

# Vamos a la Mexico

(Nine exciting activities to allow us to become better acquainted with our friends of South of the Border)

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Lookout, WV

1. Mapping Mexico
2. Pre-Hispanic Mexico and the influence of European Culture.
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## 1. Mapping Mexico

Cut-and-Paste Mexico  
Mary Sullivan-Charleston, WV

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### Overview

Students will gain a sense of the size of Mexico relative to the United States and to Florida by cutting and pasting Mexico into the United States

and by cutting and pasting Florida into Mexico. (geography, thinking skills, motor skills, math, art, reading,

- scaled maps of the [United States](#), [Mexico](#), and [Florida](#)
- blue construction paper with sentence strip on the bottom
- colored pencils or markers
- glue
- scissors
- vocabulary chart with geographical terms

## Procedures

1. Gather the children around the globe. Have a student point out and verbally describe the location of the North and South Poles. Have another student point out and verbally describe the location of the United States. Another student should locate and verbally describe the location of Florida (be sure to show east and west), and have still another student point out the location of the equator and tell what it is. As each child is locating the area on the globe, have another volunteer point to the written word on the vocabulary chart.
2. Tell the class that the country they are going to be learning about next is located south of the United States and that it touches the United States border. Tell them that it is also west of Florida. Ask if a volunteer might point to a country that it could be. When he/she does, repeat: Is this country south of the United States? Is this country west of Florida? Does it border the United States? Is there any other country that does those things? Does anyone know the name of this country? (If it has not already been named.) Write the word Mexico on the vocabulary chart.
3. Move to a class map of North America. Have a volunteer point to Mexico. Ask the students which is larger, the United States or Mexico. Let's do an experiment to find out. About how many Mexicos do you think will fit inside the United States? Write their estimates on the board, with their names beside them. Tell the class that we will use the word approximately. Explain that this word means just about

or almost. Have the students repeat the word as you write on the tablet.

4. Pass out the map of the United States with Mexico on the border along with the extra Mexicos. Have the students color the United States green and Mexico brown with colored pencils or markers. Have them color and cut out as many Mexicos as they need to fill the area of the United States. Tell the children that we call the land on a map the area. Write the word on the vocabulary chart.
5. Have the students cut out the rest of the United States and glue it on a piece of blue construction paper with a sentence strip attached to the bottom. Each student should copy from the board, onto the sentence strip at the bottom of their map: Mexico is approximately times smaller than the area of the United States.

### **Extension**

- How many Florida's will fit into the area of Mexico? Use the same procedure as the main activity. Change the sentence on the bottom to read: The area of Florida is approximately \_\_\_\_\_ times smaller than the area of Mexico.

## **2. Pre-Hispanic Mexico**

Life with the Aztecs

Aztec Mythology

By

Lorna Dils

<http://www.cis.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1994/3/94.03.03.x.html>,

found online 9/20/04

### **Part I—The Aztec Religion**

In order for teachers to present the mythology of the Aztecs to students, they need an understanding of the basics of the Aztec religion. The religion of the Aztecs is polytheistic. Some of the religion's gods had been known in Mexico for many years; others were adopted from the religions of the people the Aztecs conquered. The Aztec religion is one in which the practitioners were constantly trying to win the favor of the gods—to

influence the gods to look favorably upon them (Bray 1968: 152). This was done through offerings to the gods—human and otherwise.

The Aztecs believed that it took four attempts at creating the earth and mankind before the gods finally got everything right with the fifth attempt. The first creation took place when Black Tezcatlipoca (tes kah tlee POH kah), one of the four sons of the Lord and Lady of Duality, Ometecuhtli (oh may tay COO tlee) and Omecihuatl (oh may SEE wahtl) respectively, changed himself into the sun. The earth at that time was inhabited by giants who ate acorns, berries and roots. Tezoatlipoca's rival, Quetzalcoatl (ket sahl KO ahtl), couldn't stand the fact that Tezcatlipoca was ruling the universe, so he knocked him out of the sky. In his rage at being knocked out of the sky, Tezcatlipoca turned into a jaguar and destroyed the earth.

Attempt number two began when Quetzalcoatl took over the heavens. He created people on earth who ate pine nuts. Tezoatlipoca overthrew Quetzalcoatl and destroyed the earth with a great wind. The few people who were left on earth were changed into monkeys.

The third creation began when Tlaloc (TLAHL lock), the god of rain, became the sun. Quetzalcoatl sent rain which flooded the earth, killing almost all mankind. Those who did survive were turned into birds.

When Chalchiuhtlicue (chahl chee oo TLEE kway), the water goddess, took over the sun's responsibilities, the fourth creation had begun. This time, however, the earth was destroyed by flood and those men who survived became fish.

The final creation (the fifth sun) occurred when the gods met and decided one among them had to sacrifice himself to become the new sun. One poor, humble god did this and became the sun. However, the sun hung in the sky and didn't move. In order for the sun to move, it was necessary for all of the gods to sacrifice themselves. Once the sun was moving across the sky, it was Quetzalcoatl who took on the responsibility of creating mankind. He did this by going to the underworld to bring back to earth the bones of past generations. While fleeing the god of the underworld with his bag of bones, he slipped and fell, breaking the bones. He sprinkled the pieces of one with his blood and turned them into men. Because the pieces of bone were all different sizes, the men and women he created were all different sizes, too (Bray 1968: 154). While there are different variations of this account, in all versions, each creation brings man and food closer to the ideal of mankind

(Caso 1958: 16). This is a wonderful story to present to children, and a longer version of this myth that I have rewritten is included later in this unit.

The Aztecs believed in a heaven and an underworld. There were thirteen levels of heaven and nine of the underworld. There were also four horizontal points which corresponded to the directions of the compass and were associated with the four creator gods. All beings were assigned to one of these four points, depending on the day one was born. The earth was believed to be a large disc surrounded by water at the point where the horizontal and vertical met. The Lord and Lady of Duality, mentioned earlier also were the rulers of this central point (Bray 1968: 155).

The Aztecs believed that where you went after death depended upon what you did on earth and how you died. The eastern paradise, the "house of the sun" was the home of the souls of warrior who were killed in combat. This also included the souls of enemy warriors who had a special "god of the enemy dead." Sacrificed victims went there also. It was believed that souls stayed in the eastern paradise for four years, and then they returned to earth as hummingbirds or other exotic birds.

The western paradise, the house of corn, was believed to be for women who died in childbirth. They also returned to earth as phantoms of bad omens. The paradise of Tlaloc, the southern paradise was for people who died of lightning, leprosy or other sickness. This was a place of plentiful food.

The paradise of the north was for the rest of the dead. It was called Mictlan (MEEK tlahn) and getting there involved going through nine trials and took four years to accomplish.

The Aztec accounts of the trials a soul must go through to get to Mictlan are as follows:

- 1) cross a deep river—dogs were buried with their dead owners to guide them on this journey.
- 2) pass between two mountains which were joined together
- 3) climb an obsidian mountain
- 4) pass through icy wind that cut like a knife
- 5) pass through a place where flags waved
- 6) be pierced by arrows
- 7) pass among wild beasts which ate human hearts

- 8) pass over a narrow path of stone
- 9) reach this level where the soul found rest.

In order to make this trip, people were buried in a squatting position with items to help them on the way. These included water, the dog (tawny in color) mentioned at the first level of hell, a jade bead to act as the dead's heart at the seventh hell and other personal objects to give to Mictlantecuhtli (meek tlahn tay COO flee), god of the dead, or Mictēcacihuatl (meek tay kah SEE wahtl), mistress of the underworld, when they got to the ninth region.

There were thirteen heavens. Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl, the creator gods, lived in the double twelfth and thirteenth heavens. It was believed that the souls of babies went there as well as the souls of men waiting to be reincarnated upon the destruction of the human race (Caso 1958: 64).

Agriculture was the primary focus of the Aztec religion and the forces of water and earth were directly related to agricultural fertility. The Aztecs saw human life metaphorically—like maize or a flower. Man was born to die, but carried the seed of reproduction (Miller and Taube 1993: 31).

Therefore, ceremonies dealt with life—not afterlife—to ensure health, fertility and to avoid natural disasters.

As mentioned earlier, the Aztec religion was one of constant effort to propitiate the gods in order that they might look favorably upon mankind. The Aztecs, through their religious practices, endeavored to keep a balance in nature. One religious practice to accomplish this was human sacrifice.

The sacrificing of humans was looked upon as a pay back to the gods (Miller and Taube 1993: 30). Just as corn might be sacrificed to Tlaloc, the rain god, in thanks for that season's harvest and to ensure future crops, so humans would be sacrificed to the gods to ensure the continuation of the human race. Sacrifice was considered a necessity for the welfare of man. Those sacrificed were considered messengers to the gods, not victims.

It is difficult to present Aztec mythology or really any aspect of the Aztec culture without addressing the subject of human sacrifice with students. I have found that students are able to handle this subject well enough as long as some of the gorier specifics are left out. Just as my fourth and fifth grade students can read about the young Greek who were to be sacrificed to the minotaur in the story of "Perseus and the Minotaur", so these students can learn that sacrifice was a part of the Aztec religion. I explain it as I

have in the preceding paragraph, using the same examples. I do not go into any more detail than that, even though I know that these students are the "Terminator 2" generation. I do not feel the specific details of sacrifice or blood letting is appropriate or necessary for my students in their understanding of the Aztec culture at this point in their educations.

## **Lesson Plan**

Read and Discuss "Quetzalcoatl and the Creation of Man."

### **Quetzalcoatl and the Creation of Man**

On this night, Obsidian Snake waited impatiently for the sound of his mother finishing her day's work. All day long, as he had gathered wood for fire and helped his father work their fields of maize, he had thought of Turquoise Maize Flower's words from the night before. Soon the moon would rise up in the sky and he smiled as he thought of the moon's surprise and embarrassment when the gods whacked it with a rabbit because it shone as brightly as the sun. Now it knew its proper place and shone dimly in the night sky, still wearing the mark of the rabbit.

"What happened next," wondered Obsidian Snake? "I know how the sun and moon came to be. How did mankind get here?"

As if reading his mind, his mother quietly appeared beside him. He knew she was tired as she had woven much cloth to be sold at the market place in Tenochtitlan and would welcome the chance to sit quietly with him for awhile.

"How did we get here?" asked Obsidian Snake as his mother took her place beside him in the cool, dry night.

"We are the children of Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent," his mother began. "He is our creator; he discovered maize so that we might feed ourselves. He taught us how to find jade and other precious stones and taught us how to polish them. From him the art of weaving our many colored cotton cloth was learned and passed down from mother to daughter for many generations. The Plumed Serpent taught our people how to use the feathers of the quetzal, the hummingbird and other birds with colorful plumage to make beautiful designs. He also taught our people how to measure time. He gave us our calendar with its special days set aside for certain prayers and festivals.

But that is the end of my story, Obsidian Snake. It begins after the creation of the fifth sun when Quetzalcoatl went to the lord of the dead, Mictlantecuhtli, to ask for bones from dead men with which to create new men. When Mictlantecuhtli gave a bag of bones to Quetzalcoatl, he immediately began to run with them because he had been told that the lord of the dead was not to be trusted. As Quetzalcoatl was running, he slipped and fell, breaking all the bones in the bag and spilling them about. He was still able to gather them up and escape from Mictlan, the underworld. Once safe, Quetzalcoatl mixed his blood with the bones and created a new breed of men. Since the bones that had fallen broke into different sizes, that meant that the people he created were all different sizes. That is why, Obsidian Snake, when you look around you, you can see that no two people are exactly the same. It's because of our creator, the Plumed Serpent, and the bones that got broken.

Now, having created man and being a kindly god, Quetzalcoatl realized he needed to find a way to feed his new creation. One day he spotted a big black ant with a kernel of corn. This, he knew, would be the perfect food to feed mankind. To find out where the ant got the corn, Quetzalcoatl turned himself into an ant and followed the black ant to a mountain. In a crack in this mountain Quetzalcoatl saw not only corn but beans, peppers, sage, and other kinds of food fit for mankind. Quetzalcoatl, still in the body of an ant, squeezed through the crack, took a kernel of corn and dragged it back to man so that man could plant it for food. Quetzalcoatl realized that there was much more food beside corn in the mountain which could be used to feed mankind. He asked the other gods what to do with the mountain. They said to split the mountain open to give the food to mankind, and so one of them did. This, however, angered Tlaloc, the rain god who, with his children, stole the beans, corn, peppers, and sage from within the mountain before it could be given to man.

So it is today that Tlaloc and his children still have the food that was in the mountain. Each year they give part of the food back to man, some years more than others.

And that is why, my son, Obsidian Snake, we sacrifice to both our creator and protector Quetzalcoatl, and to the rain god Tlaloc, so that they will continue to look upon our people with kindness and keep our world in balance. Without them our crops and our people will perish."

With that word, Turquoise Maize Flower stopped and smiled down at Obsidian Snake. He leaned against his mother and could feel his eyes beginning to grow heavy in the quiet cool of the night. Even in his sleepiness, he knew these were the accounts that had been told to her by her mother and father and these were the accounts that one day he would share with his children on dry, clear evenings when the moon with its rabbit markings looked down on them.

Ask students to list the questions about Aztec life and the world around them that are answered in this story. (See Lesson Plan I)

Define and discuss the meaning of the word "agriculture."

Discuss why agriculture is so important to the Aztecs and their religion.

Divide students in to small groups of three or four. Using the books listed in the students' bibliography, have students research the food of the Aztecs.

Discuss the similarities and differences between the food that the Aztecs eat and the food that we eat today.

As a class, plan and prepare an Aztec meal.

Read the Nigerian folktale *Why the Sky is Far Away* by Mary-Joan Gerson. This myth is also about food and answers the question why people grow their food. Have students compare and contrast these two stories.

### 3. Los colores

By Laura Anne Bowen  
Nuttall Middle School  
Grade levels 5-6

**Materials:** Pre-fashioned color flashcards, white boards and wet board markers, tableros for each group, computers with Internet access

To begin the lesson, students will be asked to access the following website <http://www.quia.com/jg/325213.html>, where they can practice an interactive lesson on los colores. There are four fun activities which allow the students to access any prior knowledge of Spanish colors. After 15 minutes of independent exploration, the students will gather around the teacher. Teacher will use pre-fashioned cards with the Spanish colors on each one. Mine were ordered through a Spanish learning tools magazine.

He/she then uses the flashcards to re-teach and clarify new information. Student are asked to use tableros and whiteboards. In this activity, the students are broken into groups of three. They use the tableros to order the colors in Spanish. On the whiteboards, the students write correct color sequence in Spanish.

## **4. Mexican food**

Lesson Plan #: AELP-SPN0006,

**Grade Level: 5**

[http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Foreign\\_Language/Spanish/SPN0006.html](http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Foreign_Language/Spanish/SPN0006.html)

## **Mexican Food**

An Educator's Reference Desk Lesson Plan

**Submitted by:** Melissa Schack

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**School/University/Affiliation:** Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**Date:** June 22, 2000

**Subject(s):**

- Foreign Language/Spanish

**Duration:** two to three 45-minute lessons

**Description:** This is one of several lessons about food vocabulary. This lesson introduces Mexican food and the history behind it. The main objective of this lesson is to introduce new food vocabulary to the students. In addition, the students will also participate in classroom activities, make a menu of their own, take quizzes, and use the Internet to practice vocabulary. The students will apply what they learn in a Mexican restaurant, by ordering their own meal in Spanish.

**Goals:** Following a lecture on the history of Mexican food, grade five students will be able to recognize and order Mexican cuisine, with 100% accuracy.

**Objectives:**

1. Identify the foods associated with Mexico.
2. Compare and contrast these foods with the foods associated with the United States.
3. Recognize that many of the foods used in the world today were developed in Mexico.
4. Describe the typical foods that come from Mexico.
5. Recall that Mexican meals have similarities and differences from the meals in America.
6. Be familiar with and be able to order food from a Mexican menu.

**Materials:**

- At least one computer.
- A set of art supplies, for each student.
- Construction paper.
- Pictures of various kinds of Mexican foods.

**Procedure:**

Introduction:

The teacher will ask the students what kinds of food they think that people in Mexico eat. The teacher will ask the class to pick a particular type of food that is not common for Mexicans to eat. The teacher will ask the class if they know any of the Spanish names for the food. After the question and answer portion of the class is finished, the teacher will tell the class that they will be making a Mexican menu of their own, in Spanish, and that they will be going to a Mexican restaurant to order their lunch in Spanish.

### **Lesson Body:**

The teacher will start discussing the history of corn in Mexico. The teacher will ask the students the following questions:

1. Why do you think corn is so important in Mexico?
2. Are these foods similar to the ones that we eat?
3. What do they eat at home that similar/dissimilar?
4. What foods are typical in the American diet?
5. Which of these foods would people in other countries eat, as well?

The teacher will discuss all the questions asked in detail. The teacher will discuss why there are differences in the types of foods eaten in Mexico. The teacher will display the various pictures, with the English name and the Spanish name below it. The teacher will say the English version, then the Spanish version. The class will repeat after the teacher. After the pictures have been viewed and spoken in Spanish, the teacher will show the pictures again, without the Spanish name under it. The class will participate by trying to identify the food name in Spanish.

The teacher will now discuss about how to make a menu, using the new words they just learned. They can be creative as they like, but they must use the new words learned in this lesson. The teacher will tell the class that they will be sharing their menus' with the rest of the class. The class will become acquainted with the vocabulary for two class periods, using their menus, playing memory games, bingo, and having quizzes. At the beginning of the third class, the class will take a trip to the local Mexican restaurant and order their lunch in Spanish.

**Assessment:** The students' understanding of the vocabulary will be informally assessed through large group participation in a class discussion.

Teacher observation of individual participation in the class discussion will also be evaluated. The students' understanding will also be assessed in playing various games, such as memory, flash cards, word searches, and bingo. The quizzes and the ordering of lunch in a Mexican restaurant will be the formal evaluation.

#### **Useful Internet Resources:**

##### [La Cocina Mexicana](#)

A site dedicated to Mexican food that provides a sample Mexican restaurant menu, recipes, and more.

<http://cocinamexicana.com.mx/cocinamex.html>

##### [Quia Directory-Spanish](#)

The Quia Directory is a great starting point for new users. It is a collection of thousands of activities categorized into 40 subject areas. All of the activities in the directory were created by teachers using Quia's tools and templates.

<http://www.quia.com/dir/spanish/>

I would take this lesson plan a step further. At the end of the unit, we would make some of the Mexican dishes and include them in the end-of-the-unit fiesta.

## 5. Mexican dance

### **Mexican Hat Dance**

**Grade: 5**

Author: Laura Patey, Pine Forest School of the Arts, Jacksonville, FL

<http://www.educationcentral.org/atcd/Lesson>

**Subjects:** Social Studies, Dance, and Multicultural

**Overview:** To recognize other cultures' customs and dances.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is for the student's to increase the awareness of other cultures and to compare the dance to the culture of the United States.

**Objectives:** The students will be able to understand another culture and custom of another country.

**Materials:** The song, "The Mexican Hat Dance", hats (if possible), plenty of room, a map of Mexico/North America, chart paper and a marker.

**Introduction:** Show the class the map of North America. Have some students point out where they live. Explain to the class that they are going to be studying a country south of the United States.

**Activities and Procedures:**

Show the class the map of North America. Have some students point out where they live. Next, ask the students if they know where Mexico is.

Show the class where the country is and how far or close it may be to where they live. Ask the students what sounds may represent their country (Star Spangled Banner, Grand Old Flag, etc.) Explain to the class that they will be listening to the "Mexican Hat Dance" this is a song that is performed in Mexico. This dance is part of the culture of Mexico.

Before starting the dance lesson, use the chart paper and make a comparison chart of customs the US and Mexico (from what they may know).

Begin the dance. If possible pair the class up if not, make a circle.

*Dance is as follows:* jump RLR with the heel facing up, clap 2 times, repeat LRL, and clap 2 times. Then have the partners join arm in arm and skip for 4 counts to the RIGHT and around 4 counts to the LEFT.

Closure: Repeat the dance. Have the students compare the Mexican Hat Dance to a dance that could be popular in the United States.

Evaluation: Have the students show the dance without help.

## 6. Mexican Art

### Making a Pinata

by Catherine Fournier

<http://www.domestic-church.com>

The feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12 is celebrated in Mexico and the United States. On this feast day, large processions enter the beautiful basilica in Mexico City with flowers, banners, and singing meant to symbolize the singing of birds heard by Juan Diego at the first apparition of Mary.

It is a special feast day for families too. Families gather together for parties at which Mexican food and pinatas are featured. Children love pinatas for several reasons.

First, they are bright and colourful. Second, they are full of candy and small prizes.

Third, normal rules of behaviour encouraging sharing and gentleness are

suspended and the children are allowed to scramble for as much candy as they can reach.

Fourth, it's something that they are allowed to break! They can hit it as hard as they want!

Pinatas are easy to make, though they require a few days and some planning ahead. This is always difficult, especially at this time of year, but the results are worth it!

**Materials needed:**

- A LARGE round balloon or beach ball
- A good pile of old newspapers
- White glue or flour and water to make a paste
- Scissors
- Tape (regular or masking)
- Thin cardboard
- Crayons, markers, poster paint

- Tissue paper or construction paper
- String or yarn
- A craft knife
- Goodies to fill the Pinata - this should include candy of course, but also could include holy cards, medals, and other small items like balls, pencils, toy cars, stamps and stamp pads, and anything else that catches your imagination.

### ***Step One***

Spread newspapers or plastic sheeting over your work surface. Blow up the balloon or beach ball and tie a knot at the end. Tear newspapers into strips about 1 inch wide and about 6 inches long. Tearing rather than cutting is important, it helps the strips lie flat on top of each other. Pour some of the glue into a disposable bowl or a bowl you don't mind soaking in water for a long while, or mix flour and cold water to make a paste the consistency of thick glue. Dip the newspaper strips into the glue and spread them onto the balloon. Thoroughly cover the balloon, leaving a small hole at the top to remove the balloon and fill the pinata. Let the first layer dry.

### ***Step Two***

Repeat Step One two more times, until the papier mache is built up to a good thickness. Next day if the paper feels dry when you touch it, then wrap the balloon with the yarn to give it strength to hold when swinging it. Add another two layers of glue and newspapers. Let it dry for another day. Remove the balloon.

### **Decorating the Pinata:**

Traditional shapes for the pinata include donkeys (for the donkey that carried Mary), fish (symbolizing Christ) and birds (for the birds that sang when Mary appeared to Juan Diego). Roll the cardboard to make legs and a head for the donkey, then build up the shape with more papier mache. Shape a cone for the head and tail of a fish, then add fins and eyes. Use additional layers of papier mache to make it more 'fish like'. A similar technique will create a bird body, onto which can then be added wings, legs and a tail.

When the shape is finished and dry, fill the pinata with candy and goodies, and cover the hole with a few layers of paper.

A more simple pinata can be made as a ball with decorated papier mache cones sticking out all over it. Paper streamers hang from the cones.

Then paint the pinata. Pinatas should be bright and colourful. Crepe paper streamers cut up with a fringe can be curled up with the help of the pencil, and glued onto the pinata. Start from the bottom and layer them overlapping. Decorate the cones with the crepe paper, adding strings to the tips.

### **Playing the Pinata Game.**

Hang the pinata up from the ceiling. Each child gets a turn trying to break the pinata. Blindfold the child and give them a stick (a broom handle works well). Turn the child around in a circle 2 or 3 times and point him or her in the direction of the pinata. The child gets to swing the stick 2 or 3 times. Make sure everyone else stands clear of the swinging stick, including the grown-ups!!! Then another child gets a turn. When someone breaks the pinata, all the children get to gather the goodies. You might want to have little paper bags with each child's name on them so the kids have a place to store their goodies for the remainder of the party and a way to carry everything home.

## **7. Graphing**

Laura Anne Bowen

Grade (s) 5-6

Nuttall Middle School

**Materials needed:** Butcher paper (four sheets), markers, yardsticks (four), overhead projector.

**Procedure:** Divide the students into four groups. After each has modeled and retaught basic graphing using students ages, allow the children to break into groups. The teacher can follow the students' ideas on graphing. This activity allows the students to work together to present ideas.

**Graphing.** Invite students to use the following information from the U.S. Bureau of the Census to create a bar graph, a picture graph, or a circle graph showing the country of origin of U.S. Hispanics. The information below shows how many of every 100 Hispanic Americans list each of seven different countries as the nation from which their ancestors came.

Mexico	61 out of 100
Puerto Rico	12 out of 100
Cuba	5 out of 100
Spain	5 out of 100
Dominican Republic	2 out of 100
Nations in Central America	6 out of 100
Nations of South America	5 out of 100
Other Hispanic Nations	4 out of 100

Wrap up: Compare and contrast differences in graphs.

## 8. Día de los Muertos

### A photo essay of The Days of the Dead

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/sdwells/oaxdd/sdwoaxacadaydead.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/sdwells/oaxdd/sdwoaxacadaydead.html)

With permission of Stephen Dyer Wells ©2001 - [His Wonderful Website](#) - [His Bio](#)

Materials needed: computer with Internet access or computer projector with downloaded pictures from Website, *Burying Eula*, a short story, list of vocabulary from the story: *ancianos, mal aire. Fiestas, niña, in baile tropical, novios, señora, funerario, pan dulce, quinceañera..., Día de los Muertos:*

*The Dead Come to Life in Mexican Folk Art*

**Procedure:** Students with view the photo essay of Los Dias de Los Muertos, read a the short story *Burying Eula*. Discuss the reason the author may have

used authentic Spanish terms when referring to the story. Let the students identify the author's purpose for writing this story.

Karen Hursh Graber

Her Bio

[Her Home Page](#)

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/recipes/puebla/kgburying.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/recipes/puebla/kgburying.html)

## BURYING EULA

### A Short Story

#### I

Eula died during the rainy season, when the earth is soft and moist and a grave is easy to dig. Esperanza said that the damp weather was hard on the *ancianos*, and indeed, in those months, many a house in town bore over its gate the black ribbon which in central Mexico signifies a death in the household. Esperanza said that some people just went around looking for new black ribbons so that they could come in and have sweet rolls and rich, dark *café de olla* and maybe, if it was the last night of the rosary, a shot of something to keep the chill off. After all, the occasion itself was only proof, wasn't it, that one was never safe from the *mal aire*.

Protecting the helpless gringo family in her charge from "bad air" was one of Esperanza's resolutely pursued missions in life. Some of her other callings included planning enormous *fiestas* for the baptisms, first communions, *quinceaneras*, and weddings of her numerous children and grandchildren, as well as active participation in various social and religious functions in the *barrio*. Esperanza lived San Pedrito's version of a mad social whirl. She was particularly devoted to my own well-being and, although I was nearly twelve when Eula died, still referred to me as la *niña*. She bundled me into sweaters and scarves on even the mildest of evenings,

despite my protests that I would suffocate before I would catch a cold.

My mother, who had never worn anything heavier than a New York Yankees warm-up jacket in her life, never said a word. During all of Esperanza's ministrations against *la gripa*, which included foul-tasting teas and leafy poultices, my mother stood by like a first-year medical student watching the chief of surgery in action. My observations that she herself would never undergo these arcane treatments were dismissed with a vague wave of a slender hand. "After all, Melissa," she would say, "Esperanza has lived her whole life in this climate and she's using natural remedies which have probably been passed down for generations." And Esperanza, who did not understand a word of English, would nonetheless assume the smug expression that says I-told-you-so in any language. (Years later, realizing their benefits, I would use some of those same teas when my own children got sick and every time I did, Esperanza would appear in my mind's eye with a sly, merry wink.)

But on the night that Eula died, torturing me with herbs was not uppermost in her mind. Now we were the ones passing around trays laden with sweet rolls and coffee, and it seemed that half of San Pedrito was in the living room before Eula's coffin had even been delivered.

Eula was my grandfather's third wife and at the age of ninety-two, her death could hardly be considered unexpected. My grandfather was only seventy-eight and had met Eula in a nursing home in the States, where the venerable lovebirds had married and possibly even consummated their May-December union. Shortly thereafter, Eula had begun to develop what I now realize must have been Alzheimer's, wandering at odd intervals day and night and needing special care. This had lowered both my grandfather's spirits and his finances.

My Aunt Elaine, who had left the States with a Mexican husband years before, made the decision to bring "the whole helpless bunch" down to Mexico where, although no longer with her husband, she had a good position teaching English at the state university. Her widowed sister and "little niece" would accompany Eula and Grandpa on the flight down and settle into a house in San Pedrito, the small town where my aunt lived and from which she made the daily commute to the university. My mother, weepy and morose since my father had died, and used to listening to her older sister all her life anyway, agreed.

I had been a little scared at first, but now, after a few years, I had my friends at school and Esperanza's various children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews in and out all the time. We lived in a house with a sunny patio and flowering plants in big clay pots and good smells always coming from the kitchen. My mother, with Esperanza's help, did the marketing and cooking and housework and took care of Grandpa and Eula; my Aunt Elaine went off to the university every day and managed the finances and some nights went out dancing with "novios". My grandfather was thrilled to be out of "the home" and surrounded by family in a house where he was treated like a king instead of a patient.

Eula seemed to have no idea that she was even in another country. Now she would never leave. A few days earlier she had developed respiratory problems and my aunt had called in a bilingual doctor from the university, just in case anything that anyone said was actually registering, and he had written out a prescription while Esperanza watched skeptically over his shoulder. Now it was nearly nine at night and Eula had died as she dozed and we and several neighbors were drinking coffee and waiting for the coffin.

## II

"*Señora Cristina!*" Esperanza called from Eula and Grandpa's room. "What dress do you want me to put on the *señora?*"

"What did Esperanza say, Melissa?" my mother inquired, head down on the kitchen table, evidently too tired to follow Esperanza's rapid Spanish. She was surrounded by neighbors murmuring soothingly, while my aunt took a turn at passing the refreshments.

An hour before, the two of them had gone to the *funerarios*, rung the night bell and selected a coffin. Scarcely a half an hour later, neighbors had begun to arrive. Now the *funerarios* people were in the living room, setting up the coffin with a large cross at its head and four silver candleholders, one for each corner. One of the neighbors had arrived with long beeswax candles, wrapped in brown paper and tied with string, ready to be unwrapped, admired and lit.

There was nothing to discuss regarding "arrangements"; things were moving along on their own just exactly as they had for generations. Esperanza and the neighbors had mobilized; the group of women at the kitchen table was discussing who should lead the first rosary while the men in the living room were moving furniture in order to accommodate the coffin and the crowd that would stay up all night for the *velorio*. Esperanza's husband, Don Beto, had gone home to get folding chairs.

My mother looked faint, my Aunt Elaine rather perky and hostess-like with her tray of *pan dulce*. My grandfather, who had badly sprained his ankle only a week before while getting a lesson in *baile tropical* out on the patio with Esperanza's sister, and had been getting around with a cane, was now sitting on the edge of Eula's bed, his head and hands leaning heavily on the curved handle, sobbing pitifully.

"Mom, please," I implored. "She wants to know what to put on Eula. You know. What clothes."

"No, I don't know. I have no idea what Eula would have wanted. She hasn't spoken more than two syllables in the last three years."

"Well, I know. I know exactly which dress she'd want. She liked that navy blue silk one the best. She liked the way it felt when she touched it. I knew that because of her eyes. I could tell when she was happy because her eyes would change. I could tell lots of things about her that people never even noticed and I want to dress her."

I could understand the shocked expression on my mother's face, because I had surprised even myself. I had said what I had before I even knew what was coming out, but suddenly it had become very important to me.

"But Melissa, you're not even twelve years old!" My mother didn't seem to know what else to say. Clearly the idea of my wanting to dress a dead person struck her as an aberration.

"Elaine!" she called. "Can you believe this child wants to dress Eula?"

"Well, as long as I don't have to do it," came the reply. One of my aunt's *novios* had arrived with the first bouquet of many that would fill the room in the next several days and my aunt was getting more hostess-y by the minute.

At that moment, Esperanza entered the kitchen. My mother began to explain my request in her slow, careful Spanish, but if she was looking for an ally she was in the wrong country.

"Melissa is right," Esperanza said. "She understood the *señora* better than any of us and she should prepare her. My daughter Maricela will help her. They will make her look beautiful."

**This was my moment:** queen of the hop, member of the wedding. I was to play an important role in the events that were unfolding before my family's rather bewildered eyes. And to be included in the same grown-up category as Maricela! Maricela was five years older than I and had celebrated her *quinceañera* the summer we arrived in San Pedrito. It had been the first of many social functions in which our family would be included, and the sight of

Maricela dancing her first waltz in a big, hoop-skirted dress the same pink color as her five-tiered cake had been impressive. I had looked up to her ever since, trying to copy what I considered to be her sophisticated mannerisms and, to the limited extent permitted by my mother, styles of clothing.

My grandfather was led into the living room, where his eyes lit up at the sight of all the neighbors who had come to pay their respects. I followed Maricela into the bedroom, where Eula was in her bed looking remarkably like she always had while napping. Maricela appraised Eula in a business-like way and proceeded to wad up two small cotton balls, which she pushed delicately into the small, pinched nostrils. She touched Eula's forehead, lifted the covers to touch her feet and pronounced her *calientita*, not yet cold and stiff as I'd imagined.

"First, pick out her clothes," she ordered. "Then we'll put on the underwear, then the dress and shoes and then we'll fix her hair. We can put a little bit of my makeup on her." Maricela seemed so confident.

"Have you ever done this before?" I asked.

"Sure, I helped with my *abuelita* and also when my cousin Nati's baby died." She added importantly, "I can also give injections and put in *sueros*." I knew that *sueros* were intravenous fluids, because one time I had gone to visit a friend from school who was home with a bad stomach infection and had been lying in bed with a needle taped into her arm and a plastic pouch of liquid hanging on a pole next to the bed. I could not imagine trying to get a needle into someone's vein and silently vowed to exhibit no squeamishness around the accomplished Maricela.

I took a deep breath and reached out to touch Eula's cheek. It was a bit cool, but not cold and certainly not unpleasant. Something still

there and something gone. "Yes," I said with what I considered to be my newly-acquired sophistication, "She could use a little lipstick."

### III

A couple of the men lifted Eula into her coffin, where Maricela's and my handiwork was admired. My grandfather was particularly taken by how "sweet and pretty" she looked. I knew he was proud of me.

The next day, everyone who had been at the house the night before went to the mass and then, following in a long line behind Don Beto's pick-up truck, which contained the coffin in the back and Grandpa in the front passenger seat, walked to the cemetery. Everyone carried flowers, mostly gladiolas, red and white. I walked next to Maricela, feeling a bit more her equal than I had in the past. My mother and aunt were the only ones carrying umbrellas, which proved to be handy because when we got to the cemetery the skies let loose with a fierce downpour, the kind called an *aguacero*, where the paved roads flood and the dirt roads turn to mud.

My grandfather, overcome with grief and the pain in his ankle, had to be carried by two of the men to the gravesite, where Don Beto thoughtfully placed one of his folding chairs. Everyone stood in the rain saying another rosary while my mother and my aunt took turns leaning over grandpa with an umbrella and the gravediggers slowly and skillfully lowered Eula's coffin into the ground with ropes.

As they covered it back over with dirt, someone took out a pack of cigarettes and began passing them around. Everyone, even the oldest ladies who never smoked, took at least one puff, to chase away any bad spirits. Maricela coolly French-inhaled and passed her cigarette to me. Another first! I thought it tasted terrible and passed it to someone else. If my mother noticed, she didn't mention it then or ever.

Not until the last shovelful of earth was in place did anyone turn to leave, and afterward everyone came to our house to eat hot soup, red rice and one of Esperanza's *guisados*, which she had stayed home from the cemetery to cook. That night and for nine consecutive nights neighbors came to pray for Eula's soul as it made its journey, and to eat sweet rolls and drink coffee.

That was in early September. In early November, during the Days of the Dead, Esperanza supervised the *ofrenda*, an altar set up to commemorate the family members who have died. We set out a picture of Eula, smiling, taken before she started to get sick, and plates of her favorite foods. There was also water to refresh her during her visit back to the family, and incense and marigolds, whose fragrance would lead her to the right home. We all enjoyed setting out special things that we remembered seemed to make her happy during those times when we were permitted a glance into the person behind the illness. Grandpa wasn't supposed to eat sweets, but everytime he stopped to admire the altar he snatched a few of Eula's M&Ms and no one told him not to.

#### IV

To this day, there is a family altar built in our house at the beginning of November. My children are very young, but they understand that we are remembering the people in the pictures. Even when I went back to the States for a few years in a university, I made my own little altar each year. As time went by, more pictures got added, including my grandfather's.

Grandpa lived for several years after Eula died and when we went to bury him we had a surprise waiting. As the gravediggers dug Grandpa's spot next to Eula, we were amazed to see that there was another coffin on top of hers, a tiny, homemade box. Anyone's best

guess was that some poor person who had lost a baby and couldn't afford a plot had paid one of the cemetery workers a few extra pesos to slip it in somewhere. All the neighbors said how wonderful it was that now Eula and my grandfather had their own baby, since they had been too old when they met to have one. And I thought back to the time of burying Eula and realized that Esperanza had never called me *niña* again..

## Día de los Muertos:

The Dead Come to Life in Mexican Folk Art

By Mary Jane Gagnier Mendoza

[Her Email](#)

[Her Bio](#)

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/mjmendoza/mjmdiadelas\\_muertos.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/mjmendoza/mjmdiadelas_muertos.html)

For foreigners, the traditions and celebrations in Mexican homes and cemeteries during the Day of the Dead seem strange, if not incomprehensible. There is mourning and rejoicing; sadness and silliness - woven together into one emotional fabric.

To me, it's like welcoming the return of a dear friend or relative, who moved far away and visits just once a year. Mexicans try very hard to be with their families for this *fiesta*, as the living and the dead gather for the most complete of family reunions.

The Day of the Dead activities actually span several days, beginning late at night Oct. 31, when the spirits of dead children (*angelitos*) start arriving, followed by adult spirits sometime during Nov. 1. They leave, after joining in a family meal, on Nov. 2. Although exact times for the spirits' entrances vary from pueblo to pueblo, the *angelitos* always arrive ahead of the adults.

I grew up in a French-Canadian Catholic family. From an early age, I believed that when you died, you put on a white satin smock with

lace around the cuffs and joined the anonymous army of souls (in heaven if you were lucky).

Mexicans have a distinctly different view of themselves in the afterlife. First, you keep your identity, since to return to this world for the Day of the Dead, you must remain who you were. This explains the profusion of skeletons of all sizes, doing ordinary day-to-day things. If uncle José was a barber, he continues as a barber after death. Placing a skeleton figure of a barber on your altar reaffirms to uncle José that he has not been forgotten on his spiritual return.

Most Oaxacan homes have a highly adorned Day of the Dead altar. Sugar skulls with the names of dead loved ones inscribed in their icing indicate to the returning spirits that they have indeed returned to the right spot, where the living await their arrival. The altar is a sort of landing pad and its objects serve as signals to guide the spirits home.

Throughout the year, but especially during the Day of the Dead season, *calacas*, or skeletons, are displayed in shops throughout the city. In the Abastos market, for a few pesos each, you'll find cardboard, wire and cotton-ball figures depicting nearly every walk of life. The more upscale folk art stores display elaborate ceramic and paper mache *calacas*, individually signed by renowned Mexican folk artists.

## **DUALITY IN MEXICAN FOLK ART**

The skeletons and skulls of Mexican folk art reflect the dualism fundamental to the pre-Hispanic world view. Without duality in all aspects of life, the universe loses its equilibrium. Animal and human forms; masculine and feminine energies - all are needed. Of all these balancing forces, perhaps none is more significant than that of life and death.

Images expressing dualities abound in Mexican folk art. The *Nahuals* of Oaxacan woodcarvers, for example, are supernatural beings that transform back and forth from animal to human form and from human to animal form. The belief in *Nahuals* is well-documented in indigenous folk culture. However, if a survey were taken among Mexico's folk artists, the combined imagery of life and death - *la vida y la muerte* - would emerge as the most popular and pervasive theme.

The iconographic image of the living and dead sharing a single body or head remains a common visual theme in Mexican folk art. The reason is simple: for the Mexican, life and death are part of the same linear process. Birth leads into life, and life leads to death. Join the ends of the process and the cycle of life is created.

The roots of this duality are ancient and deep. The Borgia Codex depicting pre-Hispanic life shows two gods: Quetzalcoatl, the god of life who governs the earth and sky; and Mictlantecuihtl, the god of the underworld and keeper of the dead. They appear in profile, joined at the spine. At first glance, they seem a single form. Two distinct shapes then define themselves, one complementing the other and the two together forming a complete whole. Each, we learn, needs the other to justify its existence.

#### THE ALTARS AND THE ROLE OF EPHEMERA

No exploration of the Day of the Dead would be complete without a discussion of the ephemeral creations used in its celebration. Most of the elaborate Day of the Dead altars found in Oaxacan homes are adorned with authentic works of art meant to last no longer than the *fiesta* itself.

To Western culture oriented to preserving everything as long as possible, it may seem strange to expend so much labor on objects having no other purpose than to be consumed and destroyed. Mexicans, especially indigenous Oaxacans, see themselves as

empheral beings in an empheral world. To enjoy material objects, yet be willing to relinquish them, is totally natural to them.

Nothing is more empheral than the sugar used to make elaborate skulls, angels, and animals for the Day of the Dead. Saving these items for the following year would never occur to Oaxacans. Children used to wait all year for parents to buy them *calaveras de azúcar* with their names inscribed in the icing. Today, chocolate skulls are replacing the sugar ones, but the tradition of eating sweet skulls is as alive as ever.

*Papel picado* - intricately cut tissue paper banners depicting scenes of skeletons dancing, drinking and otherwise celebrating - are strung along the edge of altars, creating a lacey border. Non-Mexicans often ask how to preserve them. "You shouldn't," I say, "because they were never made for that." Such ephemera celebrate other events and fiestas as well. White tissue paper is used for weddings. Red, white and green commemorate Independence Day. A riot of color surrounds the Day of the Dead. When fiestas end, *papel picados* are left to fly in the open air until rain reduces them to nothing.

Flowers, candles and incense are indispensable to any lovingly adorned altar. Wax flowers, fruits, and cherubs decorate hand-dipped beeswax candles. As the candles burn non-stop, the wax decorations are set aside to be melted for the next batch of candles.

## THE TOYMAKING TRADITION

A thriving tradition of toymaking plays a central role in the Oaxacan Day of the Dead. Among such diverse themes as the Nativity, bullfights and carnival rides, the skeleton is by far the most popular image. Mariachi *calaveras* in the form of puppets made of painted plywood and string are special favorites among small children. Who

knows what makes skeleton toys funnier than toys depicting the living? Maybe it's the surprising juxtaposition of the dead doing something lively and spirited that brings a chuckle to the most sober face. Perhaps by making death more approachable through friendly images, like a dancing skeleton playing a guitar, Mexicans begin to lose their fear of death at an early age.

## THE SPIRIT OF POSADA

The name *Posada* and lively skeletons are linked as few other icons of contemporary Day of the Dead culture. Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) popularized Mexico's life of the dead in biting satiric, mass-produced etchings and lithographs that have enthralled Mexicans for generations.

By depicting social and political personalities as *calaveras*, Posada's posters achieved lasting and unrivaled popularity. By caricaturing his targets in their bare bones, his scathing and often risky political satire became funnier and thus more acceptable.

In his posters, priests, politicians, farmers and streetsweepers share the same destiny - death, an end neither money nor power can outwit. For a country living in extreme social inequality during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, the idea of the rich and poor alike one day rubbing elbows (if only bone to bone) was attractive to the masses.

Posada's handprinted *calaveras*, accompanied by witty social commentary in rhyming verse, reached the farthest corners of the Mexican Republic. To this day, his work pervades the image and spirit of Mexican folk artists. The *Catrina*, an upperclass lady of the turn-of-the-century always depicted in her broad-brimmed hat, has become a classic in Mexican folk art and is displayed prominently in many store windows. The images can be found in everything from

fine ceramic and artistic paper mache figures, to inexpensive *papel picados* and plaster miniatures.

Nothing is static about Posada's *calaveras* (mischievous skeletons). They are always up to something, going somewhere or, as in the *Calavera Oaxaquena*, just raising hell.

### **The Calavera Oaxaqueña**

The valiant calavera  
Has just arrived today.  
Take off your hat and greet him.  
Don't look at him that way!

In Oaxaca they pay for bravery  
With a hooter of mezcal.  
And without a single rival  
Are their beautiful young gals.

No one ever scares me.  
At them all I do is guffaw.

And to prove this I danced a two-step  
Upon a dandy from Guadalajara.

The Oaxaca calavera  
Has just arrived today.  
Take off your hat and greet him  
Because he's here to stay.

For all of you who like to travel, be assured that in the afterlife you'll get a chance to come back, kick up your heels with loved ones and, like the *Calavera Oaxaquena*, raise hell. So three cheers to the life of the dead - in Mexican folk art!

# 9. Cinco de Mayo Web Quest

**Targeted Grade Level:** fifth and six grades

by Janet Riehecky

**Overview:** This WebQuest concentrates on the holiday Cinco de Mayo and encourages students to explore the rich cultural roots connected to today's current celebrations.

**Major Curriculum Area:** Social Studies

**Interrelated Curriculum Areas:** Art, Language Arts, and Music

**New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks:**

## **Social Studies**

1. Students will use knowledge and cultural understanding to explain how the world's people cope with ever-changing conditions, examine issues from multiple perspectives, and respond to individual and cultural diversity.

- Recognize that the world is made up of many people, and their histories have similarities and differences from the student's own.

3. Students will know, understand and apply the language, tools, and skills of social studies.

- Develop an understanding of social studies vocabulary and concepts.
- Gather information from diverse sources by reading, listening, observing, and questioning for social studies concepts.

4. Students will know and understand the ways in which human beings view themselves and others over time.

- Recognize that people may describe the same event or situation in different ways.
- Describe how past events, people and places are recounted in stories, pictures and historical accounts.
- Use various sources such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, petroglyphs, and oral histories to understand the past.

5. Students will know and understand relationships and patterns in history in order to understand the past and present and to prepare for the future.

- Use facts and concepts drawn from history, as well as elements of historical inquiry, to make informed decisions on personal and group issues.
- Identify the people, events, places, and ideas that created the history and prehistory of the United States and the Americas.

11. Students will know and understand the diverse, dynamic, and ever-changing nature of culture.

- Demonstrate how languages, stories, folktales, music, media, food, and other artistic creations and performances serve as expressions of culture, and influence the behavior of people.
- Explore how people and their physical environments interact.  
Demonstrate an appreciation for and respect of diverse cultures.

14. Students will know and understand the impact of science and technology on societies.

- Use art, music, language, technology, and other cultural elements to connect with individuals and societies.
- Explore issues of human rights.

**Length of Lesson:** Approximately 30 minutes per day for one week.

**Materials Needed:**

- *Cinco de Mayo* by Janet Riehecky
  - *Mexican Independence Day and Cinco de Mayo* by Dianne M. McMillian
  - *iViva México!* by Argentina Palacios
  - Word Processing Software (ClarisWorks or Microsoft Works)
  - HyperStudio (Roger Wagner Publishing, Inc.)
  - KidPix Studio (Broderbund, Inc.)
-

**Prior Knowledge:** Students should have a "working knowledge" of the following:

- Basic Word Processing Skills
- HyperStudio Software
- KidPix Software

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**Cinco de Mayo Webquest**

Familiarize yourself and your students with the WebQuest format. The best way of doing that is to try someone else's WebQuest with your class. You can find a matrix of ready-made examples at [Matrix of Example WebQuests](#). You can also find a less selective list of WebQuests at [WebQuest Collections](#)

<http://www.zianet.com/cjcox/edutech4learning/cinco.html>

**This unit defines and explains the ten thematic strands that form the basis of the social studies standards. They are:**

- ◆ Culture
- ◆ Time continuity and change
- ◆ People, Places and Environments
- ◆ Individual development and identity
- ◆ Groups, and institutions
- ◆ Power, authority, and governance
- ◆ Production, distribution, and consumption
- ◆ Science, technology and society
- ◆ Global connections
- ◆ Civic ideals and practices

