

Los Maya y El Norte

THEME:	CULTURAL IDENTITIES									
LANGUAGE:	SPANISH									
STANDARDS:	COMMUNICATION		CULTURES		CONNECTIONS		COMPARISONS		COMMUNITIES	
	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.2	5.1	

Purpose:

To gain cultural understanding of the Maya using all four modalities; to become aware of the concept of oppression from historical and present day perspectives; to become aware of how stereotypes are formed and how they affect the ways in which people relate to one another; to understand some of the reasons for immigration, and; to become aware of the place of indigenous peoples and immigrants in our society.

Communicative Functions:

- *Personal:* Expressing one's thoughts and feelings; expressing social concerns
- *Interpersonal:* Sharing and asking about beliefs, thoughts, and opinions
- *Directive:* Giving and responding to directions
- *Referential:* Understanding messages/descriptions; scanning for information; paraphrasing; comparing or contrasting; reporting facts about a text; interpreting information; hypothesizing; creating questions; supporting opinions
- *Imaginative:* Discussing a film and songs; creating poetry

Time Frame:

Approximately three weeks of 50-minute class sessions

Materials needed:

- Background information on the Maya and Guatemala (realia, slides, visuals, maps, printed information, etc. all available from the Resource Center of the Americas, see references)
- Music video "Guatemala"

Level:

Novice-High

Language Structure(s):

Present and past tenses, subject verb agreement, number/gender agreement, word order, question formation

Cultural Aspects:

Awareness of attitudes and stereotypes; reasons for immigration; aspects related to the Mayan and the struggle of indigenous peoples

Modalities:

Listening

Reading

Speaking

Writing

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- Maps for information gap exercise (handouts with blank maps, handouts of maps containing different pieces of information, transparencies of blank maps)
- Cassette recordings for *Madre Campesina* and *La Andina*, along with lyrics (provided), vocabulary charts, and cloze activities (provided)
- Video of Rigoberta Menchú at Northrop
- Chart for new vocabulary (provided)
- Video *El Norte*
- Study guide for *El Norte* (provided)
- Stereotype chart (provided)
- Culture comparison chart (provided)
- Rubric for assessing poetry (provided)

Background and Context:

An awareness of other cultures helps us to understand our own. One cannot appreciate diversity without first having the knowledge of how other cultures differ from or are similar to our own. This unit exposes students to the voice of “the other” (Kramersch, 1993). Through this exposure, it is hoped that students will begin to feel an empathy, a connectedness, a concern for other people as they mature and develop to a point where they see themselves not only as individuals and as U.S. citizens but also as part of a global citizenry.

The impetus to create this particular unit was the film *El Norte*. The goal has been to provide the students with enough background knowledge (Melendez and Pritchard, 1985) so that they understand the Mayan culture, have some empathy for the characters and can relate the story to some of their own attitudes.

Unit Overview:

This unit is an introductory overview of the role that indigenous people have held historically and hold at present in Latin American society. This information is also related to the role of Native Americans in the United States. To give the unit a more specific focus, the Maya are emphasized but

reference is made to the fact that all indigenous groups have shared some common history since the conquest. This will provide the background schema for future study of more specific issues such as: land rights, human rights violations, the women's movement, the role of the church, the importance of family/ethnic heritage (ancestry), the indigenous political conflicts, the influence of the United States foreign policy in Latin America, etc., which can be explored in later points in the curriculum.

The unit begins with a music video to spark students' interest. The first section provides the student with specific cultural and historical knowledge of the Maya. The story of Rigoberta Menchú brings the Maya into present day and introduces the topics of military repression and refugees. This knowledge is then applied to the viewing of *El Norte*. The film illustrates the cultural clash between Mayan and North American cultures relating Mayan culture to the students' own culture. The film is followed by a presentation from the Resource Center of the Americas with opportunity to hear the personal account and ask questions of a Mayan refugee. At the end of the unit, students will be writing cinquain poetry where they will be able to use the notes accumulated during the unit. The ongoing notetaking, in addition to serving as a study skill, is an authentic task in that it serves the real purposes of organizing the information presented and are used as a student tool during the unit and as part of the assessment.

Activities for Developing Background Knowledge:

Prior to the unit students should be exposed to some elements of Mayan culture. Pre-unit activities can be integrated throughout the year.

1. Numbering system—Students can do an exercise with Mayan numbers while learning numbers.
2. Weaving—Students can use pictures of weavings to describe while learning colors and shapes and clothing. A slide show is available, "Ethnicity and Guatemalan Weavers in the Struggle for Survival" (Beamish, 1989).
3. Modern Central American art style—Students can do a reading exercise to color pictures depicting nature and village life. Blackline masters are available, "El Salvadorian Folk Art" (Resource Center of the Americas).
4. Geography—Prior to the unit, students should have learned the general geography (countries, capitals, major geographic features) of Latin America.

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5. Racial Groups—Students should have learned about the general racial and ethnic make-up of Latin America in conjunction with the geography (predominant location of races and historical reasoning behind their locations).

Description of the Unit:

Lesson 1: Guatemala Music Video

The lyrics of the music video “Guatemala” (available at Resource Center of the Americas) relate the struggle of the indigenous people set against images that reflect both the beauty of the people and violence inflicted by the military. The lyrics and images should raise many questions in the students that will be answered during the unit. Because the video is in English, specific pre-, during-, and post-viewing activities aren’t necessary. After viewing the video, students should generate a list of questions that they would like to explore throughout the unit. The teacher may want to use the *K-W-L technique*: students first list what they *know* and what they *want* to find out, then after completing study of the topic, they list what they *learned* (Ogle, 1986, in Chamot & O’Malley, 1994). The K-W-L chart generated can then be revisited throughout the unit.

Lesson 2: Geography

Pre-activity:

The teacher reviews directional vocabulary (e.g., norte, sur, este, oeste) and expressions for describing locations.

Information-gap activity:

For this exercise, the teacher will need to create two maps, one showing the location of several indigenous groups throughout Latin America and the other showing details of the Mayan area. The class is divided into two groups: one group receives the maps showing various indigenous groups and the other the maps showing details of the Mayan regions. Students are paired for an information-gap exercise. For each exercise, one student is given a map showing half of the information and the other is given a map with the other half of the information. Students must ask each other, “¿Dónde está...?” and listen to descriptions in order to complete their map.

Post-activity:

An overhead transparency of the blank map is displayed for the whole class and student volunteers from one half of the class (e.g., the half that worked with the Mayan regions map) provide the necessary information, describing in Spanish the location of various regions for the other half of the class. For example, a student goes to the overhead projector with a marker and fills in a piece of information while describing it to the class. Then, s/he passes the marker to another student, who provides another piece of information. Meanwhile, the students in the class who worked with the Mayan regions map are checking the answers on their map while the other half of the class is filling in the new information on a new blank map. Then, a second blank map is displayed on a transparency and again student volunteers from the second group (the half that worked with the indigenous groups map) fill in the necessary information on the transparency and describe the map for the class. This exercise will provide reinforcement of the directions (*norte, sur, este, oeste*) and the grammatical structures needed for describing locations. The teacher may need to review the forms during this activity. The emphasis should be on accuracy of *both* content and form. By the end of the activity, all students should have copies of the two completed maps, which they will use as a reference during the unit.

Lessons 3–5: Pre-Colombian Culture

For these lessons, the teacher will need a Guatemalan country box with realia, slides and transparencies, as well as other background information. A plethora of material is available at the Resource Center of the Americas. The teacher may choose any number of activities for presenting the information. A combination of Spanish and English should be used.

The teacher can begin by showing slides of ruins in the Yucatán and giving a narration in Spanish. The teacher asks questions in Spanish throughout the presentation as a means of checking students' listening comprehension.

The teacher provides an interactive mini lecture on Mayan history and culture using visuals and realia from the box to prompt the discussion. Students take outline notes in Spanish as guided by the teacher during the interactive mini lecture. Throughout the activity, the teacher asks questions that elicit the important information about Mayan culture. The notes are kept by students and added to throughout the unit.

The teacher shows the video "The Burden in Time" in English. This video explains the significance of historical events in relationship to the Mayan

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calendar. It contains a good explanation of Mayan beliefs and a brief overview of their history up to the present. The concept of oppression by the Spaniards and by first world nations is pointed out. After the video, students continue to add information into their outline notes via another interactive mini lecture in Spanish.

Slides of Diego Rivera's murals and class discussion will also add to students' understanding of pre-Colombian civilization. The teacher shows slides of the murals depicting pre-Colombian civilization, conquest, and colonial eras. A class discussion (in Spanish and English) during viewing emphasizes the meaning of depicted symbols and the point of view of the artist towards groups of people (conquistadors, landowners, church, indigenous groups and the North Americans). Again, students add to their outline notes in Spanish. The struggle with the Indians began much earlier in 1492 with the arrival of the Spaniards. The murals are used to reflect the struggle that has been around for centuries to let students understand that this has a history.

Lesson 6: The Struggle of Indigenous Women

The activities in Lessons 6 and 7 serve as previewing activities for *El Norte* so that students begin developing an understanding of the reasons why some indigenous peoples flee Central America and seek refuge in the United States.

This lesson focuses on the song *Madre Campesina* by Sabiá. The song depicts the struggle of indigenous women and the concepts of powerlessness, economic gap of the classes, and oppression of the landowners. A series of pre-listening, during listening, and post-listening activities is used to aid student comprehension.

Pre-listening:

Before receiving the lyrics to the song, students listen to the song several times, list recognized words and make predictions as to the message of the song based on vocabulary and tone of the music. (The song has a somber tone, sung in minor keys and no instrumentation other than slow beating drums.)

During-listening:

Pairs of students are given strips containing the lyrics of the song (lyrics provided). The pairs need to work together, listening to the song until they have put the lyrics in the correct order.

After students have the completed lyrics, they need to find familiar words and cognates, and attempt to derive the meaning of new words by guessing from contextual clues. Finally, they must decide on 5 words to be looked up in the dictionary. Such an activity forces the students to make wise choices as to what are the key words for understanding (e.g., repeated words). To facilitate this activity, students make vocabulary lists under these headings: *madre*, *patrón*, *niño* and *tristeza*. They list words and phrases from the song that are related to these topics.

Finally, pairs are to write 2-3 sentences describing what they believe to be the main message of the song.

Post-listening:

On the next day, as a formative assessment, have students complete a cloze listening exercise (provided). Then, have the class do a choral reading. The class can be divided into two groups, each assigned to one “voice” in the song. This particular song is split into two alternating voices and so lends itself perfectly to a two-part choral reading. (The song is sung in minor keys making it a difficult sing-along piece.)

Lesson 7: Rigoberta Menchú

A video showing Rigoberta Menchú’s presentation at Northrop auditorium at the University of Minnesota is available at the University of Minnesota. An interpreter’s English translation also appears on the video, so the tape should be paused prior to the English interpretation in selected segments to have students explain what they understood. Immediate reinforcement is given when the translation is played. During the video, students listen for familiar words and cognates and add to their vocabulary lists.

Students may also read about Rigoberta’s life in English or Spanish if more time is devoted to this portion of the unit. Many readings are available at the Resource Center of the Americas. In addition, Rigoberta Menchú’s book “I, Rigoberta Menchú” (Burgos-Debray, 1984) is available in both English and Spanish.

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This is a good time to have students revisit the K-W-L charts they created at the beginning of the unit. What pieces can they add to the “Learned” column? How does the exploration of the struggle of indigenous women extend their background knowledge? What aspects should be added to their notes?

Lessons 8–10: *El Norte*

The film illustrates Mayan culture and the clashes between Mayan culture and Spanish/Ladino (Guatemala and Mexico) and North American cultures. Two main exercises accompany the viewing of the film: the study guide (provided) and a stereotype chart (provided). They deal with picking out the main themes of the film and awareness of how stereotypes often determine relationships between groups of people. Students will make comparisons between Latin American and North American treatment of indigenous peoples.

The study guide created for this section of the unit provides the student with comprehension questions to focus their viewing, to help them to relate previously presented cultural information to the story, and to get them to examine their own attitudes. The study guide is divided into three segments that correspond to parts of the film, so instead of viewing the whole film and then trying to discuss, students are given the opportunity to discuss ideas in small groups (compare answers, give opinions and make predictions) after viewing each of the three segments. Each segment should be shown on a separate day, and the study guide for that segment should be completed by students. In addition, at the end of each day, students should be asked to add to the stereotype chart.

Some sections of the study guide contain a written transcript in Spanish of key lines in the film. In Part I, the transcript excerpt is studied before viewing, treating it as a reading selection. This will help the students understand the Spanish when these lines are spoken in the film. Excerpts from the last portion of the film are transcribed to be used as a reading text after viewing the film. In addition to reinforcing their importance, the re-entry of these lines in another learning mode will help the students who missed them while watching the film. Students are asked to discuss the significance of these lines. These particular lines are the heart of the film’s message.

An interesting twist to using this film is that some of the dialogue is in Mayan. While viewing the film, students may be asked to give a sign (e.g., holding up their pencil) whenever they hear Mayan. This serves three

purposes. First, it will help to focus the students' attention to continue listening to the spoken language and not just be tempted to read the subtitles. Second, it is a form of assessment, to see if the students can distinguish between Spanish and another language. Third, students who are listening to the spoken language will be put at ease instead of becoming concerned that they can't catch a single word.

Lesson 11: La Andina

This song depicts the struggle of the indigenous people living under a repressive government and the sentiment of North American solidarity between all women of the Americas. The lyrics are provided. A set of activities similar to the ones described in Lesson 6 should be used. In the during listening activity, students make vocabulary lists under two headings: *represión* and *esperanza*.

Lesson 12: Culture Comparison

Students complete a culture comparison chart (provided), which is an adaptation of a Venn diagram. They are to use knowledge from all of the previous activities to create expressions and formulate concepts to place on the chart.

A large chart should be placed on the wall (like a mural). Students use different colors of markers, photos, drawing, other visuals, to place the information from their individual charts onto the large class mural. This can be displayed in the hallway or another part of the school.

Lesson 13: Cinquain Poetry

Pre-writing:

Using the vocabulary and themes presented in the unit, students will choose two concepts, groups of people, or themes to write *cinquain* poems. There are a variety of versions of this fixed-form poetry. One offered by Allen and Valette (1977, pp. 321-322, in Shrum & Glisan, 1994) follows:

Line 1: State the subject in one word (usually a noun).

Line 2: Describe the subject in two words (often a noun and adjective or two adjectives)

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Line 3: Describe an action about the subject in three words (often three verbs).

Line 4: Express an emotion about the subject in four words.

Line 5: Restate the subject in another single word, reflecting what you have already said (usually a noun).

The teacher will need to introduce or review the format of the poem. Students are encouraged to use their notes and vocabulary lists (which will have been categorized according to parts of speech). Vocabulary lists and word associations (from the song activities), as well as all previous activities serve as additional prewriting preparation. Students should also be informed that their poems will be displayed and also sent as a thank-you to the guest speaker who will be visiting.

Writing:

First draft. Students work individually to write and, if they wish, to illustrate their poems.

Feedback. Students are paired and are expected to check each other's poems to check for accuracy of format and agreement.

Revision. Students revise based on the feedback they received and produce the final version of their poem on computers.

Post-writing:

The poems are then reproduced by the students in poster form to be displayed in the classroom. Students may add their own visual creativity to the posters using drawings, pictures, photographs, etc. In addition to being an outlet for student creativity, this activity will help the students integrate pieces of information presented throughout the unit and serve as a form of assessment.

Lesson 14: Guest Speaker

As a culmination of the unit, the teacher should invite a Mayan refugee as a guest speaker. (In Minnesota, The Resource Center of the Americas can be contacted for assistance.)

Pre-listening:

The day before the guest speaker is to arrive, students should revisit the K-W-L charts. They need to examine the information they wanted to know and learned. What did they want to know that may not have been answered in the previous activities? What else would they like to know? Students create a list of questions they would like to ask. Each student (or pairs of students) is assigned a question that they will be responsible for asking the guest speaker.

During listening:

The guest speaker attends the class, students ask their previously prepared questions (and others as they arise during the presentation), and take notes as the speaker responds to the questions.

Post-listening:

After the visit, the class constructs a class letter to thank the guest speaker. The students provide content for the teacher to record on an overhead transparency. During the process, the teacher can review necessary grammatical structures. This is a good opportunity for the teacher to introduce letter format. The letter, along with copies of students' cinquain poetry, should be sent to the guest speaker.

Assessment:

The vast majority of the activities described for each lesson have assessment built in. The teacher will be able to observe students' participation and comprehension throughout the unit. Student notes and responses on the study guide, the stereotype charts, the culture comparison chart, etc. can all be collected and assessed according to the teacher's preferences. The poems can be assessed with a holistic rubric (provided). The teacher may also choose to create an essay test as a summative assessment of the content of the unit.

Extensions:***Suggestions for adapting the unit for various levels:***

For advanced levels: All activities would occur in the target language and students would be expected to deal with the issues at a high level of critical thinking.

Other extensions:

A simulation on Mayan civilization (Roth, 1993) is also available for adding to students' understanding of Mayan history. The simulation would add several days to the unit.

Cultural extensions:

The activities in the unit can be adapted to incorporate a cross-cultural comparison between the indigenous groups in Central America and the Native Americans in Minnesota.

References and Resources

This lesson makes use of the following authentic material: to reprint this material: to reprint this material online permission has been requested.

Allen, E. D., & Valette, R. M. (1977). *Classroom techniques: Foreign languages and English as a second language*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Chamot, A. U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). *CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Melendez, J. E., & Pritchard, R. H. (1985). Applying schema theory to foreign language reading. *Foreign Language Annals*, 18, (5), 399-403.

Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L group instruction strategy. In A. S. Palincsar, D. S. Ogle, B. F. Jones, & E. G. Carr (Eds.), *Teaching reading as thinking*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (1994). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Printed Material:

Most of the material listed here is available at:

Resource Center of the Americas
3019 Minnehaha Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55406
Phone: 612-267-0788
Website: <http://www.Americas.org>

Burgos-Debray, E. (Ed.). (1984). *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala*. New York: Verso.

Resource Center of The Americas (1993). Background Information on Guatemala.

Rigoberta Menchú: The prize that broke the silence. (1993). Minneapolis, MN: Resource Center of the Americas.

Roth, P. (1993). *Maya: A simulation of Mayan civilization during the seventh century*. Lakeside, CA: Interaction Publishers.

Tape Recordings:

Sabiá (1984). *La Andina* on the cassette "Formando un puente...Building Bridges." Oakland, CA: Redwood Records.

Sabiá (1984). *Madre Campesina* on the cassette "Formando un puente... Building Bridges." Oakland, CA: Redwood Records.

Videos:

El Norte (available for rental at most video stores)

Sears, P. (1990). *Guatemala* (music video). Earth Island Institute. Watchfire Productions.

The Burden of Time. (National Geographic Special, Resource Center of the Americas).

University of Minnesota. (1993). *Carlson Distinguished Lecture Series: Rigoberta Menchú*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

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Visuals:

Country Box for Guatemala. Minneapolis, MN: Resource Center of the Americas.

Beamish, M. (1989). *Ethnicity and Guatemalan Weavers in the Struggle for Survival* (slides and narration). Minneapolis, MN: Resource Center of The Americas.

Resource Center of The Americas. *El Salvadoran Folk Art—29 Activity Sheets*. Minneapolis, MN: Resource Center of The Americas.

Other Multimedia Materials:

Interact Simulations
1914 Palomar Oaks Way, Suite 150
Carlsbad, CA 92008
Phone: 1-800-359-0961
Fax: 1-800-700-5093
Website: <http://www.interact-simulations.com>
E-mail: sales@interact-simulations.com

Reflections:

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