

Countries Around the World™

Mexico

Program Summary

Meet 10-year-old Judith. She and her family live in Mexico City, the capital of Mexico. Join Judith as she strolls through Mexico City's central plaza, the Zócalo, and introduces us to aspects of Mexico's history when she passes the National Palace and encounters a puppet show, which features a puppet that looks like Pancho Villa, a leader of the Mexican Revolution. Discover the prevalence of the Aztec culture and legacy in Mexico as Judith watches a traditional Aztec dance before visiting the ruins of Templo Mayor, the central temple of Tenochtitlán, the ancient Aztec capital. After a visit to the Castillo de Chapultepec, Judith and her friend Mayte watch a performance of the high-flying Voladores before snacking on some quesadillas and looking at the colorful frescoes in Mexico City's Magdalena neighborhood. Finally, Judith and her family cruise the waterways of the floating gardens of Xochimilco while snacking on *mole poblano* and listening to Mariachi music.

Country Information

- **location:** southern North America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the northern Pacific Ocean; bordered by the United States, Guatemala and Belize
- **capital:** Mexico City
- **official language:** Spanish
- **type of government:** federal republic
- **total area:** approximately 1,972,550 sq km
- **climate:** varies from tropical to desert
- **terrain:** high, rugged mountains, low coastal plains, high plateaus and desert
- **natural resources:** includes petroleum, silver, copper, gold, lead, zinc, natural gas and timber
- **industries:** includes food and beverages, tobacco, chemicals, iron and steel, petroleum, mining, textiles, clothing, motor vehicles, consumer durables and tourism
- **agricultural products:** includes corn, wheat, soybeans, rice, beans, cotton, coffee, fruit, tomatoes, beef, poultry, dairy products and wood products

Vocabulary

Aztec — A group of Central Americans who established a powerful, advanced empire in the area of present-day Mexico. The Aztec first settled in Mexico in 1325 B.C.E. and thrived until their defeat by Hernán Cortés in 1521 C.E.

Zócalo — The large, open-air central plaza in Mexico City. "Zócalo" can also refer to any central square in a city or town.

Pancho Villa (1878–1923) — One of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution.

Mexican peso — The currency of Mexico.

Tenochtitlán — The capital city of the Aztec civilization. Mexico City is built on top of Tenochtitlán.

madrecita — Spanish for "little mother."

voladores — Spanish for "those who fly." The Voladores are a troupe of acrobats who perform in Mexico City.

quesadilla — A tortilla that is folded in half over a filling of shredded cheese and then fried or toasted.

tortilla — A type of flatbread that is made from either ground corn or wheat.

fresco — The technique of painting directly onto walls and ceilings that consist of fresh plaster.

Pico de Orizaba — The largest mountain in Mexico, which stands 5,700 meters tall.

Xochimilco — Nahuatl for "place of flowers." A series of canals, originally built by the Aztec, in Mexico City where people travel in *trajineras* past small, man-made islands covered with flowers.

trajinera — A large, colorful, flat-bottomed boat.

mole poblano — A Mexican dish made with a dark, reddish brown sauce made from chili peppers and flavored with chocolate. It is usually served with chicken.

cacao — A native tree found in Mexico and South America. Its seeds are the main ingredient in chocolate.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Distribute outline maps of Mexico to the class. Have them label the capital, other major cities, bodies of water, landforms and neighboring countries. Questions to ask include: Which countries border Mexico to the north? To the south? Since Mexico is such a large country, do you think there are differences among the people who live there? If so, what? How might people along the border with the United States be different than the people along the border with Guatemala?
- Invite students to share stories about a time when they took a trip somewhere. Ask questions, such as: Where did you go? Why did you go there? How did you get there? How different was the place you visited from where you live? Was there anything that was the same? Would you go back? If you could choose to go anywhere in the world, where would it be? Why? After watching the program, encourage students to share anything they saw that would make them want to visit Mexico.
- Lead a discussion about what constitutes a "place of interest." What makes a particular place worth seeing? What are some places that you would consider fun to visit? As a class, have students compile a list of criteria for designating something a "place of interest." As students watch this program, invite them to consider how the tour of Mexico meets the list of student-created criteria.

Follow-up Activities

- The Aztec ruled southern Mexico for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, and the Aztec Empire's influence is still present in Mexico today. In fact, Mexico City is actually built on top of Tenochtitlán, the ancient Aztec capital! Students can bring the history of the ancient Aztec to life by working together to build a classroom display dedicated to the Aztec. Displays can include fact sheets, posters, pictures and illustrations, models, dioramas, time lines and maps. Assign students specific topics to cover so that diverse aspects of Aztec civilization, such as food, clothing, religion and history, are equally represented. Students can take turns presenting their display contributions to the class and sharing what they learned. For information about the Aztec, visit library.thinkquest.org/27981/.

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- During the Age of Exploration, Spanish explorers, such as Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Coronado and Hernán Cortés, traversed large swaths of Mexico and had many adventures, including contacts with Mexico's indigenous peoples, like the Aztec and the Maya. Have students investigate the lives and voyages of the Spaniards who explored Mexico. Begin by dividing the students into small groups and assign each group an explorer. Each group can produce fact sheets, posters, maps and time lines and plan and give a presentation on its assigned Spanish explorer. As an extension, students can work together to mark a classroom map of Mexico with the routes of the Spanish explorers and post time lines of the various explorations.
- Due to its location in a high-altitude valley, thin atmosphere, dense population and large number of motor vehicles, Mexico City suffers from extremely bad air pollution. In fact, the air pollution in Mexico City is so bad that the city even has "smog emergency days" during which people are advised to stay indoors! Discuss the reasons why Mexico City has such onerous air pollution and some possible ways that the people of Mexico City could alleviate this problem. Then, conduct an experiment to find out the amount of pollutants in the air around your school. Visit www.pca.state.mn.us/kids/exp2_airpollution.html for an experiment on measuring the amount of pollution in the air. The experiment can be modified to include different factors, such as elevations, times of day, areas of the school, etc. In addition, students can use the data they collect to express greater than/less than relationships, convert units of measurement and create graphic organizers that measure the amount of particulates in the air. As a culmination, students can discuss things they could do to reduce the amount of air pollution in their communities.
- The ruins of the Maya city of Chichén Itzá, located in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, stand as testament to the greatness of the Maya civilization, and thousands of tourists each year flock to this ancient city to marvel at its many temples and pyramids. Invite students to learn more about this mysterious and marvelous city by visiting www.internet-at-work.com/hos_mcgrane/chichen/chichen_index.html. Students can pick their favorite structures and, using various craft materials, shoeboxes and cereal boxes, build models of them. Students can write fact sheets for their structures that contain information, such as when the structure was built, what its purpose was, how long it took to build, etc. Finally, using their knowledge of scale, students can work together to build a 3-D layout of Chichén Itzá in the classroom.
- Throughout Mexico City, you can see large, vivid murals adorning various structures, and no matter where the frescoes are found, they often incorporate imagery from Mexico's folklore, heritage and history. Invite students to decorate a wall in the classroom with a mural. Begin by covering a section of a classroom wall with a large sheet of paper. Then, students can take turns using crayons, markers, colored pencils and paints to create their sections of the mural. After the mural is finished, students can share what their contributions to it means.
- Mexican state bingo! Invite students to create their own bingo cards that feature some or all of the 31 states of Mexico. Have students fill out their bingo cards with the names of the states and draw the names of the states from a bag. After the game, have students work together to mark a classroom map of Mexico with the names of the Mexican states.
- The national flag of Mexico and the unofficial flags of the states of Mexico all prominently feature coats of arms that hold symbolic meanings for the places they represent. Students can learn more about the flags of Mexico by visiting www.fotw.net/flags/mx/ for an interactive map of the country that links to images of the Mexican flags. Then, assign each student a Mexican flag and have the students draw pictures of them for display in the classroom. As an extension, students can redesign their state flag so that it features a coat of arms with symbols representative of their state.
- In the program, Judith encounters a puppet that looks just like Pancho Villa, a hero of the Mexican Revolution. Students can have fun retelling the history of Mexico in the form of a puppet show! Begin by dividing the class into small groups and assigning each group a period of Mexican history to cover. Students can learn about their periods of Mexican history by visiting www.elbalero.gob.mx/kids/history/html/home.html. As students prepare their performances, they can write fact sheets about their periods of Mexican history to pass out to the class. After each performance, students can review the information on their fact sheets.
- *¡Todos comamos un poco de alimento de México!* Students can have fun planning and holding a Mexican food lunch by preparing dishes that feature Mexican foods and bringing them to class. For each dish that they bring in, students can write out the recipe and include a picture. Collect all the recipes for inclusion in a Mexican food class cookbook.
- Read Linda Lowry's *Cinco de Mayo* (Lerner Publishing Group, 2005) to the class. Then, discuss Cinco de Mayo, talking about the history behind it and differentiating it from Dieciséis de Septiembre, Mexico's Independence Day. Students can also learn more about these and other Mexican holidays by visiting www.elbalero.gob.mx/kids/about/html/holidays/home.html. Next, students can create Venn diagrams that compare and contrast these Mexican holidays with similarly-themed American holidays, like the Fourth of July and Veterans Day. As a culmination, students can plan and participate in a classroom Cinco de Mayo celebration. Students can adorn the classroom with decorations, such as piñatas, make masks and costumes, play games and enjoy foods associated with Cinco de Mayo. At the end of the celebration, have students discuss what they learned about Cinco de Mayo.
- *¡Buenos días!* Invite students to learn basic words and phrases in Spanish, Mexico's official language, by visiting www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/talk/. Students can pair up, and using a combination of the words and phrases, write and perform short skits in Spanish. After they perform their skits, students can translate what they were saying into English. If you have fluent Spanish speakers in your class, encourage them to share their knowledge and serve as class leaders in pronunciation and alternate ways of saying things.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.elbalero.gob.mx/index_kids.html
Assembled by the Mexican government, this site includes information for students about Mexico's government, geography, history and culture.
- library.thinkquest.org/CR0212302/mexico.html
Learn about the culture and customs of Mexico from the perspective of a child who lives there! The students of Roosevelt School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin present this award-winning site to teach people about different cultures.
- www.kidskonnnect.com/AncientAztec/AncientAztecHome.html
Learn more about the ancient Aztec. This website provides comprehensive historical information about the ancient Aztec civilization.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Mexico and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

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Suggested Print Resources

- Hamilton, Janice. *Mexico in Pictures*. Lerner Publishing Group, Minneapolis, MN; 2002.
- Lourie, Peter. *Hidden World of the Aztec*. Boyds Mill Press, Honesdale, PA; 2006.
- Lowery, Linda. *Day of the Dead*. Lerner Publishing Group, Minneapolis, MN; 2003.
- Stein, R. Conrad. *Mexico*. Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2006.

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