

Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

Lesson Title: Mexican Holidays

Grade level: 6-8

Subject Area: Geography

Duration: Two class periods (with time between them to research and plan)

Objectives:

Students will do the following:

1. Research one of two Mexican holidays, Day of the Dead and Cinco de Mayo
2. Present important facts about the holiday to the class
3. Host an in-class celebration that reflects the dress, music, food, and traditions of that holiday

Materials:

- Internet access
- Resources about Mexico and its holidays and traditions
- Materials for students to create posters (such as poster board, markers, and paint)

Procedures:

1. Ask students to name about five holidays celebrated in the United States (*They might mention the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Rosh Hashanah, Labor Day, or New Year's Day.*) Write their answers on the board. Now ask students to discuss the importance of each holiday. What values or beliefs do the holidays reflect?
2. Tell students that they are going to study two important holidays in Mexico: Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) and Cinco de Mayo. (You may wish to include other holidays, such as Guadalupe Day and Mexican Independence Day, depending on your time limits and student learning levels.)
3. Divide the class into two groups and assign each a celebration. Suggest that students within each group work in pairs, first to learn basic facts about the holiday and then to study a unique aspect of that holiday, such as rituals, food, costumes, dance, music, or images. Provide the groups with the following Web sites:

Day of the Dead

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

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

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

<<http://www.holidays.net/dayofthedead/index.htm>>

<<http://www.web-holidays.com/muertos/index.htm>>

Cinco de Mayo

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

<<http://www.geocities.com/holidayzone/cinco/cinco.html><
<<http://www.web-holidays.com/demayo/>>
<<http://www2.worldbook.com/features/cinco/html/cinco.htm>>
<<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/cinco/index.html>>

4. To guide students' research, ask them to answer the following questions:
 - What is the name of the holiday? (Give the Spanish name and the English translation.)
 - When is this holiday celebrated?
 - Who celebrates this holiday?
 - Why does this group celebrate this day?
 - How is it celebrated? (Each pair within the group should focus on one activity or custom associated with this holiday, such as rituals, food, costumes, dance, music, or images.)
 - Where is this holiday celebrated (in specific regions or across the country)?
5. Explain that in addition to answering the questions, each group will present what they learned by hosting a celebration of the holiday in the classroom. Encourage them to use their imaginations in how they re-create the celebration for the class. They can create posters, bring in food, play appropriate music, dance, or dress in costumes.
6. Have students present what they learned on a special "Mexican Celebration" day. The groups should provide basic facts about the holiday they studied and then share a flavor of the holiday with the class through food, music, images, or dress. This information can be presented on an overhead projector or with a PowerPoint presentation.
7. After the in-class celebrations, ask students to discuss the holidays. What beliefs or values does each holiday reflect?

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss some common elements of Mexican holidays. What did you learn about Mexican culture by studying the holidays?
2. If you could be in Mexico to celebrate one of the holidays, which one would you choose? Why?
3. Choose one of the holidays and compare it with a holiday celebrated in the United States. How are the two alike? How are they different?

Evaluation:

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate how well students participate in class discussion, work within their groups, research important facts about a Mexican holiday, and present a unique aspect of that celebration, such as customs, food, music, or dress:

Three points: participated actively in class discussion; worked well within their groups; exhibited strong research skills; demonstrated above-average creativity and communication skills in their holiday presentation.

Two points: participated to an average degree in class discussion; worked somewhat well within their groups; exhibited on-grade research skills; demonstrated average creativity and communication skills in their holiday presentation.

One point: participated little in class discussion; did not work effectively within their groups; exhibited weak research skills; demonstrated below-average creativity and communication skills in their holiday presentation.

Extension:

Ancient Sites in Mexico

Mexico is a country with a rich history. It was once the home of two ancient empires: those of the Mayas and the Aztecs. Divide students into four groups to study these sites of Mesoamerican civilizations: Chichén Itzá, Teotihuacán, Tenochtitlán, and Palenque. Ask each group to draw a map or a picture of the site and to answer the following questions:

- Where was this site?
- Which civilization built it?
- When was it built (approximately)? Is it still standing?
- What was its purpose?

The following Web sites may be helpful:

Chichén Itzá

<<http://www.st.rim.or.jp/~cycle/CHICHEE.HTML>>

<http://www.internet-at-work.com/hos_mcgrane/chichen/chichen_index.html>

<http://www.mesoweb.com/encyc/encyc/meso_entry.html/chichen_itza_e.html>

Teotihuacán

<<http://archaeology.la.asu.edu/teo/>>

<http://www.mesoweb.com/encyc/encyc/meso_entry.html/teotihuacan_e.html>

<<http://www.corelight.org/teotihuacan/>>

Tenochtitlán

<http://www.mesoweb.com/encyc/encyc/meso_entry.html/tenochtitlan_e.html>

<<http://archaeology.la.asu.edu/tm/pages2/sala1.htm>>

<http://www.mexicocity.com.mx/anc_city.html>

<http://www.differentworld.com/mexico/common/pages/history_notes/tenochtitlan.htm>

Palenque

<http://www.mesoweb.com/encyc/encyc/meso_entry.html/palenque_e.html>

<<http://www.virtualpalenque.com/>>

Suggested Reading:

Belize (Cultures of the World)

Leslie Jermyn. Marshall Cavendish, 2001.

Belize is a tiny country facing the Caribbean Sea, sandwiched between Mexico and Guatemala. It's a beautiful place, as evidenced by the many color photographs that illustrate this introductory title, which covers the geography and history of Belize, as well as its government and economy. Further chapters cover the people of Belize, their language, and their culture and customs.

The Route of the Mayas

Borzoj Book, 1995.

If you want to take a trip to see the many places the Maya lived, here's a guide to do just that. It begins with a history of the Maya and progresses to the present-day life of their descendants. A brief discussion of their textiles and architecture is also featured. This guide focuses first on the Yucatan peninsula and follows the route of the Maya to sites through Guatemala and Belize. Abundant color photographs and drawings illustrate the fantastic sites. Historical information is interwoven with geographic detail. A large section of "useful information" concludes the guide.

Vocabulary

Cinco de Mayo

Definition: A holiday celebrated by Mexicans and Mexican Americans on May 5 that commemorates the victory of a Mexican army over a French army at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. (Its name in Spanish means "Fifth of May.")

Context: **Cinco de Mayo** commemorates the victory of the Mexicans over the French at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862.

Día de los Muertos

Definition: A traditional Mexican holiday held on November 1 and 2 that honors Mexico's dead. The people of early Mexican civilizations believed that the souls of their loved ones returned each year to celebrate with them. (Its name in Spanish means "Day of the Dead.")

Context: The holiday **Día de los Muertos** is not a sad day but a festive time of remembering and rejoicing.

fiesta

Definition: The Spanish term for festival or celebration.

Context: Every Mexican city, town, and village holds a yearly **fiesta** to honor its local patron saint.

Guadalupe Day

Definition: Mexico's most important religious holiday; it honors the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico.

Context: **Guadalupe Day** is celebrated on December 12, when the Virgin is believed to have appeared as an Indian maiden on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico City.

Mexican Independence Day

Definition: A Mexican holiday celebrating the nation's independence from Spanish rule.

Context: People celebrate **Mexican Independence Day** on September 16.

Academic Standards:

This lesson adheres to standards issued by the National Council for the Social Studies for students in grades 5-8:

1. Provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
2. Provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Credit

Joy Brewster, freelance writer and editor of educational material.

This lesson was created in consultation with George Cassutto, a middle school social studies teacher.

DiscoverySchool.com

<http://www.discoveryschool.com>

Copyright 2002 Discovery.com.

Teachers may reproduce copies of these materials for classroom use only.