

It sneaks into de la
cruz's tomb



It is true that Chandana watched Coco in the theatres twice and left feeling enamored each time. Coco is truly one of its kind. It is the story of Miguel, a boy who dreams of becoming a famous musician like his childhood hero, Ernesto de la Cruz.

Despite his family's generation-old hatred towards anything music related and his great-grandfather, Miguel finds ways to practice music and keep his passion alive. When his family finds out about his interests, his grandmother breaks his guitar. In anger, Miguel runs out on the family and decides to play at the Talent Show in Mariachi Square on the night of El Dia de los Muertos.

Desperate to accomplish his dreams, Miguel escapes his familial responsibilities and tries to acquire a guitar. He sneaks into de la Cruz's tomb to steal his guitar, and when he does, he is transported to a colorful and vibrant Land of the Dead. Miguel then goes on a journey that reveals the real story behind his family's history. Background - Josh There is an imperative need for diversity within media, whether that be books or film. Today, racial struggles and misrepresentation plague our society, forming negative feelings and alternative narratives to what should be well respected and celebrated cultures. There is either misrepresentation or no representation at all when it comes to accurately depicting Mexican culture in family media, but Coco is working hard to change all of that with its rich music, and bold casting that come together to tell a heartfelt and faithful story of the Mexican holiday, Dia De Los Muertos (The day of the dead).

We went into this movie expecting to learn more about a holiday foreign to our culture and it is evident that the filmmakers had the right intent when

developing this feature film. Lee Unkrich, the director of the film was able to give personal insight on the creation of the film during a dinner hosted by Dodge college that Josh Baca attended. Unkrich told Josh that the film started as an idea that would incorporate traditional Mexican music with the Day of the Dead to form an authentic Pixar musical, it would have been the first of its kind. However, Unkrich continued by stating that he couldn't do it alone, recognizing his inability to successfully tell this story as he himself was a white male unfamiliar with the true meaning of the Mexican holiday.

Coco, originally titled Dia De Los Muertos came under heavy fire when Disney tried to trademark the name for the movie. To many people, it looked as if Disney was attempting to trademark the holiday, a notion that did not bode well for Latinos. Unkrich insured Josh that this was not at all his intention but looking back at the incident he understands the outrage and credits the catastrophe as being one of the key moments in the films pre-production that signified the need to have Latinos on board with the project. CNN reported, " Tweets included tell @Disney not to trademark Day of the Dead.

Culture is not for sale!" (Rodriguez, Cindy, CNN). So, how did Disney and Unkrich respond? Soon after, a team of cultural advisors was put into place. Lalo Alcaraz was once a cartoonist who spoke out about Disney trying to " trademark the holiday" but soon after the trademark was retracted, Disney contacted Alcaraz.

" My first reaction was ' Wow. Is this for real? Should I do this? It's pretty risky. Are they going to ask me to just rubber stamp stuff, or are they going

to listen to what I have to say, cuz, you know, I have strong opinions, my second reaction was, PIXAR WANTS TO TALK TO ME' A combination of joy and terror" (Alcaraz, Lalo). Alcaraz and the other advisors were brought to every behind the scenes screenings and gave notes that made influential changes to the film, which was just among the many ways actual Latinos were brought in to help. Once again, Josh has a personal connection to the film being from Tucson, Arizona. The Day of the Dead has quickly gained popularity in the states and Tucson happens to be the largest gathering of Dia De los Muertos celebrations in the country! Local Tucsonan, Roni Capin Rivera and her son were asked to create a children's book to coincide with the release of the movie.

Rivera was very excited to work on this project because in her eyes she is contributing to a project that is working hard to accurately represent Mexican culture and bring it to the limelight. The importance of which would prove to rally support of other filmmakers to make movies focused on minorities and their cultures. What we will consider when taking a deeper look at Coco can heavily be related to the diversity and educational concepts discussed in our class. It is our goal to examine the film through a sociocultural lens, highlighting what the film does to accurately represent a culture and holiday that has long been misunderstood.

Following its November release, it is critical to see just what the film has accomplished and how it can set the stage for Mexican representation in films to come. Culture/Holiday - Chandana (Part II) Although the entirety of the story contains the themes of family, culture and music, the aspect of culture will be deconstructed in this section of the essay. The setting of Coco <https://assignbuster.com/it-sneaks-into-de-la-cruzs-tomb/>

is during El Dia de los Muertos. The holiday originates from central and southern Mexico. The essential idea is that on that at midnight on October 31, the souls of all deceased family members come down from the world of the dead (called Mictlan in Aztec mythology) to reunite with their families. Families decorate their altars with colorful flowers, photographs, candles, their loved one's favorite foods, and pan de muerto, or sweet bread. Families also decorate their loved one's grave with flowers and foods.

The holiday is celebrated the entire night with festive music and picnics at the cemeteries. The purpose of this holiday is to celebrate the life of their loved ones, instead of focusing on their death and absence. El Dia de los Muertos dates back to the time of the Aztecs, almost 3, 000 years ago. It survived the Spanish invasion in the 16th century and has retained most of its original traditions. Today, however, pop culture has tainted the holiday's reputation. Most people mistakenly associate the holiday with Halloween because of the sugar skulls that are traditionally prepared and the white painted faces to represent the dead.

The purpose and hope of the holiday is to reconnect with loved ones that have been lost. This idea is lost in a frenzy of stereotypes and misinterpretations. Another common misconception is that El Dia de los Muertos can be scary or morbid. It is, in fact, quite the opposite.

It is important to emphasize that the holiday is meant to celebrate a person's life, not mourn it. Therefore, El Dia de los Muertos is a very upbeat and fun holiday that many people enjoy. It is a time to reflect upon our own lives and reminisce our family's heritage and ancestry. Ofrendas are also considered

as places of worship in today's society, but their significance is to show and offer love.

These are the most popular misconceptions that taint the holiday's spirit and glosses over its purpose. One of the things *Coco* does beautifully in the film is the accurate representation of the holiday and Mexican culture. The aspect of family and tradition is highlighted so well and interconnects with Miguel's passion for music.

In the end, music itself becomes the unifying factor in Miguel's family. Music is not the only thing that was accurately represented in the film. Alibrejés, or spirit guides, are a concept coined by the Mexican Folk Art artist, Pedro Linares. Basically, these spirit guides are idolized into little figurine either made out of paper mache or carved wood. In the film, these fantastical creatures are depicted in a colorful and positive manner. They also serve their purpose, which is to guide spirits after death. Artist Frida Kahlo and the lucha libre wrestler, El Santo, also make an appearance in the film. These popular figures are central to Mexican history and having them in the film increases its credentials.

Another prominent part of Mexican culture in the movie is Dante, a Xolo dog that accompanies and guides Miguel through his journey in the Spirit World. Xoloitzcuintli is a Mexican hairless dog breed that are known to be spiritual protectors in the culture. During the time of the Aztecs, these dogs were highly revered, valued and priced. Dante is a central part of the movie and heightens the experience. His original purpose is revealed in the end when Dante turns into an alebrije and guides Miguel back home. Ultimately, *Coco*

does a great job of capturing Mexican traditions, history and culture.

Because of this accurate representation, the movie-watching experience was specifically enriching.

Music - Kendall

Pixar

has a long history of distinguished music in films, most of which have won Oscars. Coco is no exception to this long legacy of brilliant films that are striking in their presentation and evolution. The beauty about a film like this is that despite the heavy influence music has, it is not an outright musical, and depicts authentic relationships and social structures. Music is treated almost as a character and not a genre, which made it much more of a tangible presence and not some obstructive archetype. Pixar assembled a talented team that held the cultural significance of a movie like this in high esteem and gave us something to cherish and learn from. In terms of building the world in which the film took place, music played an integral role. Composer Michael Giacchino had a very deliberate vision with what he wanted to communicate to the audience.

"I wanted you to watch the movie and feel like you were there. We wanted it to come from a place of home- Mexico." Giacchino sums up perfectly the intention of the film- by creating an authentic space that sounds like the real thing, as an audience we are drawn into that reality. Arguably more impressive than the message and sophistication of a film like this, are the musicians that brought it to life. Giacchino's score featured a whopping eighty-four piece orchestra, most of whom are Latin American, that played traditional Aztec percussion, bamboo flutes, and a myriad of guitar types from guitarron to vihuela. This specific team did a wonderful job in

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incorporating a diverse set of instruments and musicians to achieve Casting - Katarina Trifunovic As we discuss how the music is a crucial factor throughout *Coco*, the casting of the award nominated film is also an important topic, especially for the Latin community.

Coco had the first ever all Latino cast for a film and this has been such a great success for Latino communities all over the world. The director, Lee Unkrich, said himself that it was the plan all along. Unkrich, who has been on the Pixar creative team for quite some time, has had an interest in the *Día de los Muertos* holiday ever since he finished *Toy Story 3*. He explained, "I learned about how much of this holiday is about family and the obligation to remember our loved ones, and to pass their stories along and tell their stories to the next generation" (Unkrich, Lee, Deadline, 2017). Unkrich, who is a white male, clearly didn't know anything about the Mexican heritage and their culture, so he realized he needed to research and bring in people of Latin descent to help guide and inform him. To no surprise, he included an all Latino cast; some coming straight from Mexico and others were descendants of Latin ancestors who resided in Los Angeles. Of the all Latino cast, there were eight Latin Americans and seven Mexicans. Although not explained in an interviews with the director, we think that there was a fair split between how many actors were from America with Latin descent and others who were born in Mexico.

Some of the actors/actresses who were Latin American were actually of Puerto Rican and Salvadorian descent, like Alanna Ubach who played Mamá Imelda and Herbert Siguenza who played Tío Oscar / Tío Felipe. We believe that having the Latin American actors/actresses work with the Mexican

actors/actresses allowed each of them to learn from one another because some grew up with the Mexican heritage that is portrayed in *Coco* and others grew up in Los Angeles, which was a huge melting pot of cultures and still is. Originally, the lead, Anthony Gonzalez, who played "Miguel", was hired just to do a scratch track for the role. A scratch track is a temporary voice recording before an actual actor is cast. This is done to help the animators and storyboards come to life during the early phases of production. Gonzalez initially auditioned at nine years old, but now at 13 years old, we can see that those scratch recordings became something much greater. It was such a great accomplishment for Anthony because his family, "most of them aspiring musicians" (South China Morning Post, 2017), had always struggled to pay for the proper training for the children.

After Gonzalez received news that he was to be the lead role, it "totally changed their lives" (Baca, 2018). Casting an all Latino group was the "initiative from the beginning" (Lang, Cady, Time Magazine), but to our surprise, this was actually not the case. Ever since the first *Toy Story* came out in 1995, a white male actor, John Ratzenberger, has been casted in almost every Pixar movie since with very small acting roles. When Lee Unkrich was created *Coco*, he was faced with this challenge because he knew he wanted to keep it as an all Latino cast. Unkrich struggled to make the right decision but because he didn't want to break tradition, we can now see a small clip of Ratzenberger playing the character of "Juan Ortodoncia". We think that although Lee Unkrich decided to not break tradition and added John Ratzenberger to the cast of *Coco*, that the action to make the rest of the cast Latino was more important and powerful.

In the actual film, we see the main character, Miguel, struggling in the beginning because his family had him reciting traditions and asking him to follow them blindly. After some great discussion, we realized this was an example of The Banking Concept of Education because of the perpetuating ideologies that have been drilled into Miguel. The story of Miguel starts off with his family who have honed their perspective into Miguel, without giving him a chance to form his own ideas. They didn't allow him to be critical of what he was being taught. In Paulo Friere's chapter about "The Banking Concept of Education", he explains that it is a transaction where students have no knowledge and the teacher knows everything.

Instead, Friere wanted there to be more of a challenge and critical thinking between the teacher and student. He explained that students should have power in the classroom, and frankly, anywhere else. In *Coco*, Miguel was always told that family comes first and that music was bad. He was never encouraged to critically think about these concepts, therefore, this movie is representative of The Banking Concept of Education.