Experiencing Mexico Without Leaving the Classroom

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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SENIOR THESIS - ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCING MEXICO

During my student teaching experience, I completed my honors thesis for the Honor's College at Ball State University. I created a unit designed to make students aware of the Mexican Culture. I had the opportunity to teach this unit to the fourth grade students I was teaching. I believe that they gained a better understanding of the Mexican culture which is rapidly growing in their community. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing in the United States today. In some regions, there are many misconceptions about Mexico and the citizens that move to our country. My five-week experience in Mexico helped me to clear many of the misconceptions that I harbored. Children need to be aware of where their new neighbors are coming from and to appreciate the differences between the cultures.

The content of the unit covers a wide variety of areas. I developed a lesson that compares Mexico and the United States because I believe that the students need to see where the similarities and differences lie between the two countries. I also included a geography lesson to incorporate learning land regions and locating important features in Mexico. The next two lessons dealt with the Aztecs and Aztec art. These experiences provided the students with a look at Ancient Mexico. Next, I developed a lesson that looked into literature: folktales and legends. This is a good way to learn about a culture and its beliefs. I also included a lesson on the language. The class enjoyed learning bits and pieces of another language. Finally, to bring the entire unit to a close and link all we had learned, I ended the unit in a fiesta. The fiesta includes many aspects of an open market and authentic experiences.

The materials included in this unit were no more than could be found in any school or community. I found music and artworks, literature and trade books, to create a learning center for the unit. I included all of these things throughout the lessons as well. The materials I provided allowed the students to learn through seeing, hearing, and hands-on experiences.

Most of the instruction included group work and self discovery. I introduced a topic and then gave the students a task to complete. They were able to learn and answer their own questions without the teacher spouting off information. Student interaction was important because of the diverse cultures represented in the classroom and the objective of learning about another culture.

Assessment took place by the use of a portfolio. The students added writing samples and activity sheets to the portfolio throughout the unit. I, then, graded the portfolio by using a checklist. As the papers were turned in, they received a separate grade and the portfolio was the final grade for the unit.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Linda Martin, my advisor, for her leadership in Mexico and for her enthusiasm in working with me on this project. Her help has been greatly appreciated. Thank you also to Tracy Kelm, my supervising teacher during student teaching, who was supportive in my teaching of this unit. Thanks to Mrs. Kelm’s fourth grade students who helped make the unit a success. Thanks also to my parents, Jerry and Louann Smith, who put up with my reactions to stress during this semester. Finally, I want to thank my fiance, Steve Cash, who has always tolerated my being a perfectionist.
Introduction

During my student teaching experience, I developed a unit dealing with Mexico and the Mexican culture. The Hispanic culture is the fastest growing minority in the United States. Many of the new residents are from Mexico. I felt that children needed to be aware of the similarities and differences between the cultures because they are sharing communities, schools, and friendships. I feel that my experience in Mexico, during a summer of study with Ball State, has helped me to develop an understanding of this topic and my further study has made my knowledge even broader.

I have chosen a wide variety of topics for the content of the unit, which can be taught during a two week period for one hour a day. The lessons are designed to give the students a small sampling of each topic and to find out where the students’ interests lie. These lessons can also be extended to make the unit longer once the teacher has determined the class interest. I have left quite a bit of room for the extension of activities because students are different. They may be really interested in one topic and do not want to stop learning. How can a teacher deny the students’ request for more knowledge?

I was able to teach this unit to my class of fourth grade students during my student teaching experience. Each student had a folder that contained lined paper to use as a journal. The folder, then, also held all of the work the students did in class concerning the unit. This was necessary to keep all materials together and refer to those materials during another lesson. The final grade for the unit was based upon these portfolios. The overall reaction to this unit was a
desire to learn more. Students who were rarely attentive during regular studies, listened with interest and asked a plethora of questions. The teachers were pleased with the success of the unit and even the principal praised my literature lesson.

The following information will consist of describing each one of the lessons, giving a rationale of the information presented, the students reaction to the lesson, and my evaluation of the lesson. Overall, I am extremely pleased with the development and success of this unit and I hope to teach it again in the future.

**Lesson 1 - “Comparing Countries”**

The first lesson of the unit consisted of a discussion between students and the teacher. A large poster with national facts from the United States and Mexico was displayed in the classroom. These facts were the basis of the discussion. After the discussion, students were to write a journal entry discussing how the United States and Mexico are similar and how they are different.

I felt that comparing the U.S. and Mexico was very important for children. Most of what they may know is based upon the knowledge that they have about the United States. I thought that comparing the information and seeing the similarities and differences would help the students to learn about the country and also clear any misconceptions they may have about the country. By giving the students something to compare, they may find it easier to learn the information.

The students’ reaction was an eagerness to learn something different. At first, they were a little wild and hard to settle down. Then, they became very interested in what I was telling them and what their classmates had to say. They had so many questions about Mexico that I had to set aside time the next day to answer their inquiries! When we got to the journal, I had some moans
and groans. This particular class does not like to take the time to write, but they need the experience. As the unit progressed, however, I found that the writing became much easier for them.

I was pleased with the success of this lesson. I liked the content and enjoyed hearing the comments and questions. If I were to teach this again, I may have the students find the information on the Internet with partners in the computer lab. I would have the students tell me what they would like to learn about Mexico, I would provide them with the information on the United States, and the students would research and report that information. Then, I would make a poster to display in the classroom.

Lesson 2 - "Geography"

This lesson links information students will need to know about geography with the study of Mexico. First, the students come up with definitions to terms such as desert, volcano, etc. and write them in their journals. Then, the teacher models a map of Mexico and labels each of those terms and cities. The students create their own maps and decorate them as they wish.

I wanted to include a lesson on the geography of Mexico because I think that the students should know the basic climate and geographical features of the country. This is another opportunity to compare and contrast to the United States. I also wanted the students to label the major cities and cities that they would see in the pictures that I showed them from my travels to Mexico.

The students were unusually quiet during the lesson. I came to the conclusion that, when you do something they find interesting, they are more likely to be attentive. This showed me how important it is to try to make everything interesting for the students. The students’ previous knowledge on the geographical features was excellent. As a class, they were able to give me a
good definition of each term. Another activity that went well was the pictures of mountains. I showed the class a picture of a mountain in Monterrey (Northeast Mexico) and a mountain in Puerto Vallarta (Southwest Mexico) and had the students tell me the differences and why they were different. They were able to tell me that the mountain in Monterrey was rocky and had less vegetation than the one in Puerto Vallarta. They also told me that the mountain in Puerto Vallarta was covered in trees. The students told me that this was because Puerto Vallarta was more of a rainforest and Monterrey was more of a dry climate. I was pleased with their deductions. The students seemed to enjoy the map activity and came up with good symbols for their map key.

Needless to say, due to the good thinking of my students, I was very pleased with this lesson. I was pleased with the discussion of the pictures and the ability of the students to determine the definitions of the terms. One thing I could have done differently would have been to have the students brainstorm geographical features of Mexico before introducing the terms. Then, I could have seen even more evidence of learning about the country.

Lesson 3 - Aztecs

This lesson begins with brainstorming the prior knowledge students have of Aztecs. Then, a book about the Aztecs is read. This book deals with how the Aztecs settled in Mexico and how they were defeated by Cortes and the Spaniards. As the book is read, students are encouraged to talk about the events in the story. Next, the students are divided into 5 groups and each group gets a packet of information on one topic about the Aztecs. Each group must present the information with a poster. During the presentations, students complete a comprehension worksheet that covers each topic presented.
This lesson was created to give the students a look at Ancient Mexico. By learning about an ancient culture, students are able to make connections in history. For example, one connection I made was that the United States was first settled by England, making the official language English and Mexico was settled by Spain, making the official language Spanish. Another important aspect of this lesson was to engage the students in cooperative learning. Each student in the group had a job to perform. Also, the group was responsible for finding the information on their own, thus enhancing research skills.

The students were very focused during the story and few distractions occurred. They made some excellent connections which made me extremely happy. The story told a little about the Mexican flag and the students caught on that my choice in folder colors matched the flag. They also discussed the symbol on the flag, which is one of the only non-Spanish symbols in Mexico. The students, again, seemed very eager to learn more about the Aztecs and were on-task for most of the group work time. This is extremely rare for this particular group of children.

My observations were that the students really needed a good 45-60 minutes to complete their presentation preparations. They really wanted to make these projects interesting. I was very happy with the outcome of the lesson. Some students had difficulty with some of the questions. I believe, however, that a fourth-grade student should be able to handle the questions. This group of students have a tendency to be lazy and they want the answer to be very clear without doing any thinking. If I were to do the lesson again I would consider changing the wording in some of the questions in order to make the answer easier for the student to understand.

Lesson 4 - Literature

This lesson begins with a discussion on what a legend or folktale is. Then, a Mexican
folktale is read to the students and a new concept is introduced, a discussion web. A discussion web is designed to create a concrete way for the students to weigh the positives and negatives of a controversial issue in the story. The students and the teacher complete a web together for one issue in the book and, then, the students complete one on their own and discuss it with a neighbor.

The reason I chose a literature lesson is because a legend can reveal quite a bit of information about a country. It also encourages students to further study the literature from that particular country. The discussion web encourages students to listen and think creatively about ideas. It also helps students participate during a classroom discussion.

The students were able to accurately tell me what a legend was and how they were told orally from generation to generation. They really enjoyed the story which included many words in Spanish. I told them what the words meant and, since they were repeated in the story, they could remember the meanings. The students' participation was excellent. The discussion web was a new concept and they were challenged by the work. It was difficult for them to give yes/no reasons for an idea but, they were able to understand through the discussion.

When I taught this lesson, I had the principal of the school observe me. She was very impressed with the discussion web, a concept she had never seen before. I was very happy with the way the students participated during the story. If I were to teach this again, I would make more use of the discussion web. I could introduce it during a reading lesson and then, they would be already familiar with the concept. Then, I would be able to dig deeper into the issue.

Lesson 5 - Aztec Art

The art lesson from this unit was designed to show the students the purpose of ancient
Aztec art. The first task is for the teacher to show the students actual photos of ancient artworks and to describe them. An emphasis on the meaning and function is placed on the artworks. Next, each student receives an Aztec symbol. They are asked to guess what each symbol stands for. Each student is asked to draw a symbol that represents something important in his or her life. Those drawings are put together in books, called codices, which was learned in a previous lesson. Finally, students were asked to write in their journals about why pictographs were so important to cultures like the Aztecs.

I wanted to include an art lesson in the unit because I wanted the lessons to be well-rounded and include many subject areas. Since music is introduced during the fiesta, I focused on art. I included links to art history, art production, and art criticism. This is three of the four disciplines. The lesson also emphasized the importance of functionalism in Aztec art and symbolism.

The students were not quite as cooperative during this lesson as during the others. They were very attentive during the discussion of artworks and were happy to be having an art lesson (this school does not provide an art class for students). Students did not want to work on their drawings for very long. They were not paying attention during the explanation of the pictographs because they had to ask questions. They did not use any time to think about what they were going to draw. They wanted to sketch something and not put any thought into it so they could be done. It was like pulling teeth to get them to think.

I think I could improve the students' reactions by changing part of the lesson. I would use a transparency of the Aztec symbols to display on the overhead instead of going from student to student to check their guess. I would also try to spend more time on the journal for the lesson. I would probably try to do a web on why pictographs were important and have the students write
their own thoughts in the journal.

Lesson 6 - Introduction to Spanish

This lesson was designed to expose students to as many Spanish words they could get into about one hour. The first activity is for the teacher to read a book that combines English with Spanish using rhyme and pictures to make the words predictable. After a word is said in Spanish, the students are supposed to guess what the English translation is. Next, students receive a song sheet and a Spanish song is played as they follow along and look at the English translation. Then, students brainstorm some of the words they had learned from both the book and the song. They write these words, along with a few essential conversation words, in their journals or on word file cards. Students begin to practice conversations with a partner when their words are written. Finally a video of a dance, the “Cielito Lindo,” is played in order to subject the students to more of the Mexican culture.

I believe that a lesson in the language of Mexico compliments the unit. Students are very interested in other languages and would like to know some of the words their classmates may speak at home. Giving students a dose of the language may spark their interest to learn the language in the future. It may even cause the them to be more accepting of immigrants from other countries. The best way I know to introduce language is through books. They are entertaining and full of information. The second part of introducing a language is to practice. Both of these elements occur in this particular lesson.

The students in my class completed this activity with more success than I ever imagined. I was surprised at how many words they remembered from the story. They were attentive during the story and were very eager to guess translations, even if the guess was incorrect. I even heard a few of the words they learned during conversations after the lesson. The only difficulty for
them was explaining some of the details of the written language. For example, the many
accents, tildes, and "upside-down" punctuation that occurs in the Spanish language were
especially difficult. I was not intending to go into many of those details, but some of the
Hispanic students in the class insisted on it.

I was pleased with the outcome of this lesson. I only wish I could have taught more than
one lesson on the language. Perhaps, in my future classroom, I could teach a few Spanish words
at the end of the day as a reward for good behavior. The best time for someone to start learning
a new language is when he or she is young. One thing I might have done differently is to make a
handout of the words I thought were important. This would have been better because the
students would have had more time for practicing the language.

**Final Activity - FIELSTA!**

The final activity, or closure, to the unit is a fiesta. Students receive "pesos" to spend at
the many activities, which include a folk dance, craft, music, food, piñata, and other activities.
The students are supposed to barter with the teacher on the prices of the activities. The fiesta
was designed to integrate all the information the students learned during the unit. The fiesta can
be as simple or as ornate as the teacher wishes. Even the simple fiesta that consists of only food
and music can be beneficial to students.

Students in my class really enjoyed the fiesta. The use of the pesos was a difficult thing
for them. I am not sure why, but, I think that the students were focused only on the aspect of
having fun. The folk dance was a success, however, not so much a success that they would do it
a second time. I think that is where the age of the students comes in. First grade students are
more likely to enjoy dancing than fourth graders, who are very concerned about where they stand
socially. Those students who did barter with the pesos seemed to be successful, although, a few
of them went with the original price. To my surprise, most of the students liked all of the food that was included in the fiesta.

My only problem with the fiesta was that it was not quite as authentic as I would have liked it to be. This group of students has so many behavior problems I had to modify some of the activities and cut some of them out completely. Another reason for some of the lack in authenticity was that the day of the fiesta fell on Good Friday. Most of the Hispanic students in the classroom are Catholic and did not come to school, therefore, parents did not either. I really would have liked to arrange a tortilla demonstration but it was not possible. I was happy with the outcome of this event and I have also gained many new ideas on how to improve my next fiesta.

**Conclusion**

The unit I have created is one of the biggest and most successful products of my pre service teaching career. The students learned a lot of new knowledge about Mexico and actually had fun while the learning was taking place. Every day, at least one student would ask me if I was teaching about Mexico that day. It really made me feel good.

The unit itself can be modified to fit any grade in the elementary school. The changes and thoughts I had after teaching the unit, are only suggestions to make the unit run more smoothly with this particular class. Each class of students is different and what works for one, may not work for another. In conclusion, I believe this unit is very appropriate for any classroom and can be useful in classrooms which are diverse. The unit focuses on accepting the Mexican culture and learning how two cultures are similar as well as different. Students, parents, and teachers can benefit from participating in “Experiencing Mexico.”
EXPERIENCING MEXICO
Without Leaving the Classroom

A unit created by Heather Smith
I. Unit Objectives
   A. Students will participate in activities about the people and culture of Mexico
   B. Students will participate in an open market and fiesta at the end of the unit, an authentic Mexican experience
   C. Students will participate in activities about the customs of the people of Mexico (music, art, etc.)

II. Geography
   A. Map activity
      1. locate major cities, mountain ranges, and bodies of water
      2. compare to United States in size, location, and geographical features
   B. Climate
      ■ discuss rainfall, desert, plant life, and animals of Mexico

III. History/Culture
   A. Aztec activity
      ■ discuss the symbol on the Mexican flag (eagle devouring serpent) and how the Aztec Indians came to Mexico
   B. Discuss what people do for a living and stress that they have many of the same jobs as people in the US.
   C. Discuss the Mexican government in terms of
      ■ voting (recently approved)
      ■ choices (comparing U.S. choice with Mexican choice)
   D. Discuss religion (Catholic)

IV. Language
   A. Learn Spanish greetings and songs
   B. Participate in activities with Mexican music
      ■ learn a Mexican dance

V. Literature
   A. Listen to and read Mexican folktales and legends
   B. Read different folktales, discuss them in groups and do activities to share with the class.

V. Art
   A. Discuss one or two color copies of ancient art works
   B. Create Mexican String Art

VI. Miscellaneous
   A. Discuss different modes of transportation
   B. Participate in open market
VII. End of Unit celebration

A. Economics
   1. use Mexican money
   2. become aware of common wages for people in Mexico
   3. become aware of marketing

A. Open market
   1. play money
   2. bartering with student made and teacher provided prizes
   3. participation of community members with Hispanic background

B. food - corn chips, salsa, "real tacos," Mexican wedding cakes (cookies), Mexican hot chocolate, etc.

C. tortilla demonstration

D. music

E. piñata

F. A discussion of all these activities will precede the celebration
MEXICO UNIT

Introduction

This unit was designed to make students aware of the Mexican culture. In the United States today the Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing in the country. Children need to be aware of where their new neighbors are coming from and to appreciate the differences between their culture and the Mexican culture.

Unit Objectives

1) Students will participate in activities about the people and culture of Mexico

2) Students will participate in an open market and fiesta at the end of the unit, an authentic Mexican experience

3) Students will participate in activities about the customs of the people of Mexico (music, art, etc.)
MEXICO UNIT – Assessment

Assessment for this unit is dependent upon the teacher’s evaluation of the student’s completed portfolio at the end of the unit. Throughout the unit students will be asked to keep journals and add maps, worksheets, and other items to the portfolio. This grade will be determined by a checklist, which will be completed by the teacher. Some of the items may be graded individually to ensure the completion of those items when they are due. In most cases, this grade will be included in the social studies grade.
Mexico Portfolio Checklist

1. Map
2. Aztec Worksheet
3. Discussion Web
4. Word File
5. Journal
   - Compare U.S. and Mexico
   - Geography Vocabulary
   - Aztec Pictographs

Final Portfolio Grade
MEXICO UNIT - Materials

Books:
Aztecs by Fiona MacDonald
Passport to Mexico by Carmen Irizarry
Growing Up in Aztec Times by Marion Wood
Half-Chicken by Alma Flor Ada
The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote by Tony Johnston
The Sad Night by Sally Schofer Mathews
The Aztecs by Michael E. Smith
The Central Americans by Bacheli
Say Hola to Spanish, Otro Vez by Susan Middleton Elya
De Colores: and Other Latin-American Folk Songs for Children by Jose-Luis Orozco

large, white, heavy paper to make folders for portfolios
8 sheets of lined paper for each student
pencils
posterboard
transparencies
markers
colored pencils
poster paper
stiff paper
string
cassette with Mexican folk songs
tape player
video of “Cielito Lindo” dance
TV/VCR
index cards
food, as listed in “fiesta” explanation
craft sticks (popsicle sticks)
various colors of yarn

Any other materials are listed in each individual lesson plan
MEXICO UNIT - Resources


MEXICO UNIT - Comparing Countries

Objectives:
Students will write a journal entry that focuses on the similarities and differences of Mexico and The United States.

Materials:
pencil, paper, poster with countries’ facts

Procedure:
1) The teacher will display a poster containing basic information about Mexico and the United States.
2) The teacher and the class will discuss the information included in the poster.
   Government - same
   Population - U.S. is triple the population of Mexico
   Language - due to U.S. being settled by England and Mexico settled by Spain
   Climate - Mexico is basically hot but the United States varies greatly
   Crops - similar crops except for coffee and cocoa
   Natural Resources - similar
   Currency - Show examples of currency from both countries
3) Students will then write a journal about how Mexico and the United States are similar and how they are different.

Information:

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>MEXICO</th>
<th>UNITED STATES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Official name:</td>
<td>The United Mexican States</td>
<td>The United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government:</td>
<td>Federal Republic</td>
<td>Federal Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 31 states</td>
<td>- 50 states</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Federal District</td>
<td>- 1 Federal District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population:</td>
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<td>250 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official Language:</td>
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<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Religion:</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate:</td>
<td>Varies from desert to tropical</td>
<td>Varies from desert to tundra with everything in between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crops:</td>
<td>corn, tomatoes, coffee, sugarcane, cocoa, beans</td>
<td>apples, beans, cotton, citrus fruit, corn, peanuts, sugarcane, tomatoes, wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources:</td>
<td>oil, copper, zinc, iron, coal, fish</td>
<td>coal, copper, gold, limestone, natural gas, oil, iron ore</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency:</td>
<td>Peso - centavos</td>
<td>Dollar - cents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital:</td>
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<td>Washington D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Anthem:</td>
<td>Mexicans, at the Cry of War</td>
<td>The Star Spangled Banner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEXICO UNIT - Geography

Objectives:
1) The students will discuss vocabulary dealing with the geography of Mexico and write these words in their journals.
2) The students will fill in a blank Map of Mexico with important geographical features to keep in their portfolios.

Materials:
chalkboard, overhead projector, transparency of Mexico, blank map for each child, journals, markers, colored pencils.

Procedure:
1) Write the following words on the board and have the students discuss the definitions until the correct one is reached. Each word and definition will be placed in the students’ journals. desert, rainforest, volcano, mountain, highlands, plateau
2) A map of Mexico and the surrounding areas will be shown. Students will be asked to point out where Mexico is and surrounding countries and bodies of water.

Activity:
1) Put an overhead of Mexico on the projector and start labeling and discussing Mexico according to the vocabulary introduced at the beginning of the lesson. Each student will fill out a blank map as well.
2) Each of the following items will be labeled and put in the key:
   Cities
   - Monterrey
   - Zacatecas
   - Mexico City
   - Puerto Vallarta
   - Cancun
   Desert
   Rain Forest
   Volcanoes
   Mountains
   - Sierra Madres: Occidental, Oriental, del Sur
   Central Highlands
   Central Plateau
3) This map will be included in the students’ portfolios.

This activity will be followed by the sharing of Mexican artifacts, such as pictures, post cards, maracas, pesos, wrappers, etc.
Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States)

Government – Federal Republic (31 states and a federal district)
Population – about 86 million
Official Language – Spanish
Major Religion – Roman Catholic
Climate – Varies from arid to tropical
Major Crops – Corn, tomatoes, coffee, sugar cane, cocoa, beans
Natural Resources – Oil, copper, zinc, iron, coal, fish
Currency – Peso, Centavos

Creative Teaching Press, Inc.
MEXICO UNIT - Aztecs

Objectives:
1) Students will be read The Sad Night by Sally Schofer Mathews.
2) Students will participate in group research and present their information.

Materials:
poster paper, markers, Aztec papers, books, The Sad Night, information sheets, worksheets.

Procedure:
1) Brainstorm - ask students what they know about the Aztecs. Make a web on the chalkboard.
2) Read The Sad Night.
3) Split students into 5 groups. Each member will have a job.
   A) recorder - writes information
   B) materials manager - gets materials from teacher
   C) speaker - present information
   D) reader - reads books and papers
   E) artist - creates poster (or oversees creation)
4) Each group will receive a packet of information on 1 of 5 topics: legend, religion, social classes, calendar, Aztec defeat.
5) Students will have certain questions they need to answer (located in packet). They will also create a poster to help present the information. Students may also include additional information on their topic.
6) During presentations, the students must complete a worksheet and turn it in.
AZTEC WORKSHEET

The Legend of the Flag:
1) What was the sign telling the Aztecs where to build their new empire?

2) What city now rests on the old city of Tenochtitlan?

3) On what national symbol can you find the sign the Aztecs were looking for so long ago?

Religion:
4) What are the two families of gods the Aztecs worshipped?

5) How did the Aztecs represent their Gods?

6) Why did the Aztecs participate in human sacrifice?

Social Classes:
7) Name the 4 major social classes.

8) What did the Aztecs use to show a sign of social class?

9) What would happen if men and women did not dress according to their class?

Aztec Calendar:
10) What object did the Aztecs make famous?

11) How many calendars were included in it?

12) What were the Aztecs afraid of when 2 of the calendars ended together?

Aztec Defeat:
13) Who came to Mexico to conquer the Aztecs?

14) Where was he from?

15) How did he use the Aztec's beliefs to conquer the empire?
Aztecs

According to Aztec legend, a sun god called the Hummingbird Wizard directed ancient Aztec people to leave their homeland of Aztlan in A.D. 1168. The Hummingbird Wizard told his people to travel south into the Valley of Mexico and make their homes where they saw an eagle devouring a snake while sitting on a cactus, or tenochtitlì. They found the eagle on an island in Lake Texcoco, and called their city Tenochtitlán (tay-nak-teet-LAN) or “place of the cactus.” The Aztec filled in the lake with mud and built their city in the middle of Lake Texcoco. In time, the Aztec Empire included much of central and southern Mexico.

Religion played a major role in the life of every Aztec. It involved group ceremonies performed to please their gods. Many of their ceremonies required human sacrifices.

The Aztecs had four major social classes: the king and high priests, the merchants and craftsmen, the poor, and slaves. The majority of people were poor farmers who lived in family units called clans. Each clan had its own leaders, priests, and schools. Male clan members either served in the army or worked on farms or buildings. Women took care of the children and households.

Aztec clothing was a sign of social class. Poor women wore ankle-length skirts and over-sized blouses. Peasant men wore loin cloths and a cloak called a tilmantli tied over their right shoulders. Upper-class merchants wore their tilmantli tied under their chins, while wealthy women wore flowing dresses with fine jewelry and headdresses. Priests wore black hooded cloaks.

The Aztecs spoke the Nahuatl language. They used a form of picture writing called glyphs. They created a 360-day calendar, which is on view today in the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. This calendar also foretold solar eclipses and great earthquakes.

The Aztec Empire came to an abrupt end in 1521 when Hernán Cortés of Spain fooled Aztec ruler Montezuma II into thinking that Cortés was a god. The Spanish conquered and nearly wiped out the Aztecs, due to superior weapons and deadly diseases brought by the Europeans to the New World.
Group - 1  The Legend of the Flag

Materials: pages 1-2 of The Sad Night by Sally Schofer Mathews

- Tell about the Aztec's Travels from Aztlan to the new land
- Tell about the sign the Aztecs needed to find in order to settle
- What lake did they build the new city on and what did they name it.
- What countries today once included the Aztec Empire?
- What does Tenochtitlan mean?
- What symbol can you find on Mexico's flag?
- What city now rests on the old city of Tenochtitlan?
THE LEGEND OF THE FLAG

From The Sad Night by Sally Schofer Mathews

Long ago in Mexico, when volcanoes sent lava rivers steaming into the jungles and jaguars hissed messages to man, a wandering people listened to their leaders.

"We must move again," the priests said. "Put on your sandals and your robes and take your children by the hand, and walk and keep on walking until you see an eagle on a cactus with a rattlesnake in its beak. In that place, we will build an empire."

Every day they walked. To sleep, they curled up in their robes. To eat, they chopped up cactus and roasted rattlesnake meat. And one day, one very good day, they looked across a lake and saw an eagle on an island. It was perched on a cactus, with a rattlesnake twisting around in its beak. They named the island Tenochtitlan, which means "the place of the cactus stone."
Group 2  Religion

Materials: pages 40-45 of *Aztecs* by Fiona MacDonald

- Explain how important religion was in the Aztecs’ lives.
- How many gods did they believe in? (2 families-tell about them)
- How did the Aztecs represent their gods?
- Why did the Aztecs participate in blood sacrifice? What is it?
- Who was Coatlicue?
Group 3 Social Classes

Materials: pages 38-39 of *Aztecs* by Fiona MacDonald

- Describe the 4 major social classes of the Aztecs

- What was the Aztec sign of social class?

- Explain what could and would happen if men and women did not dress according to their social classes.
Group 4       The Aztec Calendar

Materials: page 47 of Aztecs by Fiona MacDonald

- Describe the Aztec calendar.

- How many calendars did it include?

- Each time 2 of the calendars ended together, what did the Aztecs think would happen?
Group 5  The Aztec Defeat

Materials: *The Sad Night* by Sally Schofer Mathews

- Talk about Cortez and the Spaniards
- Describe Moctezuma's beliefs about the gods and the Spaniards
- Discuss the battle between the Aztecs and the Spaniards and Cortez's escape
MEXICO UNIT - Literature

Objectives:
1) Students will be exposed to literature such as Mexican folktales and legends.
2) Students will complete a discussions web over one story and make educated decisions based on the discussion.

Materials:
- variety of Mexican folktales including The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote by Tony Johnston,
- overhead of discussion web, discussion web handouts

Procedure:
1) Explain that Mexican literature includes many legends and folktales. Discuss what a legend is.
   - handed down orally
   - stories about why something happens or exists
   - culturally based (different stories depending on culture)
Have the students name some legends that they have heard.
2) Read the story and ask questions during reading. Ex) Spanish words, content, etc.
3) Put the overhead on projector.
   - explain that a discussion web will help you to discuss two options to a yes or no problem.
   - Do the example: Do you think that the event in the story really happened?
     (Use at least two yes and two no statements to make a decision.)
4) Students will get a copy of a discussion web and will complete one individually to the prompt: “Do you think the rabbit was a good character?” 2 yes, 2 no, and decision
   Take volunteers to share if time allows.

Extensions:
- Read other folktales throughout the unit during read aloud time.
DISCUSSION WEB

Do you think that this story is true?

YES

No reasons provided.

NO

Reasons:

- Animals
- Moon
- Talk
- Rabbit
- Climbing
Lesson Title: Aztec Codices

Materials: Aztec Art Cards, string, stiff paper, markers, Symbols, answer key

Objectives:
   a) Art History - Students will participate in a discussion of Aztec art pieces
   b) Art Production - Students will draw pictographs of an important thing in their lives and they will be put into codices
   c) Art Criticism - Students will discuss what some Aztec symbols mean
   d) Art Aesthetics - NONE

Preparation:
   Have Aztec Calendar symbols cut - one for each student
   Have holes in paper and string cut for the assemble of codices

Vocabulary: Aztec calendar, codices, pictograph, symbol

Sequence:

Activation: Students will sit on the floor and the teacher will hold up each card. A discussion will take place using the cues on the back of the cards.
   1) Students will each receive a slip of paper with a symbol. They will need to guess what it represents.
   2) Explain that the Aztecs used these “pictographs” as words. Explain that these symbols were put into codices or books. Using the key, let the students know if their guesses were correct and give them the correct symbol.
   3) Students will draw a symbol that represents something important in their lives. Each paper will be joined together in accordion shape into a codices book. The book will be displayed in the classroom during the unit.
   4) After completing the drawings, students will write a journal entry. The students will explain the importance of pictographs during the time when the Aztecs lived.
COATLICUE

STUDIO FACTS

This figure was found in Mexico City. It stands almost 100 inches high and represents an Aztec goddess.

ART CRITICISM

1) Figure has symmetrical balance.
2) It contains strong emotive qualities because it represents the Aztec goddess of earth and death.
3) It shows a variety of textures on the surface.

ART HISTORY

1) This sculpture was found in 1790 as workers in Mexico City removed pavement in the Plaza Mayor.
2) It was decided to replace the statue because of the strong religious meaning.
3) The Aztecs were cruel warriors and this statue represented death.

ART STUDIO

1) This statue is a carving out of stone, probably porphyry.
2) This statue was carved to represent cruel tragedy.
3) It was also carved to use in ceremonies.

AESTHETICS

1) No one can find another work of art expressing fatal truth more brutally or grandly than the statue of Coatlicue.
2) How does this object clearly show characteristics of Aztec art?
3) Mexican sculpture (ancient) equals the masterpieces of any other period.
AZTEC CALENDAR

STUDIO FACTS

This stone calendar was made by the Aztecs in the 15th century. It was found in Mexico City.

ART CRITICISM

1) This image is highly functional because it was used as a calendar by the Aztecs.
2) It has radial balance.
3) It has repeated use of shapes and symbols.

ART HISTORY

1) This relic was found (along with Coatlicue) in 1790 in Mexico City as construction workers worked in the Plaza Mayor.
2) This artwork was used in the temple for sacrificial offerings.
3) This tribe settled in what is now Mexico City when they saw a sign which is now the symbol on the Mexican flag.

ART STUDIO

1) This is a carving from a stone called porphyry.
2) The Aztecs carved astrological symbols into the stone.
3) The Aztecs also used jade and turquoise (precious stones) to make the designs in the stone. This may symbolize its importance.

AESTHETICS

1) Would some people be better at judging (critique) the Aztec calendar than others?
2) How important were the Aztecs' intentions in creating the calendar?
3) How does this object relate to culture, religion, and politics of the Aztecs?
1. crocodile  
2. wind  
3. house  
4. lizard  
5. serpent  
6. death's head  
7. deer  
8. rabbit  
9. water  
10. dog  
11. monkey  
12. grass  
13. reed  
14. acelot  
15. eagle  
16. vulture  
17. nation  
18. flint knife  
19. rain  
20. flower
MEXICO UNIT - Introduction to the Spanish Language

Objectives:
1) Students will be introduced to the Spanish Language through a book and music.
2) Students will practice speaking the new words.

Materials:
Say Hola to Spanish, Otra Vez by Susan Middleton Elya, Music tape with “De Colores” and “Cielito Lindo”, tape player, dance video, TV/VCR, index cards, pencils

Procedure:
1) Read the book, Say Hola... and hold it so that the students can see the pictures. Have students guess what the Spanish words mean by using rhyme and context clues.
2) Have students listen to the tape (after passing out the song sheets) and discuss what the song means.
3) Have students say words that they remember hearing during the story and song to add to a word file.
4) Word file must include:
   - Hola – Hello
   - Adios – Good-bye
   - Amigo – Friend
   - Como Estas? – How are you?
   - Bien – Good
   - Mal – Bad
5) Students will repeat the word after the teacher says it.
6) Students will practice greeting each other in Spanish.
7) Each student will receive 15 cards. They must write the English word on one side and the Spanish word on the other with a picture.
8) Students will practice their words with a partner.
9) If time allows, have students watch video of a dance to “Cielito Lindo” done by the 1996 Dance Team from Concord High School.
De colores,
de colores se visten los campos
en la primavera.
De colores,
de colores son los pajaritos que vienen
de afuera.
De colores,
de colores es el arcoiris que vemos
lucir.

CORO
Y por eso los grandes amores
de muchos colores me gustan
a mí. [cantar dos veces]

Canta el gallo,
canta el gallo con el kiri, kiri, kiri, kiri, kiri.
La gallina,
la gallina con el cara, cara, cara, cara, cara.
Los pollitos,
los pollitos con el pío, pío, pío, pío, pío.

CORO
Y por eso...
MEXICO UNIT - Fiesta!

Objectives:

1) Students will use play “pesos” to but food and prizes at the open market.
2) Students will participate in a Mexican Folk Dance - “Cielito Lindo”
3) If time and the area allows, community members will be invited to participate.

Procedure:

1) Before the celebration begins students will be informed of the daily wages of an average working person in Mexico. I will use the example of a friend I made in Mexico who earned 28 pesos a day for working in a pizza place.
2) Students will also be informed of what goes on in an open market in Mexico. Tables of food and goods are set up in open space and lots of bartering occurs. Bartering is when the customer and the dealer determine a price for the good. Students will be encouraged to barter prices during their open market simulation.
3) A table will be set up for each of the following; food, prizes, dance, and tortilla demonstration (if possible).
4) Students will be able to participate in each of the activities in small groups or as one large group.
FOOD

Corn chips - take authentic corn tortillas, cut into triangles, salt and bake at 350 degrees until crisp.

Salsa - any type of authentic salsa in a jar

Mexican wedding cakes (cookies) - recipe included

Mexican Hot Chocolate - recipe included

Tacos - soft corn tortillas filled with steak strips, sauteed onions, and white cheese

PRIZES

Ojos de Dios (God’s Eyes) - craft sheet included

FOLK DANCE

“Cielito Lindo”

Participants join hands in a circle and walk to the right. On “Ay ay ay ay,” they drop hands and sway from side to side. They step on the right foot and tap the left toe two times. Repeat on left foot. The step is done four times altogether. The pattern is repeated again, from circling in the beginning.

Explain to the children that this song is an authentic song except that the words are different. These are the words to the original song.

Ay, ay, ay, ay
Canta y no llores.
Porque cantando se allegran
Cielito Lindo
Los corazones
Piñata Time!

Piñatas are a favorite part of almost every celebration in Mexico. Originally they were made out of a clay pot or a bamboo frame covered with fringed, brightly colored crepe paper. Today, they are usually made out of decorated cardboard or papier-mâché. They come in all shapes and sizes from donkeys to stars to Super Heroes. But what's important is what's inside — candy and little toys!

How to make a piñata:

Materials:
- Paper lunch bag
- Newspaper
- Wrapped candies
- 4" wide strips of bright tissue paper
- 1" wide strips of bright tissue paper
- Glue, scissors, hole punch
- 24" long twine

Directions:
1. Fold bag down 2" to the outside.
2. Stuff bag ½ full with crumpled newspaper and candy.
3. Fringe the 4" tissue strips.
4. Glue the uncut edge around the bag, starting at the bottom and overlapping around to the top. Fringe edges.
5. Punch holes around the top, thread with twine, and pull and tie to close.
6. Glue 1" tissue strips to bottom of bag as streamers.

Variation: One large grocery bag can be used to make a class piñata.

Head, wings, feet, etc, can be added to transform the piñata into an animal.

Party Time!

Choose a class piñata to break open at your class fiesta (page 36).

Procedure:
1. Pass out paper sacks to each child.
2. Hang the piñata overhead from a rafter or tree limb.
3. Use a rope to lower or raise the piñata.
4. Draw a chalk line that children must stand behind when it is not their turn. Review rules, emphasizing that no one may cross line until you yell: "Fiesta!"
5. Blindfold a child and let him/her try to break the piñata by swinging a bat or stick while you raise and lower it.
6. When someone breaks the piñata, yell: "Fiesta!" Children run to gather candy and toys in their paper sacks.

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MEXICAN HOT CHOCOLATE

Traditionally, Mexican hot chocolate is made of chocolate blended with sugar, cinnamon and, occasionally, ground almonds. Mexicans make it frothy by beating it with a special carved, wooden beater called a molinillo. You may get similar results with a portable mixer.

Have the children wash their hands and the working surface area before handling the food items. Gather together the following ingredients and supplies.

**Utensils:**
- large saucepan
- mixing spoon
- measuring cups
- measuring spoons
- hot pads
- portable mixer

**Ingredients:**
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 oz unsweetened chocolate
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 6 cups milk
- 2 beaten eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla

1. In a large saucepan, cook and stir the sugar, chocolate, cinnamon, and 1 cup milk over medium heat until the chocolate melts. Then stir in the remaining milk.
2. Mix 1 cup of the hot mixture with the beaten eggs, stirring constantly. Quickly stir the mixture into the saucepan. Heat for 2 minutes over low heat.
3. Use hot pads to remove the pan from the heat. Add vanilla and then beat the hot mixture with a portable mixer until the chocolate is frothy.

SERVING SUGGESTION:
Serve the chocolate hot in mugs topped with whipped cream and sticks of cinnamon.
**POLVORONES**

*(Mexican Wedding Cakes)*

Polvorones are special cookies that may be enjoyed at any Mexican or Central American fiesta.

Have the children wash their hands and the working surface area before handling the food items. Gather together the following ingredients and supplies.

**Utensils:**
- mixing bowl
- mixing spoon
- measuring cups
- measuring spoons
- hot pads
- spatula
- cookie sheet

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup margarine, softened
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- powdered sugar

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Use a portable mixer to cream the margarine, powdered sugar, and vanilla in a large mixing bowl.
3. Gradually add the flour, salt, and pecans and beat until the dough is well-blended. Be careful of any allergies to nuts in the classroom.
4. Chill the dough for a ½ hour.
5. Roll the dough into 1” balls. Place the balls on a cookie sheet and bake for 20 minutes.
6. Use hot pads to carefully remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Use a spatula to remove the hot cookies.
7. Pour some powdered sugar into a small bowl and roll the hot cookies in the powdered sugar until thoroughly coated. Cool the cookies and then roll them in the powdered sugar once again.

**SERVING SUGGESTION:** Not necessary

Polvorones may be wrapped in tissue paper by rolling the cookie in the paper, bunching the ends of the paper, and twisting the ends. Fringe the ends of the tissue paper to give the wrapped cookies a festive look.

*These may also be purchased at the grocery.*
GOD’S EYES (OJOS DE DIOSES)

These colorful decorations can be made from straight sticks, tree limbs, or branches. Invite children to experiment!

Materials:
- yam scraps
- popsicle sticks (or other straight sticks)

1. Cross two sticks at the center at right angles.

2. Ask children to tie yam scraps together to make continuous strings.
3. Help children wrap a length of yam around the centers of the two sticks to reinforce the cross.
4. Then show children how to begin wrapping the yam around the individual arms of the sticks, connecting the sticks with yam.
5. Encourage children to keep weaving more scraps of yam on the sticks until you have a decorative piece.