



## TLC Elementary School Lesson Plan Geography of Mexico and Central America

### **Subject**

Geography

### **Grade Level**

3-5

### **Duration**

One to two class periods

### **Objectives**

Students will

- compare and contrast the terrain of Mexico and the Central American countries; and
- understand that geography helps shape the economic and cultural development of a country or region.

### **Materials**

- Computer with Internet access (optional)
- *Geography of Mexico and Central America* video and VCR
- Geography texts and library resources
- Blank map of Mexico (one per student)
- Blank map of Central America (one per student)
- White construction paper
- Pencils, erasers, rulers
- Fine-point black pens (optional)

### **Procedures**

1. Open the lesson by talking about the different types of terrain in Mexico and Central America. A good way to present this topic is to view portions of the *Geography of Mexico and Central America* video.
2. Discuss how terrain helps shape the economy and culture of a particular country or region. For example, Guatemala has high mountain ranges with rich soil and heavy rainfall, which creates an ideal climate for growing coffee beans and has made coffee one of Guatemala's main industries.
3. Tell students that they will make maps showing of the terrain of Mexico and Central America. Explain that they will receive a blank map of Mexico and a blank map of Central America. On these maps they must label country names and the following terrain features:

- Plateaus
  - Valleys
  - Major bodies of water (lakes, rivers, or important canals)
  - Forests (including rain forests)
  - Mountains
4. Tell students that, after they have finished labeling their maps, they will make a chart that has information about these five geographic components for Mexico and each country in Central America:
    - Types of terrain
    - Climate
    - Major economies
    - Common natural disasters
    - Environmental issues
  5. Discuss ways to organize this information on the charts. One easy way to organize the chart would be to divide a sheet of white construction paper into eight vertical columns and five horizontal rows. Each of the columns would be labeled with a country name: Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. The rows would be labeled: Types of Terrain, Climate, Major Economies, Common Natural Disasters, and Environmental Issues.
  6. Have students complete their charts individually. Allow room for creativity—students can use any method of organizing the information as long as it is clear and the information is easily read. Give students time in class and as a homework assignment to research and create their maps and charts. Students may use geography texts, encyclopedias and other library resources, and the Internet to conduct their research. These Web sites listed have good information on Mexico and the countries of Central America:
    - [http://www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/discovery\\_sp/geography/](http://www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/discovery_sp/geography/)
    - <http://countrystudies.us>
    - <http://www.volcanolive.com/america2.html>
    - <http://www.mexonline.com/geogrphy.htm>
    - <http://www.letsgo.com/CEAM/00-Discover-1>
    - <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gt.html>
  7. When students have finished their maps and charts, discuss the countries and their terrains. Which types of terrain are specific to certain countries? Which types of terrain are present in more than one country? How have specific terrain features influenced these countries' economies? (Some examples are the coffee industry in Guatemala, eco-tourism in Costa Rica, or the fishing industry in Mexico's coastal regions.) Discuss ways geography may influence a country's culture and its climate.

### Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

**3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; used research materials wisely; correctly labeled all terrain on their completed maps; created well-organized charts that correctly included information on all five geographic components for all eight countries.

**2 points:** Students somewhat participated in class discussions; used research materials with limited teacher guidance; correctly labeled most terrain on their completed maps; created somewhat organized charts that correctly included information on all five geographic components for five of the eight countries or three of the five components for all eight countries.

**1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; were unable to use research materials without teacher guidance; incorrectly labeled terrain on their maps or did not complete the maps themselves; created incomplete charts that correctly included information on all five geographic components for only three of the eight countries or just one or two of the five components for all eight countries

## **Vocabulary**

### **isthmus**

**Definition:** A narrow strip of land surrounded by water that connects two larger land areas

**Context:** Panama is an isthmus.

### **plateau**

**Definition:** A large, raised area of mostly level land

**Context:** Mexico's diverse landscape features deserts, mountains, valleys, and plateaus.

### **El Niño**

**Definition:** A warm ocean current in the eastern equatorial Pacific region

**Context:** El Niño has a tremendous impact on the climate of Mexico, Central America, and the United States.

### **canal**

**Definition:** A manmade waterway used for navigation or irrigation

**Context:** The Panama Canal took nearly 10 years to build, cost millions of dollars, and took thousands of lives.

### **deforestation**

**Definition:** The act of cutting down forests in large swathes

**Context:** Unrestricted deforestation threatens Panama's plant and animal life.

### **tsunami**

**Definition:** An immense sea wave of unparalleled force created by tectonic effects such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions

**Context:** The devastating 1985 Mexico City earthquake created a small tsunami.

## **Academic Standards**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of the NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>.

This lesson plan addresses the following standards:

- People, Places, and Environments

- Culture
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Global Connections

*The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) provides 18 national geography standards that the geographically informed person knows and understands. To view the standards online, go to [www.ncge.org](http://www.ncge.org).*

This lesson plan addresses the following standards:

- The World in Spatial Terms
- Places and Regions
- Human Systems
- Environment and Society

**Credit**

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