

# **Latin-American Cuisine, Pre-Columbian to Present: A Discussion of the Changing Nature of the Latin American Diet**

*By Amy Davis Troyani*

*Pittsburgh Allderdice High School*

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## **Overview**

This curriculum unit begins by exploring pre-Columbian cuisines and examining the manner in which pre-Columbian diet information survived the colonization of Latin America. These cuisines are then analyzed with regard to the changes resulting from direct and indirect contact of Latin America with Europe, Asia, and Africa. Later, evolving Latin American diets are compared to earlier diets, and are assessed for nutritional value. Latin American food trends are investigated, including the movement to preserve pre-Columbian cuisines. Finally, suggestions are given for developing a more healthful Latin diet.

This curriculum unit allows students of the Spanish language to view the language as part of a cultural heritage. This heritage, in turn, reflects the history of many Spanish-language speakers. As a result, students make a connection between language study and other content areas, such as anthropology, sociology, history, geography, biology, and nutrition.

Because teachers are required to cover extensive amounts of material in their classes, little time may be left to infuse additional cultural information. Therefore, the content of this unit can be adapted to varying situations. The unit utilizes a student-centered approach to learning. Students complete independent research on a series of topics and share their findings with the class. According to the time available and the need for added enrichment, the teacher determines time allotment and depth and quantity of research. Similarly, different topics can

either be introduced throughout the year in periods of ten or fifteen minutes, or several topics can be presented over consecutive days.

I currently teach high school Spanish level 2 Gifted and level 3 Scholars. However, this curriculum unit can be adapted to any high school Spanish class, regardless of level. Content can be adjusted according to the type of research questions asked, the degree of the research required, and the decision to discuss research findings in Spanish or English.

## **Rationale**

### Historical Accounts

During the early years of Spanish colonization, accounts of indigenous life, including diet and cuisine, were recorded. Sokolov, mentions the writings of Bernadino de Sahagún and Bernal Díaz de Castillo as shedding light on Aztec life. Sahagún, a sixteenth century Franciscan friar, documented information that he obtained from indigenous informants. He is said to have relied upon elderly indigenous persons who were considered to be knowledgeable (Iturriaga). Sahagún wrote this information in the native Nahuatl language and in Spanish, and included accounts of food related issues (Sokolov, Coe). He had native artisans complete drawings reflecting their way of life (Coe). Iturriaga cites one of Columbus' soldiers, Bernal Díaz de Castillo, who included in his records descriptions of foods sold in an Aztec market as well as of a banquet held by Moctezuma II. Another sixteenth century historian, the Dominican friar Diego Durán, discussed food tribute given to the Aztecs by other peoples (Ituriaga).

Diego de Landa, a further sixteenth century historian who was a Franciscan friar, wrote detailed accounts of Mayan culture on the Yucatán Peninsula, despite being responsible for the destruction of many indigenous cultural items (Iturriaga, Coe). Hernández de Córdoba, who led an expedition from Cuba into Mayan lands, also provided Mayan food information. An additional source of Mayan food facts was supplied by Juan Díaz, a chaplain in an expedition that was a continuation of Hernández de Córdoba's original expedition, now commanded by Juan de Grijalva in 1518 (Coe). Juan Díaz' writings were published in several European languages.

Guaman Poma de Ayala, an indigenous historian, provided a view of Incan life in his illustrated book written in the early seventeenth century. Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spanish soldier and an Incan princess, also supplied information about Incan food ways (Coe).

It is important, when considering colonial European historical accounts, to understand, as Coe points out, that these accounts were not necessarily objective. “Everyone wrote with a prejudice, or a political agenda, or a cause in mind” (67), and the understanding of situations was limited by the viewers’ own cultural background. This lends to misinterpretation of what was seen, and then reported. Similarly, Coe notes that Sahagún’s informants were all men and of higher social status, so information regarding women’s lives and the roles of the common people cannot be generalized from his information.

### The Indigenous Diets

The historians listed above, along with many others, have allowed us to gain an understanding of indigenous diets as they existed during the early European “occupation”, a term used by Coe. Extensive descriptions of foods, cuisines, and food culture are found in many of the works cited in this curriculum unit. There are vast amounts of information, and I have attempted to supply a general summary of various diets, usually referring to three major cultures when possible, the Aztecs, the Mayas, and the Incas, though at times, these descriptions may be geographical rather than cultural. The descriptions are not meant to be all-inclusive, but simply to provide a picture of some of the dietary habits of various indigenous groups. Occasionally, descriptions are given for Mexico, and it can be difficult to know if this is to include both Aztec and Maya areas.

It is interesting to note that, when I was reading accounts of food items, the accuracy of these accounts was problematic. I first noticed this when reading Iturriaga’s work in Spanish. Without the assistance of an unabridged dictionary, I was unable to identify certain foods he mentioned. Moreover, I questioned whether foods unknown to the European historians were given indigenous names that may have only been regional in use, or foods were given names that applied to a similar, but not the same food product that was known in Europe. Later, when reading Coe’s work, she also commented on some of these problems.

### *The Aztecs*

To begin, the Aztec Capital, Tenochtilán, was on the site of today’s Mexico City. Bernal Díaz de Castillo, among his many descriptions, discussed foods in an Aztec marketplace. Some of the foods he mentioned were beans, chickens (probably some type of fowl since chickens were not native to America), rabbits, honey, and a food prepared with the eggs from water flies. He also described a banquet given by Moctezuma II at which partridge, quail, hare, duck, venison, local birds, tortillas, fruits, and cacao drink were served. Sahagún’s food account included dogs, large rats (I suspect an American rodent, probably not a rat), turtles, turtle eggs, iguana, fish, ants, honey from both bees and a particular ant,

roots, grains, and sand fruit (Iturriaga). Sahagún specified 96 species of insects that were eaten (Alcántara), and related that worms (larvae) from the maguey plant were also a food source (Sokolov). Sahagún also stated that many types of cactus were eaten (Coe), and mentioned tortillas, tamales, and a variety of chilies (Sokolov). Additionally, Coe cites the eating of “jackrabbits, mice, armadillos, snakes, possums, and iguanas”, water bugs and their eggs (99), “lake shrimp..., frogs, and a great variety of small lake fish”, along with tadpoles, and a type of lake salamander, and lake algae (100). Of great distaste to the Europeans was *tlacatlaolli*, or human stew. Sahagún explained that human meat was prepared with maize and salt. (Coe).

In his account, Diego Durán discussed food brought to the Aztecs by other peoples as tribute. Included here were rice, beans, amaranth, a variety of chilies, venison, rabbit, quail, weasels, large mice, grasshoppers or locusts, ants, and cicadas, to name just some. A quantity of the items brought as tribute were foods that were native to climates other than that of the Aztec capital, among them tropical fruits such as pineapples, and lagoon animals (Iturriaga).

In Mexico, the maguey plant not only supplied larvae as a protein source, but sap that was drunk. This sap was ingested in its fresh form, and also fermented to make “*pulque*, a perishable, low-alcohol, milky beverage” (Sokolov 33) that could be drunk or used in cooking. The maguey flower was also eaten (Sokolov). Sahagún related that there were various Aztec beverages made of maize or other “doughs” (78), as well as the chocolate drink. As explained by Coe, “...there were many kinds of fermented drinks. Alcoholic liquids could be made from maize, honey, pineapples, cactus fruits, and many other things” (84).

Maize was a primary food source for the Aztecs, and many varieties existed. Numerous types of beans were also eaten. The combination of maize and beans provided a complete protein source. Another important grain was *chía*, or sage seed, out of which a nutritional gruel was made (Coe). Amaranth provided yet another grain source. Seeds from different types of squash were also used in cooking.

Hernán Cortés described many different chilies used in Mexico. In addition, a variety of root foods were eaten, including chayote, jícama, sweet potatoes, and manioc. Mushrooms were used in cooking and as hallucinogens (Coe).

### *The Mayas*

Turning to the Mayas, Coe describes Mayan speakers as inhabiting “southern Mexico, the Yucatán peninsula, Belize, Guatemala, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador at the time of the European conquest (121)”, and she explains that, at

the time of the conquest, the Mayans were not a united group of people. There was variation in the Mayan diet due to geographical differences within Mayan lands. More information is available about the Yucatan area as compared to the than other Mayan areas (Coe). Once again, I will proceed to simply give a general list of some of the foods that were eaten.

Iturriaga tells us that corn, beans, and chili were staples of Mexico, but he does not differentiate between Aztec and Maya areas. He also states that squashes were of importance. Much of the squash plant provided food, including the seeds, roots, flowers, and fruit. Tomatoes, armadillo, spirulina, larvae, and insects are reported to have been foods of the Mayan high plateau area, or *altiplano*, while foods in the coastal tropics were said to include papaya, heart of palm, grains, fish, shellfish, vanilla, and monkeys (Iturriaga). Coe recognizes maize as a Mayan staple, and Diego de Landa also named maize as a Mayan staple from which food and drink were made. Additionally, he reported on both a drink and a butter derived from cacao, and mentioned stews made of meats, deer, and fowl, and a variety of fish (Iturriaga). Furthermore de Landa discussed the preservation of foods through smoking and through the use of plants believed to have “insecticidal qualities” (Coe 133). In his accounts, Hernández de Córdoba referred to two types of maize based foods and two types of maize based drinks. Honey was used to sweeten maize drinks as well as to make an alcoholic beverage. Fowl as a food source was also named. (Coe).

Of great significance in Mesoamerica (including Aztec and Maya territories) was the preparation of maize through nixtamalization. “Nixtamalization is the complex process that starts with soaking the ripe maize grains and then cooking them with lime and wood ashes... it much enhances the protein of the maize for human beings (Coe 14).

A large variety of plant matter provided sustenance. De Landa described Mayan vegetable and chili dishes. (The term vegetables may have had a broad use.) Various types of beans were prepared with chilies. Beans with maize and squash were also mentioned. Continuing, tortillas, served with beans, provided a tool with which to eat the beans, in addition to being a nutritional combination. Roots such as manioc, jícama, and sweet potatoes were also eaten. In cases of food shortages, wild roots were available. A variety of vegetables, both raw and cooked were eaten, including different types of young cactuses, and mushrooms. Fruits orchards were abundant, and avocados, pineapples, and papayas were included in the diet. *Balché*, a fruit beer was consumed. De Landa described several types of bread, but it is difficult to determine if he was referring to tortillas or tamales. Maize dough could have additives, including beans, chilies, and squash seeds. Tamales, plain dough or dough with fillings, were wrapped in leaves and cooked. Among the tamale fillings were prepared beans, stews

containing meat, fish, or fowl, and a variety of greens. Though the Mayas ate meat infrequently, on those occasions, iguanas, fowl, fish, turtles, snails, howler monkeys, tapirs, and armadillos were consumed. Insects were also eaten (Coe).

### *The Incas*

Turning to Peru, Guinea pigs provided a meat source, as did two large domesticated animals, the llama and the alpaca. Unlike the Incas, the Aztecs and Maya had no large domesticated animals. Wild vicuña and guanaco were also an Incan meat sources. *Cusharqui*, cured meat, was eaten and is the source of the English word “jerkey”. The elite ate llama, while the guinea pig was more of the meat of the masses. Other food sources included deer, seafood, dried fish, frogs, mayfly larvae, caterpillars, beetles, ants, insects, and two types of clay. Geography determined, in some cases, what was eaten. Meats, fish, and insects were preserved with salt (Coe).

Though chili peppers and tomatoes may be perceived as native to Mexico, they originated in Peru (Sokolov). Among other plants, maize, quinoa, and many varieties of potatoes were eaten. Because Peru has many climate zones, depending upon where people lived, fresh water algae and fruits were included in the diet, and the choice of greens and roots varied, and included manioc. Coastal people were known to consume seaweed. Roots and greens were included in the diet of the poorer classes (Coe).

Both Sokolov and Coe include *chicha* in their writings. However, Coe describes it as a beer made from roots, while Sokolov describes it as made from corn. A different beverage was made from quinoa (Coe).

### Latin American Diet After European Contact

Life as the pre-Columbian inhabitants knew it was drastically changed after contact with the Europeans. Musgrave and Musgrave explain, “Profit was the engine that drove Europeans beyond their own shores, and crops...changed the destiny of the regions where they grew” (7). The Musgraves refer to “economic botany” (11) as the transfer of plants from one place to another for economic reasons, a process that affects “ecology, population, and economy” of colonized areas (11). I believe this concept can be generalized to aspects of colonization beyond the transfer of plants to include the transfer of animal life, language, religion, and systems of government, all of which influence the culture of the colonized as well as the culture of the colonizers. Several curriculum units could be designed around the diverse results of European and American contact, both as it influenced America and the rest of the world. However, my purpose in this

section of the curriculum unit is to shed some light on the Latin American diet after the arrival of Columbus.

Sokolov presents an analysis of contact between different cuisines. “Two ideas seem beyond doubt: Cuisines evolve almost instantly when two cultures and their ingredients meet in the kitchen, and old cuisines never die, they add new dishes and ingredients to old recipes and slough off the losers, the evolutionary dead ends...” (15). In the case of Latin America, Sokolov demonstrates varying effects on cuisine, depending upon the specific characteristics of each colony.

In Mexico, Sokolov reveals that there was a large indigenous population, and their culinary traditions were shared with the colonizers’ traditions to yield a new cuisine influenced by both cultures. He believes that the resulting Mexican cuisine is a true mixture of both cuisines. Though I have not previously discussed Puerto Rico, Sokolov’s observations are relevant. He explains that Puerto Rico’s small indigenous population was decimated due to European disease and mistreatment. As a consequence, the imported foodstuffs brought to the country, when combined with native foodstuffs, resulted in a new, unique cuisine. Similarly, “In societies heavily repopulated with African slaves brought in to run plantations (the Caribbean coast of Columbia, northeast Brazil), tribal West African dishes were either transplanted almost completely or acquired an Iberian flavor” (Sokolov 25-26). Describing Peru, Sokolov presents yet another scenario. Here the European and indigenous populations lived “side by side” (25), both cuisines coexisting and surviving, while influencing each other. To summarize Sokolov’s point, three different situations resulted: Latin American cuisines intermingled and were recreated, or they became extinct, resulting in the creation of unique cuisines offering a culinary culture with a new combination of ingredients, or cuisines continued to exist with new influences.

Below I will mention a few aspects of today’s Latin American diet that reflect the historical past. This is not meant to be long list, but rather is meant to offer a sample of a few of food items that reflect the meeting of cultures.

Some Mexican dishes now contain beef, pork, lamb, or dairy products, none of which could be found in pre-Columbian America. On Columbus’ second voyage, he brought horses, pigs, cattle, chickens, and sheep. He also transported plant foods with him such as onions, radishes, sugarcane, lettuce, cauliflower, citrus, figs, pomegranates, bananas, and wheat (Sokolov), all of which are now familiar in Mexican cuisine. (By Mexican food, Sokolov is referring to the cuisine resulting from the indigenous and European mixture.) Continuing, though some Mexican foods are fried, indigenous Mesoamericans did not fry their foods (Iturriaga, Sokolov). As a result of food introductions, European “meat, milk, and cheese made the new Mexican food possible: cheese filled *quesadillas*,

barbecued beef *carnitas*, pork-stuffed *tamales*, chicken *tacos*” (Sokolov 28-29), and *Chile En Nogada*, which contains Old World pork, walnuts, cream and pomegranate seeds with New World chilies. Tequila, made from native Maguey, and is the result of the European distillation process (Sokolov). Honey, an indigenous food still produced in Cozumel and the Yucatan peninsula, is now the product of European rather than American bees. A sweet made of squash seeds and sugar, the latter having been introduced by the Europeans, is still prepared in Mayan areas (Coe). In the Caribbean, salt cod from northern waters, used by Europeans in the Iberian peninsula and in Italy prior to European-American contact, is now an ingredient in Caribbean dishes. Examples of such dishes are salt cod and avocado food combinations. Peruvians enjoy a particular European olive that is preserved in a pre-Columbian manner (Sokolov).

### Today's Latin American Food Trends

Some pre-Columbian food traditions, though unusual to persons from the United States and often uncommon in Latin American urban settings, can still be found. Water bugs and other insects, pond scum and algae are among these foods in Mexico (Sokolov). Guineas pigs continue to be eaten in rural Peru.

Due to the desiccation of lakes in the Valley of Mexico, there is a possibility of extinction of some of these edible insects. As a result, fewer people are eating them. Moreover, meats such as rattlesnake, monkey, armadillo, wild boar, and Aztec dog are likewise increasingly difficult to obtain (Alcántara). Nevertheless, in other parts of the country, these food traditions have not been lost (Cabezas). Mexican dishes still exist that require traditional elements such as wild birds, reptiles, and a variety of insects (Alcántara), locusts, mountain chinch bugs, oak-boring beetles, red ant eggs, and wasps, salamanders, frogs, tadpoles, iguanas, rattlesnakes, cayman, monkeys, armadillos, and various rodents (Sokolov). There are 237 varieties of edible insects in Mexico according to Cabezas, and 504 according to Alcántara. Moreover, she reports that 100grams of a particular type of ant is 47.8% protein, similar to the protein value of beef. Along with high protein content, insects also contain vitamin B, calcium, sulfur, and iron (Cabezas).

Recently, there is a developing interest in pre-Columbian foods, and they have become trendy. “A curious thing has happened in contemporary Mexico, where these insect foods, those of them that have not disappeared due to pollution and overexploitation, have become immensely fashionable and almost nationalist icons” (Coe 100). Here Coe includes maguey worms, which are purchased at elevated prices and served in exclusive restaurants. A chef involved in preparing pre-Columbian dishes in Mexico also points out the problem of extinction of many insects as well as other species that were previously included in pre-

Columbian cuisine (Cabezas). Another contemporary cuisine that reflects the Latin American past is Nuevo Latino Cuisine. “These delicacies are far from the heavy Mexican dishes most of us think of when we hear the words ‘Latin food’. Yet they are truer to the original Latin diet, which nutritionists say is amazingly healthy” (Mann), and employ food such as yucca, corn, and black beans. Parallel culinary movements are reported in Peru, with Novoandino cuisine, which favors ingredients from older Andean history, including quinoa, yucca, and alpaca (Cocina Novoandina). Interesting photos of some of the dishes representing these cuisines can be found on the Internet (Almanza Escalante, Cabezas, *Jornadas de Comida Prehispánica*).

An Internet announcement for a conference that will focus on the products and food items from pre-Columbian Mexico emphasizes the interest in cultural-historical features of Mexican cuisine. This conference, *La Mesa de Moctezuma* (Moctezuma’s Table), will highlight original Mexican cuisine as it existed at the time of Cortés’ arrival, in addition to changes in cuisine that occurred after European contact. Attention will be given to ways in which Mexican food items have influenced world cuisines (*Jornadas de Comida Prehispánica*).

Of late, the healthful aspects of traditional Latin American foods are receiving attention. Traditional foods are defined as the combination of pre-Columbian food traditions and those that developed after the arrival of the Europeans. (“Latin American Diet Pyramid: Traditional Diet Pyramids”, Sokolov). According to *U.S. News and World Report*, the traditional Latin American diet consists of “beans, grains, and tubers (think tortillas, black beans, plantains, rice, cassava), fish and fowl, and plenty of fruits and veggies (don’t forget the chilies)” (Hobson).

Unfortunately, contemporary Mexicans have been moving from their traditional foods to the fast foods and culinary styles of other countries (Alcántara), as I believe, are segments of other Latin American populations. Hobson contrasts traditional Latin American cuisine with what we usually consider to be Mexican food. When reading her description of the latter, I must admit that I think of excessively large tacos or burritos and large amounts of cheese and sour cream. No longer living a subsistence lifestyle, many Latin Americans have added greater amounts of meat, fat, and cheese to their diets, are not exercising, and are experiencing extremely high rates of diabetes and heart disease (Mann).

As an answer to the health problems caused by changing lifestyle, Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust has developed two Latin Food Pyramids, one for adults and one for children. Food choices proposed by the pyramids are based on the traditional Latin American diet, a combination of the pre-Columbian cuisines

and the cuisines that developed after the European arrival in Latin America. These pyramids are designed to present dietary choices that are healthful, tasty, inexpensive, and simple to prepare; they are educational tools for the development of a healthier life (“Latin American Diet Pyramid: Traditional Diet Pyramids”). Mann also suggests that by altering food tendencies to be more in line with traditional diets, Latin Americans will be healthier. Though Latin America includes many countries with many cuisines, there are elements that Mann believes are common to the traditional diets of all of these countries. Mann’s conclusions are quoted below:

- The traditional healthy Latin American Diet was built on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, tubers, beans and nuts. (Tubers are part of the family of potato-like vegetables.) These are Latin American foods that should be consumed at every meal.
- The middle of the Latin food pyramid includes a serving of fish, shellfish or poultry, plant oils (such as soy, corn and olive oil), and a serving of dairy. These are foods that should be eaten daily.
- At the top of the Latin food pyramid are red meats, sweets and eggs – luxuries consumed only at special meals. These are foods that should be consumed weekly.
- It’s also important to remember that people in traditional Latin cultures worked hard for a living. Physical exercise and six glasses of water each day are corner stones of the traditional Latin food pyramid (Mann).

The Mayo Clinic presents various food pyramids, including the Latin American Food Pyramid, as mechanisms to promote health. Their food pyramids differ according to the availability of and preference for specific foods in the different cultures represented by each pyramid. Using the diet pyramid as a guide, one can adjust his/her diet to be healthier (“Food Pyramid: An Option for Better Living”). The Latin American Nutrition Coalition also promotes the Latin American Food Pyramid. “For those living in the Latin American region, this pyramid provides a basis for preserving and revitalizing within a modern lifestyle the centuries-old traditions that contribute to excellent health, a sense of pleasure and well-being, and are a vital part of our collective cultural heritage” (Gifford).

## **Objectives**

This curriculum unit is designed to allow students of the Spanish language to view the cultural history of a large majority of its speakers as an integral part of world language study. As stated in previous work that I completed with the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute (Troyni), it is important that students make connections between the study of world language and other areas of study, such as history, sociology, anthropology, geography, biology, and nutrition. The World

Language Standard referred to as “Connection” supports this notion. (See Appendix for this and other World Language Standards.) In making these cross-curricular connections, students become aware of the fact that language does not exist in isolation from other aspects of a society, but rather is enmeshed in all facets of that society, serving as a tool that enables the society to function.

This curriculum unit is devised with various objectives in mind. To successfully utilize the unit, the teacher can choose to address one or various objectives stated below, depending upon time available for added cultural enrichment, individual class social dynamics, and degree of acceleration appropriate for the class.

These objectives include gaining an understanding of the following:

- Pre-Columbian diet
- Method of acquiring knowledge about the pre-Columbian diet
- Effect of direct or indirect contact with Old World inhabitants on Latin American cuisine
- Recent culinary interest in pre-Columbian cuisines
- Positive health implications resulting from a return to a more traditional Latin diet

Two sub-objectives are:

- Development of research skills
- Evaluation and sharing of newly acquired knowledge

### **Strategies**

As with my previous curriculum unit (Troyani), this curriculum unit is accomplished through short cultural segments of approximately ten to fifteen minutes in length. Individual segments may be interspersed throughout the school year. Because the segments are designed as cultural enrichment, they are to be used as a supplement to the required curriculum. The teacher’s choice of segments will depend upon several factors: particular cultural themes being addressed in classroom texts, class interests and level of class acceleration, or time available. If preferred, these segments may also be presented as one extended lesson lasting several class periods.

The stated curriculum unit objectives can be achieved through a process of students researching the answers to specific questions. For homework, the teacher asks two or three of the research questions listed in the Classroom Activities section below. Students use reference sources to answer these questions. Reference sources may include the Internet, printed materials, and/or

interviews with experts, such as teachers or other professionals in related fields of study. Each evening, one question is assigned to two or three students. Because only two or three questions are assigned per evening, only a small number of students participate in that evening's research. (The remaining students will be given other research questions for future homework.)

The following day, the students who have researched the questions report on their findings, and class discussion follows. This discussion can take place either in English or Spanish, depending upon the students' level of Spanish proficiency. It is hoped that students will bring in a variety of information, since they will not necessarily refer to the same sources for their research. The teacher must decide how long to allow for this dialogue. This will depend on the previously stated variables, as well as on the degree of class engagement. To supplement the conversation, the teacher can present relevant visual information to the class via the Internet, using an LCD projector.

A specific research question is assigned to a limited number of students to prevent excessive discussion of a topic. Excessive discussion not only causes boredom, but also requires time that may not be available if many students supply information.

Before the first research questions are asked, there is conversation about what is considered a reliable resource, especially as it pertains to websites. In addition, the changing acceptability of sources according to the research purpose is evaluated. Since assignments covering the required curriculum might also be due, students are told to spend no more than ten to fifteen minutes on their research.

### **Classroom Activities**

As previously mentioned, the classroom activities are composed of series of questions that students are to independently research and discuss with the rest of the class. Whenever relevant to the topics of the day, I will have an LCD projector set up in the classroom so specific websites can be viewed. These websites may relate specifically to the day's topics, or serve as complementary enrichment. The websites will include such subjects as photographs of pre-Columbian archeological sites and of pre-Columbian cuisine, drawings of pre-Columbian and colonial life, food pyramids, indigenous people in traditional dress, maps, pre-Columbian and colonial history sites, or anything else that appears to be of relevance and interest to the students. Students will also be encouraged to share websites that they found interesting, and these sites can be accessed in class if time permits. Many of the websites that are listed in the Annotated Reading List for Teachers and Students should also be helpful, as should the sample of applicable websites in the Annotated List of Classroom

Materials, which provide added enrichment. In addition, in a previous curriculum unit, I provided an extensive list of related websites that may be applicable (Troyani).

Though cost for transportation is always an issue, if possible, I will take the class to a Latin American restaurant for a meal. Students will be asked to review the menu in groups to determine which dishes appear to have pre-Columbian ingredients, and explain their choices. They will also be asked to determine which dishes are healthy and which are less healthy, and explain their choices. If a field trip is not possible, Latin American recipes can be found online or in cookbooks, and evaluated for pre-Columbian content and healthiness.

### Sample Questions

These questions are to serve only as a guide. Teachers can determine which questions are appropriate for their classes, as well as develop new questions they consider to be relevant.

- Who were the Aztecs and where did they live?
- Who were the Mayas and where did they live?
- Who were the Incas and where did they live?
- What were some of the foods eaten by the Aztecs, and how do we know this?
- What were some of the foods eaten by the Mayas, and how do we know this?
- What were some of the foods eaten by the Incas, and how do we know this?
- Which foods were unknown to the early Europeans who came to Latin America?
- Which foods did the Europeans bring to Latin America that had not been there previously?
- Find several Mexican recipes. What is the origin of the ingredients?
- Find several Peruvian recipes. What is the origin of the ingredients?

- Can you find any information about restaurants that serve pre-Columbian or pre-Hispanic cuisine?
- What is Nuevo Latino cuisine?
- What is Novoandino cuisine?
- What is a food pyramid? What is the Latin American food pyramid?
- Find a food pyramid that seems appropriate for your culture. Think about things you have eaten in the last few days. According to the pyramid, are you maintaining a healthy diet?

### **Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

- Works Cited, An Annotated Reading List for Teachers and Students

Alcántara, Edna. “Cocina Prehispánica en México: Sobrevive A Pesar De Todo.” *UNIVISION.com*. 21 May, 2008.

<<http://www.univision.com/content/content.jhtml?cid=1095528> >. Explains that traditional Mexican cuisine is being lost, though it is still available in some places. Article considers the ingredients and nutritional value of the traditional diet.

Almanza Escalante, Lucero. “El Llegado de la Comida Prehipánica.” *UNIVISION.com*. 11 October, 2004. 21 May, 2008.

<<http://www.univision.com/content/content.jhtml?chid=3&schid=181&secid=0&cid=474081>>. Discusses a restaurant that serves dishes with pre-Columbian origins. Contains an interesting photograph of a plate of grasshoppers.

Cabezas, Alberto. “La Cocina Prehispánica Mexicana: Insectos y Gusaonos en Vía de Extinción.” *UNIVISIÓN.com*. 21 May, 2008.

<<http://www.univision.com/content/content.jhtml?cid=462525> >. Discusses the possible extinction of small insects that formed part of the pre-Columbian Mexican diet. Includes a very interesting photo of a dish of grasshoppers.

“Cocina Novoandino.” *Gastronomía Perú*. 25 May, 2008.

<<http://www.gastronomiaperu.com/cocina.novoandina.php>>. Web page describes the Novoandino style of cooking that incorporates older Andean and international cooking. Though the *Gastronomía Perú* website appears to be commercial in nature, the information on the specific web page cited here was taken from the Peruvian government travel and tourism guide.

Coe, Sophie D. *America's First Cuisines*. Austin: University of Texas Press,

1994. An extensive account of pre-Columbian cuisine, the equivalent of an encyclopedia of Latin American pre-Columbian cuisines. Among the very many aspect of the topic covered are descriptions of foods and their preparations in Aztec, Mayan, and Incan societies. There are detailed first-hand accounts by early Europeans colonizers, as well as botanical information on crop origin. This is a complete source for anyone interested in the subject.

“Food Pyramid: An Option For Better Eating.” *MayoClinic.com*. 14 February, 2008. 29 May, 2008. <<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-diet/NU00190>>. Discusses food pyramids, and how people can adjust to healthier diets.

Gifford, K. Dun. “The Traditional Healthy Latin American Food Pyramid.” *Latino Nutrition Coalition*. 27 April, 2008. <[http://www.oldwayspt.org/latin\\_pyramid.html](http://www.oldwayspt.org/latin_pyramid.html)>. Focuses on the Latin American Diet Pyramid. The pyramid is viewed as presenting a healthy way of eating, and combines pre-Columbian and later Latin American food traditions.

Hobson, Katherine. “The Latin American Diet.” *U.S. News and World Report* 7 April, 2008. 25 May 2008. <<http://health.usnews.com/articles/health/living-well-usn/2008/04/07/the-latin-american-diet.html>>. This short explanation compares the traditional Latin American diet with what, in the United States, is considered to be Mexican food.

Iturriaga, José N. “La Comida Prehispánica: Ingredientes y Usanzas Indígenas.” *Las Cocinas de México I*. Mexico: Fondo 2000, 1998. 25 May, 2008. <[http://omega.ilce.edu.mx:3000/sites/fondo2000/vol2/20/htm/sec\\_6.html](http://omega.ilce.edu.mx:3000/sites/fondo2000/vol2/20/htm/sec_6.html)> Iturriaga is concerned with the indigenous foods of Mexico, employing observations of early Europeans as sources. It contains excellent first-hand accounts, and discusses cooking methods and regional cuisines. This is a chapter of a larger work, both accessible on the Internet.

“Jornadas de Comida Prehispánica.” *Periodicodigital.com.mx* 5 February, 2008. 25 May, 2008.

<[http://www.periodicodigital.com.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=47571&Itemid=67](http://www.periodicodigital.com.mx/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47571&Itemid=67)>. An announcement in a Puebla, Mexico digital periodical of a conference entitled “La Mesa de Moctezuma” (“Moctezuma’s Table”). The conference will focus on food products from pre-Hispanic Mexico that have influenced world cuisine.

“Latin American Diet Pyramid: Traditional Diet Pyramids.” *Oldways*. 27 April, 2008. <[http://www.oldwayspt.org/latin\\_pyramid.html](http://www.oldwayspt.org/latin_pyramid.html)>. Presents educational food pyramids for a healthy Latin American diet, one for adults and one for children. Pyramids combine pre-Columbian diet with diet developed after European contact, and provide a guide to healthy eating that is in harmony with Latin cultural cuisine.

- Mann, Denise. "The Latin Diet." *WebMD*. 20 May, 2008.  
<<http://www.webmd.com/content/article/73/82025>>. Discusses the healthful aspects of the traditional Latin diet as compared to the current typical Latin diet. Gives suggestions for returning to healthier traditions.
- Musgrave, Toby, and Will Musgrave. *An Empire of Plants: People and Plants That Changed the World*. London: Caswell & Co., 2000. This work discusses the economic influence of plants on the world. The authors go into depth about seven plants. I was particularly interested in the issue of "economic botany".
- Sokolov, Raymond. *Why We Eat What We Eat: How the Encounter Between the New World and the Old Changed the Way Everyone Eats*. New York: Summit Books, 1991. Sokolov sheds light on how our food choices have changed as a result of the food exchanges between hemispheres that began with Columbus' voyages. My particular interest was in the cuisine alterations that occurred in Latin America from pre-Columbian times to the present.
- Troyani, Amy Davis. "American Plants that Changed the World: the Potato, Maize, and Cacao." *Pre-Columbian Cultures of Latin America*. Comp. Karen Goldman. Pittsburgh: Chatham University, 2006. 58-70. This curriculum unit was written for the 2006 Pittsburgh Teachers Institute. It examines the effect that the introduction of three native-American plants beyond America had on the world.

- An Annotated List of Classroom Materials

- Aztec Gardens: The Prehispanic Plants and Foods of Mexico*. 22 June, 2008.  
<<http://www.aztecgardens.com/index.html>>. This site is described as "a guide to the origins of Mexican cuisine". It contains recipes, food terms from Nahuatl, and many other topics related to this theme, in addition to relevant links.
- California Missions Study Asso.: Book Review of *Live Again Our Mission Past*. 13 August, 2003. 22 June, 2008. <<http://www.ca-missions.org/linse.html>>. Review of a book about California missions. The review includes interesting mission-era recipes that are taken from the reviewed book.
- Hutton, Carol Lyn. *Web Sites Related to the Aztecs, the Incas and the Maya*. 25 October 2004. 22 June 2008.  
<[http://www.cumbavac.org/Aztecs\\_Incas\\_Maya.htm](http://www.cumbavac.org/Aztecs_Incas_Maya.htm)>. Appears to be a New Jersey State educational site sponsored by the Cumberland County AVA, with many links to Aztec, Inca, and Maya related lesson plans, websites, and web quests.
- Maya Recipes*. 22 June 2008. <<http://car.utsa.edu/Legacy/mayarecipes.htm>>. Site describes aspects of Mayan cuisine as well as recipes.
- "Mexican Food and Cooking History." *GourmetSleuth.com*. 22 June, 2008.  
<<http://www.gourmetsleuth.com/mexicanfoodhistory.htm>>. Contains many

informational links about Mexican food history, dishes, recipes, cooking utensils, and related readings.

Oliver, Lynne. "Aztec, Maya, & Inca Food and Recipes." *Food Timeline*. 26 January, 2008. 22 June 2008. <<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodmaya.html>>.

Contains food histories and recipes.

*Yaxche: MayaCuisine*. 22 June 2008.

<[http://www.mayacuisine.com/recipes/index\\_recipes.html](http://www.mayacuisine.com/recipes/index_recipes.html)>. A website for a Mayan restaurant in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. The site contains Mayan recipes.

## **Appendix-Content Standards**

### National Standards for Foreign (World) Language

#### *Communication*

##### *Communicate in Languages Other than English*

- Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.
- Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.
- Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

#### *Cultures*

##### *Gain knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures*

- Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and the perspectives of the culture studied.
- Standard 2.2: Students understand the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

#### *Connection*

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##### *Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information*

- Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.
- Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

### *Comparison*

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#### *Develop Insight Into the Nature of Language and Culture*

- Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.
- Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

### *Communities*

#### *Participate in multilingual communities at Home and Around the World*

- Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.
- Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.