

Calico

Spanish[®]

Culture Capsule: Special Days



The importance of learning about culture with Calico Spanish Culture Capsules

A vital part of learning a language is exploring the cultures of the people who speak it. The content in these sections is intended to get your learners thinking about and investigating big questions about culture.

You probably have noticed that even within your own city, many cultural differences exist. It's impossible to say, "The people who are from [this place] who speak [this language] are [this way]." As you investigate the cultures of the various Spanish-speaking peoples, do your own research on topics that interest your students, and encourage children to make comparisons:

- If you went to visit a Spanish-speaking country that interests you, what might be there?
- What would surprise you?
- Might they speak another language besides Spanish?
- What would the family do for fun?
- How is this similar to your family?
- How is it different?



To help children start to learn more about the various peoples who speak Spanish, we use an innovative approach we call Culture Capsules. Each uses an inquiry method to explore deep questions of culture and ends in a target-language performance goal based on national standards of intercultural competence.

If you know anyone who speaks Spanish and/or is from a Spanish-speaking country, invite that person to help your class learn more about their language and culture, especially on the topics related to these Culture Capsules.

These Culture Capsules were developed to specifically support the Calico Spanish Stories Online program, a unique Video Story-based Spanish program for elementary learners that is able to be implemented regardless of the teacher's Spanish ability.

For more information, visit calicospanish.com/discover-stories

Special Days

Saint's Days and birthdays are celebrated in special ways throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

Discussion

Introduce students to the cultural concept with this discussion.

What's a Saint's Day?

In most Spanish-speaking countries, the majority of the people consider themselves Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church maintains a calendar in which almost every saint is assigned a special day, called a feast day. On that day, the church in some way specially remembers that person.

Many devoutly Catholic families in Latin America like to name their children after the church's saints. On lists of most common baby names in Mexico over the last nearly one hundred years, the girls' list includes 4 variations of *María* (Mary) in the top ten, and the boys' list includes 2 variations of *José*

(Joseph), 2 of *Juan* (John), and also *Jesús*. A family may even choose to name a child after the saint whose feast day is also the child's birthday; for example, a girl born on March 17, St. Patrick's Day, might be named "Patricia."

Though less so in modern times, traditionally Catholic families in Latin America (and many places around the world) have celebrated a "name day" or "saint's day" for their children. The special day is the date that the church has assigned as the feast day for the saint who is their child's namesake.

The celebration may involve going to mass together and having a special dinner together at home.

In the popular Mexican birthday song *Las mañanitas*, famous Mexican singer *Pedro Infante* specifically declares that he is singing, "*hoy por ser día de tu santa*" (today, because it's the day of your saint.)

Let's celebrate!

In addition to singing *Las mañanitas*, Latin American families commonly celebrate a birthday with a cake and candles, just as is commonly done in the United States. A popular cake choice for Mexican families is *tres leches*—three milks—a very moist cake with three different kinds of milk in it. Birthday children may also



participate in “*la mordida*,” when they must bend down to take the first bite out of the cake, and when family members might try to push their faces into the cake! Then the children might sing “*Dale, dale*” and take turns hitting a piñata until it breaks. Many family members will be there and will stay late into the night celebrating the occasion.



A very special birthday: *La quinceañera*

In many Spanish-speaking countries, young women have a very special celebration for their fifteenth birthday, their *quince años*. Traditionally, this party celebrates the transition of a girl from childhood to womanhood.

The birthday girl, known as the *quinceañera*, will probably wear a formal evening dress and elegant jewelry for the day. If the family is Catholic, the celebration may begin with a special Mass. Then, the family will host a large reception with lots of food, dancing, and nice gifts. The girl and her attendants, between seven and fourteen pairs of young women and men from her family and/or circle of friends, will all participate in special dances, usually including several waltzes. The reception may also include special ceremonies like the Change of Shoes, in which the girl’s father changes her shoes, presenting her with her “first” pair of high-heeled shoes.

Student activities

Guide students as they answer the questions and complete the activities for this Culture Capsule in the student portion of this Capsule.

Answers for student notes

1. Roman Catholics
2. María, José, Jesús
3. attend mass, have a special dinner
4. *tres leches* cake, *piñata*
5. 15 years old
6. the transition from childhood to womanhood
7. fancy dresses and jewelry, food, dancing, gifts, the Change of Shoes

Cultural inquiry

Consider how you could have students help you incorporate *tres leches* cake and a *piñata* into a special cultural day about birthdays. Most Latin bakeries offer *tres leches* cake for sale, and many Latin grocery and specialty stores sell ready-made piñatas. You can also find many interesting ways to make your own on the internet.

Assessment

ACTFL Cultural Awareness Performance Descriptors, Novice Range

Interpersonal: May use culturally appropriate formulaic expressions in highly practiced applications.

- Help students learn to sing the first two lines of the song “*Las mañanitas*.” You can find a link to a classic video of this song at the Calico Spanish website (CalicoSpanish.com/Stories/CultureB).

Special Days

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Discussion

As your teacher helps you learn more about how special days are celebrated in Spanish-speaking countries, write down some notes that will help you remember what you learn.



El día del santo

1. What religion has inspired the tradition of a "Saint's Day"?

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2. What are some of the top ten baby names in Mexico that are names of saints whom people consider to be especially good and holy?

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3. What are two ways a family may celebrate a child's Saint's Day?

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El cumpleaños

4. What are some ways a Spanish-speaking family may celebrate a birthday?

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La quinceañera

5. How old is a girl when she is the *quinceañera*?

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6. What does a *quinceañera* traditionally represent? What does it mean for a girl?

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7. Name two things you might see or do at a party for a *quinceañera*.

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Thinking it through

Why do people celebrate birthdays? Why are some birthdays more important than others in some cultures?

Making it personal

How is your culture reflected in your birthday celebrations? Does your family celebrate with special traditions when someone reaches a particular age? For example, is a 10th birthday different from others in your family?

Cultural inquiry

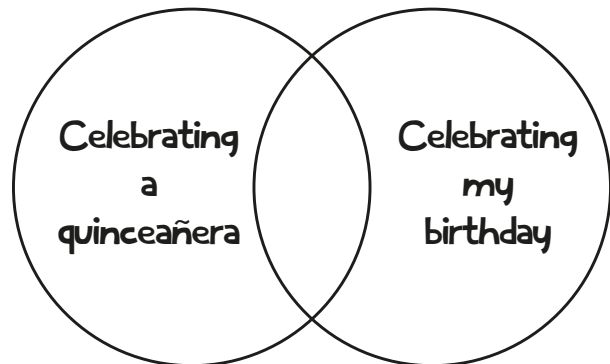
I Find a recipe for *tres leches* cake and try making it with your family. Do you like it? You can find a sample recipe at CalicoSpanish.com/Stories/CultureB. Consider bringing some to class to share.



2 Learn how to make your own *piñata*. Information can be found at CalicoSpanish.com/Stories/CultureB. What are other ways you can make a *piñata*? What is it normally filled with? What would you want to fill yours with?



3 Look up videos and pictures of *quinceañeras* in different countries. How are they the same? How are they different? How are they like your birthday celebrations? Create a Venn diagram to compare them.



What can you do?

Learn the first part of the song “*Las mañanitas*” and sing it to a classmate who has a birthday soon:

*Estas son las mañanitas que cantaba el rey David.
Hoy por ser día de tu santo te las cantamos a ti.*

This part means:

“These are the mornings that King David used to sing.

Today, because it’s the day of your saint, we sing them to you.”

Will you change *santo* to *santa* for your friend? The famous Mexican singer Pedro Infante did in his version of this song. Why?

Do you want to continue learning about Spanish culture?

Calico Spanish Stories Online offers a fun-filled journey filled with the ways children learn: stories, songs, and play. Continue your journey and learn about Spanish culture as you learn the language!

Our Stories online program allows you to learn 24/7 together where you can view, save, download and print the content needed for each lesson, or buy professionally printed copies of the materials to teach in a more formal setting.

- **Spanish speaker?** Add your personal touch and creativity while you teach.
- **Just beginning?** Enjoy the full support you need to learn together.
- **Stories, songs, and games** help children confidently use real language.
- Formative **activities** and step-by-step daily lesson plans provide guidance and feedback along the way.



Visit www.CalicoSpanish.com to start your FREE trial!

Calico Spanish uses fun characters, engaging visuals, and focused, comprehensible language to help children begin communicating in Spanish. Through the Calico Spanish Stories program children will learn to use greetings, answer basic questions, and talk about themselves while learning colors, numbers, animals, and action words.

For more information on the resources available from Calico Spanish, visit CalicoSpanish.com.

