

M is for Mexico and M is for Me!

Exploring the similarities and differences
shared with the children of Mexico



MEXICO

ME!



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West Babylon Union Free School District, West Babylon, NY—Tooker Avenue School

Designer: Mary Schafer

Subjects: Social Studies and English

Time frame: 3–4 weeks of 1 ESL unit/day (36 minutes in NY)

Grade: 3, 4 English Language Learners

Key Concepts

NY State Social Studies Standard 3: Geography. Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings, human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography.

NY State English Language Arts/English as a Second Language (ESL) Standards

1. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
2. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.
5. Students will read, write, listen, and speak for cultural understanding. (ESL)

NY State Math, Science, and Technology Standard 2: Students will access, generate, process, and transfer information using appropriate technologies.

Understandings:

- Students will understand that communities around the world all have distinct characteristics.
- Students will understand that even though communities may have different characteristics and values, they can also share similarities.
- Students will understand that history shapes current culture.
- Students will understand that every sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with punctuation.

Essential questions:

- How is life in Mexico the same as in the U.S.?
- How is life different?
- How do you start writing a sentence and what is needed to end a sentence?

Students will know and be able to:

- Locate Mexico on a map of North America.
- Explain some differences and similarities between life in Mexico and the U.S.
- Write a brief explanation regarding their selection for each letter of the alphabet as it relates to their life in the U.S.
- Properly begin and end a sentence.

Assessment Evidence

Performance Task:

- Students will create a book called M is for Mexico and M is for Me! In this book, the children will model from the photo ABC book and name something that represents them or their life in the U.S. for each letter of the alphabet.

Schafer – M is for Mexico/Me

Other Evidence:

- Classroom participation, teacher observation, informal conferencing.

Unit Summary

English Language Learners will be exposed to the culture of Mexico via a video ABC book where each letter will represent an aspect of Mexican life and will be illustrated by an original photograph taken during the 2009 Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad to Mexico. Students will be asked to form connections to their lives, focusing on the essential questions, “How is life in Mexico the same as in the U.S.?” and “How is it different?” Students will create an ABC book of *their* lives, with an eye to the Mexican version to discuss either difference or similarity.

Instructional Plan

Prior to beginning this unit, it would be helpful for the teacher to consider the level of complexity s/he will be focusing on. The student work can be as simple as a list of sentences that show understanding of the concept. The work might be as complex as a PowerPoint project that includes imported illustrations to create the connection.

(Suggestions for differentiated instruction are in italics.) As a point of differentiation, the teacher might allow those with more limited English ability to use only the letters of their name in creating the “alphabet of me,” while the more advanced students do the entire alphabet.

- Definition of community

Initiate discussion to determine students’ understanding of the word community. Create a class definition of the word community based on the input from students.

- Mexico

Locate the country of Mexico on a map or globe. Depending on the grade level of the students, the location can include the specific continent, the states of Mexico, and/or any physical/political features pertinent to the curriculum. *Differentiation: Higher-level*

students could be assigned research on the country of Mexico to be included in the book. Facts such as population, total area, number of states, and physical features might be included. As a suggestion, higher-level students might be assigned the task of using the names of Mexican states, cities, or geographical areas.

- Sharing prior experience

Invite students to share any experience they might have with life in a different country or travel. Work with students to classify the experience in order to attach it to a letter of the alphabet. Chart the collected information.

- Essential questions

Repeatedly challenge the students with the questions, “Do we have this/do this in the United States? Is this aspect of life the same or different?” Chart the responses as a Venn diagram to show where the differences and similarities are.

- View **Letters from Mexico: The ABC’s of Mexican Life**

Explain to the students that each letter of the alphabet represents something that connects to Mexico. Model the format “(Letter) is for _____.” Explain that the students will copy this format, paying attention to starting each sentence with a capital letter and ending it with a period or other appropriate end punctuation. Once they have chosen something to represent the letter, explain that they will need to write a short sentence explaining the choice, copying the format demonstrated in the video. (Example: A is for apple. I eat an apple every day.)

- Post-video discussion

Students share their favorite letters of the alphabet and explain why they like them. This discussion can be an opportunity to help students connect the ideas to their own lives.

- Student work

Students begin by writing the alphabet, one letter to a page. They are presented with the model “ ___ is for ___” for each page. Allow students to move through the alphabet at their own pace to decide what each letter of the alphabet represents in their own life. Once this is accomplished, the students will expand on the first sentence by further explaining the meaning or significance of this in their life. In accordance with the local design of the project, the student will then illustrate each letter. *Differentiation: Teacher can limit the number of letters and/or specify the letters the children will use, e.g., the letters of their name, the school name, the country they were born in, etc. Alternatively, for higher students, the teacher might determine a theme to be used throughout the alphabet, such as things we eat, geographical areas/physical features of Mexico, or historical information on Mexico.*

The teacher will meet with each student to edit his/her work. A primary focus will be starting each student with a capital letter and using appropriate end punctuation. Editing will also look at spelling, correct usage, and grammar.

Once the work has been edited and redacted, the student will proceed according to the local plan for the production of the book. This may be as simple as writing and drawing on 26 sheets of paper and creating covers out of construction paper for the work or as complex as creating a DVD like “**Letters from Mexico: The ABC’s of Mexican Life.**”

The sharing or distribution method of the student work is also subject to local decision. The teacher might decide to post the electronically created student work on a class or school Web site. All projects might be burned on to a single DVD and shown as a group presentation. Various letters from individual students might be selected and followed by a guessing game to see how well the students might know each other.

Hard copy work can be done with drawing and construction paper at the lowest level. For a bit grander project, the students could do the work in a blank bound book that they illustrate. A step up might be to do a PowerPoint presentation, print the work, and seat the work in a blank bound book.

The only limits to showcasing the student work are the availability of technology and the teacher's imagination!

Assessment

The primary assessment piece for this unit is the student-created ABC book. The completed work will provide insight into individual student progress from a language standpoint. Teachers can focus on individual aspects of the project, as they deem necessary.

Additional assessment sheets are found in the materials section of this unit for those seeking to focus on concrete skills.

Those students working on a higher level might have a quiz on facts about Mexico.

Project Materials

- Electronic access to "**Letters from Mexico: The ABC's of Mexican Life**" video via this Web site: <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/outreach/fulbright09/>
- Medium for student work: paper, markers, and crayons for most basic; marker, pencils, crayons, and bare bound books for bound paper projects.
- Computer, printer, double-sided tape, and bare bound books for electronically created books.
- Computer with appropriate software and blank DVDs or CDs for PowerPoint or video projects.

Printed Materials

All printed materials are found in the following pages.

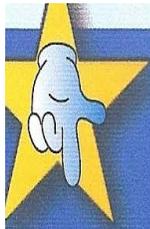
- Map of North America
- Venn diagram
- Suggested grading rubric

- Audience critique form
- Student writing model

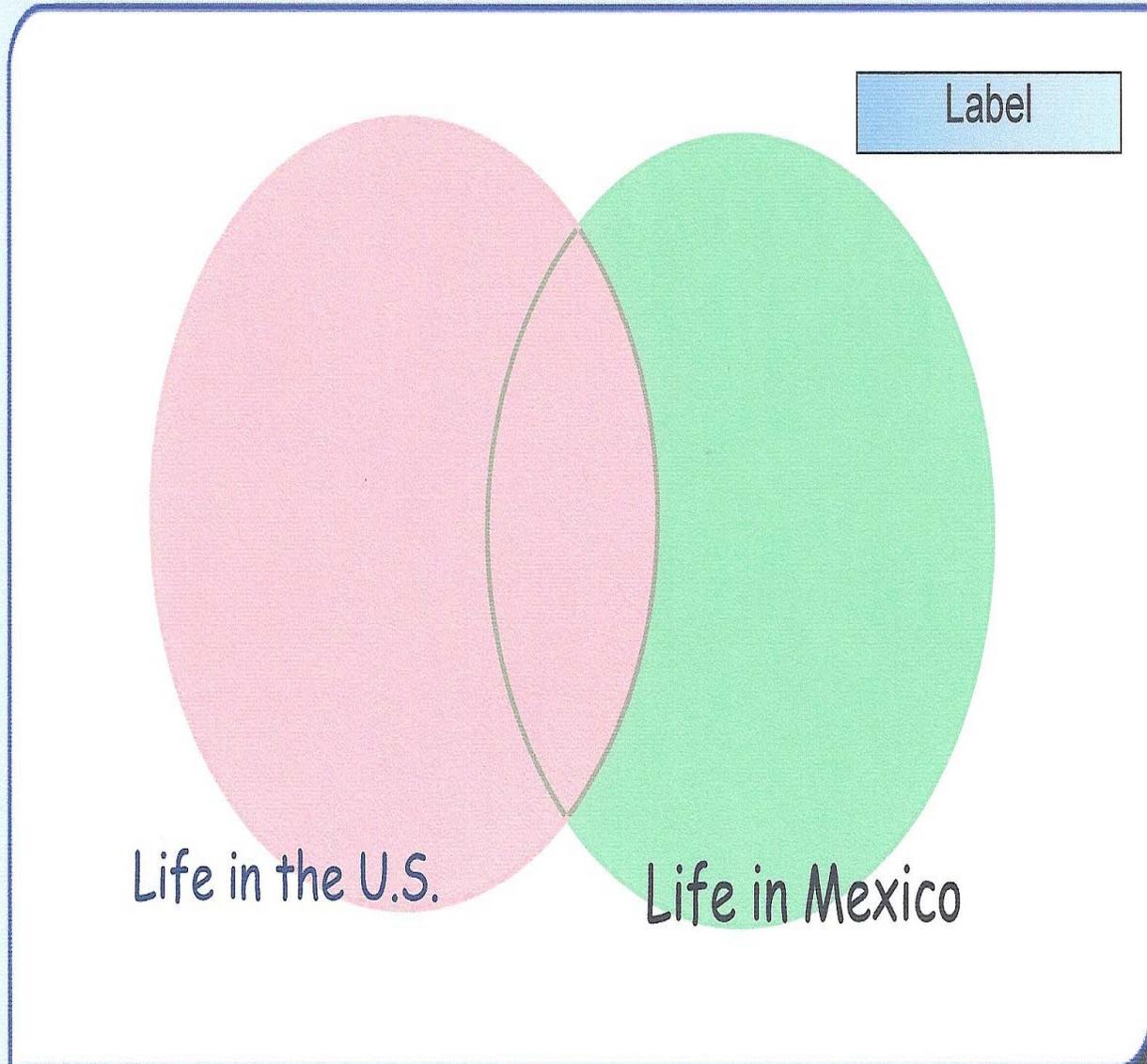


Map of North America

Label the countries in North America.



Complete the venn diagram.



Venn diagram for comparing life in the U.S./Mexico

Me is for Mexico, M is for Me! Grading Rubric

Student: _____

1. Did every sentence start with a capital letter? _____
2. Did every sentence end with proper punctuation? _____
3. Did I make the corrections my teacher and I discussed? _____
4. Are there at least two sentences on each page? _____
5. Is there an illustration on each page? _____

Total Score: _____

Scoring: 1 Infrequent evidence throughout the work.

2 Somewhat evident throughout the work.

3 Seen on every or almost every page.

M is for Mexico M is for Me! Student Writing Model

is for

is for

is for

Student writing template

First line: Student writes letter of the alphabet in blank space on the left and what it stands for on the right.

Second line: Student writes a sentence to explain the letter and the meaning written on the first line.

Notes

Mary Schafer, a participant in the 2009 Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad Program to Mexico, **Down the Roads of Southern Mexico: History, Traditions and Modern Challenges**, shot all of the photos and video clips included in the video.

The following is a brief explanation of the various “letters from Mexico.”

A is for America. The map is part of the Essentials for Educators, SMART Notebook 10.

B is for beans. Many Mexican dishes include rice and beans as a side dish.

C is for cacao. Cacao beans are ground into a chocolate paste that is used in making *mole*. *Mole* is prevalent in the cuisine of Oaxaca state.

D is for dancing. Mexico has very specific regional dances. These students perform a folk dance from the state of Quintana Roo. The video was shot at a technical high school called CECYTE.

E is for eggs. The turtle eggs in the photo were being sold at a market in Juchitán, Oaxaca. They are a rarity and not part of the daily diet.

F is for flowers. Fresh flowers are abundant in Mexico. These flowers were being sold at the market in Juchitán, Oaxaca.

G is for Guadalupe. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico and an extremely important religious figure for the overwhelming majority of Mexicans. It is said that even those who don't believe in anything else have faith and believe in the Virgin.

H is for huipil. A *huipil* is a woven garment worn by Mexicans, especially those of indigenous descent. The design of the *huipil* varies from region to region, with subtle changes in color and design over the course of time. The photo in the illustration was taken at the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.

I is for insect. The smoked grasshoppers are for sale at a market in Oaxaca City, Oaxaca. They are a crunchy protein source.

J is for jaguar. The jaguar plays an extremely important part in Mayan lore in that it represents the power of the ruling class. It is also associated with the sun. Jaguar skins were traded when trade routes were developed.

K is for kitchen. The photo in the illustration was taken at a weaver's cottage in Chiapas state. The women working at the weaver's cottage shared the work, which included weaving, selling their goods, and taking care of their families.

L is for *luchador*. Many Mexicans enjoy *lucha libre*, a somewhat theatrical version of commercial wrestling. *Luchadores* (*luchadoras*, feminine form) are the men who participate in the sport. There is a national league for the *luchadores*. An evening of *lucha libre* is an inexpensive and entertaining night out for a family.

M is for marimba. A marimba is a percussion instrument built from wood. Three musicians generally play it to cover the wide range of the instrument. Each marimba maker has their own "signature" for the instruments they produce. A special pattern of wooden pieces is inlaid along the sides of the instrument to show who made it.

N is for *nopal*. *Nopal* is a type of cactus (prickly pear) that has a number of uses to the Mexicans. *Nopal* seeds are used to make dye for wool. *Nopal* flesh is used in cooking.

O is for Oaxaca. Oaxaca is both a city and a state in southern Mexico. Both the city and the state are known for cultural contributions. Green glazed pottery is typical for the region as is black-fired pottery.

P is for pyramid. As part of ancient Mesoamerica, Mexico was home to many groups of indigenous people. From the Mayas to the Aztecs, each group left their own mark on the country. Settlements from different eras traverse the country. One common theme of the early people involved building temples to their various gods. The temples were built in the shape of a pyramid. The pyramid in the photo is known as the Pyramid of the Sun, located at Teotihuacán, near Mexico City.

Q is for *queso manchego*. *Queso manchego* is a Spanish cheese made from goats' milk. Although not typically Mexican, the cheese aging in the photo was made from goats' milk by the students of IPODERAC, a safe house center for abused boys and boys living on the streets in the area near Puebla.

R is for ritual. The altar shown in the photo is an example of the syncretic religion practiced in southeastern Mexico. The people have a strong faith that combines elements of Catholicism and Mayan beliefs. The people honor Catholic saints, especially the Virgin of Guadalupe, but prefer to worship through shamans performing ancient rituals.

S is for seeds. Mexican weavers use various types of seeds to produce dye for the fabrics they weave. Seeds from *nopal* cactus as well as different fruits, plants, and berries are harvested at an appropriate time. They are hand ground with a mortar and pestle and mixed with water.

T is for *tortilla*. *Tortillas* are the ubiquitous flat, sometimes crisp, "bread" of Mexico. They can be made from either corn or wheat. The *totopos* shown in the photo are found in Oaxaca. The Spanish word for mole is *topo* and the holes poked through the tortilla dough resemble mole holes.

U is for *ulama*. *Ulama* is a game that was played in pre-colonial Mexico. Each settlement had a ball court. The exact rules of the game are not known, but it is known that the ancient civilizations discovered the process of vulcanization because the game was played with a heavy (5–8 pound) rubber ball. The players wore loin clothes and pads on their hips. The goal was to get the ball through the hoop by using the hips or elbows.

V is for volcano. Mexico is home to a number of active volcanoes. The volcano in the photo is near Puebla and is known as Popocatepetl.

W is for weaving. The art of weaving is expressed in many ways in Mexico. Wool is weaved on large pedal looms to make rugs and wall coverings. Hammocks are woven

with either cotton or polyester rope. Cotton is woven with a back loom to produce the intricate designs found on the *huipil*.

X is for Xochimilco. The ancient Aztecs built a series of floating gardens called *chinampas* around Lake Xochimilco near Mexico City to provide fertile, arable land. The remnants of those canals are now used as a recreational facility. Families come to the area and hire a boat for the afternoon or evening. Locals provide refreshments and entertainment by traveling through the canals and offering food, drink, and music.

Y is for Yucatan. Yucatan is a state in the southeastern part of Mexico. The fact that this area is a peninsula gives the area a slightly maritime flavor. As with most areas of the country, Yucatecan cuisine offers its own special dishes. One peculiar feature of this cuisine is utilizing banana leaves to steam food.

Z is for *zocalo*. Every Mexican town has a town square known as the *zocalo*. This is a carry-over from the colonial period, following a tradition of Spanish cities.

Suggested Reading

Dahl, Michael. (1999). *Countries of the World: Mexico*. Mankato, MN: Bridgestone Books.

Jermyn, Leslie. (1998). *Countries of the World: Mexico*. Milwaukee, WI: Gareth Stevens Publishing.

Kalman, Bobbie. (1993). *Mexico: the Culture*. New York, NY: Crabtree Publishing Co.

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The Mayas History, Art and Archeology. (2006). English edition. Mexico City, D. F.: Monclém Ediciones, S. A. de C. V.

Wood, Marion. (1998). *Growing Up in Aztec Times*. Troll Associates.