

DAYS OF THE DEAD AROUND THE WORLD

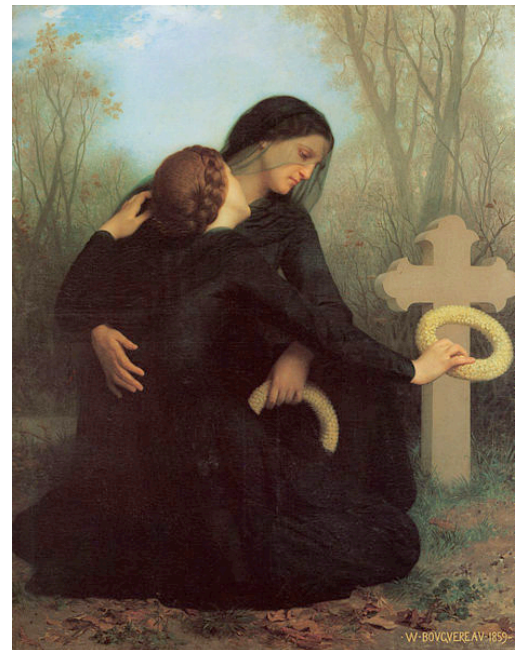
Holidays and feasts that honor and remember the dead have been a part of human cultures around the world throughout all of human history. Cultures have practiced these rituals in very different ways, but nearly all of them have had holidays that mourn the dead, celebrate rebirth, honor ancestors, and confront the question of what happens after death.

☞ *All Souls Day*

A Christian holiday that contributed to the beginning of Día de los Muertos. It is a holiday that is celebrated mostly by Catholic Christians. It is a mournful day where people pray for the souls of their loved ones that have died. It is believed that many of the souls of the dead must be prayed for before they can reach Heaven.

☞ *Samhain*

Samhain is an ancient holiday that was a part of pre-Christian Irish life. It was celebrated at the beginning of winter and was particularly important for herders, because at the end of autumn is when cattle and livestock would be brought back home from their summer pastures and butchered. It was believed that during Samhain the doors to the *other world* were opened up. Spirits and faeries were more likely to enter the world at this time, so were the spirits of ancestors. The spirits could do good things but also bad, so the festival was used to honor them and places were set at the tables for deceased ancestors. A popular item used during Samhain was a turnip lantern. A turnip was dried, hollowed out and sometimes had a face carved into it. It is believed it was used to ward bad spirits away from the house, and inspired the modern day jack o' lantern. Samhain is one of the early festivals that Hallowe'en comes from.



Two women grieving on All Souls Day.

Obon


Obon is a Buddhist Japanese holiday that is celebrated at different times, but usually in August. It is a time that people use to honor their ancestors. People visit the graves of their ancestors and the places where they lived. In modern Japan it is often used as a time for family reunions. There are festivals with games, rides and fireworks and at the end of the festival is Toro Nagashi, where paper lanterns are lit and floated down a river. It symbolizes the spirits of the ancestors returning the world of the dead.



A family celebrating Obon with a fire.

Qingming Festival

Qingming is an ancient Chinese holiday held in early spring where respect is paid to deceased ancestors, and the coming of spring is enjoyed. To observe the holiday, families get together and visit the graves of their ancestors. They sweep and tend to the grave, plant trees, and make offerings. It is still a very important holiday in modern China.

 *Each one of these holidays honors the same thing, but in different ways: with sadness, with superstition, with a celebration, and with respect. Which holiday would you most like to celebrate? Why do you think it is best to honor your ancestors in this way?*



A section of a mural showing the festivities during Qingming.
