



ÉXODO

Una Producción de Día de Muertos

Study Guide

MILAGRO  
AUTHENTIC • VIBRANT • PROVOCATIVE



Original art by Maya Ceramics

## World Premiere • Multilingual

We are proud to present Milagro's 22nd Annual Day of the Dead production, *Éxodo*. Inspired by *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and recent refugee stories, we explore themes of home, loss, and eventual adaptation. In *Éxodo* we embark on a journey of the living and the dead as they both seek safety and peace in a new home.

In this study guide we discuss Diaspora, its meanings and prevalence through history. We also take a look at *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* include information on the traditional Day of the Dead celebrations.

We hope this information informs your enjoyment of the joy and leads to a better understanding of the current refugee crises.

# ÉXODO

Una Producción de Día de Muertos

Directed by **Tracy Cameron Francis**  
with **Roy Antonio Arauz**

All text from  
***The Egyptian Book of the Dead:  
The Papyrus of Ani***

Study guide research and writing by **Daniel Caicedo**





Trail of Tears  
Painting along the highway in Golconda, Illinois

collective health or safety is at risk. In other words, diasporas are often refugee crises as well.

3. Diaspora retains a distinct cultural identity and collective memory of their homeland — In general, these are groups that band together and resist forgetting where they came from. They retain a strong attachment to their homeland and refuse to be assimilated by other cultures. Some groups may even have a strong desire or collective dream to “return” to their native homeland—even if that homeland no longer exists.

Immigration, in contrast, is most often individual, voluntary, and involves a desire to integrate and assimilate into the local culture of host states.

### Modern Diasporas

While we most often tend to think of diasporas as events that happened in the distant past, they still happen with a lot of frequency in the modern world. Consider some of the following:

- The African Trans-Atlantic slave trade (1600s-1800s)
- The Trail of Tears (1831-1850)
- Jews and other minorities fleeing Europe during The Holocaust (1941-1945)
- The Venezuelan Bolivarian Diaspora (1999-Present)
- The Syrian Refugee Crisis (2011-Present)

All of these have happened in the last 400 years and the last two have happened in the last 20 years.

# The Hardships of Diaspora and Refugees

Immigrating to a new place is never easy. It is like moving homes, only bigger because you're not moving down the street or changing neighborhoods. Often, you are also changing cities, states, or possibly countries. And especially when it is the last one, sometimes crossing the border between countries can be extremely difficult. Countries, particularly the US and especially since 9/11, are extremely cautious of whom they allow in. Usually, you have to get a visa or a permit, which is an official document that grants you permission to enter another country. And to get one of these, there are often lots of application forms you have to fill out and many tests you have to pass.

For people fleeing from conflicts or natural disasters, the difficulties are even greater because often they do not have a lot of resources. These are people who usually have lost most of their possessions and their money, and are working hard to keep their families together as they try to make their way to a safe-haven.

While most often immigrants have had a lot of time to prepare their applications and probably already have their visas, refugees have had no time to plan the move and therefore are at the mercy of the border control's discretion. Some might be forced to wait for days while border control decides what to do with them. Some might even be turned away altogether. Remember, these are people who have nowhere to go because often where they came from is too dangerous to return to! Some people try to cross the border illegally rather than through checkpoints, but governments usually do not take kindly to this and it can lead to a lot of trouble.

Even assuming that refugees are able to make it across the border safely, their troubles are far from over. Many of them are then faced with the question of where are they going to live now, how

are they going to buy food, and where are they going to find work? Often, the local communities they encounter are not welcoming or outright hostile to refugees. Some refugees might not even speak the local language, which can create a whole new set of complications. In short, they are faced with the difficulty of building a new home from scratch.

Because of this, refugees often band together to form diasporas or communities based on a shared ethnic or cultural background. They support each other in preserving their culture, building a home, and finding the means to survive in their new country; and often dream about the day they might be able to return their home. Their true home.



Bhutanese refugees in Nepal

# What makes a Home?

How would you feel if you were forced to leave your home tomorrow? Leave your friends, your school; possibly even your city, state, or country? Imagine if you were forced to leave with no clear idea of where you'll go or what you would do when you get there. What would you do? We tend to think of home as a place. Somewhere to go to. Somewhere to rest after a long day. We think of it as the house we live in with our families. But what if we didn't have a house? What if we didn't have a place to go to? What makes a place a home?

If you've ever moved somewhere new, you know that feeling: that feeling when your home is not your home anymore. You remember it used to be your home. You remember it really fondly. You remember the way the boards in specific places would creak under your feet and how to know when there was someone moving around the place. You remember the way that the photos in the hallway would look and the way it would smell in the spring. But that place doesn't exist anymore. You packed it all up and you left it behind. What you left behind wasn't your home anymore. It was just a house. A house that used to be your home.

Then you walk into a house that is supposed to your house and sleep in a room that is supposed to be your room. But it doesn't feel that way. Your favorite poster is not on the wall and there are no glow-in-the-dark stars above your head. The couches in the living room look all wrong and you can't find the cereal no matter how hard you try. It feels wrong. It feels foreign. It feels like you don't belong.

Then slowly things start coming out of the boxes. Your favorite poster, your glow-in-the-dark stars, your pictures. You go and buy your favorite cereal



Photo by Betsy & Ian F-R

and restock the pantry and rearrange the living room until the couches look just right. And before you know it, this house that used to be just a house is now your home. Your new home. But you never really forget your old home. Not really.

For people who have been forced out of their homes, home is a place that they carry with them everywhere they go. A family, a memory, a cultural tradition, a hope for better days. To an extent, a home is who we are. When we move, we carry our homes with us but we also leave a part of us behind.

Home is as much the things you keep in it as the place you keep them in. But what if you couldn't take your things with you at all? How would you make a new home? Sometimes, the only things you can take with you are the people you love. Your friends, your family, the people you love. And sometimes, not even that. Sometimes people are separated. Sometimes people die. And all you have left is their memory and the lovely things they have taught you.



## Case Study: The New Orleans Diaspora

by Daniel Caicedo

Not all diasporas are caused by political conflict. When New Orleans was hit by Hurricane Katrina, nearly 80% of the city was submerged in water. Nearly 90% of the population of New Orleans was evacuated and evacuation shelters were set up in Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. It took nearly a year for New Orleans to begin returning to normal. Many people were left homeless and lost all their possessions. Over 15% of the evacuated population relocated to cities like Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, and Baton Rouge as well as the suburbs of New Orleans.

For a time, there was a fear that New Orleans would be deserted and become a “ghost town.” However, the combined efforts of the US Army Corps of Engineers, statewide organizations such as Louisiana Disaster Relief Foundation, and community and neighborhood organizations like the United Saints Recovery Project have made much headway in the reconstruction of the city. The continued success of iconic major cultural events such as New Orleans Mardi Gras and the Jazz and Heritage Festival suggest the city has managed to retain much of its cultural identity.

By late 2008, the city had recovered to about 72% its pre-hurricane population.



Classroom destroyed in flooding.



A New Orleans neighborhood after Katrina



## What is *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*?

The ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death and dying. For them, the journey between life and afterlife was a long and treacherous one fraught with trials, tests, hidden dangers. They would have to sail down the Nile into the underworld where they would encounter many gods and monsters, and ultimately culminating with the famous Weighing of the Heart. In this final trial, the heart of the deceased would be weighed against Ma'at—the Feather of Truth. If the person had led a virtuous life and therefore had a light heart, they would be granted access into The West (the afterlife). If not, they would be devoured by the fearsome beast, Ammit, and would be lost forever.

To protect and guide themselves against these dangers, Egyptians would commission a special book to be buried with them upon their death. Written on papyrus, this book contained the spells, prayers, and secrets the dead would need to pass, defeat, or circumvent these challenges. Because of the cost of papyrus, generally only the wealthy and powerful elite had the resources to commission these books.

In *Éxodo*, all the spoken word is taken from a translation of the *Papyrus of Ani*, which is one of the best-preserved *Books of the Dead* to which we have access.

- Why do you think the creators of this play opted for this creative decision?
- How might *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* be connected to the concept of diaspora?

# Further Reading

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Metropolitan Cathedral,  
Day of the Dead monsters

# Day of the Dead

by Ricardo J. Salvador

This is an ancient festivity that has been much transformed through the years, but which was intended in pre-Hispanic Mexico to celebrate children and the dead. Hence, the best way to describe this Mexican holiday is to say that it is a time when Mexican families remember their dead, and the continuity of life.

Two important things to know about the Mexican Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) are: It is a holiday with a complex history, and therefore its observance varies quite a bit by region and by degree of urbanization. It is not a morbid occasion, but rather a festive time.

The original celebration can be traced to many Mesoamerican native traditions, such as the festivities held during the Aztec month of Miccailhuitontli, ritually presided by the “Lady of the Dead” (Mictecacihuatl), and dedicated to children and the dead. In the Aztec calendar, this ritual fell roughly at the end of the Gregorian month of July and the beginning of August, but in the post-conquest era it was moved by Spanish priests so that it coincided with the Christian holiday of All Hallows Eve (in Spanish: “Día de Todos Santos.”) This was a vain effort to transform the observance from a profane to a Christian celebration. The result

is that Mexicans now celebrate the day of the dead during the first two days of November, rather than at the beginning of summer. But remember the dead they still do, and the modern festivity is characterized by the traditional Mexican blend of ancient aboriginal and introduced Christian features.

Generalizing broadly, the holiday’s activities consist of families (1) welcoming their dead back into their homes, and (2) visiting the graves of their close kin. At the cemetery, family members engage in sprucing up the grave site, decorating it with flowers, setting out and enjoying a picnic, and interacting socially with other family and community members who gather there. In both cases, celebrants believe that the souls of the dead return and are all around them. Families remember the departed by telling stories about them. The meals prepared for these picnics are sumptuous, usually featuring meat dishes in spicy sauces, chocolate beverages,



Photo by Carlos Martínez

cookies, sugary confections in a variety of animal or skull shapes, and a special egg-batter bread (“pan de muerto,” or bread of the dead). Grave sites and family altars are profusely decorated with flowers (primarily large, bright flowers such as marigolds and chrysanthemums), and adorned with religious amulets and with offerings of food, cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Because of this warm social environment, the colorful setting, and the abundance of food, drink and good company, this commemoration of the dead has pleasant overtones for the observers, in spite of the open fatalism exhibited by all participants, whose festive interaction with both the living and the dead in an important social ritual is a way of recognizing the cycle of life and death that is human existence.

In homes, observant families create an altar and decorate it with items that they believe are beautiful and attractive to the souls of their departed ones. Such items include offerings of flowers and food, but also things that will remind the living of the departed (such as their photographs, a diploma, or an article of clothing), and the things that the dead prized and enjoyed while they lived. This is done to entice the dead and assure that their souls actually return to take part in the remembrance.

In very traditional settings, typically found only in native communities, the path from the street to the altar is actually strewn with petals to guide the returning soul to its altar and the bosom of the

family. The traditional observance calls for departed children to be remembered during the first day of the festivity (the Day of the Little Angels, *El día de los Angelitos*), and for adults to be remembered on the second day. Traditionally, this is accompanied by a feast during the early morning hours of November the 2nd, the Day of the Dead proper, though modern urban Mexican families usually observe the Day of the Dead with only a special family supper featuring the bread of the dead. In southern Mexico, for example in the city of Puebla, it is good luck to be the one who bites into the plastic toy skeleton hidden by the baker in each rounded loaf. Friends and family members give one another gifts consisting of sugar skeletons or other items with a death motif, and the gift is more prized if the skull or skeleton is embossed with one’s own name.

Another variation found in the state of Oaxaca is for the bread to be molded into the shape of a body or burial wrap, and for a face to be embedded on one end of the loaf. During the days leading up to and following the festivity, some bakeries in heavily aboriginal communities cease producing the wide range of breads that they typically sell so that they can focus on satisfying the demand for bread of the dead.

The Day of the Dead can range from being a very important cultural event, with defined social and economic responsibilities for participants (exhibiting the socially equalizing behavior that social anthropologists would call re-distributive feasting, e.g. on the island of Janitzio in Michoacan state), to being a religious observance featuring actual worship of the dead (e.g., as in Cuilapan, Oaxaca, an ancient capital of the Zapotec people, who venerated their ancestors and whose descendants do so to this day, an example of many traditional practices that Spanish priests pretend not to notice), to simply being a uniquely Mexican holiday characterized by special foods and confections (the case in all large Mexican cities.) In general, the more urban the setting within Mexico the less religious and cultural importance is retained by observants, while the more rural and Indian the locality the greater the religious and economic import of the holiday. Because of this, this observance is usually of greater social importance in southern Mexico than in the northern part of the country.



Photography by Russell J. Young

### DEVISING ENSEMBLE

Standing, L-R: Tonea Lolin, Jean-Luc Boucherot, Robi Arce, Patricia Alvitez, Samson Syharath; sitting: Kushi Beauchamp



The Northwest's premier Latino arts and culture organization  
Mailing: 425 SE 6th Avenue, Portland OR 97214  
503-236-7253 / [www.milagro.org](http://www.milagro.org)

The Miracle Theatre Group (Milagro) has been dedicated to bringing the vibrancy of Latino theatre to the Northwest community and beyond since 1985. In addition to its national tours, Milagro provides a home for Latino arts and culture at El Centro Milagro, where it enriches the local community with a variety of community outreach projects and educational programs designed to share the diversity of Latino culture. For more information about Milagro, visit [milagro.org](http://milagro.org) or call 503-236-7253.

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**October 19 - November 12, 2017**

Thursday-Saturday, 7:30 PM | Sunday, 2:00 PM

**Milagro Theatre** | 525 SE Stark Street, Portland

Tickets start at \$27

Student, senior, and veteran discounts available

For group sales, contact

Janelle Sutton at 503-236-7253 x 117

Preview: Thursday October 19 at 7:30 PM

Opening night: Friday October 20 at 7:30 PM  
followed by a reception in the café

### Special Events

**Sunday, October 22**

Talk-back with the cast and creative team  
following the performance

**November 1, 2017 from 6:30 - 9:00 PM**

**!Viva Milagro!** fundraising dinner and party