Exploring Geography and Cultural Roles in Mexico

By
Fulbright Seminar Abroad — Mexico-Peru
Summer 2008
Exploring Geography and Cultural Roles in Mexico

Menomonie Area School District, WI – Menomonie Middle School
Designer:
Subject: Social Studies & English
Time Frame: 1–2 weeks
Grades: 6–8
Key Concepts: Geographic Regions and People in Mexico

Connections to Wisconsin State Standards
Social Studies

Geography
A.8.1 Use a variety of geographic representations, such as political, physical, and topographic maps, a globe, aerial photographs, and satellite images, to gather and compare information about a place.
A.8.8 Describe and analyze the ways in which people in different regions of the world interact with their physical environments through vocational and recreational activities.
A.8.9 Describe how buildings and their decoration reflect cultural values and ideas, providing examples such as cave paintings, pyramids, sacred cities, castles, and cathedrals.
A.8.11 Give examples of the causes and consequences of current global issues, such as the expansion of global markets, the urbanization of the developing world, the consumption of natural resources, and the extinction of species, and suggest possible responses by various individuals, groups, and nations.

Political Science and Citizenship
C.8.1 Identify and explain democracy's basic principles, including individual rights, responsibility for the common good, equal opportunity, equal protection of the laws, freedom of speech, justice, and majority rule with protection for minority rights.

Economics
D.8.11 Describe how personal decisions can have a global impact on issues such as trade agreements, recycling, and conserving the environment.

Behavioral Science
E.8.7 Identify and explain examples of bias, prejudice, and stereotyping, and how they contribute to conflict in a society.

Language Arts

Reading/Literature
A.8.1 Use effective reading strategies to achieve their purposes in reading.
A.8.3 Read and discuss literary and nonliterary texts in order to understand human experience.
A.8.4 Read to acquire information.

Writing
B.8.1 Create or produce writing to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
B.8.3 Understand the function of various forms, structures, and punctuation marks of standard American English and use them appropriately in communications.

**Unit Goals:**
- Use and interpret maps and graphs to answer geographic questions about Mexico’s landforms, waterways, and cities.
- Compare and contrast the life of different groups of people in select regions of Mexico.
- Understand the class systems in both urban and rural settings with comparisons to our community.

**Understandings:**
- Students will understand that geography affects lifestyle and culture.
- Students will understand that class affects lifestyle and culture.

**Essential Questions:**
- What are the geographic features of specific regions in Mexico?
- Where are major cities located?
- What is the climate and vegetation that is located in specific regions?
- How does geography affect lifestyle and culture?
- How does class standing affect lifestyle and culture?

**Students will know and be able to:**
1. Cite place, location, and demographics of Mexico.
2. Develop cultural understanding of regions and how it pertains to different socioeconomic groups.
3. Collect and organize data.
4. Synthesize information and communicate findings with differentiated projects.
5. Read and interpret maps, graphs, charts, etc.
6. See life from an alternate perspective.
7. Understand that lifestyle and culture is determined by many things, including geography and class.

**ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE**

**Performance Task:**
- Students will write a RAFT from an alternate perspective graded by a rubric.
- Students will do map work locating cities, landform, and waterways.
- Students will analyze climate and vegetation from specific regions.

**Other Evidence:**
- Assessment of notes taken on short readings
- Daily check on progress toward final projects
- Map test on location of cities and major landforms
LEARNING PLAN

Materials needed [all handouts are included in this document]:

Geography
- Maps of Mexico – political, physical, climate, population density, and vegetation
- List of cities, landforms, and waterways to label and memorize for Map Test
- Map test
- Regional maps of landforms, climate, and vegetation – South Central-Mexico City, Southeast-San Cristobal de las Casas, Gulf Coast-Veracruz/Merida
- Survey

Cultural Study
- Contemporary Stories of young people in the region – South Central-Mexico City, Southeast-San Cristobal de las Casas, Gulf Coast-Veracruz/Merida
- Notetaking Grid
- RAFT Organizer
- RAFT (Roles, Audience, Format, Topic) Sheet
- Rubric for RAFT
- Regional photos [not included here; suggested download: *Mexico* PowerPoint from Galina Tchoulirova’s unit on this Web site]

Sequence of Teaching and Learning:

1. Present the maps of Mexico (political, physical, climate, population density, and vegetation) to students. Compare maps to discuss issues that affect people’s lives, such as: the most comfortable climate, the kind of natural environment that’s pleasant, the number of people in the area, etc.
2. Hand out map list for the test. Have students fill in the map. This information will be tested at a later date.
3. Divide students into 3 groups: South Central-Mexico City, Southeast-San Cristobal de las Casas, Gulf Coast-Merida/Veracruz. Hand students in each group the maps (landforms, climate, vegetation) of their region, along with the survey for them to complete. Students will analyze maps and answer questions on surveys.
4. Hand out regional stories. Students will use the notetaking grid to record important information. Show photos of each region.
5. Hand out RAFT organizer and RAFT sheet. Students need to select an identity and audience from regional group choices. Students will then create their RAFT. Grade using the attached rubric.
6. Have students create a Venn Diagram comparing cultures in U.S. and the different regions of Mexico.
Political Map of Mexico

Source: Perry-Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/mexico.html
Physical Map of Mexico

Climate Map of Mexico

Source: Perry-Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/mexico.html
Population Density Map of Mexico, 2006

Vegetation Map of Mexico

Source: Perry-Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/mexico.html
Geography of Mexico Map Test

Locate and label the map with the following key places.

1. Baja California
2. Yucatan Peninsula
3. Eastern Sierra Madre
4. Western Sierra Madre
5. Veracruz
6. Sonora Desert
7. Rio Grande River
8. Gulf of California
9. Pacific Ocean
10. Central Plateau
11. Gulf Coastal Plain
12. Gulf of Mexico
13. Mexico City
14. Merida
15. Cancun
16. Guatemala
17. Belize
18. Puerto Vallarta
19. Cozumel
Mexico
Regional Maps
South Central-Mexico City

Map A
MAP OF REGIONS

Map B
LANDFORMS

Map C
CLIMATE

Map D
VEGETATION

Source: Octavio M. Ruiz, Amy Sanders, and Meredith Sommers, Many Faces of Mexico.
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Regional Maps
Southeast-San Cristobal de las Casas

Map A
MAP OF REGIONS

Map B
LANDFORMS

KEY
- Plains
- Mountains
- Rivers
- Ocean

Map C
CLIMATE

Map D
VEGETATION

KEY
- Tropical rainy climate with no cool season (Coolest month with avg. temp. above 64 F. Dry season in winter.)
- Middle latitude rainy climate with mild winters. (Coldest month avg. temp. between 32-64 F. Warmest month above 71 F. Most areas have dry season in winter.)
- Deciduous forest
- Tropical rainforest
- Marsh and Swamp

Source: Octavio M. Ruiz, Amy Sanders, and Meredith Sommers, Many Faces of Mexico.
Regional Maps
Gulf Coast-Veracruz/Merida

Map A
MAP OF REGIONS

Map B
LANDFORMS

Area of Detail

KEY
- Coastal Plains
- Ocean
- Mountains
- Rivers

Map C
CLIMATE

KEY
- Tropical rainy climate with no cool season (Coolest month with avg. temp. above 64 F. Dry season in winter.)
- Middle latitude rainy climate with mild winters. (Coldest month avg. temps. between 32-64 F. Warmest month above 71 F. Most areas have dry season in winter.)

Map D
VEGETATION

KEY
- Deciduous forest
- Savanna (Tropical grassland, generally with scattered trees)
- Tropical rainforest

Source: Octavio M. Ruiz, Amy Sanders, and Meredith Sommers, Many Faces of Mexico.

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You are asked to analyze several locations. Map A shows your area in relation to other regions. Maps B, C and D simply are enlargements of your region. Each of these maps (B, C, and D) contains clues about the landscape, vegetation and climate of your region.

1. Look at map B on your handout. What does this map tell you about the landforms in your region? If you had to choose a place to live based only on the information given in map B, where would it be, and why? (Put a dot on the map)

2. Look at map C. What does this tell you about the climate of your region? Or does it vary? If you had to choose a place to live based only on the information given in map C, where would it be, and why?

3. Look at map D. What does this map tell you about the kind of vegetation in your region? If you had to choose a place to live based only on the information given in map D, where would it be, and why?

4. How do you think people in your region met their physical needs? Fill in the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Mexican Revolution ended in 1920, but the country continued to have internal political problems. In Mexico City, politicians fought and even assassinated each other in order to get power. Revolutionary heroes like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata continued to fight for their cause. Although they were sensitive to the demands of the majority of people, they lacked the education and political experience to run Mexico. The political and economic destiny of Mexico lay in the hands of new political leaders who eventually forgot or ignored the promises of the Revolution. They catered to the more developed countries and their own selfish interests.

Military officers such as Captain Luis Muñoz stayed in the army. Members of his regiment were promoted for their help with the assassination of Emiliano Zapata in 1919. Now it is 1994. Eleonora Quintanilla, age 23, is the great granddaughter of Captain Muñoz.

My name is Eleonora Quintanilla. I live in an apartment with my sister in Mexico City. I own two tourist agencies and I travel throughout Mexico and abroad. I am fortunate that I am not dark like my sister, even though we have some Indian blood. Being light-skinned is definitely an advantage in my business.

This year I was expecting an improvement in my tourism business, but since January 1st, when the Zapatistas started a war in Chiapas, things have actually gotten a bit worse. It doesn’t help that there are Mexican children begging in the streets. Tourists don’t like to see that. Sometimes the children steal money from the tourists, and when they are caught, they give some excuse like the money is for their crippled mother.

I don’t know what is going to happen here in Mexico. There are a lot of poor people and because of it, we all pay. We have a social security system for everyone who has a regular job, like me. There are also lots of government programs to take care of the poor. The government subsidizes the price of tortillas so everyone can afford them and no one will starve. It also builds hospitals and schools for the poor, and still they complain. It costs us taxpayers a lot of money for these programs, and for extra police to control crime.

When poor people are offered jobs in hotels that the government has built in places like Cozumel and Cancún, they don’t want to move there. I think ignorance is their worst handicap. They need to adapt themselves to today’s world instead of trying to keep their old ways. Indians, especially, are making trouble. They say they don’t want NAFTA, and they are against the new government.

Some of us work hard and that’s why we have what we have. It is not fair that some people don’t work at all and then want to have everything. I have a strong sense of my heritage and I also believe in our democracy. We have many rights, like the right to vote and elect our president. I think our former president did the right thing to pass NAFTA. Our lifestyles will improve because of this agreement with the US and Canada. NAFTA will bring a lot of jobs to Mexican people. Hopefully it will also bring more tourists. That’s good for my business.

Many Faces of Mexico
Contemporary Era Stories
Southeast – San Cristobal De Las Casas

CONTEMPORARY ERA

Manuel Santiago died at the age of 45 on his small plot of land in the highlands. He lived during an important time in Mexican history when a revolution swept the entire country. The revolution officially ended in 1920, and a new constitution was written. The new constitution promised land reform that would redistribute land more fairly. However, the promises did not become a reality for many people. In the state of Chiapas almost everything continued as before. The best lands continued to be held by large landowners. The Mayan people continued to be treated unfairly by the government and discriminated against by most other people.

This is the story of Manuel Santiago’s great granddaughter, Maria Santis Lopez, a descendant of Ana Santiago. Maria is a member of the Zapatistas, a revolutionary Mayan Indian army. She lives in the Lacandón rain forest.

My name is Maria Santis Lopez. I am 17 years old and I am a Tzeltal (zee-TALL) Mayan Indian. My family migrated to the Lacandón rain forest from the highlands, close to San Cristobal de las Casas. They came in search of land that they were promised in the national land reform. When they got there, a cattle rancher claimed the title to the land. My family wandered for several years, renting land to grow corn whenever they had a little money, or working for ranchers. In the worst of times, they lived on someone else’s land to survive until the government or a landowner threw them out. My mother and father now live in a little village close to the Guatemalan border.

I don’t have any brothers or sisters. My mother told me that I had two brothers, but they died as babies. One died from malaria and the other from dehydration caused by diarrhea. There are many families here without land that have hardly one meal a day. They don’t have medical care or a school. There are a few rich ranchers and coffee growers who own most of the land. The government says it will protect our right to the land. But it only protects those who have titles to the land, land that used to belong to us.

People are tired of waiting. I joined the Zapatistas, who are fighting for land reform and other measures that will bring about justice. My parents agreed to let me join only because they know there is no other way to bring change. We have tried patience. It doesn’t work.

On January 1, 1994, I was part of a Zapatista offensive to take the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. Some Zapatistas took other cities in the state of Chiapas. The Zapatistas treat me as an equal and respect me as a soldier and as a woman. I was one of the first soldiers to march into San Cristobal, but a few days later we had to retreat because the Mexican army arrived. Fifteen thousand soldiers brought tanks, airplanes, helicopters and other sophisticated weapons. Most of it was supplied by the US for its “war against drugs.” All of that against two or three thousand badly equipped Mayans! We lost several soldiers in the battle. Many civilians also lost their lives when the army dropped bombs on villages near San Cristobal. Now I am back in the rain forest, waiting for the results of the peace talks between our army and the government. I am afraid we will go back to the same situation. The government has done it before. Promises, promises, promises....

Many Faces of Mexico
Exploring Geography and Cultural Roles

Contemporary Era Stories
Gulf Coast – Veracruz/Merida

CONTEMPORARY ERA

Nobody knows exactly where Sabino went after he ran away from the hacienda, but some people say that in 1910 he joined other workers in the revolutionary army to fight the federal army. Eventually Sabino returned from the war front in the north, got some land close to the city of Veracruz and married an Indian woman. They had several children.

As time went on, the people in the state of Veracruz witnessed the arrival of immigrants from Europe and the US. The economy of this coastal area grew rapidly as the petroleum, coffee and sugar cane industries thrived. Tourism also became a major business.

Sabino’s great grandson Jacinto Silva Lagos lives near the oil refineries in the Veracruz city of Poza Rica. He is a descendant of the first Silva who arrived on a slave ship during the years of the Spanish invasion. Jacinto lives with his father and mother, an older sister and a younger brother.

I am Jacinto Silva Lagos. I am 22 years old and I was born in the city of Veracruz. I went to school for eight years but I had to quit because my parents did not have enough money. I began working in a car shop when I was very young.

My sister and brother have had a hard time finding jobs around here. My sister finally went to work at a maquiladora along the border because she could make more money there. She is paid 50 cents an hour to sew labels on jeans that are sold in the US. But she is paid so little that it would take her more than 40 hours of work to buy a pair of jeans like that in the US!

My sister says that since she started working there she has headaches all the time. Before she left for the border she never had this problem. Now she is always sick. Sometimes I feel tempted to go north and across the border into Texas. My friends who have gone there say it is a great place. It is easy to make money there and there are a lot of fun things to do. But most of my friends are here. We go dancing on the weekends. We like merengue, cumbia, and mambo the best.

Right now I am working in an oil refinery of Poza Rica. I have a half-year contract as a machine operator. It is an okay job. It pays well. One of my uncles connected me to the workers’ union of PEMEX, the Mexican petroleum company. As you know, oil is a very important industry in Mexico that is owned by the government. Although it is hard to get a permanent job here, it is possible to use your influence to buy a contract to work full-time. Some of the workers here have permanent contracts because their parents have worked here since the beginning of the oil industry. But others get jobs because they have enough money to buy them or enough influence to get them. This workplace is full of corruption.

I’m feeling restless because I don’t have a permanent job. I think I will ask my uncle to try and get me a contract for me to work in the oil towers at sea. I’ve heard that this is very dangerous, but the company pays a lot of money. Workers say many people have died in accidents there. If that doesn’t work, maybe I will look for work on the border. Or why not try to cross the border into Texas?

Many Faces of Mexico
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is your story about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where does s/he live?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some landforms in this area?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe this person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe his/her way of life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do events in Mexico affect him/her?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the physical geography (landforms, rivers, plains, plateaus) of this location influence the routines and activities of the people who live in this region?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RAFT Organizer

This form is to help you organize your RAFT. You need to choose one option from each column of the attached table—then complete at least one item under each category on this worksheet.

**Role:** (Role of the Writer)
- You are __________________________________________________________
- You have been asked to _____________________________________________
- Your job is _______________________________________________________

**Audience:** (Audience for the Writer)
- The target audience is _______________________________________________
- Your clients are ____________________________________________________
- You need to convince ______________________________________________

**Format or Product:** (Format of Writing)
- You will create a ___________________________________________________
- You will develop __________________________________________________

**Topic + Strong Verb:** (Topic to be addressed)
- You will inform about _______________________________________________
- You will describe about _____________________________________________
- You will explain about _____________________________________________
- You will persuade about ___________________________________________
- You will (strong verb) about ________________________________________
Your RAFT will be graded on quality of information with supporting details, organization and mechanics of paper.

RAFT
Choose one from each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Writer</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Topic + Strong Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen of</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Argue that the U.S. should allow open immigration for anyone who wants to live there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* South Central*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Gulf Coast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Southeast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist agent</td>
<td>Mexican Government</td>
<td>News Column</td>
<td>Appeal for a change to NAFTA regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian in the city</td>
<td>U.S. Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Hacienda owner</td>
<td>Diary</td>
<td>Explain the conditions that cause many Mexicans to be poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant worker</td>
<td>Oil company</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsistence farmer</td>
<td>Rural police force</td>
<td>Plea</td>
<td>Explain one of the geographic regions of Mexico and how it affects lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop owner</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory worker (maquiladores)</td>
<td>People of Mexico</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil refinery worker</td>
<td>Village people</td>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Convince someone that the Mexican government needs to do more for its people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee finca owner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancher</td>
<td>U.S. business</td>
<td>Instructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zapatista</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayan Indian in village</td>
<td>U.S. citizens</td>
<td>Business plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are only some ideas. If you have others check with your teacher.
### RubiStar Rubric:

**RubiStar** ([http://rubistar.4teachers.org](http://rubistar.4teachers.org))

## Research Report: Mexican RAFT

**Teacher Name:** Brenda Stoltz

**Student Name:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes are recorded and organized in an extremely neat and orderly fashion.</td>
<td>Notes are recorded legibly and are somewhat organized.</td>
<td>Notes are recorded.</td>
<td>Notes are recorded only with peer/teacher assistance and reminders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Information is very organized with well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings.</td>
<td>Information is organized with well-constructed paragraphs.</td>
<td>Information is organized, but paragraphs are not well-constructed.</td>
<td>The information appears to be disorganized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Information</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples.</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. It provides 1-2 supporting details and/or examples.</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. No details and/or examples are given.</td>
<td>Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>A few grammatical spelling, or punctuation errors.</td>
<td>Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Date Created:** Nov 10, 2008 07:10 pm (CST)
Bibliography


