

Hello Families!

Another busy week has flown by and we will all soon be caught up in our individual winter (yes...."winter"...) holidays and celebrations.

As we are all very aware of, Aquarian has a diverse population representing a rich variety of cultures. With this comes a wonderful opportunity for children to learn about many different holidays and celebrations from other cultures around the world.

You may have already heard that our intermediate Spanish classes are exploring a festival called *Dia de los Muertos* translated to "Day of the Dead." This is a holiday in Mexico that merges Pre-Columbian beliefs and Modern Christianity. Europe's All Saint's Day and Aztec methods of honoring deceased loved ones are combined in this cultural celebration on November 1st and 2nd in many homes in Mexico. This is not a holiday of evil, but one of honoring and remembrance of people no longer with us. In these homes, family members set a table area with brightly colored cloth, a photograph of the honored loved one, and items or artifacts that that person had loved (such as shells, jewelry, art, and books). This area is referred to as an altar. It is set in a prominent area of the home, and serves as a reminder for that important individual. I suggest that our families all look up the interesting information about this worthy cultural celebration. Ms. Lisa made a small demonstration area in her classroom honoring her grandmother, and has invited children to bring their own personal photographs or artifact of a deceased loved one. This is a wonderful way for children to reflect on what that person has meant to them, and serves as a personal connection of the lesson.

The reason I bring this particular subject up is because we have had a couple of parents asking about the appropriateness of such instruction in a public school. I will say that I knew in advance about the lessons, and personally reviewed both the

letter sent home, and lessons presented within the classroom. I fully support this study and believe it to be both worthwhile and appropriate in our education setting and here is why:

"The ASD is committed to a culturally responsive curriculum. We encourage all students and staff members to tolerate and appreciate each other's religious beliefs. Here at our school, classroom activities are selected on the basis of their educational value. All events will have a religiously neutral theme and will neither promote nor inhibit religious views. The traditions of different people will be shared and respected. Staff is allowed to teach about religious holidays and other occasions without proselytizing only if the instruction is reasonably related to the district curriculum and reflects a balanced approach about diverse religions and practices around the world. Although our events will be religious-neutral, you may request your children be excused from attending or participating in the holiday event. Students will not be graded on participation or non-participation in the activity. Sharing and caring are important aspects of every holiday that all staff and students are encouraged to practice throughout the entire school year."

Our school district allows for instruction that is connected to our curriculum. This type of activity and research most certainly does connect to our Spanish focus at Aquarian, and is in no way a practice in worship. It is not meant to support or revoke personal family beliefs. We will in fact be learning about many more celebrations that occur in Hispanic cultures. If you chose as a parent not to have your child participate in these lessons, that is your prerogative, but you may not dictate what is presented to other people's children. If a family wishes for their child (ren) to only learn about a single, specific culture or belief system- then

perhaps private schooling would be more appropriate. Our job as educators is to open up our children's eyes to the wonders of our world, and its vast variety of ways human beings share joys and sorrows. As you will see, many other types of events will be highlighted, such as *Las Posadas* (a candle light procession in which Joseph and Mary search for shelter in Bethlehem) and *Cinco de Mayo* (the Mexican national holiday that honors the Mexican victory over the French in 1862).

So parents please do try to support open minds..... even if the subject matter seems a bit odd to you. Do ask questions, and visit the classroom to observe the manner in which these lessons are presented. I think you just may be pleasantly surprised and we all may just learn a little bit more about humanity.

As always, it is our policy as well as the Anchorage School District's, to allow you to opt out of a topic if you chose. If you wish to do this- please contact your child's teacher and we would be glad to provide another place and activity for them.

Sincerely,

Sue