

## **Latin American Festivals and Popular Culture**

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### ***Overview***

This unit supplements the tenth grade World Cultures Latin American curriculum. After studying the history and geography of this region in the world, the students begin to learn about the culture, religion, and beliefs of the people of Latin America. This unit will expand the students' cultural knowledge by giving them the opportunity to study the importance that festivals have throughout Latin America and the role these festivals play in the people's daily lives. This unit focuses on four specific festivals: Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead), Semana Santa (Holy Week), Carnaval (Carnival – also called Marti Gras in the United States), and Santiago de Apostol (Festival for Saint James).

### ***Rationale***

Overview

Throughout the world, people celebrate important milestones, events, and religious moments in their lives. This is just one element of culture that pervades human life no matter a person's beliefs,

language, geographic location, or socioeconomic rank. There are cultural elements that all people share no matter where they live: food, clothing, language, gender identification, entertainment, and many other aspects of life. While examining my own culture, I realized that my most vivid and fondest memories dealt with family traditions and events. After reflection, I decided that writing a curriculum unit on the festivals and traditions in Latin America could be a wonderful way to draw my own students into a deeper understanding of Latin American culture. I hope that they can draw on their own experience with traditions and festivals in their own family life, to reach a deeper meaning and gain better insight into the lives of the people in Latin America.

I teach four sections of Pittsburgh Scholars Program (PSP) World Cultures. Our book is broken down into regions of the world: Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, South East Asia, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Russia, Canada, and Latin America. Each section of the book has three to five chapters that covers the geography, history, economy, and culture of each region. Although the book is a good starting point for discussing culture, it usually has a very vague and small section discussing the language, music, arts, and beliefs of each region of the world. The course has to cover such an immense amount of information that there is no way for the book to could go into depth about the culture for each country or region of the world. The sections on culture seem to be the area that my students are the most interested in and allow my students the opportunity to try and relate other parts of the world to their own lives. It is my hope that by taking a deeper look into the traditions and festivals of some of the people in Latin America, my students will be able to better understand and relate to people outside of their own sphere of influence.

The four festivals that I will include in my unit are Carnaval, Semana Santa, El Dia de los Muertos, and Santiago Apostol. Each of these festivals combines the religious or secular beliefs of the observers with dance, music, costumes, food, or other cultural elements to create a memorable and spectacular event for all participants. These festivals emerged from the combination of three main influences: indigenous, European, and African. Also, each of these festivals centers on the Catholic Church, the major religion throughout Latin America. Although there are many types of festivals throughout Latin America that celebrate village events, civic holidays, or folklore festivals, the most important and widespread festivals orbit around the Catholic religious calendar.

In order to combine this unit on Latin American festivals into the curriculum I already follow for my students, I decided to look at these festivals in the context of four different countries: Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, and Puerto Rico. I picked Mexico, Guatemala, and Brazil because the textbook for World Cultures has sections specifically on these countries and because these three countries best exhibit characteristics found in the festivals I was examining. I also wanted to do something on Mexico

because I feel that Mexico is very closely tied to the United States and in this global economy Mexico has a direct impact on United States government, economy, and culture. Although the sections in the textbook on these three countries goes in depth about the history, economy, and people of each of these countries, I hope that the unit I write can expand on what information the textbook already provides. I want to try and provide my students a better picture of at least one cultural aspect for these regions. Also, I hope that by setting up the unit this way, it will better integrate into the established curriculum for my students.

Although the World Cultures textbook does not have a lot of information about Puerto Rico, I also decided to choose one festival from this country. I felt that Puerto Rico was an important country because many of my students have little knowledge about this island even though the inhabitants of Puerto Rico are citizens of the United States. Through the lesson on the festival of Santiago Apostol, I hope to expand the current curriculum to include a discussion on the history and geography of this country and its tie to the United States. I hope that through this unit my students can learn more about Puerto Rico and its citizens and gain a better picture of what groups of people comprise American citizens.

Finally, I felt that by putting the festivals and countries together it would help to alleviate the problem of stereotyping. Many of the festivals I am doing in my curriculum unit are celebrated throughout Latin America. My hope is that by pairing one festival to one country my students can gain deeper insight into how one specific country celebrates an important festival. My students then can compare this knowledge with their own knowledge about how they may celebrate this time of year and discover the similarities and differences they share with the members of another country. While teaching the unit, I can then stress that although many cultures celebrate the same festivals they are done in many different ways.

## Introduction

A festival in Latin America can mean many things. There is no way to give a definition to the word *fiesta* because it encompasses so many different events, people, and traditions. Festival time may be very happy or it can be solemn. Rich and poor may celebrate together or both religious and non-religious people in the community may participate. Usually, a festival in Latin America is an event that has been prepared for weeks ahead of time, sometimes months, and includes traditional foods, music, religious rituals, and community participation.

Although there are village festivals, civic holidays, and folklore festivals, the most popular and widely celebrated festivals are based on the Catholic religious calendar. These festivals may be celebrated differently from region to region throughout Latin America but remain important all the same. The reason that Catholic festivals play such a large part in Latin American culture is related to the history of this region. Spanish and Portuguese conquerors brought their religious beliefs with them when they came to the Americas and these beliefs blended with the indigenous beliefs of the Native Americans who already lived in the New World. Later, these two groups blended their beliefs with those of the African slaves that were brought to the Americas by the imperialists. These three distinct belief systems have blended to give Latin America a distinct and unique culture of its own.

### Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) and Mexico

I have decided to pair Dia de los Muertos with Mexico. Although this festival is celebrated in different ways throughout Latin America, it is a significant celebration in Mexico. Since the dawn of time, man has dealt with death in different ways but the people of Mexico have a unique way of dealing with the circle of life and death.

The worship of the dead has existed in Mexico since at least 1800 BC. Ancient Mexicans, who were the Aztecs, were buried with ceramic objects like figures and masks that depicted the importance they gave life and death. Often these objects depicted the face of a man, half of the face as alive and the other half as dead, represented as a skull. Skulls were very important objects to the Aztecs and were often kept as trophies that symbolized death and rebirth. During this time, the Aztecs captured their thoughts and feelings about life and death in a series of poems that explain that life itself is fleeting and that death allows a person to enter the world of the dead, which was eternal. During the pre-colonial period in Mexico there were two months dedicated to festivals for the dead, the ninth month was devoted to dead infants and the tenth month was devoted to dead adults. On the Aztec calendar, this celebration began in late July or the beginning of August. When the Spanish conquered Mexico ideas about death slowly changed, mainly due to the introduction of Christianity. Death became evil and was often represented by a skeleton with a scythe. Death was seen as something to fear because the idea of hell was introduced as a punishment for evildoers. Unlike the Aztecs who saw death as a continuation of life, the Spanish saw it as the end of life and something to avoid and ignore. The Spanish tried to do away with the indigenous rituals surrounding death because they saw it as sacrilegious and pagan, as it was originally presided over by the goddess Mictecacihuatl who was believed to have died at birth. But the inhabitants of Mexico refused to stop their ancient traditions. In

order to make the festival more Christian, the Spanish allowed the Indians to continue this annual celebration but moved the date to coincide with the Catholic Holidays, All Saints Day and All Souls Day. Slowly, the figure of death transformed into a kindly character in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century humor was added as a way to view death. Present day Mexicans make offerings to the dead and have a special festival to remember the dead. They realize that death is a natural part of life and that by making it familiar they can keep touch with those that they have lost and have peace as they near their own deaths.

El Dia de los Muertos takes place November first and second. This is a time when the spirits of the dead are given permission to leave the afterworld and revisit their early homes. Children arrive home the first night and are often greeted with their favorite foods, hot chocolate, and toys. The next night the adults arrive and are also greeted with similar treats. Although the dead do not actually eat the food, it is believed that they extract the flavor and odor from the food. Once the dead have taken part of the food and left to return to the cemetery, the members of the family eat the food and say that there is no taste or smell to the food testifying to the fact that the dead have indeed come. Although the community as a whole celebrates this festival day, the event is essentially a family one where people can privately remember their lost relatives. It is seen as a time of reunion for the family, those alive and dead.

Mexican families go through a lot to prepare for the Day of the Dead. People go to their relatives' graves to clean them off, paint them, and lay flowers. Marigolds are often left because the ancient Aztecs felt that they were the flowers of the dead and represented the brief time of man. People also sometimes leave the deceased their favorite foods and drinks. It is believed that by leaving these items the living are able to ward off illness, bad luck, and failed crops. Mexican families also create altars or ofrendas in their homes that contain favorite foods, new clothes, candles or incense, and flowers for their dead relatives. The smell from the candles and incense help the dead find their way to the ofrenda within the home. The ofrenda is the focal point of the home and families sometime spend a great deal of their meager salaries on these alters to ensure that they do not offend their dead and to display the family's status in the community. Ofrendas serve as the meeting point for the reunion of dead and living and offer the dead a comfortable place to feast.

The Day of the Dead is big business for local shopkeepers and storeowners. Merchants begin preparing the seeds for the flowers in May, potters begin creating objects in September, and the bakers begin getting ready days before the festivities. Food is a centerpiece to the celebration and the merchants have plenty of things for people to buy. Sugar skulls are one of the most produced objects during this festival time. Also pan de los muertos, or bread of the dead, is available and is sometime

shaped in the form of a skeleton or is circular with a bone cross on the top of the bread. A special market is held on October 31 with goods for the celebration so that the people can be prepared.

Although the Day of the Dead is based on a religious holiday on the Catholic calendar, it often has less religious importance in urban areas of Mexico. Also, urbanization, tourism, the costs of the festival for the family, and the importation of American culture like Halloween is impacting the Day of the Dead celebrations. Still, in rural areas and among the Indian population of Mexico, this festival carries with it great cultural and religious importance. Whether the participants in this festival still view it in a religious aspect or not, the Day of the Dead is still seen as a Mexican holiday and the atmosphere shows the attitude that the Mexican community has toward death. Death is simply a part of life and all people will die so participants in Mexico feel as though the passing of life to death might as well be celebrated.

## Carnaval and Brazil

Although Carnaval is celebrated throughout Latin America, it is best paired with Brazil where in this country preparations for the festival begin in November. This festival is a time to celebrate, indulge, and let loose for millions of people. Since the early 1950's people have traveled from all over the world just to participate in Carnaval and it is seen as the world's largest party.

Although the exact origins of Carnaval are hard to determine, many scholars believe that the festival began in Egypt when people had ceremonies to honor the god Osiris. According to an article in O Estado De S. Paulo, scholars trace the roots of Carnaval to celebrations in Greece or Rome that also celebrated the gods of these empires. Carnaval officially first became linked with the Catholic Church in AD 325 when the Niceia Council established the exact date of Easter. Throughout the Middle Ages, Roman Catholics celebrated the time before Easter with wine and sex and throughout Europe people had parties during the pre-Easter season that mocked the beliefs and habits of their rulers.

The Portuguese originally introduced Carnival to Brazil in 1641 when the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador Correia de Sa Benevides, created a festival for an entire week to celebrate the coronation of Dom Joao IV as King of Portugal. Eventually, this festival became a pre-cursor to the Catholic holiday of Lent and literally meant “goodbye to the flesh”. Lent was the time period between Ash Wednesday and Easter when many devout members of the Catholic Church followed various customs and restrictions. Members of the Catholic Church went without eating any meat and devoted themselves to forty days of fasting and prayer to remember to Easter season and the crucifixion of Jesus. Participants only ate fish and eggs, were forbidden to wear colorful clothing, and were not even allowed to have marriage ceremonies. Carnival was developed as a totally uninhibited party where people could prepare themselves for the next forty days by indulging in food, music, dance, and fun. Today, many people participate in Carnival who are there for the food, music, dance, and fun but do not participate in the religious aspects of the festival. Still, many Catholics do give up their favorite foods, pastimes, or even meat on Fridays during the holiday of Lent to remember the Easter season.

Portuguese influence is not the only influence seen during Carnival today. When the Portuguese came to Brazil in the sixteenth century they created sugar plantations where the main source of labor came from slaves imported from Africa. This huge slave trade brought over nine million African slaves to the Americas and their influence is seen throughout the Carnival festival. The large number of descendants from the West African slaves brought to this region centuries ago have contributed to Carnival with costumes, songs, dances, and floats.

One of the largest examples of this influence is the samba school parade, which began in the 1930's but gained prestige in Brazil in the 1950's. Today, the parades put on by the samba schools are the main attraction at Carnival. Each samba school has anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 members that pick a theme for their part in the parade based on events in history, famous people, or legends. Each samba school competes for a prize based on their performance, costumes, songs, and floats, all which match their theme. The themes change every year so everyone knows that Carnival will have something new and exciting to offer each year and millions of dollars are spent annually on the show's production. Many of the pageants have African themes and carry social messages along with incorporating samba dancers and bateria percussion bands. Carnival groups called blocos afros have formed to promote black awareness throughout Brazil and have transformed Carnival into an expression of black pride and awareness of issues that affect the African community. Many have samba schools that participate in the parades to promote Afro-Brazilian culture.

One of the best examples in Brazil of Carnival takes place in Rio de Janeiro. This city has the biggest and best-known Carnival in the world with the samba school parade (desfile das escolas de

samba) and city events that last over a three-day period and take place in downtown Rio. Since 1984, the samba school parade has taken place at Rio's Sambodrome where tickets to see the parade can be very expensive. This parade contains music, dance, color, and an air of excitement. The participants in Rio spend their time designing their costumes, making decorations, and practicing with their samba schools and it is not uncommon for them to use their entire yearly savings to purchase their costume for the parade. These costumes are bright and colorful which adds to the parade as thousands of dancers come streaming past onlookers. Usually, each samba school has a core group of choreographers and dancers that practice year round and a month or so before Carnival they open their doors to the public. The samba schools feel that the more people that join their school the better, as it adds to the excitement during the parade because additional participants lend more color and flare to the parade.

In Rio three types of special Carnival music play throughout the streets: *marchinha*, *frevó*, and samba. The most widely celebrated music is samba, which is African in rhythm and is seen as the national popular music of Brazil. Although there are many types of samba, the most popular type played in Rio is samba de Carnaval. This type of samba is unique to Carnival and is often rapidly played with a special Afro-Brazilian drum and percussion accompaniment called a batucada. The themes carried throughout this special type of samba are often sad but sometimes can be jubilant. Some samba schools will practice and work on their songs for years in the hope to compete at the Municipal Theater in Rio. Usually one or two samba songs played in the parades at the Carnival in Rio become popular nationally and a few have gained popularity worldwide.

Besides music and the samba parade, there are many other things to participate in during Carnival. There are street carnivals that are free, fun, and take place all across the city. Neighborhoods across Brazil meet up at a favorite local hangout and after a few hours of drinking, dancing, and having fun the procession begins. The town has an orchestra march along a pre-determined route and samba dancers dressed in anything from costumes, bathing suits, or drag follow the orchestra! One of the more traditional street carnivals is Banda de Ipanema, which began in 1965, and attracts over 8,000 people.

There are also balls that happen throughout the city at local clubs. Balls cost anywhere from twenty dollars all the way up to two hundred and fifty dollars for the luxury balls. Usually, you can buy the tickets right at the door. During the balls two bands usually take turns playing throughout the night and sometimes there is even a special vocalist to sing. People spend the night drinking and dancing the night away. Some balls have required costumes but most allow the people to come as they are and have

fun. The balls are often based around certain groups so people have the opportunity to spend the night at a place they are going to enjoy. One type of ball is called a gala ball, which is a luxury ball. Often top actors, sports stars, models, and maybe even the mayor show up at the luxury ball. This is one ball where black tie or luxury costumes are mandatory. There are also balls for singles that tend to be on the wild side and sometimes “professionals” work the rooms for pay. One final type of ball are gay balls that occur all over Brazil. These balls attract gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, drag queens, and transvestites from all over the world and are so popular that they are televised across Brazil.

Carnaval is a festival that has evolved throughout the centuries. Today, it is seen neither as a religious or national holiday yet it came out of Catholicism and is an annual event across Brazil. Carnaval is difficult to analyze because it has no real defined purpose and simply caters to people’s sense of pleasure and an inversion to daily life but it does make a great impact on the people of Brazil. Many people seem to work the whole year just for the ability to get enough money to participate in the festival of Carnaval. It seems that for the people of Brazil, this is the one time of the year that they can forget about their daily life and troubles and have time to simply have fun and indulge in the good things life has to offer.

### Semana Santa and Guatemala

Semana Santa is one of the holiest and most solemn times of the year for Guatemalans. The festival begins on Domingo de Ramos (Palm Sunday) and culminates in Domingo de Resurreccion (Easter Sunday). During this holy week before Easter, the people of Guatemala spend time remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection through a series of processions and passion plays. This is such an important festival in Guatemala because the vast majority of the country classifies themselves as Roman Catholic and because one of the most involved and elaborate celebrations of Semana Santa in the world is found in Antigua, Guatemala.

Semana Santa in Guatemala is a mixture of Catholic beliefs and pagan Indian rights. The Guatemalan form of Catholicism is very different than Catholicism throughout the rest of the world due to the way that this religion was brought to this country. During the sixteenth century, the Spanish

Dominican friars began the process of trying to convert the indigenous Mayan Indians that lived throughout Guatemala. These friars tried to present the Catholic faith in a way they felt the Mayans would better understand and once they established a Catholic base in one area, they moved on. The newly won over converts were then in charge of maintaining the Church and the rituals that went along with the services. Often, the new converts would combine Mayan and Catholic beliefs to fill in areas they were not sure about or that was problematic for the inhabitants of the village. Through this process, a form of Catholicism emerged that linked both Indian and European influences and that was distinctively Guatemalan.

Today, Guatemalans remember the Easter season by participating in processions and plays that depict the entry into Jerusalem, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There are processions throughout Guatemala beginning on Ash Wednesday but they are often seen as dress rehearsals for the four processions that take place on Good Friday. Many Guatemalans participate in processions on Good Friday, the holiest day of all, when thousands of devout Catholics recreate the journey of Jesus to his execution. The centerpiece of the procession is a huge platform called an *anda* where a biblical scene is recreated and carried through the streets of Antigua for six to ten hours. These platforms are quite heavy and can weigh up to 7,500 pounds so usually eighty men, called *cucuruchos*, take fifteen-minute shifts carrying them along the cobblestone streets. There are smaller *andas* that are carried by women during Semana Santa and these platforms usually depict a scene from the Bible that centers on the Virgin Mary. The procession both begins and ends at the doors of La Merced, the principle chapel of Antigua that was established by the Dominican friars in 1538. Thousands of people also take part in the procession dressed as Roman centurions and cavalry to recreate the path Jesus took as he was led to his death. Casts of people are dressed up as important figures in the Biblical story of Jesus' crucifixion like Pontius Pilate and the two thieves who were hung on crosses next to Jesus. The climax of the procession for onlookers is when the gigantic *anda* of Christ carrying the cross comes by them. The *cucuruchos* perform a choreographed marching step where they take two steps forward, one step sideways, one step back and then repeat the process. This marching step produces a slow, swaying movement that causes the statue of Christ to look like it is actually walking.

Even though the procession is one of the most important aspects of Semana Santa, many of the local townspeople have found a stunning way to participate in the festivities. As the procession comes by the fronts of people's homes and businesses many people have created carpets, or alfombras, of flower petals and saw dust along the route or created pictures made out of sawdust, pine needles, flowers, and dye. This tradition began in the sixteenth century when the people laid pine needles and flowers along the procession route to make it easier for the people in the procession to walk along the cobblestone route. Today, each family takes great pride in creating their own special alfombra for the procession route and many families work on their work of art all day long. These alfombras often depict a religious event or some floral design full of color. It is not uncommon to have competition emerge

between different streets as to who has the most colorful and ornate alfombra. The most amazing thing about the creation of the alfombras is that once the procession passes they are obliterated by the thousands of people who walk over them. Within a few minutes, the entire alfombras is scattered into a pile of leaves, color, and pine needles that are then swept up and thrown away.

There are many other elements of Semana Santa that complete this festival. Many Guatemalans also participate in a passion play that depict the events from the Last Supper until the resurrection of Jesus. Those that participate wear costumes and the plays are done with reverence for the events that surrounded the death and resurrection of Jesus. On many street corners an effigy of Judas can be found hanging and dressed in old clothes with a letter in his pocket. This is one of the more humorous and embarrassing moments of Semana Santa. Someone on the block writes the letter and in it they detail all of the sins and scandals that have happened throughout the year. This letter is often read aloud and is a lighter side of the otherwise solemn activities that surround this festival. Finally, torchlight processions and many special foods, especially fish dishes and *bunuelos* which are small doughnuts glazed with cinnamon and honey, mark this week as the celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Semana Santa truly is one of the most religious and solemn festivals within Latin America.

### Santiago Apostol and Puerto Rico

Finally, I paired the festival of Santiago Apostol with Puerto Rico. This is one of the most colorful festivals in Puerto Rico and combines the traditions of the Africans, Spanish, and Tainos (native Puerto Ricans). Devotion to Santiago developed in AD 844 when the Spanish Christians began to battle the Moors during the Crusades where legend says that Santiago saved the Christians from defeat. It has been said that Santiago dressed as a knight and rode a white horse into the Muslim camp and disguised his troops to trick the Muslim soldiers. It has been said that these actions allowed Santiago to defeat the Moors and bring the Christian soldiers victory. Due to this legend, Santiago has historically been depicted as a Spanish knight on a white horse with a flag in his left hand and a sword in his right hand. Santiago was from then on seen as the special saint of Christian soldiers and was adopted by the conquistadors who brought Catholicism to the Americas.

This devotion to Santiago was brought to Puerto Rico by the Spanish conquistadors in 1514 when Diego Colon founded one of the first towns, Santiago del Daguao. Throughout Spain's early conquest of Puerto Rico, they often had to call on Apostol Santiago to help them win in battle. The

Spanish conquistadors often had to defend their lands against the Caribe Indians, English, and Dutch who at various times throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried to capture Puerto Rico. The Spanish inhabitants of Puerto Rico celebrated these successes with festivals that honored Santiago and by the early 1600's, the island annually celebrated the feast day of Santiago. Spain had a long tradition of honoring principle saints with festivals and that tradition carried over in the colonial Americas to serve not only a religious purpose but also to allow time for families and friends to visit.

Later, Santiago was also adopted by the Yoruba slaves brought to Puerto Rico in the 1500s as labor for the farms and coffee plantations on the island. The Spanish forbade them to worship their own African Yoruba warrior god, Shango, so they adopted Santiago as a cover god to continue their worship of Shango. African slaves also began to call on Santiago to relieve their suffering and pain as he did for the Spanish soldiers during the Crusades. West African culture and traditions brought to Puerto Rico by the slaves were preserved in some forms because of the poor means of communication and transportation so that is why the festival is a mix of Indian, African, and Hispanic cultures.

The coastal city of Loiza is best known as the center of activities for Santiago de Apostol and although in many areas this festival is no longer celebrated, it is still very important in this part of Puerto Rico. There is a large African influence on the festival in Loiza because this city has one of the largest percentages of African descendants of all the island towns. Residents of Loiza are isolated from the ethnic and cultural mix that has occurred on the rest of the island and this contributes to the reasons why the festival to celebrate Santiago is so different here from everywhere else.

Today, nine days before the festivities begin people honor Santiago by gathering for prayer. On July 25<sup>th</sup>, there is a big procession to honor him with music and dancing. One of the most audible types of music played during these processions is bomba y plena rhythms which combine African and Spanish elements. There is plenty of food, fun, and music to go around but the main attraction and one of the more memorable parts of the celebration is the part called "The Devils Against the Christians". During the festivities people reenact the battle between the Christians and the Moors where the devotion to Santiago began. Some people dress in bright clothes with white masks and they are called the Spanish Caballeros (men on horseback). They represent good winning over evil, as the Spanish believed they did over the Moors, and are often decorated with ribbons, bells and flowers.

Other people dress in devil masks made from painted coconut shells and long horns to represent the Moors and the struggle between the Christian soldiers and the "devilish" Moors who were

defeated. These masks are called vejigantes and those that wear these masks spend the night trying to frighten the participants of the festival, especially the children. The vejigantes look devilish and often have two or three horns attached to the top of the mask. It is believed that the tradition of making these vejigante masks came from the native Tainos Indians who were indigenous to Puerto Rico and were accomplished mask makers. Just like the Yoruba slaves brought to Puerto Rico, the indigenous natives were forced to convert from their “pagan and barbaric religions” and the creation of masks was their contribution to the ancient Spanish festival. Traditionally, the masks were painted in black, red, and yellow, which were all seen as symbols of hellfire and damnation. Today, these vejigante masks may also stand for a resistance against colonialism and imperialism although many people still participate in a more traditional sense in the city of Loiza.

### Afterthoughts

Although there are many festivals and religious events that I could have chosen from throughout Latin America, I feel that the four discussed in this curriculum unit should give a broad enough overview into the culture of Latin American festivals. There are so many different festivals throughout the world that this is not an end to the fiesta culture of Latin America, but only the beginning. I feel that as an extension to this unit, it would be interesting to take it a step further and simply examine one particular festival and how it is celebrated throughout Latin America. My hope is that through this unit my students will truly begin to see how the culture of Latin America has developed and the importance human events, like festivals, have on daily life.

### Objectives

Students in tenth grade are not usually aware of the historical beginnings of their own festivals or the impact that religion and other cultural influences may play in the development of festivals. My primary objective is to make students more aware of Latin American culture and the role that religion can play in shaping popular culture, like festivals. The students will do this by examining the history, customs, and beliefs held by Latin Americans as they participate in the four festivals examined in this unit. My secondary objective for this curriculum unit is to use the study of Latin American festivals as a way to make students more aware of their own rich history and the effects of popular culture on their own society as a whole, not just regarding festivals.

Through the following lessons I want the students to develop their social studies skills, literary skills, and critical thinking skills by reflecting on the festivals of Latin America. The students will use the lessons they complete on Latin America as a basis on how to look at culture that is different from their own. They will

have to be able to read and think about the information critically and apply that information to new situations. The curriculum unit contains specific communication and citizenship standards that incorporate Pittsburgh Public Schools' initiative for standards based education and a complete list of these content standards is included at the end of the curriculum unit.

## **Strategies**

Throughout the curriculum unit, the students will be required to read, analyze, organize, and write about Latin American festivals and popular culture. They will complete these tasks through group work, lecture, independent practice, and class discussion. The students will be assessed on their progress through class discussion, writing samples, and a quiz.

Various activities will be used to help the students achieve success and assist them with reaching the standards. The students will have an opportunity to explore their own knowledge, or lack of knowledge, about festivals in Latin America and their significance to the people by taking a cultural IQ quiz. The students will then be allowed at the end of the unit to assess their knowledge by taking a look again at the quiz to see how much they have grown over the course of the unit.

The students will gain much needed background information on the festivals in Latin America through lecture and discussion on the topic. They then will have an overview activity that incorporates the knowledge they learned in the lecture with their own analysis on popular culture in Latin America and how it relates to popular culture in the United States.

After gaining much needed background on the festivals, the students will be able to learn more about each festival through a reading, videos, music, a journal activity and two group projects. The students will be able to apply the knowledge that they already have gained on the topic while also learning more specific details or gaining a new perspective on the festivals. At the end of these activities, the students will ultimately be held accountable for what they have learned through a quiz on the four festivals discussed in the unit.

## **Classroom Activities**

## Lesson One

Begin the period with a surprise pop quiz on the four Latin American festivals covered in this unit. The students will probably not do well but the main point of this activity is to peak interest in what they will be covering for the next few days. Collect the quizzes and hold them for the students so that they can compare it with the assessment at the end of the unit. Finally, distribute a list of vocabulary terms that we will be using during the course of this unit and discuss those terms with the students. Have the students keep this handout in their notebooks. This lesson should take one day.

## Lesson Two

Begin a teacher led instruction on the four Latin American festivals. Be sure to incorporate the role Catholicism plays in each of the festivals and throughout the instruction have the students participate by asking and answering questions and having them try to relate what they are learning to their own experiences with festivals. Depending on the level of the students, any time constraints, and the students' discussion, this lesson could last from two to five days. For homework during this lesson, have the students read chapter three "The Day of the Dead" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and write a response about what they have read. This reading is about the Day of the Dead and its importance to the people of Mexico. When the assignment is turned in some of the students could take time to share what they wrote in their response.

## Lesson Three (optional)

Have the students view the video *Macario*. The viewing will take two to three class periods, depending on the length of your school bell schedule. This video is in Spanish but it can be rented with subtitles so that if your students are not native speakers they still will be able to understand the plot of the video. At the end of the video, hold a discussion where the students discuss the plot of the story and how this video ties in with El Dia de los Muertos. Have the students incorporate into this discussion what they have learned both in class and while reading *The Labyrinth of Solitude* about the attitudes of people in Mexico toward the dead and the role that the dead play in their society. The students could also make their own alters to celebrate El Dia de los Muertos. They could bring in a shoebox and decorate that shoebox with objects, pictures, drawings or other things for a person in their family that has passed on in celebration of their life. As another option, they could make the altar to celebrate their own life and include things that are important to them.

## Lesson Four

Using the bibliography at the end of this unit, search the internet or use books to bring in pictures of Carnival. Discuss with the students what is happening in a few of the pictures and use the pictures as a way to draw the students into a discussion on Carnival. Ask the students about Marti Gras and have them draw connections between Marti Gras in the United States and Carnival in Brazil. Then, divide the class into small groups (four to five students) and give each group five pictures. Have the students create an story about Carnival drawing on what they already know about the festival, the pictures you provided them, and the teacher led instruction during lesson two. For inspiration, while the students are working in their small groups you could play samba music in the background. This lesson could take anywhere from one to three days, depending on the time constraints and the depth that the students take the writing process.

## Lesson Five (optional)

Show segments, or if you have the time, the entire video *Black Orpheus* and discuss the role that Carnival plays in Latin American. At the end of the video, have the students write about why the story was set at Carnival time and why they thought the setting was or was not appropriate. This can also lead to a discussion about many elements of the Carnival celebration. One topic could be on the music of Carnival that is heard throughout the video. Also, costumes play an important role both in the video and during the celebration of Carnival and there can be a discussion about the role that costumes play during the festival. Depending on how much of the video is shown and how many separate topics are discussed regarding Carnival, this lesson could take two to four days to complete.

## Lesson Six

Bring in some pictures of *alfombras* that are created during Semana Santa. Have the students discuss as a class what they have learned about Semana Santa already and why alfombras are such an important part of the celebration. Ask the students if they can compare the alfombras to any special thing they may create during one of their own holidays. Then have each student list a holiday or festival they really enjoy. Have them write down all the things they like about the holiday or festival. Ask a few students to

volunteer their answers and allow positive comments from the class. Finally, tell the students that they are going to create their own alfombras out of the materials you have at the front of class that celebrates the holiday or festival they chose to write about. You can decide what types of materials to provide depending on your own class size and space available to store the alfombras the students create. These creations probably will not be in their native form, unless you can handle pine needles and dye spread across your classroom! This activity will probably take two to three days to complete, depending on your class size and the amount of detail the students get into while creating their alfombras.

## Lesson Seven

Assign the students to bring in pictures of *vejigantes* that are used in the festival Santiago de Apostol. Have a few of the students share what their vejigante looks like with the class and any information about what that mask represents. Then allow the students to work in small groups to create a class vejigante and a story that surrounds the mask based on the festival Santiago de Apostol. Tell the students they can incorporate any information they learned through the instruction at the beginning of the unit and all the information that was shared in class as well as any outside information they may have. This lesson should take two days to complete.

## Assessment

Obviously, there has been assessment of the student's knowledge throughout the unit but there are a few ways to assess the entire unit. One great way would be a journal activity where each student would act as though they were a traveler visiting each of the four locations during the festival time and the student would write about what they thought was interesting and unique. They also would act as though they were writing home to someone who had never heard of these festivals before so they would have to explain the background and significance of the major events of each festival. Although this is in no way a formal research paper on the four events, it does allow for the student to write about what they learned and why it is important.

Another great assessment would be a response day where the students would have one period to write about what they learned and how this can be related to a festival that they also celebrate. They would be allowed to pick any one festival they learned about during the unit and then compare and

contract that festival to any festival they celebrate in their own homes. Again while this is not a formal research paper, this would give the students the opportunity to think critically about what they learned in order for them to do the comparison with their own festival. This also would help them to begin to look more closely at their own festivals and may allow them to look more deeply at why the festival is so important to them to begin with and how this festival plays an important role in the family.

This unit could be used to not only assess your own student's knowledge but also to share this knowledge with other classes. The students could write and recreate scenes from each of the four festivals and perform these skits for other social studies or foreign language classes. They could use the objects they have created from the other activities throughout the unit as props and also use this time to create other objects for the skit. At the end of the skit, there could be a time for questions and answers which would also allow the students to think critically about what they have learned and use this experience to teach other students.

Finally, the students can be given a test over the information they learned. While testing is important, I would suggest that this assessment is paired with one of the writing assignments unless the test is designed to allow written answers instead of simply multiple choice questions. The students can also retake the initial cultural IQ quiz that they took on the first day to see how their knowledge improved. They also may see how they held previously unrecognized stereotypes about Latin American festivals that have been altered due to what they learned during the unit.

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# Annotated Bibliography/Resources

## **Annotated List for Teachers – great for background/historical information**

Amerispan Unlimited. “Latin America Fiestas”. [Latin American Travel Advisor](#).

Available <http://www.amerispan.com/latc/>. 27 Feb. 02. This web site is a general web site that review briefly festivals that occur throughout Latin America that a traveler might encounter and proper etiquette during those festivals.

Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer. [The Skeleton at the Feast](#). University of Texas

Press: Austin, TX. 1991. A great source for looking at the customs and traditions that surrounds the Day of the Dead.

“Carnival”. [O Estado De S. Paulo](#). Available <http://www.estado.estadao.com.br/edicao/>

[especial/carnaval/carvlist.html](#). 18 March 02. This web site has a link to the origins, beliefs, and impact of Carnival in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other cities in Latin America.

“Carnival in Rio Janeiro”. [Ipanema.Com](#). Available <http://ipanema.com/carnival.htm>.

18 March 02. This web site has links to various aspects of Carnival and is a wonderful source for people just beginning to learn about the festival and all the activities that go on during Carnival in Rio.

Cate, Katharine Royal. [The Brazilian Urban Carnival: A Discussion of its Origins,](#)

[Nature, and Ethnological Significance](#). Chapel Hill, NC. 1960. This book gives a lot of information describing the types of music, dances, and events that happen during Carnival. It also examines the importance Carnival plays as a festival in Brazil.

DaMatta, Roberto. [Carnival as a Cultural Problem: Towards a Theory of Formal Events](#)

and their Magic. University of Notre Dame, IN. 1980. This book makes the argument that Carnival is such a different event from other rituals that it is hard to analyze why Carnival is so important and lists some of the reasons that Carnival is different.

Garciagodoy, Juanita. Digging the Days of the Dead. University Press of Colorado:

Niwot, CO. 1998. This is an excellent book on the history and analysis of the festival. It gives plenty of detail and description on this event and discussion on why it is an important festival in Mexico.

Hernandez, Joanne and Samuel R. Hernandez. The Day of the Dead: Tradition and

Change. Triton Museum of Art: Washington, DC. 1979. This source was good for examining how Day of the Dead has changed over time.

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“Loiza.” Puerto Rico. Available <http://welcome.topuertorico.org/city/loiza.shtml>. 10

March 02. This city briefly discusses some of the important information about the city of Loiza and discusses when and how the city was founded. It also very briefly discusses the festival Santiago de Apostol.

Maynard, Dr. Ana Maria. “The Vejigante and Santiago Apostol de Loiza”. Puerto Rican

Folkloric Dance. Available <http://www.prfdance.org/santiago.htm>. 3 March 02. This site gives a brief history of the saint Santiago and how the festival emerged. It also briefly discusses the influences of various groups of people on the festival.

Porter, Darwin and Danforth Prince. Frommer’s Comprehensive Travel Guide – Puerto

Rico '95-'96. Macmillian Travel: New York City, NY. 1994. This travel guide has a wonderful section on local crafts and discusses vejigantes and their importance in Puerto Rico.

Ruiz, Efrain Cortes. The Days of the Dead: A Mexican Tradition. DICE Publishing:

Mexico. 1991. This small soft cover book briefly discusses the history of the Day of the Dead but then goes on to have wonderful color pictures of the celebration and a comparison of the event between three different Mexican towns.

“Semana Santa”. Antigua Updates. Available [http://antigua.s5.com/newsletter/updates-](http://antigua.s5.com/newsletter/updates-01-04.html)

01-04.html. 10 March 02. This site helps out with vocabulary that may be

unfamiliar to a native speaker and gives a great overview of Semana Santa celebration in Antigua.

“Semana Santa in Guatemala.” Available <http://www.pronet.net.gt/semanasanta/>. 10

March 02. This site gives an overview of the festivities that happen throughout Guatemala during Semana Santa. I accessed this through a search engine that translated the page for me because it is originally published in Spanish.

Winn, Peter. Americas. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA. 1999. This is a

great introductory book for a study on Latin America and discusses the politics, history, cultures, and customs of various Latin American nations.

Annotated List for Students – great for outside/additional reading

Berg, Elizabeth. Festivals of the World: Mexico. Gareth Stevens Publishing: Milwaukee,

WI. 1997. This is a good source for intermediate students or students with a lower reading level to learn the basics about festival celebrated within Mexico.

Foley, Erin. Festivals of the World: Puerto Rico. Gareth Stevens Publishing: Milwaukee,

WI. 1997. This is a good source for intermediate students or students with a lower reading level to learn the basics about festival celebrated within Puerto Rico.

McKay, Susan. Festivals of the World: Brazil. Gareth Stevens Publishing: Milwaukee,

WI. 1997. This is a good source for intermediate students or students with a lower reading level to learn the basics about festival celebrated within Brazil.

Viesti, Joe and Diane Hall. Celebrate in Central America. Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard

Books: New York. 1998. This book discusses various festivals and feasts that are celebrated specifically in Central America. It covers food, clothing, music and other similar objects that are often used in celebrations to make them special. This is a good book for students to use to learn about festivals in Central America.

Annotated List for Classroom Materials

Paz, Octavio. The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico. Grove Press:

New York. 1961. This book covers various aspects of life in Mexico and the people of Mexico. I used only the third chapter that dealt especially with how Mexicans view death and a comparison with other groups and their relationship to death.

Marario. Videorecording. Connoisseur Videos. Los Angeles: Clasa Films Mundiales,

1960. This is a movie about a man who received a special gift from the dead and used that gift to help save those in the community who themselves were dying. It relates to the way death and dying are viewed by the people of Mexico.

Black Orpheus. Videorecording. Connoisseur Videos. Los Angeles: Home Vision

Entertainment, 1959. This is a movie that is based on the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice but the entire plot takes place during Carnival. This is a great movie to view the scenes of Carnival and also to hear great samba music.

## Standards

### Citizenship (by standard number)

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States, and other nations.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting the United States and other nations by conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
7. All students demonstrate their skill of communicating, negotiating, and cooperative with others.
8. All students demonstrate the ability to work effectively with others.

### Communication (by standard number)

2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.

4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas
  
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
  
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
  
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.