

**Learning la Latin American vida**  
**By Alexis Kilgore**  
**Fort Pitt Elementary School**

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**Overview**

The goal of this curriculum unit is to educate pre-school students about the importance of culture, specifically Latin American cultures. First defining what culture is and then offering students a variety of experiences with various aspects of life in Latin American countries will accomplish this task. The students will be able to connect these cultural experiences with ones in their own life. It will also provide ideas for pre-school teachers to integrate a multicultural awareness component into their curriculum.

I've been teaching in the Head Start program for four years. In my experiences with pre-school students, I've noticed a great desire within the children to learn about and experience new things. In this curriculum unit, students will be given the opportunity to gain new knowledge about a culture; some might even be sharing part of their own culture. This unit promotes the idea that raising student's cultural awareness can enable them to gain greater acceptance of others' differences. They will be given the guidance to learn how to celebrate diversity.

Pre-school is the perfect place to begin explorations of different cultures. Many aspects of Latin American culture can be related to Hispanic holidays and festivals. These types of events hold a special significance in the lives of young children. Celebrations bring people together for fun, feasting, singing, dancing, and storytelling. This can also increase a child's awareness of the values, customs, and beliefs of different families and communities.

In this curriculum unit, there will be four main lessons, a guest speaker, and a culminating activity. The first lesson is an overview of Mexico. The remaining three lessons discuss various aspects of Mexican culture: food, dancing, and art. The guest speaker will bring some authenticity to these ideas and the culminating activity will provide a fun way to bring all the ideas together and showcase student knowledge.

**Rationale**

**Background**

In Webster's Dictionary, background is defined as "one's training and experience." Everyone has a background and each person's background varies in training and experience. In education, parents and guardians are viewed as childrens' first teachers. They are responsible for providing children with the training and experiences that they value. Part of our background is the unique mixture of our parents' and ancestors'

cultures and heritages. Everyone has a culture that he or she can identify with. The city of Pittsburgh is filled with a variety of cultures. Multicultural awareness should be a part of the pre-school curriculum. Children need to recognize that everyone has differences and that is something to be celebrated. By bringing pictures, stories, and experiences of people from around the world into our classrooms we can begin to value these concepts and learn new things from them. Many young students aren't aware of the importance of their cultural values, customs, and beliefs and their significance to their identity. In this curriculum unit I will be using the Latin American culture as a starting point to assist pre-school teachers in opening their students' mind to ideas about multicultural awareness. The students will then be confident and ready to share information about their own culture. Children go through various stages of development. In pre-school, children have the opportunity to extend their socialization process. After being surrounded mainly by family, they are beginning to form relationships with peers. This increased socialization is important in developing skills necessary to value multicultural awareness. The pre-school classroom is an opportune place to acquaint children with the increasingly multicultural world that they live in. This curriculum unit will aid in this socialization process by assisting with the introduction of multicultural awareness. Everyday, globalization continues to make the world interdependent. If children learn to value others at an early age mutual dependency will come naturally to them as they interact with others in the future.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this lesson is to raise multicultural awareness among pre-school students. This will be accomplished by offering students a variety of hands-on activities and materials surrounding a specific culture: Latin American.

The lessons in this curriculum unit are developed in relation to the national, state, and local standards that all Pittsburgh Public School curricula must meet. The state has developed 62 content standards within 10 Core Curriculum Frameworks to meet the national standards. In this unit the focus is on the Communication Standards. A set of communication standards has recently been adapted to meet the level of the pre-school student; these are the pre-kindergarten communication standards. This curriculum unit satisfies those standards. These standards can be found in Appendix C.

In order to address the reading/literature section of the standards, children will be offered a wide variety of age-appropriate books. Activities that develop fine motor skills necessary for writing will be offered to meet the needs of the writing section. Lastly, opportunities for students to express their feelings, share knowledge and view various other resources will be made available to meet the requirements of the speaking//listening/and viewing section of the standards.

### **Strategies**

Many, if not all, aspects of this curriculum unit can be taught using hands-on activities. This will ensure that the students get to learn the information through their own experiences. By doing this, they will achieve an increased understanding of the Latin American cultures and have a more meaningful learning experience. The cultures of Latin American life can be taught through center based experiences in the classroom. The first step would be the implementation of this curriculum unit into the daily routine of the classroom. This would lead a teacher to find out the student's prior knowledge and experiences around the subject of Latin America. Through discussions with students and parents, a teacher can discover if any students have Latin American heritage and if they participate in any customs. Also one could make efforts to survey the school community.

The next step is to provide several resources for the children to begin their explorations. Maps, pictures, books, videos, music, and artwork are some examples. Parents and community members are great resources to bring the room to life. The children will be involved with rich and meaningful interactions with each other. As a culminating activity, the children will be offered a forum to share with others what they have learned. Some ideas are writing an article in the district newsletter, video presentation and a classroom FIESTA! This

curriculum unit can be carried out in its entirety in the weeks preceding Cinco de Mayo or the activities can be dispersed throughout the year. Either way, the students will show interest and gain exciting new knowledge and experiences.

### **Classroom Activities**

The following are examples of lessons and activities that can be used to support the ideas of the curriculum unit. Since every classroom differs you will have to adapt the environment and activities to meet your needs. However the basic principles of multicultural awareness can be applied to all classrooms. In the following classroom activities section of the curriculum I will refer to the standards by number.

#### Lesson 1: Mexico (map and flag)

This can be used as the first lesson in the curriculum unit. This lesson addresses the pre-kindergarten communication standards 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 2B, 2C, and 3A. An objective of this lesson is that students will be able to locate Mexico on a map or globe. They will also be able to name the colors of the Mexican flag. We will also start a Mexican word wall. The first step is to introduce the students to the subject and find out their prior knowledge. Ask the students what they already know about countries on maps or globes and their flags. The children in my class will have previously located and discussed the United States of America and its flag. The next step is to ask if anyone can locate the country of Mexico. After this is accomplished (by student or teacher) I would stress to children that the country of Mexico is in Latin America. I would then state that is why we must say that we live in the **United States of** America rather than just America. I will write the word **Mexico** beside a picture of the country and its flag. This will be the first word placed on the Mexican word wall. Please see the Glossary in Appendix A. The next step would be for me to take a piece of white paper with the outline of the Mexican flag drawn on it. I would ask the students if they saw any shapes on the flag (rectangles), how many (3) and to guess the colors of the flag. When coloring in the flag I would use strategies such as starting on the left side moving to the right. This reinforces concepts for reading progression. I would hold up a crayon and have the children identify the color and then color in the appropriate section. The children would then use this flag as a model to color their own in the art center. To add the writing component, the word Mexico can also be written in dots on the bottom of the flag for children to trace. This will aid in the development of fine motor skills.

As an extension of this activity I would give the students a take home activity page. This page identifies the country, region, or continent that an individual students family identifies with. It also has a place for a drawing of that countries, regions, or continents flag. Finally, a few interesting facts about this country can be added. This take home activity page can be seen in Appendix B. When the students return these pages they can be shared with the class to further increase multicultural awareness.

#### Lesson 2: Mexico (food)

This lesson addresses the pre-kindergarten communication standards 1A, 1B, 1C, 2B, and 3A. Every culture has foods that they are well known for. This lesson will bring a nutritional component to the curriculum. Some of the objectives of this lesson are that the students will be able to identify some Spanish food words and to re-enact a story. I will explain to the students that we will be learning about and making some foods from the country of Mexico.

To introduce this lesson I will read the book, *Too Many Tamales*. The children will learn the Spanish word **masa**, I will explain that this is like dough but it is made with corn (**maize**). After hearing the story the students will be asked to recall the sequence of events. This will develop their listening and comprehension skills. We will then make tamales in class. Each child will be surprised to discover a plastic ring in their tamales when they are eaten! Children will be encouraged to act out this story and others in their dramatic play center.

Guest Speaker:

Near the middle of the implementation of this curriculum unit I would invite Ms. Rosalind Eannarino from the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh to visit the class.

### Lesson 3: Mexico (dancing)

This lesson will infuse the music component into the curriculum unit. This lesson addresses the pre-kindergarten communication standards 1A, 1B, 2B, and 3A. Pre-school children love to listen to and dance to music. This lesson will introduce the students to some Spanish words and the song "The Mexican Hat Dance".

First I will show the students three **sombreros** (I have a straw one and a miniature and large felt one). I will explain that sombrero is the Spanish word for hat. I will tell the students that some of the United States, such as California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas were part of Mexico a long time ago. There were **ranchos** (ranches) and the **vaqueros** (cowboys) who took care of the cattle wore these straw hats because the wide brim would protect their faces from the sun. Each student will try on the sombreros. I will explain that the felt ones were for special **fiestas** (parties). We will add the words and pictures of sombrero, ranchos, vaqueros and fiesta to our Mexican word wall. Next, the students will listen only to the song "The Mexican Hat Dance". I will instruct them to listen to the words because we will be doing the movements to the song. After the song is played, I will demonstrate the dance steps. We will then attempt to do the dance. I will then show the students **maracas**. I will explain that these are musical instruments made from dry gourds and when shaken a sound is made from the dry seeds inside. Each student will take a turn shaking the maracas. As an extension of this lesson the students will make maracas at art to be used at the Fiesta.

### Lesson 4: Mexico (art)

This lesson addresses the pre-kindergarten communication standards 1B, 2B, and 3A. The objectives of this lesson are for students to follow simple directions and learn a Mexican tradition. To begin this lesson I would tell the students that the **piñata** is something that is made for a game at birthday parties and fiestas. I would explain that the piñata will be hung from the ceiling by a string and everyone will be blindfolded and given a turn to hit the piñata with a stick. When the piñata is broken the children will collect what is inside.

The next step is to tell the children how to make a piñata. I will blow up a balloon and have the children help me to prepare the papier-mâché by mixing flour and water. We will then cover the balloon with strips of newspaper dipped in the paste. After this has dried (the next day) we will decorate it with tissue paper and streamers. The piñata will be saved for the culminating activity, the fiesta.

### The Fiesta: Mexican celebration

This will be the culminating activity of the curriculum unit. We will incorporate all of the ideas and activities learned in this section. The parents and/or guardians and family members will be invited to this event by invitation. The fiesta will be celebrated on May 5<sup>th</sup>, Cinco de Mayo.

As Chelsea and her mother enter the classroom they hear the sounds of a mariachi band playing on a tape in the background. Chelsea leads her mother through the decorated room of red, green, and white streamers. She explains to her mother that these are the colors of Mexico. She then proceeds to show her where Mexico is on the globe and shows her the Mexican flag that she made.

As more children and families arrive the teacher directs everyone to gather at the circle time area. The teacher reads the story of *Too Many Tamales* to the group. Then she announces that the children and families are going

to make tamales together. Chelsea explains to her mom that a tamale is a food that is eaten in Mexico. They are having fun getting their hands sticky with the masa.

While the tamales are cooking the families watch as the children demonstrate how to do the Mexican Hat dance. Younger siblings are given the maracas made in class to shake. When the children are finished performing they invite the families to join in. Chelsea tells her mom that the Mexican word for hat is sombrero and explains why the brims are so wide. She takes her mother to the Mexican word wall and reads the words to her with help from the pictures.

The air is filled with wonderful smells. The tamales are done and placed on a table with some other Mexican dishes. Chelsea giggles because she knows that the teacher secretly placed rings in the tamales to surprise the guests. The children are filled with excitement because they know that it is almost time to break the piñata. After everyone has finished eating, the children and families gather around the carpet area. The children are so proud of the beautiful piñatas that they made in class. It's Chelsea's turn to put the blindfold on and swing at the piñata. After several more friends and siblings take turns the piñata bursts open and brightly wrapped candies spill onto the carpet. Children rush to collect the yummy treats. Chelsea runs over to grab her mother's hand. She is ready to go home, it's time for a siesta!

### **Annotated Bibliography**

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Madrigal, Antonio Hernandez. Erandi's Braids. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1999. A story about an old Mexican tradition of women selling their hair.

Merrill, Yvonne Y. and Simpson, Mary. Hands on Latin America: Art Activities for All Ages. 1998. An assortment of Latin American art activities.

Mora, Pat. A Birthday Basket for Tia. New York: Alladin Paperbacks, 1992. A story about a young Mexican girl planning a surprise party for her great-aunt.

Oramas, Rafael Rivera. El hombre, el tigre y la luna. Monte Avila Editores Latinoamericanos, 1994. Latin American short story based on a Pemone Indian legend.

Orozco, Jose-Luis. Diez deditops=10 Little Fingers & Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America. 1997. An assortment o Latin American finger plays, rhymes, and songs.

Palacios, Argentina. A Christmas Surprise for Chabelita. Bridgewater books, 1993. A little Latin American girl who lives with her grandparents learns her mother's favorite poem to feel close to her.

Saul, Carol P. Song of the Last Miguel. Boston: Whispering Coyote Press, Inc, 1995. The story of a young Mexican girl who fights to keep the carousel open in her town.

Soto, Gary and Martinez, Ed. Too Many TAMALES. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1993. The story of a young Mexican girl who thinks she loses her mothers ring when they are making tamales.

Zapater, Beatriz McConnie. Three King's Day. Boston: The Children's Museum, 1992. Melinda and her brother prepare for the arrival of the three kings- a Latin American Christmas custom.

### **Additional Resources**

Maps:

National Geographic maps on CD-Rom

Encarta virtual globe

Videotapes:

Stories from Latin America, Four Children's Folk Tales. 1996.

Three Caballero's. Disney, 1945

Spy Kids. Disney, 2001

### **Appendix A**

Glossary of terms

**Mexico-** a country in Latin America

**Culture-** skills, arts, music, foods etc. of a given people

**Tamales-** meat and peppers cooked in corn husks

**Maize-** corn

**Sombrero-** a wide-brimmed straw hat worn to keep the sun away; fancy felt ones worn at festivals

**Ranchos-** (ranches) a large farm for raising cattle, horses, or sheep

**Vaqueros-** cowboy

**Fiesta-** a festival, celebration or holiday; a party

**Maracas-** instrument made of a dried gourd with seeds or pebbles in it

**Piñata-** a container made of clay or papier-mâché

## Appendix B

### Take Home Activity Page

Name \_\_\_\_\_

My ancestors come from the country of \_\_\_\_\_.

The flag of this country looks like this:

An interesting fact about this country is:

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## **Appendix C**

### **Pre-Kindergarten Communication Standards**

#### **Reading/Literature**

- 1A. Students will listen to, experience, and interpret a wide variety of high quality, age- appropriate literature.
- 1B. Students will be exposed to and begin to comprehend and interpret a wide variety of age-appropriate materials.
- 1C. Students will develop increasing proficiency in beginning reading skills and strategies including phonemic awareness and vocabulary building.

#### **Writing**

- 2A. Students will begin to organize thoughts and information and participate in writing to communicate for different purposes with assistance as necessary.
- 2B. Students explore gross and fine motor tasks to develop dexterity for pre-writing skills.
- 2C. Students will begin to use, with some assistance, appropriate conventions or language in writing.

#### **Speaking/Listening/Viewing**

- 3A. Students will use speaking and listening skills to communicate effectively.