

HOLA!

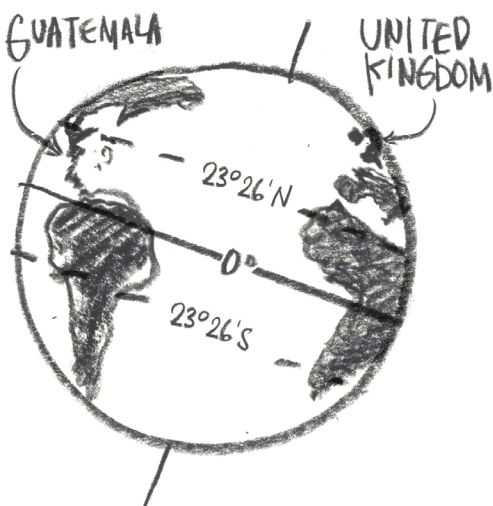


My name is **Elena Arevalo Melville** and I am an author and illustrator of children's books.

Autumn is here and it is my favourite season living in a temperate region. I love to see the leaves changing colours. Not every part of the world has such an obvious Autumn.

In some places, like **Guatemala** where I grew up, leaves stay mostly green all year round. There are other more prominent climate patterns and cycles over there; however some patterns and rhythms are universal. The moon waxes and wanes, day follows night, and everyone and everything living eventually dies.

Where you are in the world shapes everything. Not only the *geographical* where but the *cultural* where shapes you too. It shapes how you feel about birth and death and everything in between.



Death is not a taboo in Latin America. In fact there are very special days that celebrate it in early November.

The Day of the Dead takes many forms but at its heart there is the wish to connect with one's ancestors. In Guatemala there are many traditions around this day: a special meal called *Fiambre* (a salad of cured meats and pickled vegetables) is prepared at length and eaten only on this day; bright colour tissue paper kites are flown to send messages to the dead, some of them gigantic; there are towns where cemeteries are repainted in vibrant colours and places where candles are lit and families share meals around graves covered with fresh flowers. We put aside that day "to **be with** our dead", even if this is mostly imagined.

When someone you love dies, it is very, very sad, because they will miss out on all futures and you will miss them. Who gets to participate in the rituals surrounding this moment will be very different depending on your culture. Not every part of the world has such an obvious Death.

Remembering and talking about your dead is a beautiful way to relate to them when you are ready to do so. **Death requires tenderness.**

Traditions rely on large numbers of people collaborating, when you migrate you must adapt, and adopt the bits you can, the parts that are essential to you.

It was not until my mum died that I felt the need to bring the **Day of the Dead** part of my culture into our home in England. It is now important for me to remember my mum and other loved ones, and for my children to know about them. But, in the UK I wouldn't be able to recreate by myself the vast array of ways in which this day is celebrated in Guatemala, or any other important collective date. So in a way I had to invent my own version, one that sits in harmony with an English Autumn day.



For me, it is a day when my **family makes time to think about our loved ones** who are no longer with us. Around the 2nd of November, we gather photos of all those who we dearly miss, who were part of our lives once (and they are still part of our lives in that we remember them) and we place them on a table with a colourful tablecloth and decorate it with bright flower heads. The ritual is in collecting the parts and finding a good quiet moment to sit together around this table and talk about these people that were once amongst us. It is an intimate family moment.

Why not celebrate your own Day of the Dead?

As we see nature go to sleep, gather itself deep into the ground and prepare to see the winter through, take the time to appreciate the ways in which your family creates and continues rituals that connect you to others here, living and dead. **Make time to remember.**

Enjoy the changing world around you, the brightly coloured leaves before they fall and the expansive skies once the trees are bare. However and whatever you celebrate, I wish you a beautiful end of the year!

ELENA AREVALO MELVILLE

