**MEXICO CULTURE GUIDE**

This unit is published by the International 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?

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.¹

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established International Outreach 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.”² 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.

Rich Diversity

Mexico has a great diversity of climates, land formations, plants, animals, and industries because it is surrounded by water, set on tectonic plates, and divided by the Tropic of Cancer. Mexico’s terrain is divided into five major development zones, which affect the Mexican culture as well as the type of industry in each area. These industries include tourism, mining, fishery, and manufacturing.

Starting Points

1. Look at the pictures of different kinds of pets children in Mexico can have (e.g., birds, chickens, cats, dogs, ducks, fish, lizards, parrots, rabbits, and turtles). How does the environment affect the kinds of pets one can have? How does the environment affect what kind of job one can have, what one does for fun, and where one lives? How do your environment, geography, and climate affect how you live? The varied climate in Mexico determines many aspects of life in Mexico.

2. Think about your backyard. What is unique about it? What things can you do in your backyard? What is the land formation of the school playground? How does the land’s layout affect activities there? Mexico has several different types of land formations, making activities available in some areas but not in others.

3. Think about the different types of industries in the United States and how they affect the way people live. The different environments and combinations of natural resources in Mexico affect how people live, eat, and work. For example, in areas that don’t receive a lot of rain, most people raise cattle instead of farming.

Information

Beaches

Mexico is surrounded by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, so the climate is usually temperate. Mexicans who live near the coast eat a lot of seafood—such as fish, shrimp, crustaceans, and octopi—which live in the warm coastal water.

Many people from around the world visit Mexico’s beautiful beaches. The most famous beaches are Acapulco, Cabo San Lucas, Cancún, Mazatlán, and Veracruz (see Geography & Climate Visual 1). In order to serve the visitors, many of the people living in these areas work as tour guides, while others tend beaches, cook in restaurants, or work in hotels. Many of the Mexican people in these areas speak English, French, German, or other languages.

Desert

Despite Mexico’s beautiful, moist beach areas, not all areas of Mexico have an abundance of water. Because mountain chains run north to south and prevent rainfall on
the eastern side of the mountains, there are deserts in the northern states of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Tamaulipas (see Geography & Climate Visual 2). Small amounts of rain combined with constant sunshine create a desert-like condition, making it hard to grow food. As a result, some people who live in the desert herd cattle and goats or mine precious metals, while others farm.

In the mountains and volcanic areas of central Mexico and Baja California, there is a lot of mining activity. Mexico has a lot of gold, silver, and other valued metals and minerals that are exported to other countries. Many people in Mexico work in jewelry factories called maquiladoras [mah-key-lah-door-ahs].

The Rain Forest

Before it became the capital of Mexico, Mexico City was a beautiful lake surrounded by forests. Today the central region of Mexico is still covered with forest. In fact, one of the richest rain forests of the world is in the southeastern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Mérida, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo. Cocoa and coffee beans, chicle [chee-clay] (gum) trees, guavas, mangoes, tamarindo [tah-mah-reen-doh], and other foods grow in the rain forest. Children in these areas often have mango and papaya trees in their backyards.

Because there is a rain forest nearby, many children have unique and interesting pets that come from the rain forest. A parrot is a common pet because it can be taught to speak. Some children also have other tropical birds or monkeys. Children in this area are accustomed to seeing snakes, toucans, and pelicans, and they often hear the distant roar of leopards at night.

Many of the people in these forested regions of Mexico are indigenous (or native inhabitants) and live in close contact with nature. Many of them still live inside the rain forest, keep their native language, and avoid using modern conveniences.

Cities

Products from mines, fisheries, and farms are brought to cities to be sold. The city marketplace offers many shopping options such as fresh fruit—mangoes, limes, cantaloupes, and strawberries are some fruits commonly grown and sold in Mexico. Because so many people come together to buy and sell products, cities often become very large. Some of the largest, most important cities in Mexico are Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. Government headquarters are also located in Mexico City (see Geography & Climate Visual 3).

Activities

1. Write down a place that you would like to visit in Mexico. Why would you like to visit there? What would you expect to see there? Create a list of activities you could do during the day, a list of animals you would be able to photograph, and a weather forecast for this week in the place you chose.

2. Look at a map of Mexico and draw in the characteristics of its different regions (e.g., desert in the north; forest in the mountains, central regions, and coasts; and rain forest in the southeast) (see Geography & Climate Visual 4). Draw pictures of the animals that live in the rain forest and the kind of food people might eat in each area.
3. With your classmates, create a list of things that you need in order to survive, such as food, water, and electricity. Then, investigate where those things come from. Write a paragraph about how you would satisfy these needs if you lived in the rain forest as indigenous Mexicans do.

4. Write a paragraph about the various geographical regions in your country. How do they compare with Mexico’s geographical regions?

5. Many of the fruits people eat in Mexico are not as common in the United States. Have you ever eaten papaya, mango, guava, or tamarindo? In class, try these fruits. Which fruits were your favorites?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think people in northern Mexico wear leather boots and people in southern Mexico wear sandals? How does the weather affect what you wear?

2. Do you go shopping with your parents? Do you go to giant malls or small stores? What do you like about going to a giant shopping center? What would you buy in Mexico’s markets? How would the experience of shopping in a Mexican market differ from that of shopping in a mall?

3. What is your favorite type of weather? Which part of Mexico would you choose to live in if you could and why?

4. How does the weather affect what professions people have in Mexico? How does it affect jobs people can have in different parts of the United States? For example, what professions could someone have in Alaska but not in many other places? What professions could someone have in a Mexican city but not in the rain forest regions?

5. Do you have any pets? What kinds? What kinds of pets would you want to have if you lived in Mexico? Why can we have different kinds of pets depending on where we live?

6. Would you rather live in a large city like Mexico City or a small village like those found in the Mexican rain forests. Why?
HISTORY

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST

The attitudes and actions of most Mexicans have been influenced by the following four major historic periods: pre-Hispanic, colonial, independent, and modern. Influences from each of these periods have affected food, family bloodlines and traditions, and ideas about independence.

Starting Points

1. On a piece of paper, write down your eye color and the eye color of your parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. Why do different people have different eye colors? In Mexico many people have dark brown eyes because of their ancestry.

2. Where are your ancestors from? The Mexican people are descendants of both the indigenous people of Mexico and the Spanish who conquered Mexico five hundred years ago.

3. What are some typical physical characteristics of Americans? What cultures are these characteristics inherited from? Most of the physical characteristics of Mexicans are a mixture of European and indigenous characteristics.

Information

The Indigenous People before the Arrival of the Spanish

Before Hernando Cortez of Spain arrived in Mexico in 1521, most of the people in Mexico were Indians. The people living in the valley of modern-day Mexico City were called the Mexicas [meh-hee-cahs] or Aztecas [ahs-tek-ahs] (see History Visuals 1–3). The physical characteristics of the Mexican people today are inherited from their indigenous ancestry. Many Mexicans have tan skin; straight, dark hair; and dark brown eyes.

The ancient Aztecs cultivated corn, tomatoes, potatoes, avocados, cocoa, chicle, rubber, beans, and other crops unfamiliar to the Europeans. Today many of these foods, especially coffee and chocolate, are popular worldwide. Corn, which some archaeologists say was first domesticated and eaten five thousand years ago, is originally from Mexico City. Corn is very important to Mexicans, and they use it to make tortillas [tor-tee-yahs], quesadillas [kay-sah-dee-yahs], atole [ah-toh-lay], and other traditional dishes.

The family unit was very important to indigenous Mexicans, and roles within the family were and since have been divided according to gender; in fact, these divisions still exist today. Most women are the primary nurturers of their children, while the men support their families financially.

Religion was also a very important part of the indigenous Mexican culture. In the past, religion affected the Mexican government, social hierarchy, and societal roles. Today, although the dominant religion is Catholicism instead of an indigenous Mexican religion, most
indigenous Mexicans still look to their religion for protection and blessings and acknowledge the importance of religion in their daily lives.

**A Spanish Mexico**

The conquest of what is now known as Mexico has also greatly influenced the character of the Mexican people. The conquest allowed two very important civilizations to come together: the indigenous Aztecs and the Spanish.

When Cortéz arrived in the Americas, the Aztecs already possessed a large empire and had control over other groups of indigenous people in the region. Cortéz spoke with the emperor of the Aztecs, Moctezuma [mock-tay-soo-mah], in the great capital city of Tenochtitlán [ten-och-teet-lahn] and became a friend of the Aztecs (see **History Visuals 4 and 5**). However, Cortéz also befriended the enemies of the Aztecs, and he eventually succeeded in pitting the Aztecs and their enemies against one other. Cortéz and his Spanish troops took advantage of their friendship with the Aztecs once the two groups were fighting and conquered the Aztecs.

**The Catholic Conquest**

The Catholic Church also has a strong influence on the traditions and beliefs of Mexicans today (see **History Visuals 6 and 7**). When Spanish settlers came to Mexico, they brought Catholic clergymen to Christianize the indigenous people. Sometimes, if the people did not convert, they were killed. Because of the influence of the Catholic clergymen, Catholicism is the predominant religion in Mexico today.

In order to teach indigenous people the doctrines of the church, the Spanish invented new traditions like the piñata [peen-yah-tah] (see **History Visual 8**). The colorful, attractive piñatas represent the evils of the world. The piñata lesson teaches that if a person will fight against bad things, even if the bad things are outwardly attractive, he or she will receive blessings, which, in the case of the piñata, come in the form of candy, fruit, and toys. Children and adults in Mexico celebrate many different holidays and special events by breaking piñatas.

**Piñata Instructions**

**Tips before you start:**
1. Wear clothes that can get dirty.
2. Find an area that can get messy and be easily cleaned up.

**You will need:**
- 1 big balloon
- newspaper
- 2 C flour
- 4 C water
- 1 C sugar
- thin paper in various colors
- cardboard (optional)
- candy and fruit
- string or rope
- a stick, bat, or broomstick

**Preparation**
1. Boil water. Once the water is boiling, add sugar.
2. Mix the flour with two cups of cold water in a separate bowl. When the mixture is completely blended, pour it into the pot of sugar water. Allow the liquid to boil for one minute. The result is called engrudo [ehn-groo-doe]. Engrudo works well to make piñatas.
because it is sticky and becomes very hard when it dries. Let the mixture cool for a few minutes.

3. Tear the newspaper into small pieces, about four inches by five inches.

4. Blow up the balloon.

5. Put some engrudo on one side of the newspaper and then stick it on the balloon. Cover the entire balloon with newspaper using this method. Wait ten to fifteen minutes and then repeat. Cover the whole balloon with at least three layers of newspaper and engrudo.

6. Plan a design for the piñata. If you want to make a star, take some lightweight cardboard and roll it into cone shapes. You will need five similar cones. Tape them to the balloon.

7. Once you finish shaping the piñata, use the colored paper to decorate it. Use the same engrudo to stick the paper onto the piñata.

8. Set the piñata on a large can to dry. The less contact it has with other objects while it is in the drying stage, the better.

9. When the piñata is dry, poke two small holes in the top. String a long piece of thin rope through the holes and tie the piñata on with a knot. Keep the other end of the rope free.

10. Cut a small flap in the side, near the top. Make it big enough to put the treats in, but not so big that it will be easy to break open. Fill the piñata with treats, and tape the flap back together.

11. Hang the rope over the branch of a tree. If you want, have someone hold the end of the rope over the branch and move the piñata up and down to make it harder to hit. If you choose to have someone hold the rope, take care that the person is out of the way so that he or she does not get hit.

12. Blindfold the first participant. Give the person a stick and tell the other students to stand back. Allow each student to take one or two hits blindfolded until someone breaks open the piñata!

**Other Catholic Influences**

There are many other Catholic traditions that have become part of the Mexican culture. When a baby is born, the parents take the child to the nearest Catholic church to be baptized. When children are between nine and twelve years old, they are dressed in white and are presented to God as part of their first Catholic ceremony, or Communion. When people get married, they marry inside the church so God will recognize the marriage. When someone is in trouble, women light candles to saints and recite *Padre Nuestro* [pah-dreh new-ehs-troh] or *Ave Maria* [ah-bay mah-ree-ah] prayers to ask for blessings. When people are close to death, the Catholic father comes, and they confess their sins to him. When people die, their bodies are taken into a church and sprinkled with holy water.

These are some of the Mexican traditions that have been handed down from the colonization period and the introduction of Catholicism. Although there are many people in Mexico that are not Catholic or are Catholic in name only, these people still usually participate in cultural activities introduced by the Catholic church, such as Christmas celebrations, piñatas, and Christmas nativities.
Ideas about Independence

In 1810, the people of Mexico declared their independence from Spanish rule. Before Mexican independence, most people of Spanish descent believed that the indigenous people were worth less than the Spaniards and Europeans. However, Mexican independence brought with it ideas about the worth of every individual, the individual’s right to protection and progress, the right of ownership, and the right to work. For many Mexicans, the concept of equality among humans, regardless of race, came with the realization of political independence.

Modern Pop Culture

With the advent of globalization, the world is becoming more connected at an amazing rate. For example, in the United States, tacos and burritos are now as common as hamburgers and hot dogs. Just as students in the United States learn about the people of Mexico, students in Mexico learn about the people in the United States and other parts of the world through the Internet, television, and other mediums of communication. Most young people in Mexico today enjoy the pop culture prevalent around the world. They listen to music from the United States, Venezuela, Spain, and other countries.

Many of the children of Mexico go to school and learn about people in other places of the world. They learn the same kinds of things that children in the United States learn today. They like many of the same things that other children do, like swimming, dancing, playing with their friends, and spending time with their families.

Activities

1. In small groups discuss or research what people used to do on a daily basis in the countries your ancestors are from. Then play charades as a class, acting out the activities you identified.

2. Play Hangman using Spanish vocabulary from the lesson as the words to guess.

3. Make a piñata and take turns trying to break it open.

4. In small groups discuss the ways that Mexican culture has influenced culture in the United States. What are some example of Mexican influences in food, music, and language?

5. Imagine you are an ancient indigenous Mexican boy or girl at the time of the Spanish conquest. Write in your journal about what things were like before the Spanish conquered the land. How is life different for you now?

Discussion Questions

1. Identify some objects in the classroom that were made in Mexico. How would your life be different if you didn’t have these items? How has Mexico influenced the United States?

3. What has Spanish culture contributed to Mexican culture? What has Mexican culture contributed to other parts of the world? List the pros and cons of the Spanish conquering the Aztecs.

4. If you were an Aztec, would you have wanted to become Catholic? Why or why not?

5. The piñata is an important part of many Mexican celebrations. What are some of your favorite traditions from celebrations in the United States? Why are traditions important to a culture?

6. Why do you think Mexico declared its independence from Spain? How do you think modern Mexico would be different if it were still ruled by Spain? How might it be the same?
**NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

Mexico’s geographic, political, and economic proximity to the United States allows unity between the two countries in the same areas. Through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico, Canada, and the United States not only trade goods, but share ideas and opportunities.

**Starting Points**

1. (Divide the class into groups of three and give each group two doughnuts.) The two doughnuts in each group represent goods and resources, and the three group members represent Mexico, the United States, and Canada. What solutions can you come up with that would make each “country” happy? What is the fair thing to do with the doughnuts? Can you think of situations that the United States, Canada, and Mexico might face that are similar to this? In reality, these three countries have decided on an agreement called the North American Free Trade Agreement. According to this agreement, the doughnuts should be divided equally.

2. Have you been to Mexico, or do you have a Mexican friend? Has anyone eaten a taco or heard the phrase “buenos días” [bwen-ohs dee-ahs]? Your knowledge of these things is partly possible because of treaties between the United States and Mexico, as well as improved technology in and geographical proximity of the countries.

3. What does democracy mean? What does free trade mean? How are these possible because of NAFTA? How is NAFTA possible because of them? Mexico and the United States built their friendship on democracy. They have established a free trade agreement to allow the trade of ideas and goods between the two countries and to allow interaction between people and businesses.

**Information**

**Definition of NAFTA**

The North American Free Trade Agreement is an agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In order to understand what the agreement is, it is important to understand each part of the title.

**North America**

The geographic region that is made up of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Many people think Mexico is part of South America because Mexicans speak Spanish, but it is actually part of North America. Also, in the United States, many people use the word “America” or “Americans” to refer to inhabitants of the United States of America. While people living in the United States are Americans, “America” is really the name for the whole continent, and the name “American” can apply to all the people on the continent.
Free Trade
The liberty to exchange goods and services without repeatedly asking for permission or paying large amounts of money in the form of tariffs to governments. Free trade includes the exchange of material things and nonmaterial things like intelligence, service, and people.

The Impact of NAFTA in North America
Because of NAFTA, the United States, Mexico, and Canada are building economic bridges and interacting more. As a result, the cultures and lives of the people involved are improving. For example, many Mexicans and Canadians can go to school in the United States. In the same manner, the United States gives scholarships to American students to study in Mexico. People in all three countries are becoming bilingual and are finding jobs that involve interaction between the countries of North America. In addition, Canada now exports nearly one-half of its products to the United States. While it is difficult to prove that NAFTA is directly responsible for economic growth, it is a fact that the economies of all three countries continue to grow annually.

One of the most important aspects of NAFTA is that it allows Mexico to send its products to the United States and Canada to be sold with reduced trade tariffs (or without them). The United States, in turn, can sell its products in Mexico. This way, both countries benefit from each other because they can exchange for the things they want. For example, Mexico exports cocoa to United States where it is made into chocolate, and the United States establishes companies in Mexico to provide employment for Mexican people.

There are many factories throughout Mexico where American products are produced and then sent around the world. Some of these products include cars, clothes, and machinery. Mexico produces many goods the United States needs. Some of these products include oil, fish, shrimp, honey, automobiles, electronics, clothing, glass, leather, furniture, transportation, and telecommunication products.

Because of this cooperation between Mexico, Canada, and the United States, the countries are “friends.” They benefit from each other, not only materially, but also intellectually and culturally.

NAFTA and the Future
With the increased level of exchange, Mexicans are becoming more familiar with American culture. Many youth in Mexico know American songs, buy American clothing, learn English, and travel to the United States on vacations.

There are also many Mexican immigrants living in the United States. Although NAFTA does not provide for immigration within countries, other treaties and opportunities have been provided by the United States. Mexican immigrants work in various industries throughout the United States and they help the economy of the United States by working on farms, in maintenance, and in construction. Mexicans also work in professional industries such as architecture, law, business, politics, and so forth.

Many immigrant workers become American residents or citizens because the United States recognizes their contribution to the country. The largest group of immigrants to the United States is from Mexico. Consequently, parts of Mexican culture have
also been adopted by the United States. Food, music, and dance are just a few areas where the United States has borrowed a bit of Mexican culture. This trading of ideas has enriched the United States and Mexico, and both countries have benefited from their friendly relationship. In the future, NAFTA leaders want to extend the trade benefits enjoyed by their countries to other nations in the Caribbean and South America. This would result in more cross-cultural interactions and greater economic freedom in the Americas.

Activities

1. Pretend you are giving a TV news report on the Hispanic community around your neighborhood. Report on the things you have learned about the Mexican people.

2. Each member of class should bring three identical pieces of his or her favorite candy. Pretend you are in an international market. Trade candy with your classmates to demonstrate a free trade atmosphere. Discuss why trading is beneficial.

3. Make a plan for what you would show a Mexican friend who came to visit the United States. Where would you take him or her? What would you do? What would you eat?

4. Complete the NAFTA word search (see Politics & Economics Visual 1).

5. Research one of the nations in the Caribbean or in South America. What would this nation gain from joining NAFTA? What could it contribute to NAFTA?

Discussion Questions

1. What would life be like if there were no trade? Would you prefer it? Why or why not?

2. Why do we use money? What does money represent? Can you think of a better system? How does money fit into NAFTA?

3. How has NAFTA impacted your life? What might life be like without it? Why is this agreement good for all of the countries involved? Could anything be done to improve it? Does it have any pitfalls?

4. Why did Canada, the United States, and Mexico agree to NAFTA? What other agreements could they have made?

5. How does NAFTA encourage not only material trade but intellectual and cultural trade? What are some ways that the United States, Mexico, and Canada can benefit from one another culturally and intellectually?

6. How would the countries in NAFTA benefit if more countries joined the trade agreement? Would the trade agreement still be called NAFTA? What could NAFTA's name be changed to in order to include other countries?
**WHAT PEOPLE DO FOR A LIVING**

Despite their differences in appearance and language, people in the United States and people in Mexico share many similarities. Workers in the United States and Mexico are often the same in everything except name. There are *rancheros* [rahn-chair-ohs] in Mexico and cowboys in the United States, *granjeros* [grahn-hair-ohs] in Mexico and farmers in the United States, and *ciudadanos* [see-oo-dah-dahn-ohs] in Mexico and city people in the United States. There are also students, teachers, nurses, lawyers, and presidents in Mexico just as in the United States.

**Starting Points**

1. Dress up in different outfits that are typical of different professions. Guess what your classmates do for a living based on their clothing. Some of the clothes could include those of a farmer, a rancher, a business person, or a doctor. All of these jobs can be found in Mexico.

2. What is a stereotype? Why do people have stereotypes? Are there stereotypes about Mexicans? Are they good or bad? Often when people think of Mexico, they think of stereotypes, which are not always correct. For example, many people assume that all Mexicans wear *sombreros* [sohm-brair-ohs] (traditional hats) and work on farms. In reality, Mexicans have many different types of professions and backgrounds just like Americans do.

3. Listen to a guest speaker talk about different professions and how every job is important. Some people may view certain jobs as being less important, but each has its role in society. This is just as true in Mexico as it is in the United States.

**Information**

**Stereotypes**

When learning about people from other parts of the world, one may easily think that everybody in a given culture is the same. Sometimes television and movies show us an image of another part of the world that is not true. For example, some people may think all Americans are like characters on television sitcoms and soap operas, which isn’t true. Also, some people may think Japanese people dress in *kimonos* [key-moh-nohs] every day, wear dish-like hats, live in small villages, and only eat rice. This is not true either. People also have inaccurate views of Mexico. Because of stereotypes on television, sometimes people think all Mexicans wear big sombreros, live in small towns in the middle of the desert, have chickens and donkeys, and sleep all day long. Although some Mexicans have chickens or wear sombreros, it is incorrect to think all Mexicans do. There are many different kinds of people in Mexico with many different professions, just as there are in the United States.
Native Americans
When people think of Mexico, they often think of Indians or Native Americans. It is true that there are some indigenous people in Mexico who are considered Indians, but the majority of the people in Mexico don’t live like these people traditionally do.

The indigenous people in Mexico live in their own communities and speak their own languages, such as Nahuatl [nah-wah-tahl], Zapotec [sah-poe-tek], and Mayan [my-ahn]. Most of the indigenous people are descendants of the Aztecs. The indigenous people belong to different tribes and live in various places both inside and outside of Mexico. The Nahuas [nah-wahs] live in the central area of Mexico in the Estado de Mexico [es-tah-doh day meh-hee-coh]. There are also descendants of the Zapotec people in the northern United States and Mayan people in the southeast part of Mexico. Often, the few remaining Maya live inside the Selva Lacandona [sell-bah lah-cahn-doh-nah], or the Black Rain Forest of Mexico.

In many ways, the indigenous people of Mexico are like the Native Americans of the United States. They both lived in the Americas before the Europeans came, and today they live in their own communities and keep the traditions of their ancestors while maintaining a close connection with nature.

Ranchers
The image of a tall man wearing a big hat and boots is the traditional look of a Mexican ranchero. Rancheros live in desert-like states in Mexico on big cattle ranches. The rancheros are comparable to American cowboys. They take care of cattle, ride horses, live in the countryside, and sell milk, cheese, meat, and leather to make a living.

Farmers
Some people make a living growing wheat, fruits, or vegetables. San Luis Potosí [sahn loo-ees poh-toh-see] and other central states are known for their production of carrots, strawberries, and corn. Farmers are called granjeros in Mexico and help to produce many crops that are eaten throughout the world.

City People
Many Mexicans live in big cities. These people work in factories and businesses and are doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, and other professionals. Most of the professions that exist in the United States also exist in Mexico. Many Mexicans and Americans like to travel to each other’s country to get to know the people and the culture. Some of the people in Mexico take vacations in the United States, while some people in the United States go to Mexico on vacation.

The most important city in Mexico is Mexico City—one of the biggest cities in the world (see Geography & Climate Visual 3). Approximately one out of every five Mexicans lives in this city. It is built on the once-great Aztec city of Tenochtitlán. Today, Mexico City is even more populated than New York City in the United States. Other big cities include Monterrey, a city in the north that is close to the United States, and Guadalajara, a city in the central western part of Mexico.
Activities

1. Divide into four groups and dress up as one of the following people: native Mexican, rancher, farmer, or city person. As a group, present your character to the class.

2. Write a paper about a day in the life of either a native Mexican, rancher, farmer, or city person.

3. Interview your parents about their jobs. Write a paragraph about what type of job they might have if they lived in Mexico.

4. Interview a person from Mexico or Latin America. Write a news article about what you learned by talking with the person.

5. As a class, watch a clip from an American soap opera or read a soap opera synopsis (see Additional Resources). What kinds of stereotypes do you think people in other countries might form from watching shows such as this?

Discussion Questions

1. What would you like to do professionally when you grow up? How will you prepare for that profession? Would going to Mexico help you?

2. Why are all of the jobs that Mexicans do important? What would happen if everybody worked in the same profession?

3. What are some effects of diversity in our lives? Why is it good that everyone is different?

4. How could the places people live in affect what jobs they can have? How has it affected what jobs Mexicans have?

5. How can stereotypes be hurtful? How are stereotypes different from facts?

6. What are some of the pros and cons of living in a very large city versus a very small one? What kinds of things can you do in the city that you can’t do in the country and vice versa?
FACTS ABOUT MEXICO

Official Name: Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States)
Capital: Mexico City
Government Type: federal republic
Area: 1,972,550 sq 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: 106,202,903 (2005 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, a variety of Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional indigenous languages
GDP: $1.066 trillion (2005 est.)
GDP Per Capita: $10,000 (2005 est.)

GDP Composition By Sector: agriculture 4%, industry 26.5%, services 69.5% (2005)

Labor Force: 37.38 million (2005 est.)
Unemployment Rate: 3.6% plus underemployment of perhaps 25% (2005 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: $213.7 billion (f.o.b., 2005) manufactured goods, silver, fruits, oil and oil products, vegetables, coffee, and cotton
Imports: $223.7 billion (f.o.b., 2005) metalworking machines, agricultural machinery, electrical equipment, car parts for assembly, repair parts for motor vehicles, aircraft, aircraft parts, and steel mill products
Trade Partners: U.S., China, Japan, Canada, and Spain
Currency: Mexican peso (MXN)
HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS

TIME LINE

3500 B.C.E.–300 C.E.  Pre-classical era: many native tribes inhabit the area; the Olmecs are the most prominent
300–900  Classical era: Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, Zapotec, and Mayan cultures flourish
900–1521  The post-classical era
1325–1521  The Aztecs establish Tenochtitlán
1521  Hernando Cortés lands in America and establishes Veracruz
1521–1810  The Spanish conquer and rule over most of America
15 Sep 1810  Independence Day: Mexico declares independence from Spanish rule; the struggle to gain independence begins
1821  Mexico gains its independence
1824  Mexico becomes a republic
1846–1848  Mexico fights the U.S.-Mexican War
1848  The Mexican territories of Texas and California become United States soil
1855  Liberal government under Benito Juárez begins period of reformation
1863  The French occupy Mexico City
1864–1867  Fernando Maximiliano from Austria rules over Mexico
1867  Maximiliano is executed and Juárez regains power
1877–1910  Porfirio Díaz rules Mexico
1910  The Revolutionary War of Mexico begins; Díaz is overthrown
1917  Revolutionary constitution is adopted
1920–1930  Economic, social, and political reforms take place, including land distribution laws
1926–1993  Mexico has a single-party system government
1994  Mexico signs the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada
2001  Vicente Fox becomes the first Mexican president that is not from the PRI party (in English: Institutional Revolutionary Party—IRP)

HOLIDAYS

1 Jan  Año Nuevo (New Year’s Day)
6 Jan  Día de los Santos Reyes (Three Kings Day): Mexican children exchange gifts in similitude of the wise men giving gifts to the baby Jesus
17 Jan  Feast Day de San Antonio de Abad: the Catholic Church allows animals to enter the church for blessings
5 Feb  Día de la Constitución (Constitution Day)
24 Feb  Flag Day: honors the Mexican flag
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb or Mar</td>
<td>Carnaval: a week-long holiday celebrating the indulgence of carnal behavior before Catholic Lent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Lent: a Catholic holiday celebrated by fasting for forty days from Ash Wednesday to Easter</td>
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<td>21 Mar</td>
<td>Benito Juárez’s birthday: a famous Mexican president and national hero</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Semana Santa (Holy Week, which includes Easter)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 May</td>
<td>Primero de Mayo: equivalent to United States’ Labor Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 May</td>
<td>Cinco de Mayo: honors the 1862 Mexican victory over the French in Puebla</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>Mother’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Sep</td>
<td>Mexican Independence Day: celebrates Miguel Hidalgo’s “Grito de Dolores” that announced the Mexican revolt against Spanish rule</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Oct</td>
<td>Día de la Raza: celebrates the day of Columbus’s arrival to the Americas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1–2 Nov</td>
<td>Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead): mixes indigenous beliefs and modern Catholicism; a day on which they honor their children and their dead</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Nov</td>
<td>Anniversary of the Mexican Revolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Dec</td>
<td>Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe: celebrates the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego on Mexican soil</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Dec</td>
<td>Navidad (Christmas)</td>
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MEXICAN EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES
1911 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone: (202) 728-1600
Web site: http://www.embassyofmexico.org

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

BOOKS
Finerty, Catherine Palmer. *In a Village Far from Home: My Years Among the Cora Indians of the Sierra Madre*, University of Arizona Press, 2001.

FILM
*Travels in Mexico & the Caribbean*, Sandra Lewis Nisbet, 1999.
INTERNET SITES

CIA World Factbook:
http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook

Commission of Environmental Cooperation:
http://www.cec.org

Mexico Desconocido:

Mexico’s Economy (in Spanish):
http://www.economia.gob.mx

Mexico for Kids:
http://www.elbalero.gob.mx

Mexico History Online:
http://www.mexonline.com/history.htm

Mexico Web (in Spanish):
http://mexicoweb.com.mx

Mexico's Baja California Californian Peninsula:
http://www.bajalife.com

Movies about Mexico:
http://www.inside-mexico.com

NAFTA Index:
http://www.mac.doc.gov/nafta

National Commission for Biodiversity (in Spanish):
http://www.conabio.gob.mx

National Institute of Anthropology and History (in Spanish):
http://www.inah.gob.mx/index_.html

News About Mexico City:

Today’s Soap Operas:
http://soapnet.go.com
History Visual 5: Statue of an Aztec Warrior
History Visual 6: A Day of the Dead Altar
Name: __________________________

**NAFTA Word Search**

Agreement  
Canada  
Cars  
Clothes  
Culture  
Free  
Goods  
Mexico  
NAFTA  
North America  
Services  
Trade  
United States
NAFTA Word Search

Name: ___________________________

Agreement  Free   Services
Canada      Goods   Trade
Cars        Mexico   United States
Clothes     NAFTA   North America
Culture
The flag has three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white, and red; the coat of arms (an eagle perched on a cactus with a snake in its beak) is centered in the white band. The color green represents hope; white, purity; and red, religion.