¡Vamos a Celebrar!

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Spanish 1 - Grades 7-8 or 9

Time needed: five 50-minute class periods

This unit aims to introduce students to major holidays in Mexico, namely: el Día de la Independencia, el Día de los Muertos, las Posadas, el Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe and la Guelaguetza. Each lesson can be taught in one class period to add a little cultural insight into classes. The unit includes a mix of the historical origins of each celebration along with traditional customs associated with each event.
Goals:

Illinois State Board of Education Foreign Language Goals:

29 A. Understand manners and customs of various target language societies.

29 B. Understand music, dance, folk art, visual art, drama and architecture related to the target language societies.

29 C. Understand literature and various media (audio and visual) of target language societies.

29 D. Students who meet this standard can understand history of areas where the target language is spoken.

Enduring Understandings:

By the end of this unit, students should gain insight into how certain holidays are celebrated in Mexico today. Students should have a clear understanding of the history behind the celebrations and vocabulary needed to discuss the holidays. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on the similarities and differences between various holidays celebrated in the United States.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the historical origins behind el Día de la Independencia, el Día de los Muertos, las Posadas, el Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe and la Guelaguetza?

2. How are these holidays celebrated today in various parts of Mexico?

Performance Tasks:

Since the lessons are spread out over the course of the year, teachers may choose to have the days go without assessment. There are essential discussions and mini-activities in the lessons, so the teacher may decide to assess students on the performance tasks included throughout the lessons. Each lesson is unique in what it presents and requires students to do.
Learning Activities:

Each lesson includes a warm-up activity—usually a discussion to appeal to students with prior knowledge and to encourage conversation about the festival at hand. The lesson will then move into a main activity which can range from a craft to a video to a webquest, and then there will be a concluding activity of some sort, which may be a presentation, summation of material, mini computer fact-finding activity or celebration. Please see lesson plans for a specific, detailed account of each day.
Lesson 1: El Día de la Independencia

Background for the Teacher: Mexican Independence Day can best be compared to the Fourth of July in the United States. On September 16, Mexicans celebrate their freedom from the Spanish, who ruled Mexico for 300 years. Father Miguel Hidalgo is said by many to be the father of the revolutionary movement, as he, and many other frustrated Mexicans, decided to rise up against the wealthy, unjust Spanish colonists. Father Hidalgo sought to better the lives oppressed Mexicans by overthrowing the Spanish government. On September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo rang the church bells in the town of Dolores in the state of Guanajuato and then delivered the cry, el grito, that urged Mexicans to unite and rise up against Spain to pursue freedom and an independent nation. Mexico finally gained independence in 1821 after a long fight, although Father Hidalgo died in 1811, so he did not see his dream become a reality. Every year, the Mexican president reenacts the grito from the balcony of the National Palace, which overlooks the zócalo, or central plaza, in Mexico City.

Warm Up Activity: (5 mins.) Have students turn to their partners or groups and guess when Mexicans celebrate Independence Day. Have each pair or group put their guess on the board to share out their ideas for dates. Discuss answers and reasons behind the selections. Find out what students already know about Mexican Independence Day. Clarify that this event is celebrated on September 16, if students did not know that yet.

Note: If students guessed that Cinco de Mayo is Mexican Independence Day, it would be a good opportunity to explain what May 5 actually commemorates: the Mexican defeat of the French at the Battle of Puebla in 1867.

Main Activities:
1. Video: (5–10 mins.) Show students a clip of the president reenacting the grito in the zócalo in Mexico City from the current year. Explain that the president of Mexico delivers a grito every year to commemorate Padre Hidalgo’s Grito de Dolores from
1810. There are many clips available on the Internet; one from the 2010 Bicentennial Celebration can be found at: http://youtu.be/SIcF_ziS1WU

Questions for discussion:

- What names did you hear the president say in his speech? Have you heard of these individuals before? If so, why are they famous?
- How would you describe the crowd’s reaction?
- What U.S. holiday would you compare this to and why?

2. Student work: In groups, for 25-30 minutes, students will research different topics related to Mexico’s independence. Divide your class into four groups. Each group must use reliable sites on the Internet or print sources to answer their questions to the best of their ability. They will then share their answers with the class.

Each student needs a computer for research or give each group print copies of the research, depending on the level of your class.

Print out the following, cut into slips, and either hand one randomly to each group or pre-select the content that would best suit the needs of each group of students.

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Group 1: What were the conditions like for Mexicans leading up to the revolution? What year did Mexico finally gain its independence from Spain?

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Group 2: Who is Father Hidalgo and why is he a significant figure in the Mexican independence movement? What other individuals helped Mexico during the Revolution?

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Group 3: Explain the significance of the Mexican flag and provide a picture of it for the class.

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Group 4: How is Mexican Independence Day celebrated? What special foods are eaten? What music or dances are important parts of the festivities?
If students are struggling to find information, or if some groups need assistance, here are some suggestions:

**Overview:**  [http://www.inside-mexico.com/featureindep.htm](http://www.inside-mexico.com/featureindep.htm)

**History:**  [http://www.inside-mexico.com/laentrevista2.htm](http://www.inside-mexico.com/laentrevista2.htm)


**Food:**  [http://www.mexgrocer.com/mexcocina-sep1.html](http://www.mexgrocer.com/mexcocina-sep1.html)


**Conclusion:** (10 minutes) Have each group present their findings to the class. Consider requiring a 1–2 slide PowerPoint or Keynote presentation from each group. Each presentation must include the answers to the questions for that particular group.
References for Lesson One


Lesson 2: El Día de los Muertos

Background for the Teacher: This holiday, celebrated on the Catholic holidays All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day on November 1–2, is a perfect example of syncretism of the pre-Hispanic beliefs and the Catholicism that the Spanish brought with them when they arrived in the Americas. These two belief systems melded together and each group of individuals honors the dead in the way they deem most appropriate.

It is important to stress that death is not to be feared in the Mexican tradition of Day of the Dead; instead, it is a continuation of life and this holiday is a true celebration. According to tradition, the deceased ancestors come back to Earth to visit their loved ones.

Warm Up Activity: (5 minutes) Show students various images that embody Day of the Dead traditions, such as the excellent and thorough photo essays on http://www.dayofthedead.com. If you can find a sugar skull, that would be a wonderful addition to this preview set.

Have students discuss the pictures in the pairs or groups with which they typically work. Questions for consideration:

- What holiday does this remind you of?
- Are the images scary or friendly?
- Do you know anything about Día de los Muertos already?

Have some students share their answers with the class, but don’t steer them in any particular direction—just listen to what they already know about the holiday.

Main Activity: (30–35 minutes) Show the video “El Día de los Muertos” from Teacher’s Discovery. The movie is 25 minutes long and has an American high school student join a Mexican girl in Oaxaca as she and her family celebrate the holiday. Students really appreciate that an American unfamiliar with the celebration experiences it in Mexico; the
questions he asks of his host are very insightful and informative. The movie is in English with Spanish vocabulary and subtitles provided. Show students where Oaxaca is on a map and then give them the worksheet from Teacher’s Discovery that accompanies the video (attached). Have students work on the sheet while they are watching the video. It will probably take five to ten minutes to review the answers with them after the movie.

**Conclusion:** (remainder of class, 10–15 minutes) Have students build an electronic altar, or ofrenda. Students should go online to the website for the Smithsonian Latino Center: [http://latino.si.edu/dayofthedead](http://latino.si.edu/dayofthedead). Click the box that says “Build your own altar.” Students can then drag and drop images from the bottom of the page, such as marigolds, incense and bread onto an altar. With each click, an explanation about the item appears. As an exit slip activity, have students write down three things that they have learned from today’s class (or have them email you, depending on your district’s technology requirements).
Photos from a restaurant in Merida highlighting the non-threatening skeletons – death is not to be feared; it is a natural process and the day of the dead allows the living to celebrate the lives of the dead.
El día de los muertos

1. What do Mexicans build to honor the deceased?
   a. una ofrenda   b. una casa   c. una tumba

2. What is the flower of the dead?
   a. the daisy   b. the marigold   c. the rose

3. What is the name of the special bread made for this celebration?
   a. pan de día   b. pan de muertos   c. pan de vida

4. What does chapulin mean in English?
   a. grasshopper   b. incense   c. flower

5. What is mole?
   a. bread   b. spicy chocolate sauce   c. a taco

6. What do they do on October 31st?
   a. play songs   b. prepare   c. trick or treat

7. What is November 1st?
   a. el día de los santos   b. el día de las velas   c. el día de alegría

8. What is celebrated on November 2nd?
   a. angels   b. children   c. deceased adults

9. What does máscara mean in English?
   a. mascara   b. museum   c. mask

10. How do Mexicans perceive death?
    a. embrace it   b. fear it   c. deny it

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References for Lesson Two


El Día de Los Muertos. Teacher's Discovery, 2005. DVD.

Lesson 3: Las Posadas

Background for the teacher: Beginning on December 16, and continuing for nine nights, many Mexicans celebrate “Las Posadas.” The term posada signifies a place to stay, such as an inn, and the celebration allows the faithful to recreate Mary and Joseph’s struggle to find a place to stay right before Jesus was born.

Warm Up Activity: (10 minutes) Read the children’s book Las Posadas with your students. The story is written in an introductory level of Spanish, so it is perfect for beginners. Students will learn about the celebrations and key vocabulary words that pertain to the holiday.

Main Activity: (30 minutes) Have students make and decorate a tin ornament. See the worksheet on the next page.

Conclusion: (10 minutes) Have students show off their artwork and then share the lyrics of a traditional posada song with them. An example of one song in English and Spanish, courtesy of the book, Piñatas and Skeletons, is included in this section.
Tin Ornament

In early Hispanic tradition, gold and silver were often used in making artwork because the metals were soft and easy to work with. However, as the value of these metals increased, artisans looked to other metals to replace gold and silver. When the Spanish forbade the natives to use the precious metals, the artisans began using tin. Now, many toys and ornaments are made from tin, often starting from simple scraps of metal that become transformed into beautiful works of art. Follow these directions to design a unique yet simple Christmas decoration.

Materials:
- Scrap paper
- Pencil
- Aluminum pie pan
- Craft paint pens
- Pen
- Scissors
- Hole punch
- Yarn or ribbon
- Tape

Procedure:
1. Draw a detailed design on a piece of scrap paper to make a template for the ornament design.
2. Have an adult cut off the rim of the pie pan so that only a circle remains.
3. Tie the paper template to the circle, placing a few sheets of newspaper underneath.
4. Trace the pattern by pressing down very hard with a pen. Remove the pattern.
5. Let an adult cut the outside of the design to form the ornament.
6. Place the ornament on a surface with the pen marks facing down. Use craft paint pens to color the ornament between the raised lines.
7. Have an adult punch a hole at the top of the ornament.
8. Tie a piece of yarn or ribbon through the hole to display the completed ornament.

Posada Song

This is a song Mexican children sing during Posada:

En el nombre del cielo
os pido posada
pues no puede andar
mi esposa amada.

Aquí no es mesón,
sigan adelante,
yo no puedo abrir
No sea algún tunante.

Mi esposa es María,
la Reina del Cielo
y Madre va a ser
del Divino Verbo.

Entren santos peregrinos,
reciben este rincón
aunque es pobre la morada
es grande mi corazón.

Humildes peregrinos,
Jesús, María y José,
mi alma doy por ellos,
mi corazón también.

In the name of heaven
we beg you to let us stay,
my dear wife cannot walk
any farther today.

This is not a hotel
keep moving on, I say,
you might be a thief,
you must go away.

My wife is Maria,
Queen of Heaven and Earth,
she'll soon be the mother
of God's most Divine Word.

Come in holy pilgrims,
rest in our small space,
the house may be poor,
but kind hearts fill this place.

To the three humble pilgrims,
Jesús, María, and José,
I give to them my soul
and my heart on this day.

References for Lesson Three


Lesson 4: El Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe y las fiestas patronales

Background for the Teacher: Most towns in Mexico will hold a celebration celebrating the patron saint for which the town is named. At the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, an exhibit stated the following, “there are two types of festivals: those of the patron saints and those dedicated to the Virgins and Christs…The festival is not a short-lived moment for a community, with music, abandon and happiness. It is the deepest expression of the life of a community. An entire annual cycle is involved.” Instead of focusing on one particular town’s celebration, the main focus of this lesson is on La Virgen, who plays a prominent role in the lives of most Mexicans.

Warm up Activity: (10 minutes) Mini-discussion on saints. Use the following questions as a guide to gauge what level of familiarity students have with the saints.

- What saint names have you heard before?
- Are there any celebrations you know of that pertain to those saints?
- If so, what happens at those celebrations?
- Does your town hold any special kind of unique celebration?
- Describe any town-specific festivals.

Explain to the students that most towns in Mexico will have a patron saint whom the town sees as a guardian for the town. They celebrate that individual on the designated saint's day on the calendar. There is a great mix between the indigenous beliefs and the Catholic tradition of the cult of the saints.

Supplementary Information: (10 minutes) Show students the following pictures taken in the town of Xico, in the state of Veracruz, in Central Mexico. I had the privilege of witnessing this event while on the trip. The entire town seemed to be present at the celebration. Mass was celebrated, after which a procession of a statue of Saint Mary Magdalene through town ensued. Many buildings were decorated with flowers and
papel picado hung in the streets. Stalls were selling savory and sweet treats ranging from conchas to tacos. Music filled the air, as did incense and random noise makers. It was truly a sight to behold and that was only the first of many nights of festivities.
Procession leaving the church

The procession through town
One of the many food stalls

A banner advertising all of the events for the Fiesta Patronal de Santa Maria Magdalena

Janik - ¡Vamos a Celebrar!  
 p. 20
**Main Activity:** (30 minutes) Once students realize the importance of individual saints to particular towns, I think it is important for them to see the significance of religious figures to the country as a whole. Explain to the students that the Virgin Mary, affectionately called *La Virgen de Guadalupe* due to her appearance to Juan Diego, is the Patroness of Mexico. Mexicans call themselves *Guadalupanas* even if they do not consider themselves to be religious. For this reason, I think a lesson on her will help students to grasp how and why her image is important to the Mexican people.

Have the students get on their laptops to do a webquest to learn about the importance of the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico. On the following pages there is a student worksheet as well as an answer key.

**Optional Extension Activity:** For additional information on *fiestas patronales*, I suggest the following resource: *Mexico Desconocido*, “Fiestas en Mexico”. This magazine contains many quality images, dates and other information about patron saints’ festivals throughout Mexico. Another magnificent supplement is a book I picked up in Mexico entitled *De Santos y Milagros*. If you can locate a copy of that book, your students would be in for a treat. The book highlights various patron saint festivals throughout Mexico from the perspective of the youth. Young children described the celebrations to the older students who transcribed the information. Included throughout are pictures drawn by the narrators. It is truly a masterpiece written in Spanish. I intend to share a few pages with my students every so often, as I think it is such a valuable resource.
¿Quién es La Virgen de Guadalupe?

Answer the following questions using this website:

http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1404-la-virgen-de-guadalupe-mother-of-all-
mexico

1. Why is La Virgen seen as “a common denominator” for Mexicans?

2. What year did La Virgen appear in Mexico?

3. What were conditions like for Mexicans living under Spanish rule?

4. Look at the image of La Virgen in addition to reading the material on the page and then explain how she became a symbol for the oppressed indigenous communities, partly based on her appearance.

5. What does it mean to be a Guadalupana?
6. Describe what happens on December 12 outside of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

7. Now go to the website for the Basilica: http://cyberbasilica.org/index.htm

Look at the inscription (in Spanish) above the main entrance. What does it say?

8. Translate that to English.

9. What does that mean to you now that you know what La Virgen means to the Mexican people?
¿Quién es La Virgen de Guadalupe?

1. Why is La Virgen seen as “a common denominator” for Mexicans? Languages were diverse, as was ancestry and geography. La Virgen was a symbol that could unite any Mexican from any genealogical background, who spoke any language, and who lived in any part of the varied Mexican terrain.

2. What year did La Virgen appear in Mexico? 1531

3. What were conditions like for Mexicans living under Spanish rule? Oppressive – the indigenous had the Catholic religion imposed upon them and they were not allowed to continue worshiping their gods.

4. Look at the image of La Virgen in addition to reading the material on the page and then explain how she became a symbol for the oppressed indigenous communities, partly based on her appearance. La Virgen appeared and spoke a language the locals could understand and she had brown skin. She appealed to the indigenous who were in need of someone to worship as their own, instead of the God of the Catholic Spaniards.

5. What does it mean to be a Guadalupana? A Guadalupana is someone who is devoted to the virgin.

6. Describe what happens on December 12 outside of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Pilgrims with offerings of flowers and prayers, as well as dancers, gather at the basilica.

7. Look at the inscription (in Spanish) above the main entrance. What does it say? “¿No estoy yo aquí que soy tu madre?”

8. Translate that to English. Isn’t it I here who is your mother?
9. What does that mean to you now that you know what *La Virgen* means to the Mexican people? *Answers will vary.*
References for Lesson Four


Lesson 5: La Guelaguetza

(This is celebrated in July in Oaxaca, but I think it’s a good lesson right around Thanksgiving due to the content.)

Background for the Teacher: On the Fulbright trip, we had the privilege of watching some of the preparations for Oaxaca’s Guelaguetza celebration unfold. I’ve scanned in pictures from around Oaxaca to help students connect to the excitement of the holiday.

Warm Up Activity: (10 minutes): On the board, write these two questions:

- What are three things other people have done to help you or your family?
- What did you and/or your family do to show your gratitude for the help?

Have students jot down their ideas in their notebooks for about five minutes. Then ask for volunteers and have students share a few examples.

Main Activity: (25 minutes) Educate students about the Guelaguetza celebration in Oaxaca. It is usually celebrated on the last two Mondays in July and allows people to show gratitude towards their neighbors for help received over the course of the previous year. It is another example of a festival that arose from the indigenous people needing to hold on to their beliefs and practices despite the Spanish conquistadors and their attempts to impose Catholicism on the indigenous. The Oaxaca Department of Tourism states that the Virgen del Carmen’s feast day was celebrated around the time of the Guelaguetza, which allowed both the natives and the Spaniards to celebrate for different reasons in July. My pictures from Oaxaca are included in this section.

One major feature of the Guelaguetza is the traditional dancing unique to each region. Here is the official website with many valuable clips from previous celebrations, including the famous “Flor de Piña” dance: http://www.guelaguetzaoaxaca.com/

Also check out this one: http://www.viveoaxaca.org/2011/04/guelaguetza-2011-25-de-julio-y-1-de.html
After the dancing, it is not uncommon for the dancers to share regional specialties with the crowd, thereby further enhancing the spirit of community.

Here is another festival-related clip from Jennifer Jervis, a participant on the Fulbright-Hays seminar: http://www.youtube.com/user/jjjervis13?feature=mhee#p/a/u/0/jPQXK_vlbU.

At this point, students should have a better understanding of the celebration, especially about the high spirits and sense of unity and togetherness that people share not just during Guelaguetza, but throughout the year.

**Conclusion:** Have students fill out the following worksheet to design a Guelaguetza-inspired celebration for their community. They could fill out the worksheet for their school, hometown, or wherever they feel a great sense of attachment. If there is time, you may want students to share their answers; otherwise, assign the worksheets for homework and collect them the following day.
Women in traditional dancing costumes heading to the plaza.

Parade decorations.

Janik - ¡Vamos a Celebrar! p. 29
Dancing and a parade!

Banner advertising the festival
**Nuestra Guelaguetza**

Using the information that you learned in class about Oaxaca’s famous Guelaguetza celebration, think about how you could share a sense of community and togetherness among the people in your school or hometown.

Design and describe your ideal festival of sharing below. There are no correct answers, but please thoroughly explain the reasons behind your answer choices.

1. How do people in this community help each other?

2. What is most important to the community?

3. How can we best celebrate how much we appreciate each other? Let’s design a fiesta plan.
   a) What time of year would you celebrate and why?
b) What food would be available for the participants? Explain your choices.

c) What kind of entertainment would be featured at the event? How would this highlight the theme?

d) How long would the festival be? (Specify days and times.) Why?

e) Would there be a dress code? Why or why not?

f) How would you decorate the area? Explain your choices.
References for Lesson Five


