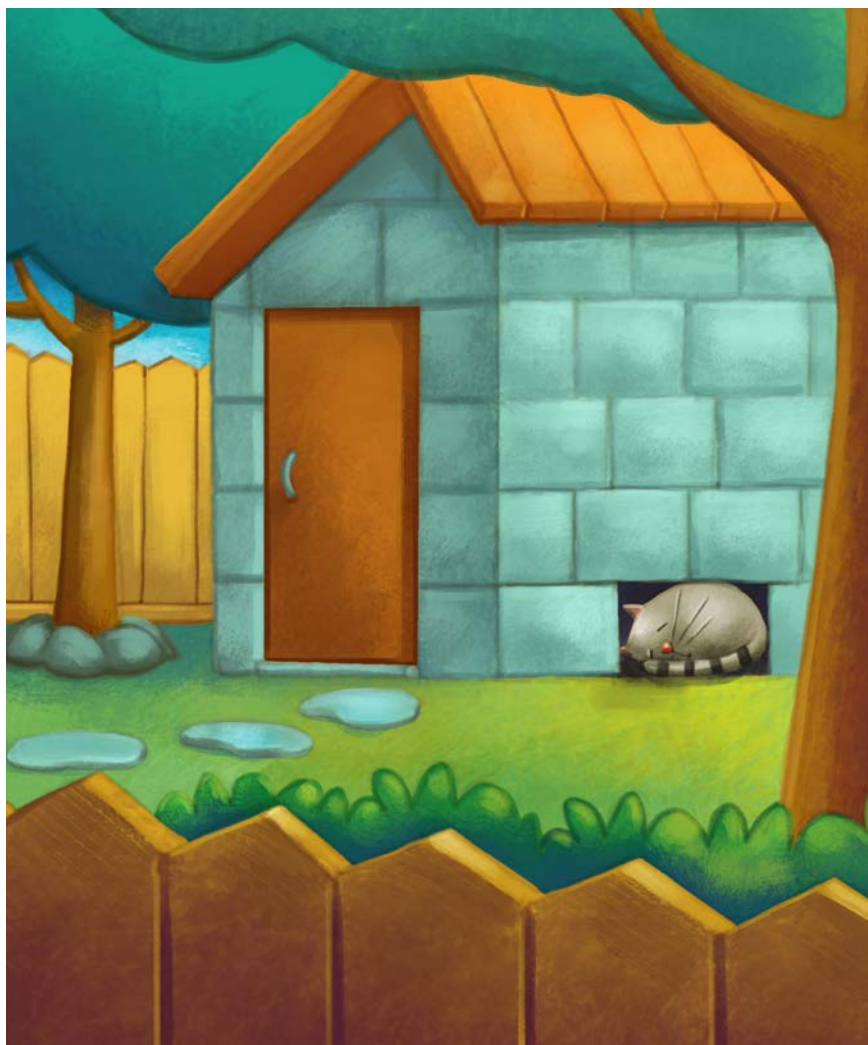
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### Focus Question

How do María and her family celebrate loved ones who have passed away?





Having a cat named Mouse sounds like a joke. *Ratona* was small and gray, and her meow was a tiny squeak. She liked to sit in a hole in the wall of our shed.



Ratona lived for a long time. Eight months ago, she died. I'm not sad anymore, but I think about her often.

One day, Mamá was setting up Tía Teresa's *ofrenda*, a special **altar**, for *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead. Teresa **passed away** when I was a baby.

"Mamá, can we also **celebrate** pets?"  
I asked.





“Día de los Muertos is mostly for family . . .” Mamá said. “Though I suppose Ratona was part of ours.”

“We can celebrate her the day before Día de los Muertos,” I suggested.

“That’s a nice idea, María,” Mamá said.

## What Is Day of the Dead?

Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is a Mexican holiday celebrated around the world. It usually happens on November 1 and 2. Día de los Muertos is a happy holiday when people celebrate family and friends who have passed away. People build ofrendas, march in parades, visit graveyards, and make special foods to honor those who have died. Some people believe that the spirits of loved ones visit during this time.



Later that day, Mamá and I went to the market in Puebla. I held her hand so I wouldn't get lost.

We got paper banners, **marigolds**, and three candy *calaveras*, or **sugar skulls**.







On October 31, my friends Adriana and Gloria came over. Adriana brought her dog, *Sal*, or Salt. She had a photo of Sal's sister, *Pimienta*, or Pepper, who died last summer.

Gloria also had a picture of a pet she had lost—Raúl the rooster.

We hung paper banners and scattered marigolds where Ratona used to sit. Then we set up our photos in the flowers.

“Pimienta got into our cooler once,”  
Adriana said. “She ate so much  
*queso*. We thought she would feel  
sick. Later, she got into the trash  
and ate the rest!”

We all laughed.

“I have some queso for Pimienta,”  
Adriana said. She set down a  
piece of cheese.





“My mother makes *pepitas* for my great-grandfather’s ofrenda,” Gloria said. “Raúl jumped up and ate them! My *madre* was so mad. I have pepitas for Raúl.”

Gloria set the pumpkin seeds by his photo.

“Ratona was always quiet,” I said.  
“Unless someone had *helado*. Then,  
she went, *Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!*  
until you let her lick the bowl. I  
have some *helado* just for Ratona.”  
I placed the bowl of ice cream  
in her old hiding spot.







I gave Adriana and Gloria each  
a calavera before they went home.

I thought about the funny things  
Ratona used to do.





At sunset on the last day of celebrations, my family walked to the graveyard to visit Tía Teresa. Every family from the area came out. There was even a band.

Tía Teresa's **gravestone** was piled with flowers, sweet *pan de muertos*, and candles.

Someone began setting off fireworks. Mamá smiled to herself.



“I have a story about your Tía Teresa,” Mamá said to me. “One day, Teresa heard a tiny squeak coming from some tall grass. It was a little gray kitten. She was so small that Teresa named her Ratona.”

“When Teresa died, I took Ratona home,” Mamá continued. “You were just a baby, María, but you loved her right away. Seeing you with Ratona reminded me of Teresa.”





Everyone in the graveyard was laughing and dancing. I was too young to remember Tía Teresa, but we had both loved Ratona. That made me happy. That was what Día de los Muertos was all about.

Mamá took my hand and stood up. “I think it’s time to dance!” she said.

## Glossary

<b>altar</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a table or other raised surface that is used for religious or spiritual purposes (p. 4)
<b>celebrate</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to do something special to honor an event (p. 4)
<b>gravestone</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a marker at the head of the place where a dead body is buried (p. 13)
<b>marigolds</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	flowers in the daisy family with orange or yellow petals (p. 6)
<b>passed away</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	stopped living; died (p. 4)
<b>sugar skulls</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	brightly colored skulls made from sugar cane, used in the Mexican celebration of Day of the Dead (p. 6)



## Words to Know

altar

celebrate

gravestone

marigolds

passed away

sugar skulls

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Level M Leveled Book  
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### Correlation

LEVEL M	
Fountas & Pinnell	L
Reading Recovery	19
DRA	24

# Día for María

*A Reading A-Z Level M Leveled Book*

*Word Count: 548*

## Connections

### Writing and Art

María celebrates family members by telling stories about them. Write and illustrate a favorite story about one of your family members.

### Social Studies and Art

As a class, discuss how the ofrenda is an important part of Día de los Muertos. Make paper banners and decorations for an ofrenda and set it up in your classroom.

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