

Let's Celebrate

Lisa looked out her bedroom window and watched her mom and her cousin Elena carry suitcases into the house. Elena had come from Mexico to stay with them for the rest of the school year. Her parents wanted her to live in the United States for a while so she could practice her English.

“Sixth grade won’t be much fun anymore,” Lisa thought. “I’ll be doing nothing but homework every afternoon and evening. After I help Elena with hers, I’ll have to do my own, and I won’t ever have time to watch TV or visit my friends or do anything fun. I’m happy that Elena already speaks English so at least we’ll be able to understand each other, I think.”

Since Elena was arriving at almost the end of October and had already missed the first part of the school year, Mom insisted that Lisa give up her after-school activities.

“I can’t be driving back and forth all the time,” Mom had told Lisa, “and it wouldn’t be fair to make Elena wait for you to finish play practice, so I’ll have to pick you both up right after school.”

Lisa had a big part in the school play *Let’s Celebrate*, but she hadn’t yet told Mr. Blake, the director, that she couldn’t come to rehearsals anymore. She was hoping that Mom might still change her mind.

“Well, here we are,” Mom said, as she led Elena into the bedroom and put the suitcases down next to the bed that Elena would be using while she was there. “I’ll leave you two to get acquainted. Lisa, you can help Elena unpack.”

“But Mom,” Lisa pleaded. “I was going to help you make something special for dinner. I think we should welcome Elena with a good, home-cooked



American meal, don't you?"

"Not tonight," Mom said, leaving the room. "Dad's bringing pizza home with him, so Elena will see how we normally eat around here."

"I am very glad that you are in this room with me," said Elena. "In Mexico, my three sisters and I all sleep together in the same room. We do everything together! We are very close. We will be good friends, you and I—no?"

"Well, we'll be together a lot. That's for sure," Lisa answered quickly. "Come on, let's start unpacking."

Lisa watched as Elena opened the biggest suitcase. The first things Elena took out of the suitcase were pictures and candles.

"I brought things for Día de los Muertos (mwer-tohs), the Day of the Dead," she said. "My mother sent them with me so your family can make an altar for our grandfather."

"We don't celebrate the Day of the Dead," said Lisa.

"But I saw skeletons in many windows when we were driving here from the airport," Elena responded.

"Oh, the skeletons..." Lisa replied. "They're for Halloween! It's a fun holiday for kids, and part of the fun is decorating houses and yards with skeletons, ghosts, bats, spiders, and lots of other creepy stuff."

Lisa took some clothes out of Elena's suitcase and put them in the dresser drawers her mom had emptied to make room for Elena's things.

"Mom told me about the Day of the Dead," Lisa continued, "but I didn't understand all of it. Some of Mom's friends have altars in their houses for family members who have died, but Mom doesn't do that, maybe because my dad is from England. I'm sure we celebrate holidays a lot differently at our house from what you do in Mexico."

“Everything will be strange here, I think,” said Elena, setting the pictures and candles on top of the dresser. “I will miss being with my family for the Day of the Dead holidays.”

“Holidays? You mean the Day of the Dead is more than one day?” Lisa asked.

“It begins on the last day of October and ends on the second day of November,” Elena told Lisa. “For three days, we invite the souls of our ancestors to visit us. We clean up the cemetery and decorate it with many flowers, and then we put out some food in our homes and in the cemetery to honor the dead. Look! I have brought this special candy to share.”

Elena showed Lisa a box of sugar skeletons and chocolate skulls. Then she pulled out another box.

“I have also brought pan de muertos,” said Elena. “It is bread for the dead. My mother baked it, but I decorated it with bones. You can give the bread to your mother to save.”

Lisa looked at the bones and skull frosting on the bread. “It looks good,” she said. “Let’s show it to Mom. Bring that other stuff, too.”

Elena picked up the pictures and candles and followed Lisa downstairs. “Hey, Mom, look at this bread,” said Lisa. “Elena brought it for the Day of the Dead. She brought pictures and candles, too. I guess it’s a pretty special holiday for her.”

Mom looked at the bread, and then she smiled and put her arm around Elena.

“I guess I’d forgotten just how special it is,” she said, giving Elena’s shoulders a squeeze.



“I’ve lived in the United States for such a long time that I’ve lost track of most of the Mexican holidays I used to celebrate. But many Mexican Americans celebrate those holidays here, and I still enjoy watching the parades and the dancing on Cinco de Mayo. I think I’d like to start celebrating more of the Mexican days again, and I’d like to remember my dad. Maybe we should have an altar this year. Several of our neighbors always set up altars on the first day of November.”



Lisa and Elena watched Mom as she started to arrange the candles and the pictures Elena had brought on a long cabinet in the dining room.

“On Día de los Muertos,” Mom went on, “we’ll put out some of the foods your grandpa liked, and we can invite friends to share dinner with us.”

“Well, since we’re talking about holidays, Mom,” said Lisa, “wouldn’t it be nice for Elena to learn about the ones we celebrate in the United States? The play we’re doing at school is about all the holidays in the year—Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July—all of them! If Elena was in the play, then she could find out about our holidays and practice her English at the same time!”

“Oh, could I?” Elena asked. “I would like to be in the play very much.”

“Well, Mom?” Lisa asked with a grin.

“Well...” Mom said hesitantly. Then she grinned back at Lisa. “If Mr. Blake agrees, I’ll pick you both up from school after rehearsal.”

Questions About Let's Celebrate

1. Why was Elena going to stay in the United States for a while?
2. Give two reasons why Lisa wasn't sure she would enjoy Elena's visit.
3. Why did Lisa's mom change her mind about Lisa being in the school play?
4. Describe how Elena's family celebrated the Day of the Dead.
5. Many countries celebrate special days to remember those who have died. Why do you think these holidays exist? What is the name of the holiday in the United States that honors people who have died?

Vocabulary

Match each word to its definition.

cemetery	acquainted	honor	rehearsals	altar
cabinet	pleaded	arrange	souls	insisted

1. the unseen spiritual parts of human beings
2. a place where the dead are buried
3. made an urgent request; begged
4. a piece of furniture with a cupboard-like storage area
5. scheduled times for practicing a play or a performance
6. informed about or familiar with
7. a special place at which to honor a departed spirit
8. to show high respect, regard, or recognition
9. stated firmly; demanded
10. to place in a certain order

Antonyms

Find an antonym in the story for each word below.

1. morning
2. remembered
3. familiar
4. filled
5. enemies
6. upstairs
7. separate
8. shame
9. led
10. frowned
11. leaving
12. closed

Helping Verbs

A. Helping verbs are forms of the verbs be, have, and do. They are paired with action verbs to set the time of the action or to make the meaning clearer. Am, is, are, was, were, had, has, have, will, would, did, do, can, and could are common helping verbs.

Examples: I **will** *bake* a cake. (sets the time of the action in the future)

I **had** *baked* a cake. (sets the time of the action in the past)

Read each sentence below. Draw one line under the action verb and two lines under the helping verb.

1. Elena had come from Mexico.
2. Dad is bringing pizza home with him.
3. You can give the bread to your mother.

4. Elena will miss her family.
5. Lisa was hoping to stay in the play.

B. *Sometimes, a helping verb is part of a contraction.*

Example: I **am** leaving tomorrow.

I'm leaving tomorrow.

Rewrite each of the following sentences to make the helping verb part of a contraction.

1. She will make sandwiches for us.
2. You have done a good job.
3. He did not finish his homework.
4. They are traveling through Europe.

Compare Celebrations

Use information from the story and prior knowledge to compare the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) with Halloween as it is celebrated in the United States. Write words or phrases in the Venn diagram below that describe or relate to these holiday celebrations. You do not have to use complete sentences.

