

DIA DE MUERTOS POETRY CONTEST 2026

Día de Muertos at UBC

Organized by:

Mexican Student Association of UBC

Mexican Business Association of Canada

Consulate General of Mexico in Vancouver

In celebration of **Día de Muertos**, which will take place on **November 2, 2026, from 17:00 to 19:00 at The Nest AMS, University of British Columbia**, members of the public residing in Metro Vancouver are invited to participate in the **2026 Día de Muertos Poetry Contest**.

The contest seeks to celebrate and share one of the most characteristic literary expressions of Mexican tradition: the **calaverita literaria**, while also encouraging creativity, humor, satire, and cultural exchange among the communities of Metro Vancouver.

1. What is a calaverita literaria?

A calaverita literaria is a traditional Mexican composition written in verse, generally humorous, satirical, and irreverent in tone, in which Death is personified and interacts with people, characters, institutions, or situations from everyday life.

Calaveritas often imaginatively portray encounters between Death and their protagonists with wit and humor. Although the tradition commonly uses rhyme and meter, for this contest both meter and rhyme structure are free.

A calaverita literaria is not simply a poem about death. It should retain the playful, satirical, and creative character that defines this Mexican tradition.

1A. A short guide for English-speaking participants

For readers who are new to the tradition, it can be helpful to think of a calaverita literaria as a playful mock epitaph or miniature comic story in verse. Its subject is often still alive. Rather than mourning that person, institution, or situation, the poem imagines Death arriving to meet, chase, bargain with, outsmart, punish, recruit, or otherwise interact with the subject.

A simple way to build one is:

- Choose a recognizable person, institution, habit, profession, object, or everyday situation.
- Identify a trait, habit, contradiction, or situation that can be treated humorously or satirically.
- Bring Death into the poem as an active character. Death should do something, want something, say something, or cause the situation to change.
- Develop a short narrative or comic progression: setup, encounter with Death, and a witty or

unexpected ending.

- Use rhyme, rhythm, wordplay, repetition, or irony if they help the poem, but English-language entries do not need to imitate Spanish rhyme patterns.
- Keep the tone playful, clever, and irreverent rather than solemn. **The purpose is to joke with the idea of mortality**, not simply to write a serious poem about death.

Example:

“Death came strolling through Gastown one rainy night,
Her umbrella broken, her skull shining bright.
She hopped on the SkyTrain, heading downtown,
But missed her stop twice while chasing a clown.

At English Bay she sat down for a rest,
Complaining that Vancouver rent was a test.
She searched for a condo, but screamed at the price,
“Even the underworld looks rather nice!”

She climbed Grouse Mountain to look for a soul,
Then slipped on the rain and rolled down the whole.
So Death left Vancouver, defeated but glad:
“Too wet, too expensive, I’ll come back when I’m mad!”

Published English-language example

A published example appears in the November 2012 *Calaveras y Ofrendas* issue of *La Voz de Esperanza*, a publication of the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center in San Antonio, Texas. The issue contains literary calaveras in both Spanish and English. One English-language calavera, “Hays St. Bridge Calavera,” (page 23) personifies Death as a character looking for a bridge and uses that encounter to build satire around a local situation.

Transcription:

“*Calacas*, the purveyor of death
Surveyed her world of the dead.
“I need more cadavers,” she said
As she slowly drew a deep breath.

A bridge to the underworld, she thought
Would certainly increase the population
And beautify this god awful infernal nation
Whose byways with obstacles are fraught.

Lady Death looked for *un puente*
Something historic, sturdy and old.
There was one close by she was told
That no longer was to serve *la gente*.

A bridge gifted to San Anto, our city
Paid for with our people’s money
With land for a park given for free!
But for the public it’s not to be.

Our city council in all of its wisdom
Is turning it over for a micro-brewery
In spite of protests, petitions and fury
They're giving it all to a high roller bum.

La Katrina declared, "It's perfect!"
—A bridge and council cadavers, to boot!
She took them off to the kingdom of soot
—A consequence of a lack of respect."

This brief passage shows several characteristic elements of the form: Death acts as a character with a purpose, the poem immediately creates a comic narrative situation, and English can naturally coexist with Mexican cultural vocabulary. **Participants should use published examples only to understand the genre and must not copy or adapt them for their own submissions.**

Source of published excerpt:

La Voz de Esperanza, "*Calaveras y Ofrendas 2012*," November 2012, Vol. 25, Issue 9, Esperanza Peace & Justice Center, San Antonio, Texas. Online reproduction:

<https://studylib.net/doc/8841606/calaveras-y-ofrendas-2012-calaveras-y-ofrendas-2012>

Additional background references used for this explanatory section:

Smithsonian Magazine / National Museum of the American Latino, "*Literary Calaveras*," October 23, 2018:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/smithsonian-latino-center/2018/10/23/literary-calaveras/>

Hallmark Ideas & Inspiration, "*How to write literary calaveras for Día de Muertos*," September 11, 2024:

<https://ideas.hallmark.com/articles/fall-ideas/how-to-write-literary-calaveras-for-dia-de-muertos/>

2. Participants

The contest is open to members of the public residing in Metro Vancouver, regardless of nationality.

Participation is free of charge.

Each participant may submit **only one** calaverita.

3. Languages

Entries may be submitted in:

- Spanish, or
- English

Entries in both languages will compete within one general category and for the same three prizes.

The jury will be bilingual.

Calaveritas written in English may freely adapt the linguistic resources of the Mexican tradition and are not required to reproduce rhyme structures typical of Spanish. However, they must preserve the essential spirit of the calaverita literaria: wit, humor or satire, and the personification of Death.

4. Theme and characteristics of the work

The theme is open.

Entries must meet the following requirements:

- Be written in verse.
- Be between 4 and 16 lines in length.
- Use free meter and rhyme.
- Maintain a humorous, satirical, witty, or irreverent tone.
- Include personified Death as a character or active element in the composition.
- Be original and unpublished.

Calaveritas may refer to real people or institutions, including public figures, professors, historical figures, universities, companies, organizations, or situations from everyday life.

Satire is a fundamental part of this tradition; however, content that constitutes discrimination, threats, harassment, personal attacks, sexually explicit content, or expressions intended to humiliate or degrade a person or group on the basis of personal characteristics will not be accepted.

5. Originality and use of artificial intelligence

Entries must be original, unpublished, and written entirely by the participant.

The use of ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or any other generative artificial intelligence tool to draft, rewrite, or generate all or part of the calaverita is not permitted.

The organizers and jury will use automated artificial intelligence detectors as an additional criterion when assessing the authorship of a work.

Each participant must include the following declaration in the submission email:

"I declare that the submitted work is original, unpublished, and my own authorship, and that it was not written, generated, or rewritten, in whole or in part, using generative artificial intelligence tools."

Failure to comply with this provision may result in disqualification.

6. Submission period

Entries may be submitted beginning:

October 20, 2026

and until:

October 31, 2026, at 23:59 Pacific Time.

Entries received after the deadline will not be accepted.

7. Submission of entries

Calaveritas must be submitted by email to:

diademuertoscana@gmail.com

Subject line:

Literary Calaverita 2026 - [Title of the Work]

The email must include:

- Participant's full name.
- City of residence.
- Contact email address.
- Title of the calaverita.
- Language of the work.
- Full text of the calaverita.
- The authorship declaration established in these rules.

The organizers will assign an identification code to each entry and remove all personal information before sending it to the jury.

The jury will evaluate only anonymized versions of the entries.

8. Jury

The jury will be composed of bilingual members affiliated with:

- **Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia (STIBC)**
- **Organizing committee (Mexsa/MexBAC)**

Entries will be presented to the jury anonymously.

If a jury member identifies the author of an entry or has a direct conflict of interest, that jury member must abstain from evaluating the work.

The jury's decision will be final and not subject to appeal.

9. Evaluation criteria

Each entry may receive a maximum of **100 points**, distributed as follows:

Adherence to the spirit of the calaverita literaria: 30 points

Creative use of the personification of Death and understanding of the tradition.

Originality and creativity: 25 points

Originality of the idea, approach, and situations presented.

Wit, humor, and satire: 20 points

Effectiveness of humor, irony, wordplay, or satire.

Literary quality: 15 points

Use of language, construction of the lines, rhythm, and internal coherence.

Overall impact: 10 points

The work's ability to surprise, entertain, and remain memorable to the reader or audience.

Works in Spanish and English will be evaluated according to the resources and possibilities of each language.

10. Prizes

Three prizes will be awarded:

First place: CAD \$200

Second place: CAD \$150

Third place: CAD \$100

Prizes may be awarded in the form of **gift cards or cash** via e-transfer, as determined by the organizing committee.

11. Award ceremony

The results will be announced during the Día de Muertos at UBC celebration on:

November 2, 2026

17:00-19:00

The Nest AMS

University of British Columbia

Attendance at the event is required in order to receive a prize.

The winning poems (*calaveritas*) may be read during the celebration by their authors, if they wish to do so, or by the contest's host.

12. Copyright and dissemination

Participants will retain copyright in their works at all times.

By participating in the contest, participants authorize the organizers to reproduce, publish, project, or read selected and winning works, with appropriate credit to the author, exclusively for cultural, educational, promotional, or dissemination purposes related to the contest and the Día de Muertos celebration.

This authorization is non-exclusive and does not constitute a transfer of copyright.

13. Disqualification

Entries may be disqualified if they:

- Do not comply with the required length.
- Do not correspond to the format of a calaverita literaria.
- Have been previously published.
- Constitute total or partial plagiarism.
- Have been generated or rewritten using generative artificial intelligence.
- Include discrimination, threats, harassment, personal attacks, or sexually explicit content.
- Are submitted after the deadline.
- Fail to comply with any of the provisions established in these rules.

14. Acceptance of the rules

Participation in the contest implies full acceptance of these rules.

Any situation not addressed in these rules will be resolved by the organizing committee of the 2026 Literary Calaveritas Contest.