

Clatter Bash!

A Day of the Dead Celebration

by Richard Keep
Peachtree Publishers



Reviewed by
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Knock-knock!
Shhh! Huh? Rat-
tle-rattle ¿Qué?
Creak-crack, Up we
go! Big fiesta! Yay!”
Playful skeletons
prance and dance
across the pages as
fact and fancy tell

the story of El Día de Los Muertos, a Mexican holiday celebrating death. Now there’s a concept: celebrating death! But, in reading this book, we learn that El Día de Los Muertos is not a time to feel sad or afraid of death. It is a time for *familias* (families) to come together, share memories of past loved ones and celebrate the joy of being alive!

Bright, cut-paper illustrations show the traditions of this holiday, from the arrival, at sunset, of the families at the graveyard to decorate with marigolds ... to stories, feasting and dancing under the stars ... and, finally, the clean-up and quiet *tumbas* as dawn brings an end to the fiesta. Skeletons skedaddle across every page, but they are such fun-loving specters that there is nothing scary about them as they chase butterflies (symbolizing the souls of the departed) or join in the mariachi band.

The story of the celebration is told through pictures, with sparse text on the bottom of each two-page spread. A section in the back of the book explains the meaning of symbols that appear throughout: *pan de muertos*, *papel picado* and *ofrendas* in honor of the memory of beloved friends and family who have died. After reading this book, it is easier to understand how El Día de Los Muertos helps families incorporate the inevitability of death into the life of the living. Nothing is morbid or disrespectful—the

noisy fun is balanced with quiet respect. As sleepy partygoers return home, they know that the dead are not forgotten and that they will be able to revisit them again next November 1.

The text only hints at what is happening as the story unfolds, and a delightful bonus is that Spanish words are mixed in with English in such a way that the meaning of every word is clear for speakers of either language. Onomatopoeia extends the wordplay and encourages expressive reading. The rhyming text is based on an eight-beat phrase structure and offers opportunities for echo clapping ... and for creating new rhythmic pat-

terns by rearranging words or creating new ones.

Clatter Bash! is a wonderful way to inform children about a Mexican holiday that contrasts with the American celebration of Halloween. It honors the language of Spanish speakers in the classroom while engaging all students in rhythmic word play. And the spirits of the dead that dance across these pages will help children begin to process a concept that is often cloaked in anxiety. Mortality is a little less scary after reading about playful skeletons who return to their graves with a “Wink-blink, Yawn ... Snore ... ¡Adiós! Goodbye!”

