



CULTURE GUIDE

# MEXICO

SERIES 1  
PRIMARY (K-6)



DAVID M.  
KENNEDY CENTER  
FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

# MEXICO CULTUREGUIDE

This unit is published by the Intercultural Outreach Program of the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University as part of an effort to foster open cultural exchange within the educational community and to promote increased global understanding by providing meaningful cultural education tools.

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# WHY STUDY CULTURES?

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For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulous, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we're studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established Intercultural Outreach<sup>2</sup> as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 gratis cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. *CultureGuides* derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty eMACs, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

*CultureGuides* share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try to “make culture real.”<sup>3</sup> Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that *CultureGuides* will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

<sup>1</sup> Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon. *Introducing Cultural Studies*, Totem Books, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The program was originally called International Outreach when it was established in 1982, but it was renamed Intercultural Outreach in 2006 to better reflect its aims.

<sup>3</sup> *The Edge: The E-Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Summer 1998, Vol. 1(3) Posted 10/11/98, <http://interculturalrelations.com/v1i3Summer1998/sum98sorrellshall.htm>.

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# TRADITIONS

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## DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

One of the most important parts of Mexican culture is its intense focus on the past. Mexico has a very rich history that both has shaped and continues to shape its culture today. *Día de los Muertos* [dee-yah day lohs mwair-tohs] (Day of the Dead) is one holiday that shows the emphasis Mexicans place on the family and remembering the past. It also has European and indigenous Mexican characteristics, a dual trait that is typical of many festivals in Mexico and that results from Mexico's diverse history. Studying the history and holidays of Mexico helps build a better understanding of the present-day country and its culture.



### Starting Points

1. What do you know about your country's origins? Mexico is very focused on its past, and Mexicans are almost obsessed with their origins. They are so focused on their past that when a large downtown section of Mexico City was under construction in the 1970s and workers found historical artifacts at the site, construction was stopped to excavate the findings. The past is a central part of Mexican life.
2. Are there holidays in your culture that are actually a mixture of different cultural traditions? *Día de los Muertos* is a festival that has a very old origin and represents a mixture of Catholic and indigenous Mexican rituals. Ancient rituals of the dead existed in Mexico before the Europeans ever came, and those rituals changed to incorporate European traditions when the Spaniards arrived.
3. Does your culture have festivals to remind people of the past or to honor the dead? *Día de los Muertos* is one of the biggest festivals in Mexican society. One of the reasons this festival is so popular in Mexico is the great importance its society places on its past.



### Information

Mexico is a country that is very interested in its past. Indigenous Mexican groups like the Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs have inhabited Mexico for thousands of years. They saw the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and they continue to live in Mexico today. Mexico's present has been greatly affected by its past; many aspects of today's culture are a product of the mixing of ancient and more modern societies. In fact, most of Mexico's holidays and festivals are a mixture of Catholic and indigenous traditions. One of Mexico's biggest and most important national holidays is *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead. This holiday has its roots in ancient Mexican society and incorporates aspects of European tradition as well.

### Ancient Origins

The basis of this holiday comes from various Aztec beliefs. The Aztecs were very interested in death and rebirth. They believed that time was cyclical and that it

always repeated itself. One example of this belief is seen in their calendar, which was round and repeated every fifty-two years (see **Traditions Visuals 1 and 2**). Aztecs believed that because of the cyclical nature of time, their ancestors and loved ones who had passed away would return to visit them during their festival of the dead.

Death was not the end of existence in Aztec culture, but instead it was just another step in life. Many Aztec rituals revolved around death and often included human sacrifices. Death was the necessary passage into the afterworld where the Aztecs hoped to inherit a paradisiacal existence. Because they did not fear death, the Aztecs used the festival of the dead as an opportunity to celebrate. It was even seen as an opportunity to make light of death.

### **Arrival of the Spanish**

In 1519, Hernán(do) Cortés [err-nahn(doe) core-tess] of Spain arrived in Mexico and traveled to Mexico City, the Aztec capital. By 1521, Cortés had conquered the Aztecs, and Spain took over as the ruling organization. Shortly after the Spanish military conquest, a new form of conquest began. Catholic priests accompanied the conquistadors and tried to Christianize the newly conquered Aztecs, although it proved hard to completely convert them to Christianity and replace their old rituals and ceremonies.

Because the Catholic priests (see **Traditions Visual 3**) could not completely destroy the Aztec Day of the Dead, they decided to combine it with a Christian holiday. The priests merged the Aztec practices with the Catholic rituals of All Hallows' Eve and All Hallows' or All Saints' Day, which encouraged the indigenous people to more readily accept Christianity. This is just one example of the many combinations of European and indigenous cultures.

Since the time these Old and New World cultures were combined, Día de los Muertos has been celebrated on 1 and 2 November. These days in modern Mexico have many activities, most of which still remind Mexicans of the dead and the return of their ancestors.

### **Modern Customs**

Día de los Muertos focuses on the family and the Aztec belief that ancestors will return to visit their loved ones on this night. In order to receive them well and show them love and respect, Mexicans usually visit the cemeteries where their family members have been buried. They clean the graves and place flowers all around the headstones. Sometimes they also place old photographs of their family members near their graves to remember them better. Even though they are separated by death, families believe they are still united and will be together again someday.

At home the celebrations continue where many families build an altar or shrine to their ancestors (see **Traditions Visual 4**). It is believed that when the ancestors return, they will be hungry, so favorite foods and drinks are placed around the altar along with more flowers and lots of candles. People also dress up as skeletons or wear skeleton masks during Día de los Muertos.

One of the typical foods prepared as part of Día de los Muertos is *pan de muerto* [pahn day mwair-toh], or bread of the dead (see **Traditions Visual 5 and 6**). This festive bread is made into a shape that represents a skull and crossbones. Family

members all eat some of the bread, and they also offer it to their ancestors. Candy skulls are another favorite treat during this holiday. Colorful candy skulls are made in lots of different shapes and sizes. The eating of these emblems of death represents that Mexicans do not fear death.

Day of the Dead, though not very well known outside of Mexico, is an excellent example of the mixture of ancient and modern cultures. It is a very important and colorful holiday and a wonderful example of the diverse culture that exists in Mexico.



### Activities

1. Write a list of food or other items that you would leave for an ancestor. Why would you choose these particular foods and items? Would your list change if you were focusing on a different ancestor?
2. What kinds of things would you include in a memorial to a deceased relative? Draw a picture of your own shrine to an ancestor.
3. In groups of three or four, discuss the activities that you and your family do to remember your ancestors.
4. Make your own candy skull or pan de muerto. Recipes and directions for candy skulls can be found in **Additional Resources**. Pan de muerto can be made from any type of bread dough, but don't forget to shape it into a skull and crossbones.
5. Make your own skeleton mask out of paper, string, and crayons. Decorate it according to how you think it should look if you were to wear it for the holiday in Mexico. Use **Traditions Visual 7** as a template.



### Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the most important holidays in your culture? Why are these holidays so important?
2. Is there any holiday similar to Día de los Muertos in your culture? How do you celebrate it?
3. What does your family do to remember the dead?
4. How does remembering the dead honor them? Do people in Mexico and the United States view death in the same way? Which way makes more sense to you? Which way shows greater respect for the dead? Why?
5. Are there holidays in your culture that are a mixture of different traditions and cultures? If so, what are they? Which cultures do they come from?
6. How does Día de los Muertos help people overcome their fear of death? Do you think this is a positive thing? Why or why not?

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# FOLKLORE & LANGUAGE

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## TENOCHTITLÁN AND THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

The legends of Mexico, like the legends of other countries, embody cultural values and ideas. Many Mexican legends come from the ancient civilizations of Mexico's past; others come from more recent times, such as those related to Catholicism. Two important legends are those of Tenochtitlán [ten-oh-cheet-lahn] and the Virgin of Guadalupe [gwad-ah-loop-ay].



### Starting Points

1. Did you know Egypt is not the only place with pyramids? Thousands of years ago, the ancestors of many modern-day Mexicans built great cities in the Americas with huge pyramids (see **Folklore & Language Visual 1**). The stories of the ancient people who built the pyramids continue to be told today as the Mexican people remember their past.
2. Do you know what the colors of your country's flag symbolize? Find a collection of the world's flags (see **Additional Resources**). Can you find the Mexican flag? Which flags are similar to Mexico's flag? Do the same colors symbolize the same things on different flags? On the Mexican flag, not only its color has meaning, but its emblem does, too.
3. Why do we like to remember our ancestors? Do you ever hear stories about your grandparents or great grandparents? Share some stories with the class. Stories are important to the Mexican people because they help explain why things are the way they are.



### Information

#### Legends

Legends are stories that are passed from generation to generation by storytellers. Since they are not usually written down, many different versions of the legend arise over time. The native people that lived in Mexico during ancient times had many legends that explained how certain things came to be, such as aspects of nature or the creation of the world. Through learning and telling these stories, Mexicans preserve their history and remember their heritage.

#### The Legend of Tenochtitlán

One important legend in Mexican culture is depicted by the emblem on the national flag (see **Flag of Mexico**). This emblem represents the story of founding the capital of the Aztec empire by the ancient Aztec people.

Many years ago there was an ancient tribe called the Aztecs that lived in northern Mexico. They did not fit in with the other tribes and longed to live in a land they could call their own. The main god of the Aztecs was named Huitzilopchtli

[weet-see-loh-pech-tah-lee]. One day Huitzilopchtli revealed to the tribe a place where they could live in peace. He showed them a vision of a big lake, and there was an island in the middle with a prickly pear cactus growing on it. An eagle was perched on top of the cactus with a live snake in its mouth. Huitzilopchtli told the Aztecs that in order to live in peace, they would have to find the island that he had shown them.

After many years of wandering, the Aztecs found the place from the vision. On a small, swampy island in Lake Texcoco [teks-co-co], they saw an eagle with a snake in its mouth perched on a prickly pear cactus. The Aztecs built a great city in this place and named it Tenochtitlán, which means “The Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus.”

Tenochtitlán was the capital city of the Aztec empire for hundreds of years until it was conquered by Hernán Cortéz and his men in the sixteenth century. Although the new settlers destroyed Tenochtitlán, a new city was built on top of it (**see Folklore & Language Visual 2**). This city is Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, and it has become one of the largest cities in the world.

### **Symbols of the Mexican Flag**

To celebrate the founding of Tenochtitlán, the Mexican flag bears an emblem symbolizing the vision Huitzilopchtli showed to the Aztecs. The colors in the Mexican flag are also symbolic. Green represents hope; white represents purity, honesty, and unity; and red represents parenthood and the blood of national heroes.

### **The Legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe**

Today, Roman Catholicism is the prominent religion in Mexico. While most Catholics believe that one should worship only God, most Mexican Catholics worship and pray to the Virgin Mary as well. She is considered to be the “mother of Mexico.” The story of Mary’s first appearance, a vision given to a poor native farmer, has become a symbol of Mary’s love and compassion for the Mexican people.

On 12 December 1531, an Aztec farmer named Juan Diego was walking near Mexico City where an ancient Aztec temple dedicated to the earth goddess Tonantzín [tone-ant-seen] once existed. Suddenly, he saw a vision of a beautiful woman with both Aztec and Spanish features; she was the Virgin Mary (**see Folklore & Language Visual 3**). She directed him to go to Mexico City to tell church officials to build a church in her name. Juan Diego followed her instructions, but the church officials did not believe that the Virgin Mary had appeared to the lowly farmer. They asked for proof that the miracle actually happened.

Juan Diego returned to the hillside, and when the Virgin appeared again, he asked her for a sign. Even though roses do not naturally bloom in central Mexico during December, beautiful red roses miraculously bloomed before Juan Diego’s eyes. He gathered them into his rough *tilma* [teal-mah], or blanket, and took them to Mexico City. When he opened his tilma for the church officials, they fell to their knees in amazement. There, imprinted on the humble blanket of Juan Diego, was the image of the Virgin Mary, exactly as Juan Diego had seen her (**see Folklore & Language Visual 4**). It is said that this image was so perfect and detailed that the reflection of Juan Diego could be seen in the eyes of the Virgin. Because the Virgin was seen by an Aztec and because her features are *mestizo* [meh-stee-so], or mixed race, she symbolizes the union of indigenous and Catholic beliefs.



## Activities

1. Play a game of telephone. Sit in a circle, and have someone start the game by whispering a short sentence to the person next to him or her. Pass the message around the circle until it reaches the last person. Have the last person repeat what was whispered in his or her ear to the whole circle. Then have the person who started the game repeat the sentence that he or she began the game with. How has the message changed by the time it reached the end? Discuss how this activity represents the way legends change as they are passed on orally.
2. Make your own miniature Mexican flag (**see Folklore & Language Visual 5**). You will need some popsicle sticks (6–8 inches long), scissors, glue, and crayons or markers. Color the flag. Make sure the order of the colors is correct. (Green is closest to the glue space). Cut out the flag along the dotted lines. Cover the glue space lightly with glue and carefully and evenly wrap it around one end of a popsicle stick. Hold the paper and popsicle stick tightly until the glue is dry.
3. Practice saying the names of the Aztec people and places in the legend of Tenochtitlán and the Virgin of Guadalupe (**see Folklore & Language Visual 6**). While the official language of Mexico is Spanish, many indigenous languages still survive today (one surviving Aztec language is called Nahuatl [nah-wah-tahl]). Look at a map of Mexico (**see Map of Mexico**), and see if you can guess which city names are Spanish and which are Aztec.
4. Draw a picture of the Virgin Mary just as you think the picture on the inside of Juan Diego's blanket would have looked. Imagine what it would be like to travel a long way just to see that picture.
5. Write your own legends about how something came to be. For example, write about how the camel got its hump or how a large body of water was formed (e.g., how the Great Salt Lake became salty, how the Mississippi River became so wide, or how San Francisco Bay got its shape). Then design a flag based on your legend.



## Discussion Questions

1. What are some legends you know? How do they help explain events?
2. What are some reasons people pass legends on from generation to generation? How do these stories affect us today?
3. Do you believe the legends of Tenochtitlán and the Virgin of Guadalupe? Why or why not? Have you ever heard different versions of these stories?
4. Are legends completely true, completely false, or something in between? Why is it important to understand that legends can never be proven true or false? What can we do or say if we don't believe a story is true, but we know that someone else believes it is true?
5. Like the Mexican flag, most countries' flags display symbolic colors or pictures. Why do you think this is so? What does your country's flag represent?
6. Can we learn from legends even if we don't believe them? How?

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# FOOD

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## THE FLAVOR OF MEXICO

Mexicans take pride in the freshness and variety of their foods. Foods such as *chile* [chee-lay] sauce and salsa are known for their vivid colors and strong flavors that come from the chile pepper. These foods are a reflection of the liveliness and diversity of the Mexican culture.



### Starting Points

1. What food do you usually associate with tortilla chips? Salsa, of course! The best and most authentic salsa is homemade. In Mexican cuisine, salsa is extremely common—not only because it uses so many local ingredients, like chile peppers and tomatoes, but because its vivid flavor appeals to the liveliness of the Mexican people (see **Food Visual 1**).
2. Looking at what people eat can often help us understand many things about their culture and even about their personality. What is your favorite dessert? Why? What do you think this tells about your personality? For most Mexicans, salsa is not only a favorite food, but it also reflects Mexican culture and personality.
3. Food can often help show what people value. What kinds of food in the United States show what American culture values? How can you tell? Salsa is a great example of Mexican culture because it uses ingredients uniquely popular in Mexico.



### Information

#### Mexican Food and Culture

Mexican food comes in all varieties—it ranges from seafood to desert lizard! Culinary skills are something that Mexicans take great pride in. Many Mexican women dedicate hours of their day to the preparation of the evening or afternoon meal (see **Food Visual 2**). Mexican food is known for its tendency to burn your mouth, as well as for being colorful and flavorful. Meals are made from fresh ingredients that are bought daily from the local market. Rarely, if ever, will a Mexican household serve a prepackaged or microwaved meal.

#### Staple Foods and the Pepper

To understand the Mexican culture, one must understand Mexican foods. Mexicans pride themselves on the freshness and diversity of the food they offer. Some staple foods in Mexico include rice, beans, tortillas, beef, and chicken (see **Food Visual 3**). These foods can be served in many different ways, and their flavor varies according to the cook.

A unique flavor that is present in the majority of Mexican dishes is the spicy, hot taste of the chile pepper. From the basic tortilla to more complex dishes, the pepper, or chile, is a time-honored ingredient in almost all meals.

Many traditional dishes include hot peppers as the key ingredient. If a dish does not include fiery spices, it is likely to be served with a spicy salsa as a topping or garnish. The pepper is a hot, aromatic plant that can be used fresh, cooked, or dried in a variety of dishes. Peppers were used hundreds of years ago by the indigenous people that inhabited what is now Mexico. Because it is relatively easy to grow and has a distinct flavor, the pepper has become a favorite seasoning for all types of Mexican dishes. Its hot, stinging sensation comes from the oil in the pepper's seeds. Different varieties of the pepper are used throughout Mexico according to the region. The southern states enjoy hot, spicy peppers in great quantities, while the northern states prefer milder peppers.

### **Salsa**

The most common way Mexican women use the pepper in everyday meals is in salsa. There are many different types of salsa, and most of them have peppers as the key ingredient. Each salsa is made to accompany certain foods and traditional dishes. Some salsas include a variety of ingredients with complex preparation. Simpler salsas are made with fewer ingredients and accompany a wider variety of meals or snacks. The most common salsa is made with three ingredients: tomato, pepper, and garlic. Additional varieties of peppers, onions, and lime juice can be added as well. Traditionally, a stone bowl called a *molcajete* [mole-kah-hey-tey] is used to grind the ingredients together, but a blender or food processor can be used as a substitute.

### **Recipe for Salsa**

#### **Ingredients:**

4–6 serrano peppers  
4–6 roma tomatoes

2 garlic cloves  
pinch of salt

#### **Preparation**

*Note: You may want to use rubber gloves when handling peppers to keep the spicy oil from burning your hands or eyes. This can happen if you have sensitive skin or if you touch your eyes after touching the peppers.*

1. Set oven to broil.
2. Place peppers in pan and toast in oven. Turn after five minutes. Repeat until skins are slightly black. Remove from oven. Peel off pepper skins. Set peppers aside.
3. Repeat step two for tomatoes. Adjust turning time to every two minutes. Set tomatoes aside.
4. Crush garlic in molcajete or blender. If using a blender, all ingredients can be put in the blender at the same time.
5. Add peppers and blend with garlic.
6. Add tomatoes and blend all ingredients together until mixed into a pulp.

Yield: 4–6 servings

### **Flautas**

Another traditional Mexican dish that has become popular throughout the United States is *flauta* [fla-oo-tah]. The word flauta means “flute” in Spanish, so it is no surprise that these taco-like delicacies are long, skinny, and round like the instrument for which they are named. Flautas are made from corn tortillas filled with chicken or

beef. They are rolled, deep-fried, and usually topped with a type of salsa called *guacamole* [wah-kah-mole-lay], which is a creamy blend of avocados, tomatoes, and seasonings.

### Recipe for Flautas

#### Ingredients:

4 avocados	corn tortillas
2–3 tomatoes, diced	enough vegetable oil to coat pan
diced onions	1 head lettuce
cilantro, finely chopped	sour cream
1 whole chicken	sliced tomatoes
4–5 potatoes	

#### Preparation

1. Mash avocados until pasty.
2. Add diced tomatoes and onions to avocados. Use as many as you like.
3. Mix in a pinch of cilantro. Set this guacamole mixture aside.
4. Boil chicken for 30 minutes.
5. Skin and de-bone chicken. Cut chicken into bite-size pieces. Set aside.
6. Boil potatoes at least 20 minutes. Peel and cut into bite-size pieces.
7. Spoon pieces of chicken and potatoes into the center of each tortilla. Roll tortilla around the filling and secure the tortilla with a toothpick through the center.
8. Over medium heat, fry tortillas in frying pan until crispy. Drain grease.
9. Place cooked flautas on a plate and cover with shredded lettuce and guacamole. Garnish with sour cream and sliced tomatoes.

Yield: 4–6 servings



#### Activities

1. Make salsa and eat it with chips or tortillas. If time permits, try making flautas. Find other traditional Mexican recipes to make and share them with the class.
2. Complete the Flavor of Mexico word search (see **Food Visual 4**).
3. As a class, make two lists: one list of traditional Mexican dishes and another of traditional American dishes. Discuss the similarities and differences between the dishes in regard to flavor, ingredients, appearance, and preparation time.
4. Read the book *Mexican Food and Drink*, which is about Mexican food and its origins and varieties (see **Additional Resources**). Answer questions found in **Food Visual 5**.
5. Read the book *Mexican Food and Drink* as a class. Discuss the influences that make Mexican cuisine so varied. What are some specific influences from other cultures that are apparent in Mexican cuisine? What does Mexican cuisine reveal about the lifestyle of the Mexican people?



## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Mexicans enjoy the foods they do? Are any of your favorite foods from Mexico?
2. What aspects of eating (e.g., preparation, consumption, etc.) are affected by culture? Why?
3. Why is salsa a good food to use as an example when talking about Mexican culture? What role does it play in Mexican culture? Why do you think Mexicans eat it so often?
4. What are some differences between Mexican food and the food eaten in the United States? What are some similarities? Why do you think each of these similarities and differences exist?
5. Why do you think that most Mexicans prefer to make food from scratch rather than cooking microwavable or prepackaged food? What insights do you think this gives us about Mexican culture?
6. Salsa is an important part of most meals in Mexico. Do Americans have any seasonings or sauces that they use the way Mexicans use salsa? Why do you think that salsa has become a popular food in America as well as in Mexico?

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# CROSS-CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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## FÚTBOL

*Fútbol* [fute-bowl], or soccer, is the most popular sport in Mexican culture. From an early age, children are taught to revere this game and its players. To many Mexicans, soccer is not just a sport, it's an art form. The influence of soccer on Mexican daily life is evident in clothing styles, television and radio programs, and the popularity of professional soccer players.



### Starting Points

1. Watch a video clip of an international soccer game (see **Additional Resources**). What is the crowd like at the soccer game? Is this what soccer games are like in the United States? In Mexico, as in many other countries, soccer is a very popular spectator sport.
2. How do sports influence life in the United States? What is your favorite sport? What sports do you watch on television? Do you have a favorite athlete? Have you ever been to a professional athletic event? In Mexico, most people would say that their favorite sport is soccer and that their favorite athlete is a soccer player.
3. Do you like soccer? What do you like or dislike about it? Most Mexicans love soccer. Soccer is very popular in Mexico because of its fast-paced excitement and artistry.



### Information

#### Soccer

Modern soccer originated in England and was introduced in Mexico during the Spanish conquest. It quickly gained popularity because it was similar to games that people were already playing in Mexico before the Europeans arrived. Since then it has become an integral part of the culture in Mexico. People practice soccer any time they can. It is not uncommon to see people playing soccer in the streets, at the beach, or in the park (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1**).

#### The Game of Soccer

Soccer is played with eleven players on each team. Each player has a specific position on the soccer field. The goalkeeper (goalie) defends the goal and the marked rectangular area in front of the goal. Unlike the other players on the field, goalies can touch the ball with their hands. Other positions include forwards, midfielders, and defenders (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 2**). The midfielders generally stay between the forwards and the defenders. Midfielders bring the ball toward the other team's goal by dribbling or passing the ball. Often they pass the ball to the forwards, who are positioned near the other team's goal. The forwards try to score goals. Defenders guard their own team's goal. They are the last line of defense before the opposing

team challenges the goalkeeper. Defenders try to get the ball up to the midfielders and forwards. Therefore, regardless of the recognition one individual player may receive, it is the responsibility of the entire team to win each game. Teamwork is essential.

In Mexico, like much of Latin America, soccer is considered a type of artistic performance. Professional soccer players play in large stadiums that hold thousands of fans (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3**), and the players are expected not only to win but also to entertain. The athletes play with the spectator in mind and are expected to show their skill in such ways as short, crisp passes and impressive footwork. To the Mexican people, a player's ability to entertain and to play with style is evidence of the player's connection to the artistic element of the game.

Mexico is known for its prowess in soccer. Mexican soccer players are among the best in the world. Although the United States' national soccer team has not moved up in the ranks of international soccer for years, a rivalry has recently emerged between the American and Mexican national squads. This rivalry with Mexico has helped America's national team dispel negative stereotypes associated with their soccer program and develop into a team capable of international competition.

American and Mexican cultures differ regarding the figures they hold as athletic heroes. Most Americans grow up with athletic heroes who play basketball or football like Kobe Bryant and Vince Young. In contrast, many Mexican teenagers are much more interested in athletic figures who play soccer like Cuauhtémoc Blanco [kwah-oak-teh-mohk blahn-koh].

### **The Influence of Soccer**

Soccer ticket sales and associated promotions contribute heavily to the Mexican economy. Most Mexicans recognize the logos of the national soccer teams, which are reproduced on a variety of consumer goods. It is common for Mexicans to spend entire Sunday afternoons watching soccer games on television or listening to them on the radio. Professional soccer players star in prominent television and radio commercials and are spokespersons for a variety of products. Lately, the excitement of Mexican soccer has been spreading to the United States as well.



### **Activities**

1. Test your soccer skills by juggling a balloon. In soccer, juggling the soccer ball means keeping the soccer ball in the air by hitting it with your feet, thighs, chest, shoulders, and head, without touching the soccer ball with your hands or arms. You can juggle by yourself, with a partner, or in a small group. To start juggling, use your hands to pick up the balloon and toss it to yourself or a teammate. You might also have a juggling competition. Juggle the balloon as many times as you can. The player with the most juggles wins. Go home and practice juggling with a soccer ball like you did with the balloon in class.
2. Play "circle soccer." As a large group, hold hands in a circle. Kick the ball back and forth within the circle. Try to keep the ball moving and under control. If the ball stops moving, give it back to the last person who kicked it and start the game again. If the ball escapes the circle between two people, the people it

escaped between leave the circle. If the ball is kicked over the arms of other players, the one who kicked the ball must leave the circle. The circle gets smaller and smaller until only one person is left.

3. How well do you know soccer? Take the soccer quiz (**Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4**) to find out.
4. Do the soccer-logo activity (see **Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5**). From the list of soccer team names, choose a team and create a logo for them. How does your logo incorporate the team's name, colors, mascot, and city?
5. Work together in small groups to make a commercial advertising an upcoming soccer game in Mexico. Be sure to tell the audience which teams will be playing and some of the exciting things people will see at the game.
6. In groups, research a popular Mexican soccer team. Find information about the team's prominent players, the team's win-loss record, and the team's logo. Share what you find with the class.



### Discussion Questions

1. Why is soccer such a popular sport in Mexico? Which sports in the United States are as popular as soccer is in Mexico? What makes these sports popular in the United States?
2. Why do people admire athletes? How do athletes represent their country's culture? Choose some popular Mexican and American athletes. What are the characteristics of popular Mexican athletes? What are the characteristics of popular American athletes? How are the athletes similar? How are they different?
3. What are some ways that sports affect cultures? How does culture affect sports? How does soccer affect Mexican culture and vice versa?
4. Do you think of athletes as performers? Do you consider sports to be an art form? Why or why not?
5. Could a friendly rivalry between Mexican and American soccer teams help strengthen cultural ties between the two countries? How? Is there any way that such a rivalry could hurt relations between Mexico and the United States?
6. Why do you think that soccer has become more popular in the United States during recent years? Do you think it could be connected with the popularity of soccer in Mexico? How?

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# FACTS ABOUT MEXICO

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**Official Name:** Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States)

**Capital:** Mexico Distrito Federal (Mexico City)

**Government Type:** federal republic

**Area:** 1,972,550 sq km

**Land Boundaries:** Belize 250 km; Guatemala 962 km; United States 3,141 km

**Climate:** varies from tropical to desert

**Terrain:** high, rugged mountains; low coastal plains; high plateaus; desert

**Lowest Point:** Laguna Salada -10 m

**Highest Point:** Volcan Pico de Orizaba 5,700 m

**Natural Resources:** petroleum, silver, copper, gold, lead, zinc, natural gas, and timber

**Natural Hazards:** tsunamis along the Pacific coast; volcanoes and destructive earthquakes in the center and south; and hurricanes on the Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean coasts

**Population:** 107,449,525 (2006 est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** mestizo (Amerindian-Spanish) 60%, Amerindian or predominantly Amerindian 30%, white 9%, other 1%

**Religions:** nominally Roman Catholic 89%, Protestant 6%, other 5%

**Languages:** Spanish, various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional indigenous languages

**GDP:** \$1.134 trillion (2006 est.)

**GDP Per Capita:** \$10,600 (2006 est.)

**GDP Composition By Sector:** agriculture 3.9%, industry 25.7%, services 70.5% (2006)

**Labor Force:** 38.09 million (2006 est.)

**Unemployment Rate:** 3.2% plus underemployment of perhaps 25% (2006 est.)

**Industries:** food and beverages, tobacco, chemicals, iron and steel, petroleum, mining, textiles, clothing, motor vehicles, consumer durables, and tourism

**Agricultural Products:** corn, wheat, soybeans, rice, beans, cotton, coffee, fruit, tomatoes, beef, poultry, dairy products, and wood products

**Exports:** \$248.8 billion f.o.b. (2006) manufactured goods, oil and oil products, silver, fruits, vegetables, coffee, and cotton

**Imports:** \$253.1 billion f.o.b. (2006) metalworking machines, steel mill products, agricultural machinery, electrical equipment, car parts for assembly, repair parts for motor vehicles, aircraft, and aircraft parts

**Trade Partners:** United States, China, Japan, Canada, and Spain

**Currency:** Mexican peso (MXN)

**Exchange Rate:** 11.024 MXN = \$1 U.S. (2006)

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# HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS

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## TIME LINE

- 900 B.C.E.** Rise of the Olmecs
- 600** Founding of Monte Albán on a mountain overlooking three valleys
- 200** Rise of Teotihuacán, one of the Western Hemisphere's largest ancient cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants
- 200 C.E.** Construction of the Sun and Moon pyramids at Teotihuacán
- 700** Fall of Teotihuacán
- 1100** The Cholula pyramid reaches its maximum size as the largest known pyramid in the world
- 1325** Aztecs found the city of Tenochtitlán
- 1519** Spain, led by Hernán Cortés, arrives in the New World
- 1521** The armies of Cortés defeat the Aztec Empire
- 1810** Miguel Hidalgo begins independence movement
- 1821** Mexico wins independence from Spain
- 1836** Texas gains independence from Mexico
- 1846–1848** The Mexican-American War
- 1853** Gadsden Purchase—the United States purchases land from Mexico that is now southern Arizona and New Mexico
- 1862** The Battle of Puebla (Mexican victory)
- 1876** Porfirio Díaz revolts against the government and becomes dictator of Mexico
- 1913** Victoriano Huerta seizes Mexico City
- 1914** Venustiano Carranza revolts against Huerta; Emiliano Zapata leads a revolt against Carranza; Francisco (Pancho) Villa also leads revolts
- 1917** Mexico Revolution ends; new constitution written; Carranza elected president
- 1920** Carranza killed in a revolt lead by General Alvaro Obregón, who is elected Carranza's successor
- 1942** Mexico enters WWII and sides with the Allies
- 1945** Mexico becomes a member of the United Nations
- 1953** Women in Mexico receive the right to vote
- 1968** Summer Olympics held in Mexico City
- 1985** Earthquake in Mexico City kills thousands
- 1992** Mexico, Canada, and the United States sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
- 2001** Vicente Fox becomes the first Mexican president that is not from the Institutional Revolutionary Party
- 2005** Hurricane Emily; Popocatepetl [pop-kah-tay-pay-tul] volcano erupts

## HOLIDAYS

- 1 Jan** Año Nuevo [ahn-yo nweh-voh] (New Year's Day)
- 6 Jan** Día de los Santos Reyes [dee-yah day lohs sahn-tohs ray-ez] (Day of the Three Kings)

- 24 Feb** Flag Day
- Feb–Mar** Carnaval (the week before Ash Wednesday)
- 21 Mar** The Birthday of Benito Juárez [ben-ee-toh wahr-ehz] (Mexican national hero)
- Spring** Semana Santa [seh-ma-na sahn-tah] (week of Good Friday and Easter)
- 1 May** Primero de Mayo [pree-mair-oh day my-oh] (similar to U.S. Labor Day)
- 5 May** Cinco de Mayo [sink-oh day my-oh] (honors the Mexican defeat of the French in 1862)
- 10 May** Mother’s Day
- 16 Sep** Mexican Independence Day
- 12 Oct** Día de la Raza [dee-yah day lah rah-zah] (Day of the Race/ Columbus Day)
- 1–2 Nov** Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)
- 12 Dec** Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe [dee-yah day nwest-rah sen-your-ah day gwad-ah-loop-ay] (the Virgin of Guadalupe)
- 6 Dec** Las Posadas [lahs poe-sah-dahs] (celebrates Joseph and Mary’s search for shelter in Bethlehem)
- 25 Dec** La Navidad [lah na-vee-dahd] (Christmas)

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### **MEXICAN EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES**

1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
Phone: (202) 728-1600  
Web site: <http://www.embassyofmexico.org/>

### **MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM**

#### **New York**

21 East 63rd Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10021  
Phone: (212) 821-0314, Fax: (212) 821-0367  
E-mail: [milmgto@interport.net](mailto:milmgto@interport.net)  
Web site: <http://www.mexico-travel.com>

#### **Mexico City**

Av. Presidente Masaryk No. 172  
Col. Chapultepec Morales, C.P. 11587, México, Distrito Federal  
RFC: STU750101-H22  
Web site: <http://www.sectorturismo.gob.mx>

### **MEXICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE**

2829 16th Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
Phone: (202) 728-1628, Fax: (202) 462-7241  
For additional locations throughout the United States, see the embassy web site above.

### **BOOKS**

- Alvarado, Manuel. *Mexican Food and Drink*, Bookwright, 1988.  
Andrade, Mary J. *Through the Eyes of the Dead in Mexico—Michoacan*, La Oferta Review Inc., 1999.  
Ancona, George. *The Piñata Maker*, Harcourt Brace, 1994.  
Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer. *The Skeleton at the Feast: Day of the Dead in Mexico*, University of Texas Press, 1992.  
*CultureGram '99*, Brigham Young University, 1998.  
Flind, David. *Mexico*, Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1994.  
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Graulich, Michel. *Myths of Ancient Mexico*, University of Oklahoma, 1997.  
Greenleigh, John and Rosalind Rosoff Beimler. *The Days of the Dead: Mexico's Festival of Communion with the Departed*, Pomegranated, 1998.  
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Irizarry, Carmen. *Passport to Mexico*, F. Watts, 1994.  
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Lasky, Kathryn. *Days of the Dead*, Hyperion, 1994.  
Marzollo, Jean. *Soccer Sam*, Random House, 1987.  
Silverthorne, Elizabeth. *Fiesta! Mexico's Great Celebrations*, Millbrook, 1992.

Spence, Lewis. *The Myths of Mexico and Peru*, DIANE Co., 1995.  
Stuart, Gene S. and George E. Stuart. *Lost Kingdoms of the Maya*, National Geographic Society, 1993.  
Toor, Frances. *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways*, Bonanza, 1995.  
World Book. *Christmas in Mexico*, World Book, 1996.

#### **FILM**

*101 Classic Goals of the World Cup*, FIFA official videos, 1986.  
*Mexico Central*, International Video Corp, 1990.  
*Mexico—Story Of Courage & Conquest*, A&E Entertainment, 1999.  
*Mexico Yucatan*, International Video Corp, 1999.  
*Mexico's Great Pyramids*, A&E Entertainment, 1998.

#### **INTERNET SITES**

##### **Alegría—The Mexican Folklore Home Page:**

<http://www.alegria.org>

##### **CIA World Factbook:**

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>

##### **Culture and Society of México:**

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~rjsalvad/scmfaq/scmfaq.html>

##### **Day of the Dead:**

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead>

##### **Day of the Dead Holiday:**

<http://www.mexonline.com/daydead.htm>

##### **El Mariachi:**

<http://www.elmariachi.com>

##### **EZ.Tracks: Free Latin Music Downloads:**

<http://www.ez-tracks.com/Latin-page-3.html>

##### **Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA):**

<http://www.fifa.com>

##### **How to Make Candy Skulls from About.com:**

<http://mexicanfood.about.com/od/sweetsanddesserts/ht/candyskulls.htm>

##### **Maya/Aztec/Inca:**

<http://www.mayaLords.org>

##### **Mexican Recipes:**

[www.mexgrocer.com](http://www.mexgrocer.com)

##### **Mexico—A Country Study:**

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/mxtoc.html>

##### **Mexico at a Glance:**

<http://www.worldbank.org/mx>

<http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eataglance1.htm>

##### **Mexico Connect:**

<http://www.mexconnect.com>

##### **Mexico For Kids (in Spanish):**

<http://www.elbalero.gob.mx/explora/html/home.html>

##### **Mexico Online (Web site list):**

<http://www.mexonline.com/websites.htm>

**Mexico Weekly Report:**

<http://www.mexicoweekly.com>

**World Flags Collection:**

<http://web.telia.com/~u84508119/index2.html>

**World Soccer Page:**

<http://www.wpsoccer.com>

**Sugar Skull Making Instructions:**

<http://www.mexicansugarskull.com/mexicansugarskull/recipe.htm>

**MUSIC**

*20 Éxitos del Mariachi Silvestre Vargas*, Sony Discos/Ofeon, 1995.

*All the Best Mariachi: 20 Great Favorites*, Madacy Records, 1991.

*Guadalajara and the Mariachi Music*, Mariachi Vargas, Latin, 1998.

*Mariachi Cobre*, Kuckuck Records, 1992.

*Mariachi From Mexico*, Laserlight, 1991.

Traditions Visual 1: Aztec Calendar 1



Traditions Visual 2: Aztec Calendar 2



Traditions Visual 3: Statue of Catholic Priest St. Francis of Assisi in Mexico



**Traditions Visual 4: A Simple Shrine to Remember the Dead on Día de los Muertos**



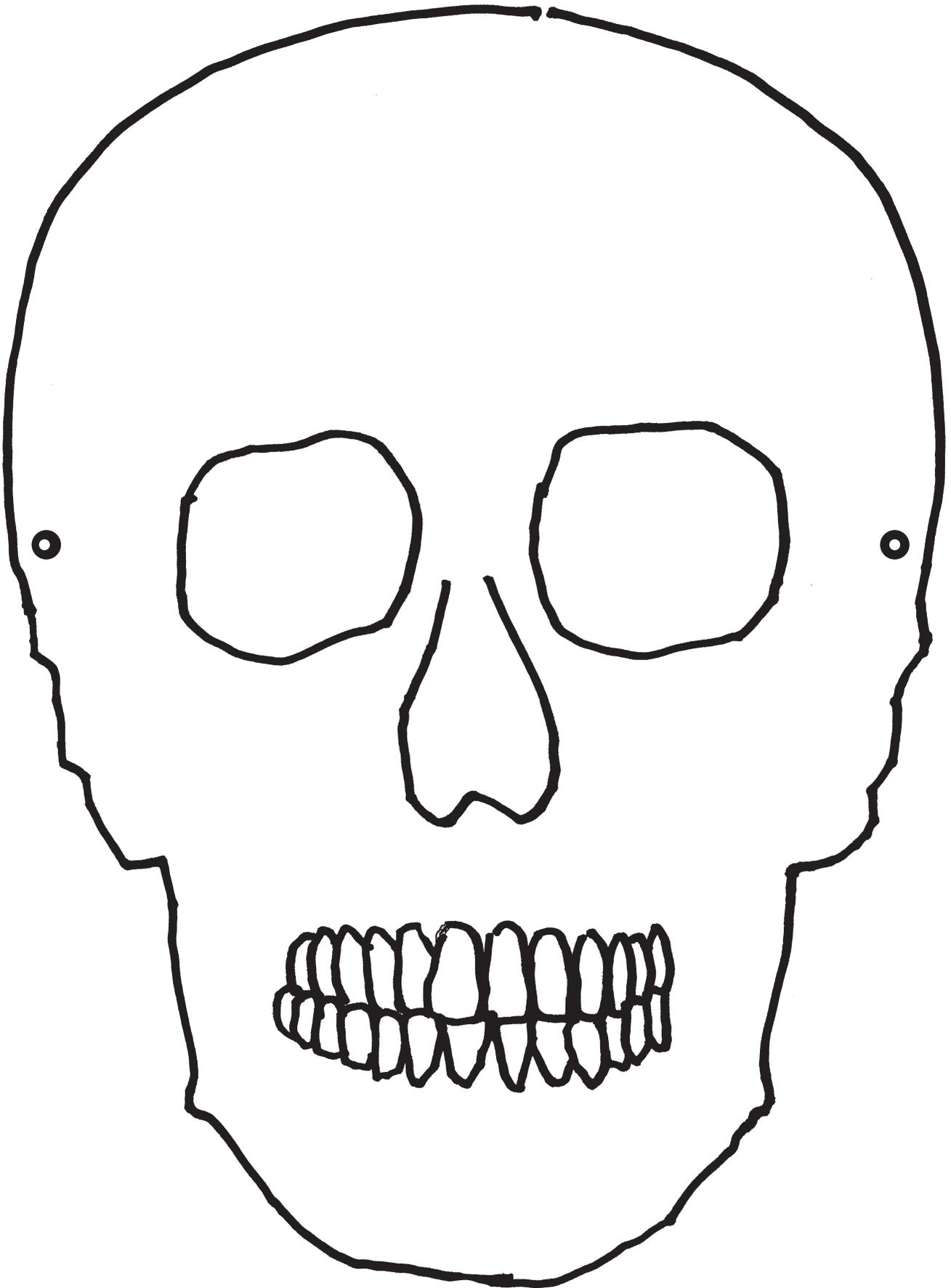
**Traditions Visual 5: Example 1 of Pan de Muerto**



Traditions Visual 6: Example 2 of Pan de Muerto



Traditions Visual 7: Paper Skull Mask Pattern



**Folklore & Language Visual 1: Pyramid at Teotihuacan—North of Mexico City**



## Folklore & Language Visual 2: Mexico City



Folklore & Language Visual 3: The Virgin of Guadalupe





Folklore & Language Visual 5: Miniature Mexican Flags

Glue Space			
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Glue Space			
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Glue Space			
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**Practice saying the following names of Aztec people and places:**

Huitzilopchtli    weet-see-loh-pech-tah-lee

Lake Texcoco    teks-co-co

Tenochtitlán    ten-oh-cheet-lahn

Tilma    teal-mah

Aztec    as-tek

Nahuatl    nah-wah-tahl

Tonantzin    tone-ant-seen

Food Visual 1: A Variety of Peppers



Food Visual 2: Mexican Woman Cooking Tortillas



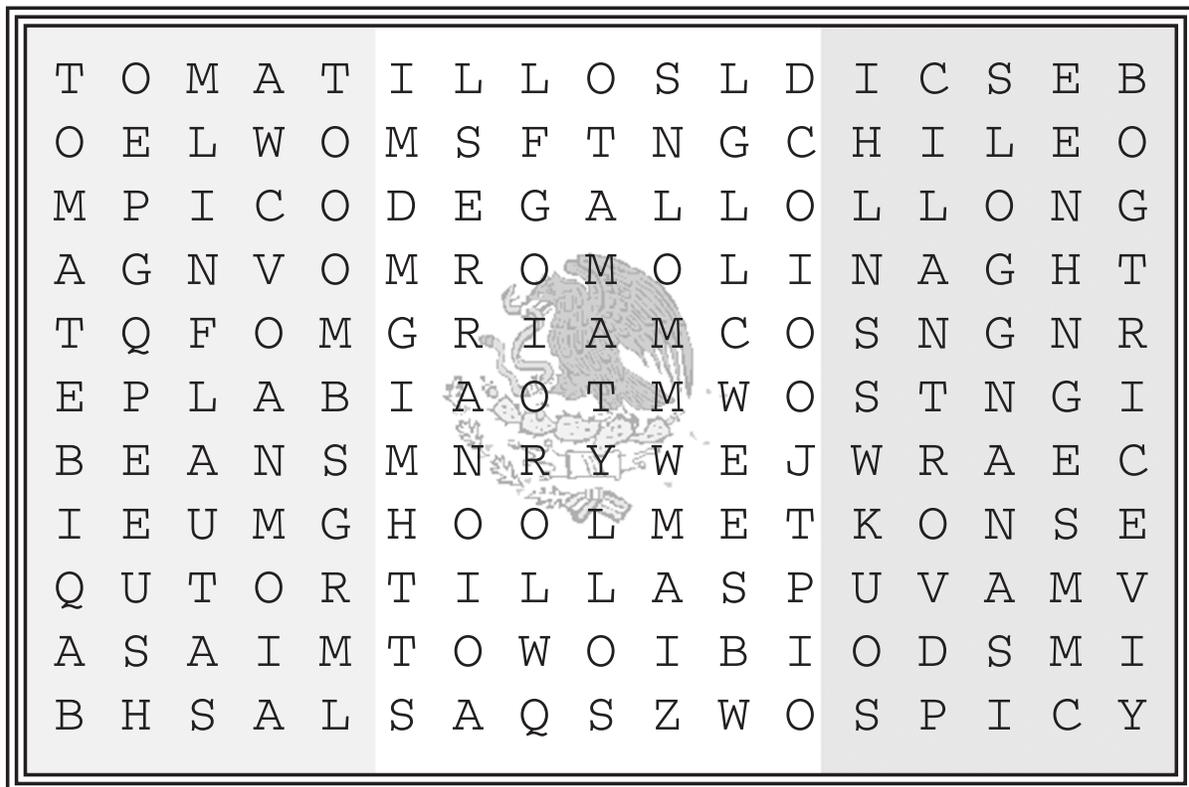
Food Visual 3: Rice, Refried Beans, Chicken Taco, Chile Relleno, and Beef Enchilada Smothered in Cheese



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# FLAVOR OF MEXICO

Find the words listed below in the word search. Words may be vertical or horizontal.



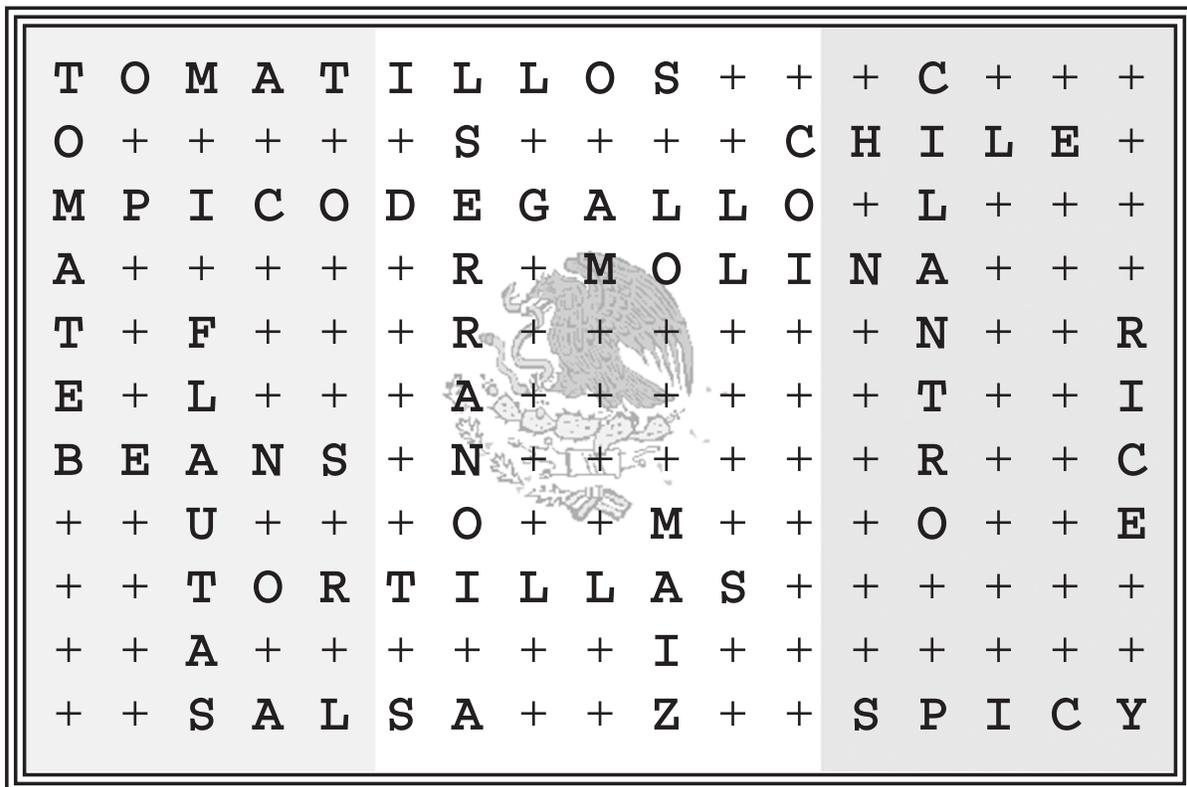
BEANS  
CHILE  
CILANTRO  
FLAUTAS  
MAIZ  
MOLINA  
PICO DE GALLO

RICE  
SALSA  
SERRANO  
SPICY  
TOMATILLOS  
TOMATE  
TORTILLAS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# FLAVOR OF MEXICO

Find the words listed below in the word search. Words may be vertical or horizontal.



BEANS  
 CHILE  
 CILANTRO  
 FLAUTAS  
 MAIZ  
 MOLINA  
 PICO DE GALLO

RICE  
 SALSA  
 SERRANO  
 SPICY  
 TOMATILLOS  
 TOMATE  
 TORTILLAS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions about *Mexican Food and Drink*

1. Who was the *conquistador* that conquered the people that lived in what is now known as Mexico?
2. What did he do to describe Mexico's topography?
3. How does Mexico's topography affect what the people eat?
4. What is the cacao bean? How do we know it was important in ancient Mexican culture?
5. How did the Europeans influence Mexican cuisine?
6. What are some staple foods in Mexico?
7. What are some of the differences in the type of food Mexicans eat if they are rich or poor?
8. What are some Mexican national specialties?
9. What are some of the regional specialties in the north? On the coast? In the south?
10. What are some of the different types of chili peppers grown in Mexico?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

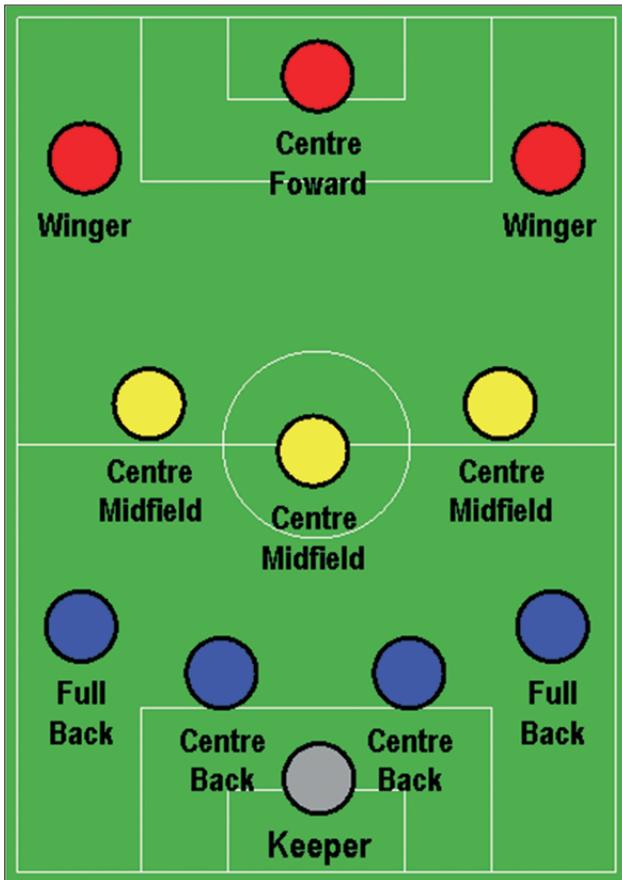
## Questions about *Mexican Food and Drink*

1. Who was the *conquistador* that conquered the people that lived in what is now known as Mexico?  
**Hernán Cortés**
2. What did he do to describe Mexico's topography?  
**Picked up a piece of paper, crumpled it, and threw it on the table.**
3. How does Mexico's topography affect what the people eat?  
**Since Mexico has a diverse topography, they grow a wide variety of foods and also raise animals for food. The people along the coast eat more seafood, while the people inland eat more fresh vegetables.**
4. What is the cacao bean? How do we know it was important in ancient Mexican culture?  
**It is the bean from which chocolate is made. We know it was important in the ancient Mexican culture because they used it to measure wealth.**
5. How did the Europeans influence Mexican cuisine?  
**They brought new types of foods to Mexico, which were then incorporated into the Mexican diet.**
6. What are some staple foods in Mexico?  
**Tortillas, beans, chili peppers, potatoes, tomatoes, rice, tobacco, sugar, coffee, and cacao.**
7. What are some of the differences in the type of food Mexicans eat if they are rich or poor?  
**People who are poor eat mostly tortillas, beans, and coffee, while richer people eat fresh fruits and a wider variety of other foods.**
8. What are some Mexican national specialties?  
**Chilies, tortillas, salsa, and refried beans.**
9. What are some of the regional specialties in the north? On the coast? In the south?  
**Some of the regional specialties in the north are cheese, enchiladas, wheat tortillas, and smoked beef. On the coast the specialties are fish, shellfish, fruits, avocados, and vegetables. Southern specialties include tamales, roasted pork, and fruit.**
10. What are some of the different types of chili peppers grown in Mexico?  
**Serrano, jalapeño, poblano, cayenne, habanero, ancho, mulatto, pasillo, chipolte, and guajillo**

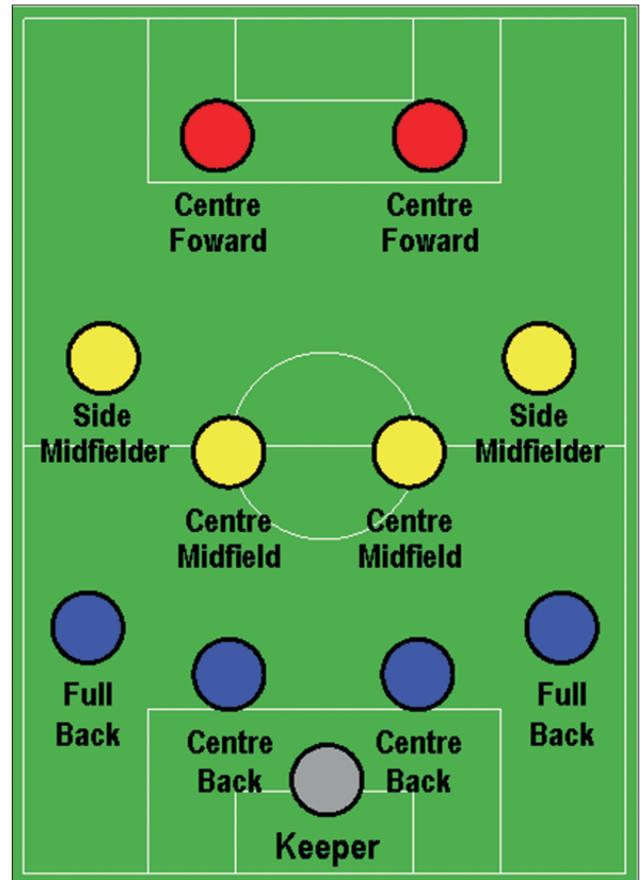
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1: Mexicans Playing Soccer Wherever They Can



## 4-3-3 Formation



## 4-4-2 Formation



-  **Defenders**
-  **Midfielders**
-  **Forwards**
-  **Goalie**

Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3: Dorados Stadium in Mexico



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Soccer Quiz

1. Where did modern soccer originate?
2. How many players at a time can each team have on the field?
3. What are the four positions in soccer?
4. Which players can touch the ball with their hands?
5. Whose responsibility is it to win each game?
6. What are some ways that the athletes are expected to show their skills?
7. Which country has Mexico recently started a rivalry with?
8. How do Mexicans commonly spend their Sunday afternoons?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Soccer Quiz Answers

1. Where did modern soccer originate?  
**In England**
2. How many players at a time can each team have on the field?  
**Eleven**
3. What are the four positions in soccer?  
**Goalkeeper, forwards, midfielders, and defenders**
4. Which player can touch the ball with their hands?  
**Goalkeepers (goalies)**
5. Whose responsibility is it to win each game?  
**The entire team's**
6. What are some ways that the athletes are expected to show their skills?  
**Short, crisp passes and impressive footwork**
7. Which country has Mexico recently started a rivalry with?  
**The United States**
8. How do Mexicans commonly spend their Sunday afternoons?  
**Watching soccer games on television or listening to them on the radio**

## Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5: Mexican Soccer Team List

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Mexican Soccer Teams and Their Mascots

Below is a list of Mexican soccer teams and their mascots. Design a logo using one of the teams below *or* create your own team name, mascot, and logo.

<b>Team</b>	<b>Mascot</b>	<b>Team</b>	<b>Mascot</b>
Chiapas	Jaguar	Veracruz	Red Sharks
Cruz Azul	Rabbit/the Machine	U.N.A.M.	Puma
Guadalajara	Goat	Santos Laguna	Warrior
Morelia	King	Sinaloa	“Dorado”
Necaxa	Lightning Bolt	Toluca	Red Devil
U.A.N.L.	Tiger	U.A.G.	Owl

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mascot: \_\_\_\_\_

Logo:

## Flag of Mexico



### FLAG OF MEXICO

The colors in the flag are green for hope; white for unity, purity, and honesty; and red for parenthood and the blood of national heroes. The symbol in the center is taken from the Aztec legend of the founding of Tenochtitlán, the ancient Aztec city that became Mexico's modern capital—Mexico City.

# Map of Mexico

