

teacher resource guide

**schooltime  
performance  
series**



**sugar skull!  
a día de muertos  
musical adventure**

**arts  
education  
njpac**





## about the performance

*Sugar Skull!* A *Día de Muertos Musical Adventure* is a joyous, heartfelt adventure that delves into the rich, tuneful traditions of *Día de Muertos*, an annual celebration in Mexican and Latin American culture. In this bilingual musical, audiences witness 12-year-old Vita Flores as she embarks on a magical journey to honor her ancestors.

Vita thinks her family has gone loco planning a celebration for deceased loved ones. Why throw a party for the dead? But when a spirited candy skeleton suddenly springs to life, Vita finds herself on a magical, musical journey to unravel the true meaning of *Día de Muertos*. Meet *Sugar Skull*, a charismatic skeleton who guides Vita as she dances with ancient ancestors, sings with a sorrowful sorceress, escapes the trickster *Chaneques*, and even meets the famous *Catrina Calavera*. But can Vita gather the missing pieces needed for her family *ofrenda* before it's too late?

*Sugar Skull!* A *Día de Muertos Musical Adventure* was developed by Rhythm of the Arts, Gregory Van Acker, Sinuhé Padilla, and Elena Aráoz, with Mexico Beyond Mariachi. Rhythm of the Arts was founded in 2005 in NYC to provide a platform for culturally specific performing arts companies to reach greater audiences.

## about rhythm of the arts

Rhythm of the Arts was founded in 2005 by Peter Bogdanos as a boutique production and management company for culturally specific projects and performing artists. Under the leadership of Leah Keith, Rhythm of the Arts has recently expanded its scope as a booking agency, with a carefully curated roster of artists that responds to the current needs of presenters. The company celebrates authentic storytelling, multi-disciplinary projects, cross-cultural collaborations, and live music.

## njpac on the mic podcast

with Rocio Magaña & Luna Garcia



**How to listen to this episode of NJPAC On the Mic**  
Scan the QR code or visit [njpac.org/arts-education/teacher-resources](https://njpac.org/arts-education/teacher-resources) to access the podcast and the following show notes:

**Part 1: About** | *Pre-show audio, 5 minutes*

**Includes:** An introduction to the performance, artists, venue and welcome message

**Welcome message voiced by**  
Rocio Magaña and Luna Garcia, a mother and daughter from Newark who celebrate *Día de Muertos*

**Part 2: Connect** | *Post-show audio, 8 minutes*

**Includes:** Reflection question, a look at the symbolism in a *Día de Muertos* *ofrenda*

**Opening question voiced by**  
Rocio Magaña and Luna Garcia

**Part 3: Spotlight** | *Post-show audio, 10 minutes*

**Includes:** A chat with Rocio Magaña and Luna Garcia, discussion starters

**Interview guests**  
Rocio Magaña and Luna Garcia

### Additional Episode Credits

**Series producers:** Michael Aquino and Dania Ramos

**Written and hosted by** Dania Ramos

**Additional writing by** the team behind *Sugar Skull!*

**Theme and outro music:** Michael Aquino

**Additional music from** Epidemic Sound

**Sound editing, sound design and voiceover by** Michael Aquino

### About NJPAC On the Mic

*NJPAC On the Mic* invites your students to expand their experience of attending a SchoolTime Performances show. We provide three podcast episodes for each production, suitably aligned with New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLs) and New Jersey Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies. With *NJPAC on the Mic*, the learning begins before — and continues beyond — your visit to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center!



# inspired ideas in the classroom

## Teacher Focus

## Student Activity

## NJ Student Learning Standards

P

### Prepare for the performance

Have students listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: About* for an introduction to the performance, what to expect at the theater and a welcome message. Review audience etiquette mentioned in the episode, including respecting the performers, watching and listening to the performance, avoiding eating or drinking in the theater and reacting or responding to the performance at the appropriate times.

Have students share what they know about Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead).

Share these videos: [Things to Know About Día de los Muertos](#), [Día de los Muertos](#)

Facilitate a discussion about the videos using the prompts listed in the student section.

Listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: About*. Share your previous knowledge about Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead). Watch the videos [Things to Know About Día de los Muertos](#) and [Día de los Muertos](#) about Día de Muertos.

Participate in a discussion guided by the questions below:

1. How is watching a live stage performance different from watching a movie or TV show?
2. Have you ever seen or participated in a Día de Muertos celebration?
3. Why do families celebrate the life of a deceased loved one?
4. How can families preserve the memories of a loved one who has passed away?
5. Which emotions did the young girl express in the animated video?
6. What are the different ways that families prepare to celebrate Día de Muertos?

**English Language Arts**  
NJLSA.R7., NJLSA.SL1., NJLSA.SL2.

**Visual & Performing Arts**  
Anchor Standard 7, 8, 11

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Social Awareness Sub-competency 9  
Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

**Social Studies**  
NJSL-SS 6.1.2. Geo. HE.2  
NJSL-SS 6.1.5.HistoryUP.7

E

### Experience the performance

Before the performance, encourage students to observe how the story is told and how emotions are conveyed to the audience. (Example: live vocals, a lighting cue, the strumming of an instrument, dialogue, etc.)

Ask students to consider the questions in the student section as they watch the performance. You may choose to first define conflict as a problem the main character faces in a play or story that keeps them from getting what they want.

During the performance, observe how the story is told and how emotions are conveyed.

Consider these questions:

1. What does Vita want? What keeps her from getting it? (This is the conflict)
2. What is the Día de Muertos? When and where is Día de Muertos celebrated?
3. How do families and neighbors prepare for Día de Muertos?
4. What are ways you feel close to a loved one who have passed?
5. Is there a tradition that your family celebrates every year? What is it?

**English Language Arts**  
NJLSA.SL1., NJLSA.SL2.

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Social Awareness Sub-competency 9

R

### Reflect, respond and read

**Reflect:** Hand out copies of **Activity Sheet 1** and crayons or colored pencils. Have students draw an ofrenda altar as they listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: Connect*. Pause the audio to allow students to share their answer to the question: What was your favorite moment of the show? Students can also share their ofrenda drawings, pointing out which items they chose to include.

**Respond:** Facilitate a post-show debrief where students answer the prompts in the student section. This can be done as a class or in pairs.

**Read:** Share this read-aloud video of [“Día de los Muertos” by Roseanne Greenfield Thong](#). Review the Spanish vocabulary terms provided in the vocabulary section.

**Reflect:** Listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: Connect*. As you listen, draw a Día de Muertos altar. When prompted, share your favorite moment from the show and your drawing, pointing out which items you chose to include.

**Respond:** As a class or in pairs, share your answers to the questions below:

1. Before the performance, have you ever come across a sugar skull or Día de Muertos celebration in real life?
2. In your opinion, how can celebrating a deceased person be happy instead of just sad?
3. What questions do you still have about Día de Muertos?
4. As an audience member, when did you feel most connected to the show?

**Read:** Watch the read-aloud video, [“Día de los Muertos” by Roseanne Greenfield Thong](#). Review the Spanish words from the performance.

**English Language Arts**  
NJLSA.SL1., NJLSA.SL2., NJLSA.RL3.1., NJLSA.RL.3.2.

**Visual & Performing Arts**  
Anchor Standard 7, 8, 11

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Social Awareness Sub-competency 9  
Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

**Social Studies**  
NJSL-SS 6.1.2. Geo. HE.2  
NJSL-SS 6.1.5.HistoryUP.7

**World Languages**  
7.1.NL.IPRET.1

F

### Focus

Have students listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: Spotlight* to learn how a local family prepares their home altar to celebrate Día de Muertos. When prompted, pause the audio so students can share their answers to the discussion prompt.

Share [these images](#) of decorated ofrendas found in the article about Día de Muertos. Have students identify items in the images that were mentioned in the play or in the podcast. Ask the students to describe how they feel when they see the items.

Revisit **Activity Sheet 1** and ask students to share their ofrenda drawings and which items they chose to place on their altars.

Listen to *NJPAC On the Mic: Spotlight*. When prompted, share your answer to the discussion prompt.

Study the [images](#) of ofrendas. Which items do you recognize from the play? How do you feel when you see the items?

Revisit **Activity Sheet 1**. Share your ofrenda drawings and the items you placed on your altar.

**English Language Arts**  
NJLSA.SL1., NJLSA.SL2.

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Social Awareness Sub-competency 9  
Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

O

### Originate

Define tableau as one or more actors using their bodies to create a still image that conveys emotion or action. You may demonstrate this by holding a body position that shows Vita crying, expressing sadness and then shifting to Vita laughing, expressing happiness. Ask students what they noticed about your two positions. Emphasize that you conveyed opposite emotions through your tableau sequence.

Break the class up into groups. Share with students that they'll be working with their group to bring moments from *Sugar Skull!* to life. Ask students to create a sequence of two tableau images, one for each emotion they've selected. They should also decide on a clear transition from one emotion to another.

Ask each group to use **Activity Sheet 2** to plan their tableau sequence, selecting characters from the play and a pair of contrasting emotions (example: happy/sad).

Use **Activity Sheet 2** that you've completed with your group to select characters and two emotions to convey in two tableau images. (Hint: Group members can also portray objects in the tableau). Consider these performance elements and questions:

**Size:** How big or small can you make your bodies?

**Level:** Are you low, medium or high to the ground?

**Shape:** Is your body straight, curved, in a ball, etc.

**Focus:** Who should the audience focus on? Where are you looking?

**Speed:** Will you transition slowly, quickly or somewhere in between?

**English Language Arts**  
NJLSA.SL1.

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

**Visual & Performing Arts**  
Anchor Standard 1, 2

**Theater**  
VPA.1.4.2.Cr1a

R

### Rehearse

Allow your students to find space in the classroom to rehearse their tableau sequence. Offer feedback and support as they practice, encouraging them to incorporate the performance elements listed in the previous section. Remind them to reference **Activity Sheet 2** from the previous section to guide them.

Use **Activity Sheet 2** as you rehearse your tableau with your group. Do you have a variety of sizes, levels, shapes and focus? How are you transitioning from one emotion to the other? Remember to honor and support each voice in the group and hold space for others to create together.

**NJ Social-Emotional Learning**  
Social Awareness Sub-competency 9  
Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

**Visual & Performing Arts**  
Anchor Standard 3, 5, 10, 11

**Dance**  
VPA.1.1.5.Pr4a, VPA.1.1.5.Pr4c

M

### Make magic

Provide space and time for all groups to share their presentations. Remind everyone about audience expectations.

After each presentation, invite students to offer feedback on what characters and emotions they saw represented and what performance elements they observed. Consider recording or documenting the presentations to capture their work and to share with family members.

Perform your tableau sequence with your group and observe your classmates' presentations.

Offer support and feedback to your classmates by sharing what characters and emotions you saw represented and what performance elements you observed in their presentations. What levels did they show (low, medium, high)? What shapes did their bodies make (straight, curved, zigzag, etc.)? How did they adjust the size of their bodies (small, medium, large)?

**Social-Emotional Learning**  
Self-Management Sub-competency 6

**Visual & Performing Arts**  
Anchor Standard 4, 5, 6

**Dance**  
VPA.1.1.5.Pr4a, VPA.1.1.5.Pr4c

# curriculum standards

## NJ Visual & Performing Arts Standards

- 1: Generating and conceptualizing ideas.
- 2: Organizing and developing ideas.
- 3: Refining and completing work.
- 4: Selecting, analyzing, and interpreting work.
- 5: Developing and refining techniques and models or steps needed to create products.
- 6: Conveying meaning through art.
- 7: Perceiving and analyzing products.
- 8: Interpreting intent and meaning.
- 10: Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to create products.
- 11: Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

### FIND THE STANDARDS

For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:

NATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS  
[corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy](http://corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy)

NATIONAL SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS  
[socialstudies.org/standards](http://socialstudies.org/standards)

NATIONAL CORE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS  
[nationalartsstandards.org](http://nationalartsstandards.org)

# common core state standards

## English Language Arts

### NJSLSA.R.7.

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

### NJSLSA.RL.3.1.

Ask and answer questions, and make relevant connections to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

### NJSLSA.RL.3.2.

Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message/theme, lesson, or moral and explain how it is revealed through key details in the text.

### NJSLSA.SL.1.

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### NJSLSA.SL.2.

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## NJ Social-Emotional Learning

### Social Awareness Sub-competency 9

Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds.

### Relationship Skills Sub Competency 16

Utilize positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

## Social Studies

### SS 6.1.2.Geo.HE.2

Describe how human activities affect the culture and environmental characteristics of places or regions.

### 6.1.5.HistoryUP.7

Describe why it is important to understand the perspectives of other cultures in an interconnected world.

## Dance and Theater

### VPA.1.4.2.Cr1a

Propose potential character choices and plot details in a guided drama experience

### VPA.1.1.5.Pr4a

Perform planned and improvised movement sequences with increasing complexity in the use of space. Establish relationships with other dancers, increasing spatial awareness and design.

### VPA.1.1.5.Pr4c

Perform planned and improvised movement sequences and dance combinations applying a variety of dynamics and energy

## World Languages

### 7.1.NL.IPRET.1

Identify a few memorized and practiced words contained in oral, viewed, and written chunks of language in culturally authentic materials when supported by visual cues such as pictures and gestures and text support such as bolded words, bulleted lists, and/or captions.

# vocabulary

## Alma

Soul

## Ancestro

Ancestor; a family relative from a previous generation who is no longer living

## Blocking

An actor's movement onstage during a performance

## Calavera

Skull

## Calavera de azúcar

Sugar skull; candy skulls used to celebrate Día de Muertos

## Celebración

Celebration

## Cempasúchil

A marigold flower; they are often left as part of a Día de Muertos ofrenda

## Conflict

A problem the main character faces in a play or story that keeps them from getting what they want

## Gesture

A pose an actor strikes to convey emotion or action

## Hueso

Bone

## Ofrenda

An offering or altar decorated by families to honor loved ones on Día de Muertos

## Pan de Muerto

Bread of the Dead; sweet bread made with orange zest and powdered sugar

## Recuerdos

Memories

## Tableau

One or more actors using their bodies to create a still image that conveys emotion or action

## Tumba

Grave

## Velas

Candles

# resources

## NJPAC

About NJPAC  
[njpac.org/about](http://njpac.org/about)

NJPAC's Arts Education programs  
[njpac.org/arts-education](http://njpac.org/arts-education)

NJPAC Resources | *Sugar Skull!*  
*A Día de Muertos Musical Adventure*  
[njpac.org/education-program/sugar-skull-resources](http://njpac.org/education-program/sugar-skull-resources)

## Website

*Sugar Skull! A Día de Muertos Musical Adventure*  
[rhythmofthearts.com/sugar-skull-live](http://rhythmofthearts.com/sugar-skull-live)

Rhythm of Arts  
[rhythmofthearts.com](http://rhythmofthearts.com)

A Kid-friendly Introduction to Day of the Dead  
[spanishmama.com/day-of-the-dead-kids](http://spanishmama.com/day-of-the-dead-kids)

Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos)  
[history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead](http://history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead)

Day of the Dead: How Ancient Traditions Grew Into a Global Holiday  
[history.com/news/day-dead-dia-de-muertos-origins](http://history.com/news/day-dead-dia-de-muertos-origins)

José Guadalupe Posada and la Calavera Catrina  
[arlingtonmuseum.org/exhibitions/posada-and-la-calavera-catrina](http://arlingtonmuseum.org/exhibitions/posada-and-la-calavera-catrina)

Mexico Beyond Mariachi  
[mexicobeyondmariachi.com](http://mexicobeyondmariachi.com)

Día de los Muertos:  
How to celebrate Mexico's Day of the Dead  
[lonelyplanet.com/articles/dia-de-los-muertos-what-to-know](http://lonelyplanet.com/articles/dia-de-los-muertos-what-to-know)

5 Facts about Día de los Muertos  
[si.edu/stories/5-facts-about-dia-de-los-muertos-day-dead](http://si.edu/stories/5-facts-about-dia-de-los-muertos-day-dead)

The Ultimate Vocabulary Guide to Day of the Dead  
[spanish.academy/blog/the-ultimate-vocabulary-guide-to-day-of-the-dead-in-spanish](http://spanish.academy/blog/the-ultimate-vocabulary-guide-to-day-of-the-dead-in-spanish)

Mexican Bread of the Dead Recipe (Pan de Muerto)  
[mexicoinkitchen.com/pan-de-muerto-mexican-bread-of-dead](http://mexicoinkitchen.com/pan-de-muerto-mexican-bread-of-dead)

Día de los Muertos Activities For Kids  
[fabulousclassroom.com/dia-de-los-muertos-teaching-resources](http://fabulousclassroom.com/dia-de-los-muertos-teaching-resources)

## Videos

Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos)  
Fun Facts for Kids  
[youtube.com/watch?v=vXN8qJHy-uM](http://youtube.com/watch?v=vXN8qJHy-uM)

Día de los Muertos How to Build an Altar or "Ofrenda"  
[youtube.com/watch?v=5RW-RohWyuU](http://youtube.com/watch?v=5RW-RohWyuU)

What is the Day of the Dead?  
[education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/what-day-dead](http://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/what-day-dead)

# njpac staff

**Charles F. Lowrey & Carmen S. Villar**  
Co-Chairs, NJPAC Board of Directors

**John Schreiber**  
President & CEO

**Sherri-Ann Butterfield**  
Senior Vice President, Social Impact

**Jennifer Tsukayama**  
Vice President, Arts Education

Shannon Pulusan  
Special Assistant to Vice President,  
Arts Education

Rosa Hyde  
Senior Director, Performances &  
Special Events Operations

Victoria Revesz  
Senior Director, Arts Education Operations

Taylor Masamitsu  
Senior Director, Research & Impact

Mark Gross  
Director, Jazz Instruction

Natalie Dreyer  
Director of Curriculum &  
Collaborative Learning

Roe Bell  
Director of Program Operations  
& Advancement

Kristine Marrone  
Director, CRM & Business Operations

Ashley Mandaglio  
Assoc. Director,  
Professional Learning & Programs

Treasure Borde  
Senior Manager,  
Programming & Performances

Daniel Silverstein  
Senior Manager, On-Site Programs

Randal Croudy  
Manager, Youth & Emerging  
Artist Development

Steven Hayet  
Manager, CRM & Business Operations

Alonzo Blalock  
Manager, In-School Programs

Angela Peletier  
Manager,  
Professional Learning & Training

Justin DePaul  
Office and Facilities Manager

April Jeffries  
Outreach & Sales Manager

Antonella Sanchez  
Senior Coordinator, Program Operations

Demetria Hart  
Senior Coordinator of Faculty Relations

Lucas Jeron  
Coordinator,  
Youth & Emerging Artist Development

Kendall Lipham  
Coordinator,  
Programming & Performances

Josef Woodson  
Creative Lead, On-Site Programs

## NJPAC Arts Education performances team:

Rosa Hyde, Treasure Borde, and Kendall Lipham. On the Mic is an NJPAC Arts Education production, produced in partnership with CM Studios. CM Studios producers: Michael Aquino and Dania Ramos. NJPAC and CM Studios are located in Essex County, New Jersey, situated on the traditional territory of the Leni Lenape people.

## the arts in your school

**In-School Residencies:** NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

**Professional Development:** Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at [artseducation@njpac.org](mailto:artseducation@njpac.org). Or visit [njpac.org/education](http://njpac.org/education)

## study the arts at njpac

**Saturday Programs:** NJPAC's Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level — from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, theater, musical theater and symphonic band.

**Summer Programs:** Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

Generous support for SchoolTime provided, in part, by



Generous support provided by The Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund, Broadridge Financial Solutions, The Office of U.S. Senator Cory Booker, Inc., The Arts Education Endowment Fund in honor of Raymond C. Chambers, Jennifer A. Chalsty, Judy and Stewart Colton, Toby and Leon Cooperman, Mimi and Edwin Feliciano, The Izzo Family, Don Katz & Leslie Larson, McCrane Foundation, Inc., care of Margrit McCrane, The MCJ Amelior Foundation, Albert+ and Katharine Merck+, NJ Advance Media, David & Marian Rocker, The Sagner Companies/The Sagner Family Foundation and an anonymous donor.

+ deceased