A Trip to Pilsen
Amaleia Chronopoulos—Reflection

It all started with a town full of history and a group of 7th grade students, anxious to learn its deep culture. One of these students, in fact, was myself. Between the amazing food to the museum exhibit of Día de los Muertos, this exciting field trip was a small window into a different world. If I could go back, I gladly would.

One of my favorite things about this trip was the amazing lunch, which took place at Los Comales. We had our choice of chicken or pork tacos or burritos, all of which came with a side of traditional cooked rice and refried beans. To drink, we had a choice of water, soda or horchata, a traditional drink made of sweet rice water and cinnamon. I chose the tacos de pollo (the chicken tacos), which ultimately was the right choice. They were DELICIOSO! I also chose the horchata, which was a great addition to the slightly spicy dish.

The next part of the trip was even better than the last—visiting the museum exhibit of Día de los Muertos, also known as Day of the Dead. We first walked through the National Museum of Mexican Art, admiring all of the beautiful exhibits: paintings, pictures, portraits, altars—all dedicated to loved ones or important role models who had passed. One of my favorites of these was a small enclosed room showered in black light, walls painted in neon colors of people of the past. Among the people sat hearts, stars and foods, commemorating the ancestors.

After we toured the great museum, it was time for us to take part in the tradition. Our group gathered in the art room, where we proceeded to paint small plaster tiles representing the holiday. Some chose to paint skeletons, some landscapes, but some (including myself) chose to paint and design marigold flowers. Marigold flowers are the official symbol for the Día de los Muertos event, as they are traditionally included in every altar, for a few reasons. One reason is that it is thought that the beautiful scent from these flowers will lead souls to their families. Another is that the marigold symbolizes the fragility and simplicity of life. Either way, I think we can all agree that the marigold flower is a beautiful addition to a Día de los Muertos altar.

Once we left the museum, it was decided that we would go and see some local murals representing more of the culture. Some were dedicated to stopping gun violence, some paintings portrayed myths or legends, but one, in particular, caught my eye. It was a painting of a man, a skull portrayed on his
face. His body was covered by what appeared to be barbed wire fencing, and his blue overalls faded into a raging sea. He looked somehow a mix of sad and distraught, half of his face covered by a billed hat. This huge mural was painted on the side of a house, and, put simply, it was breathtaking. We learned it was representing people migrating to America. The skull on his face represented the people who had died trying to immigrate here, and the fence showed the hardships of getting into our country. The fence also showed that even if you began life here, you may face some hardships like racism and discrimination and never quite feel as though you belong.

All in all, traveling to Pilsen was a truly amazing experience like no other. Between the breathtaking artwork and sense of community in the town, it truly was an incredible trip.