



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2000 Volume IV: Ethnicity and Dissent in American Literature and Art

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## **"Friday and Friends: A Prospectus of the Mexican Family through Children's Literature"**

Curriculum Unit 00.04.06  
by Geraldine Martin

### **Introduction**

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American children's literature becomes the basis of analysis for enrichment and enlightenment as young children gather information about early native people's home and family life, their resistance to Spanish control, and how the blending of the two cultures has helped to shape the present day nation of Mexico. Can children conjure thoughts and pictures in their young minds about an ancient people and their culture and traditions that are vastly different from their own, and how those fighting back to keep those traditions helped to shape present day Mexico? Are they able to compare, contrast, and gain insightful information about this impact on another culture through the help of children's literature? Has the blending of the two cultures in Mexico had any effect on the culture of the United States of America?

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to explore strategies in which puppetry and the art of story-telling, via children's literature from America, can be integrated into a unit for helping young children examine the art, poetry, dance and other cultural examples of both Spanish and ancient native people. At the same time, we want to look at how both groups have helped to shape the present day nation of Mexico, and how this blend can be seen in the culture of the United States of America. In addition, my goal is to enhance my first grader's reading skills and critical analysis of stories. A key component to my unit would be the active participation of children in using puppetry and American literature in reading and analyzing ancient family traditions, and its impact on the Mexican culture of today.

Mexico, rich in culture, geography and history is like traveling across many yesterdays. One soon becomes acutely aware that this is a large, rich and complicated country, filled with much diversity. Despite the military and political dominance of Spain, the culture of the native people of Mexico could not be smothered. What exists in Mexico today is a result of a blending of two cultures that are clearly evident in modern day Mexico. In the large cities, many Mexicans work in modern office buildings and live in comfortable homes. However, outside the cities, Indian farmers live in thatched roofed houses, and still cultivate the land as they did hundreds of years ago. The past melts into the present and future as an ultra-contemporary building complex rises to form the background of the steps of an Aztec ceremonial center. Holidays still bring brightly colored fiestas to the streets containing half Christian and half pagan activities and practices. Interestingly enough, sometimes Mexican culture can be viewed as a contradiction. For example, it is not unusual to see an Indian couple dressed in traditional clothing lead a burro past a Volkswagen while glancing at a Japanese motorcycle.

With this much diversity in culture, it is difficult to comprehend the complexity of the country as a whole. However, through the eyes of authors and their written works and pictures, we are able to get a glimpse of this beautiful country and its people, and learn from their ancient roots and colorful traditions. A good starting place would be Helen Arnold's book, *Postcards from Mexico*. The book uses large print with brightly colored pictures describing various places and people of Mexico. In simple terms easily understood by first graders, the book gives insightful information about ancient peoples and their traditions as well as children and Mexican people in modern times. We will find out that rodeos had their roots in Mexico, and then spread to the United States of America. *Colors of Mexico* by Lynn Ainsworth Olawsky is another insightful book using different colors to describe family traditions and holidays in various parts of Mexico. We also discover that many foods that we enjoy today come from the ancient natives of Mexico. Fictional books such as *The Hummingbirds' Gift* by Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes along with Nancy Riecken's book, *Today is the Day and Saturday Market* by Patricia Grossman and Enrique O. Sanchez will help to give information about the Mexican home and family life, and how this has helped to shape the culture and traditions of the nation of Mexico. We soon discover that in many places of United States, colorful markets are also found and used to purchase foods and material goods for families and their homes.

More specifically, my unit would include activities suitable for children in kindergarten through third grades with an emphasis on literacy for the first grade child. Along with reading and the language arts, the lesson plans would cover curriculum areas such as math, social studies, science, music and art.

I teach first graders in a self-contained classroom at L. W. Beecher School on Jewell Street in New Haven. My classroom contains approximately 26 children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with varying abilities in the six-to eight-year-old age range. Along with a need for improved vocabulary, many children exhibit poor self-images and have difficulty conveying their thoughts and feelings. I want the children in my classroom to be able to draw upon their inner strengths, enhance their academic skills and strengthen their overall social-emotional development.

## Objectives

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My overall objectives for the course of my curriculum unit are:

1. To provide an interactive experience through the use of puppetry and literature in:

- a. small groups of two or four
- b. large group interaction

2. To help stimulate children's intellectual and cognitive development about the

Mexican family and their way of life as it reflects ancient groups of people and the conquest by the Spaniards:

- a. through written works and illustrated art work
- b. with creative puppetry
- c. by a drama production

3. To improve auditory reading and listening skills of participants through:
  - a. written language
  - b. spoken language
4. To encourage confidence and a positive self-image while participating in class activities:
  - a. as listeners
  - b. as narrators
  - c. as actors
  - d. as members of an audience
5. To connect the classroom unit with the school curriculum:
  - a. reading, language arts and the music curriculum
  - b. science and social studies curriculum
  - c. socialization skills

## Examples of Strategies

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How would the art of puppetry tie into a unit using American children's literature to explore family life in Mexico? The art of ventriloquism has been in my teaching repertoire for years and as a result many characters have evolved along with my first grade curriculum. For example, Willie Sunday, a favorite in the classroom keeps the children spellbound by his expertise in phonics, or lack of it, as he misses letters and letter sounds to the squeals and delight of the children. Tuesday's Cup of Sugar, Alphabet Thursday, and Blue Monday have all gained a stronghold in the classroom through their initiation of the writer's workshop, story mapping, interactive writing and modeling classroom stories. Wednesday Delight cannot be missed as she brings new poems for discussion and reading on a weekly basis. Friday Funtastic, a duck who has his own unique carrying case, sporty hat and bright green vest, has been useful in helping to introduce many films for analysis and discussion. All of the puppets contain personalities of their own, interesting voice variations and a flare for bright colorful appearances.

With all of these characters in mind, I would like to pull out Friday Funtastic and give him the opportunity to assist the children in gathering information about the home and family life in Mexico, and how the ancient customs have influenced present day Mexico. A look into the Spanish conquest will help the children see how that culture has blended into the native Indian culture. In addition, we will look at this blend and how it has affected our own culture in United States of America. A great source of information would be the World Wide Web along with various other resource books where Friday will be able to find factual information pertinent to introducing a story in class. For example, while introducing the book *Today is the Day* by Nancy Riecken, Friday will tell the children about the ancient Myan peoples, their customs and traditions, showing various pictures and contrasting them with the author's illustrations and content of the story. Discussion will center

around the food that the family ate, living and cooking quarters, and papa's leaving the family to look for work so that he could provide for the family. The children will be able to analyze their own family structure, compare and contrast situations that are similar or different to that of the story. How do you think the girls felt when Papa did not come back for a long time? Do your mother or father have to leave your family sometimes? How does it feel when your father or mother leave for an extended period of time? Have you ever been afraid like Yesenia was in the story that her father would not return? What did she do while she waited for her papa to return? What do you do while waiting for your parents to return?

Literacy will play an important role in every facet of my unit. In addition to hearing the stories being read in the classroom, the children will share a book with a buddy in the classroom and read together. Parents will assist through the H.E.L.P. program. H.E.L.P. stands for "Helping Every Child to Learn and Progress in Reading." Parents come into the classroom once a week for a fifteen-minute period and listen to the children read aloud.

Of course, Friday's friends, the stories and books, contain many exciting activities for the children. These activities, we soon learn, stem from ancient, as well as, Spanish (i.e. from the country of Spain) traditions and customs. Every child will be given the opportunity to participate in the breaking of the pi-ata at our Mexican fiesta. We will also discuss how many families in the United States of America use pi-atas at their birthday or other party celebrations. It will be fun to participate in a Mexican children's dance. We may even experiment with making our own pi-ata. Most exciting will be a visit to a local restaurant where we will be treated to some authentic Mexican food. Of course, we will want to try our hand at making tortillas with cheese, tomatoes and onion. We will also discuss some foods that were used in ancient Mexico and are common for us today.

A culminating activity will be a drama production based on the story *Today is the Day* by Nancy Riecken. The production will be rehearsed in our Extended Day Academy and produced on stage for a school wide assembly sometime near the end of the school year.

Although this unit will not be part of an official team effort, Jean Sutherland, her third grade class, along with my first graders and myself will be working together to produce a school-wide culminating activity for the students, parents and the Beecher community at large. The student production "Today is the Day" will be a part of this combined effort.

This unit will involve students, teachers, and parents who work together to create a beautiful unit about the home and family life of the Mexican people, and how the dissent of an ancient group of people has been kept alive in the present day culture.

## **The Mexican Family Through Literature**

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### ***Mexico***

Harry Jonas Lerner takes the reader on a tour of Mexico – home of many ancient Indian cultures. He covers topics such as the land, history and government, the people, and the economy. We discover

that Mexico is a land of great cultural and physical diversity. Mountains cover much of the terrain of Mexico. The Central Plateau is Mexico's agricultural region and contains the most dense population, especially in and around Mexico City. Low tropical plains surround the coastal areas of Mexico. Early civilizations such as the Olmecs, the Maya, the Toltecs, and the Aztecs leave behind evidence of their highly developed societies in artworks, statues and religious sites.

#### Week One - Day One

As an introduction to our unit, Friday (i.e. our classroom puppet) will help to introduce our Mexico cultural box. The Mexico box will be an integral part of our unit, bringing many items pertaining to our daily lessons. Today's box contains an inflatable ball, which, we soon discover, turns into a globe. After helping the children find their home country and state, and the country of Mexico, Friday tells the children to bounce the ball around the circle. Those catching the ball have to find, first the United and States and their home state, Connecticut, and then the country of Mexico. Classmates on either side of the "catcher" make sure their neighbor has identified the areas correctly.

As we look at the pictures and read the information from Lerner's book, we soon discover the sharp contrasts in family life throughout Mexico. Modern houses made of wood, or an apartment building made of steel could be home to some Mexicans living in the city. However, for most living in the city and in rural Mexico, houses are made of brown adobe. Adobe is a mixture made of mud, straw, and water.

The majority of Mexicans speak Spanish and belong to one of three major ethnic groups. For example, Indians who are direct descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, have substandard incomes and dwell in crowded neighborhoods with poor housing. A small portion of the population are descendants from the Spanish conquerors and colonists. However, the largest ethnic group consists of mestizos - resulting from intermarriage of both Indians and Spaniards.

We discover that most rural Mexicans cannot afford meat in their diets and live mostly on fruits and vegetables. Actually, the diet of most Mexicans is very similar to that of the original Aztecs. This includes foods such as maize (corn), beans and hot chili peppers. Many of foods in Mexico such as tortillas, tamales, and pozole (a corn chowder) can be dated to the days of the Aztec Empire.

Although the vast majority of Mexicans speak Spanish, many Indian groups speak only a dialect. With the growing population, the government finds it difficult to keep pace with the need for new schools and more

teachers. Mexican law requires children who are between the ages of 6 and 14 to attend school. However, many children living in rural areas do not attend classes. At this point the children will enter a “quick write” (i.e. a few lines about their lesson from the book, Mexico) in their log books for evaluation.

Two books, Postcards from Mexico and Colors of Mexico are great books written from a young child’s perspective. They will be read in class and then placed in our resource center in the classroom. The children will be able to take them to their seats and read them during quiet reading time. Colors of Mexico depicts various colors written in Spanish to describe cultural and historical events in Mexico. We will take these colors, write them on a chart and learn the Spanish words in class.

### ***The Mayan***

McKissack gives a beautiful overview of the Mayan civilization known for its magnificent cities with elaborate temples and carvings. The Maya Indians are chiefly an agricultural people whose chief crop and primary food staple is corn. The Maya farmers are known as the common people and are responsible for supporting the minority population which consists of the noble clergy. The agriculture land surrounds the ceremonial centers where the priests live. Another Mayan group known as the craftsmen are responsible for serving the nobility, building their houses and making their clothes.

#### Week One – Day Two

The Mayan is introduced by Friday, and we soon discover that this ancient civilization that lived in the Yucatan Peninsula worshipped many gods. They sacrificed birds and small animals to their nature gods. Human sacrifices were also a vital part of their religious ceremonies just as their successors the Aztec did during their religious ceremonies.

The children of the nobility were the only ones who received a formal education. Mayan parents taught their children at home. It will be of interest to note that crossed eyes and a flattened head were considered beautiful to Mayan parents. Shortly after a baby was born a mother would strap her baby between two boards in order to flatten and lengthen the baby’s head. In order to cross a baby’s eyes, a mother would tie an object so that it would dangle at the tip of the baby’s nose. If a baby was born with crossed eyes it was felt that the

gods blessed the baby.

A Mayan house contained one room made of four stucco walls and a thatched roof. Today as one travels throughout the rural areas of southern Mexico, very little has changed. Houses made of stucco walls and thatched roofs still dot the countryside and villages of modern day Mexico.

There are many theories surrounding the demise of this ancient civilization. However, their history and legacy can be seen through the archaeological explorations throughout the Yucatan Peninsula. Detailed carvings in the temples and ruins give the historian remarkable knowledge of this ancient civilization and their way of life.

Our “quick write” will include several sentences about what we gleaned from our study of the Mayan civilization.

### ***The Spirit of the Maya: A Boy Explores His People’s Mysterious Past***

In his book, Garcia explores the ruins of Palenque through the eyes of a twelve-year-old Lacandon Indian boy. The family is trying to preserve their Mayan traditions, and Kin is particularly intrigued by Pacal, a boy-king who is buried at Palenque. We are taken on an exploratory journey surrounding the ruins near Palenque.

#### Week One – Days Three and Four

Friday finds Garcia’s book, *The Spirit of the Maya: A Boy Explores His People’s Mysterious Past* in his Mexico book and begins to tell the story to the class while showing the colorful photographs surrounding the story of Kin and his Mayan ancestors. We find that Kin can speak the Mayan language but prefers Spanish. In the story, Kin goes along with the idea of making clay figures, but prefers to play soccer. As we visit the ruins with Kin, we try to identify with his conflicting emotions ranging from pride to sadness, from excitement to loneliness. We also discuss possibilities for Kin’s emotions. Why do you think Kin preferred Spanish instead of the Mayan language? Do you think people living in the United States today who can speak both Spanish and English prefer English? Why? Why does Kin prefer soccer instead of making clay figures? Would it have anything to do with the fact that soccer is a national sport in Mexico? Would that make Kin more popular with his classmates if he chose soccer? Why? The ancient Mayan people played a game similar to soccer. The winning team lost their lives. Their culture was synonymous with their religious way of life. Why would a winning team lose their lives?

Friday brings our resource book, *Colors of Mexico* to class, and we reread about the tomb of Lord Pacal that Kin explored. Actually his body was just discovered in the jungles of Mexico in 1952. When discovered, they found his body surrounded by jade. He even wore a jade mask and jade rings on each finger. We want to explore our past too. Our homework assignment for today will involve an interview of an older family member (i.e. mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, etc.) We will brainstorm ideas and questions that we can ask of

our family member. Where did our ancestors come from? What did our parents or grandparents do for entertainment? Was there any special heirloom that they passed on from generation to generation? Could we bring it to class or would an older family member bring something to class and share with our classmates? Did any of our ancestors risk their lives (e.g. in coming to the United States)?

### ***The Aztec***

Patricia McKissack's book captures the life and times of early Aztec family life. McKissack explores the rise and fall of the Aztec in Mexican history, including the tale of the eagle holding a snake while sitting on a prickly pear cactus on a swamp island. This tale reportedly gave the Aztec direction in settling on Lake Texcoco.

### Week One - Day Five

Friday helps to introduce the book, *The Aztec* to the class as we look at the colorful pictures and read the information about these early ancient people's way of life. He also finds a Mexican flag in his Mexico box. On the flag we discover the eagle holding the snake in his mouth. We soon discover that the Aztec had three social classes in their civilization. The nobility stood at the top, the merchants and craftsmen in the middle, and the peasants at the bottom. The family unit consisted of a close-knit bond. When a baby was born, it was a joyful occasion. Extended family members of the clan brought gifts. Children began school at the age of three. Each clan had two schools - one for the boys, and one for the girls. Each school had their distinct curriculum. The boys were taught citizenship, religion, dance, music, crafts, history, and warfare. Girls were taught crafts, songs, music, dance, and history. It will be interesting to note that many of the common foods that we eat today originated from early ancient Aztec times. For example, foods such as corn cakes, beans, sweet potatoes, avocados, squash, peppers, fish, fowl, deer, turkey, and even popcorn were all popular in ancient days. Most of the foods were grown by the peasants and traded for other necessities at the marketplaces. Colorful markets were a daily part of everyday life, and can be seen throughout modern day Mexico as well. Today Aztec Indians can be seen weaving and selling all kinds of wares made in much the same fashion as ancient days. Actually little has changed from early times to our own present day markets in the United States. One only has to travel a short distance to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where markets are plentiful throughout the rural countryside. Farmers and craftsmen display vegetables and fruits, along with brightly colored hand-made crafts. Larger markets contain buildings with rows of booths exhibiting crafts and foods from the local area. *Saturday Market*, written by Patricia Grossman is a beautiful story about a typical Mexican market. The children will discover through pictures and text that getting ready for the market is hard work. They also find out about many of the foods and goods that are sold in the local markets of Mexico.

Although the Spaniards defeated the Aztec in 1521 as a nation, we continue to see Aztec influence in the arts,



sciences and culture of Mexico and the world. We will discuss these influences in class, and try to understand why culture cannot be stamped out even though a nation is defeated. Why do you think we see Aztec influence in our world today? Why is it important to pass memories and heirlooms unto succeeding generations? Does our way of life and the way we do things as a family make us special?

Friday will help close this lesson by showing several craft items from his Mexico box that show influences from early ancient times. These will include pottery, dolls, and tapestry. He will also help the children with their “quick write” evaluation.

#### Week Two – Days One and Two

We want to visit a local Mexican restaurant. On The Boarder (a local restaurant) will allow us to make our own tocos and give us a tour of their facility.

In addition to our visit to a restaurant, we want to try quesadillas in our classroom. Quesadillas (tortillas with cheese) are like little Mexican pizzas. Cheese is spread over a warm tortilla and baked until melted. Then toppings are added such as tomatoes, onion, pitted olives, peppers, etc.

Today, tortillas are eaten all over the world, and in our own country they can be found in most local supermarkets.

#### Week Two – Day Three

Mexico is well known for its many wall paintings and murals depicting stories from both the past and present. Mural paintings and carvings were especially popular among the ancient Maya and Aztec Indians. After reviewing the information on ancient Mexico, we will make our own mural showing scenes from Mexico’s heritage.

#### ***Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico***

Although written more than thirty years ago, this delightful book gives us beautiful insight into a family tradition still carried on today throughout Mexico. Ceci, a kindergarten student experiences her first posadas – a special Christmas party. Her mother takes her to the colorful market where all of the pi-atas become alive within the little girl’s imagination and want Ceci to pick them. But it is the big star that captures the girl’s heart and becomes Ceci’s pi-ata for the Christmas party.

## Week Two – Days Four and Five

To the delight of the children, Friday pulls out a pi-ata from his Mexico box today and then discovers the book, *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico*. As we read this book and share in the emotions with Ceci as she becomes sad because her beautiful star pi-ata was broken, we wonder if we dare try our hand at making our own. Phyllis Shalant gives step-by-step directions for making a star pi-ata in her book, *Look What we've Brought You From Mexico*. Of Course, after we make our pi-ata, we march through the hallways of our school, knocking on nine doors. At the first eight doors, we are turned away just like the story of Mary and Joseph's search for an inn where the birth of Jesus took place around 2,000 years ago. Posada in Spanish means inn and the procession is called posadas. At the ninth door, it is opened and the fiesta begins. Songs, food and dancing become a part of our celebration. Now it is time for the pi-ata game and collecting our treasures inside.

Aztec influence blends into the colorful fiestas – before the Indians went into war, they would use colorful paint and brightly colored feathers to adorn themselves, and participate in a celebration surrounding the preparation for battle. Bright colors are used in all of the Mexican fiestas today. Many Indian groups still adorn themselves with brightly colored feathers also. We will try our hand at painting these warriors – using watercolor to recreate a scene of preparation for war.

Christmas in Mexico is another book filled with colorful pictures and ideas for making crafts that will be used as a reference book and placed in our resource center for the children to take to their seats and enjoy.

### ***The Little Red Ant and the Great Big Crumb***

The little red ant in Chirley Climo's book finds a crumb cake. The crumb cake is very tasty and sweet, and it is big enough to last all winter. But the ant is not strong enough to carry it back to her home. Maybe the lizard, spider or coyote are strong enough. As she is going from one to another and hears their excuses, she discovers that she is strong enough and carries the crumb cake to her anthill.

## Week Three – Day One

Friday finds this delightful Mexican fable in his box along with an ear of corn. There are pictures of corn stalks in the book. After reading the story, he talks to the children about planting corn and how the corn grows on stalks.

Friday will help the children get started on their story mapping. The children will fill in a chart giving the title,

setting, characters, problem in the story and the solution to the problem.

This will be a good time to introduce our ant project in class. We will look for information about ant colonies on the internet and in books at our library media center. Then we will set up an ant farm in class and watch the ants form tunnels and bring food into their colony.

### ***The Hummingbirds' Gift***

The story takes place a long time ago when a farmer named Isidro and his wife, Consuelo, lived in the village of Tzintzuntzan. The town is famous for flowers that attract hundred of hummingbirds. But one year there isn't any rain. Therefore, there isn't any nectar from the flowers for the hummingbirds and no wheat on Isidro's farm. Consuelo thinks of a plan to save the hummingbirds by mixing sugar into water and filling clay pots. In turn the hummingbirds think of a plan to help save Consuelo's family. They gather straw and begin to weave tiny figures so that Consuelo can sell them and earn money for her family.

### Week Three - Day Two

After Friday helps to read the story, he tells the children that Tzintzuntzan was the capital of a once powerful Tarascan empire. Today it is a small village near the ruins of the yacatas. These pre-Columbian pyramids were destroyed by the Spanish around 1520. At that time, the Spanish introduced wheat and the Tarascan Indians used straw to weave figures that could be used for various holidays.

We will discuss questions in class - Why was it important to preserve the weaving? Is it important to preserve our culture? How do we preserve our culture?

The book contains many brightly colored pictures of flowers and village life. Mexicans paint brightly colored flowers and birds onto bark and sell them to tourists. Friday's box will contain a sample for the children to enjoy. We will try our hand at painting colorful flowers and birds onto brown wrapping paper. We will crumple our paper to resemble the bark used in Mexico.

Story mapping will be used again as Friday helps the children prepare for a final evaluation of this lesson.

## ***Today is the Day***

Yesenia's father is due home today. He's been up north looking for work so he can support his family. Yesenia looks for her father as each bus stops on the highway. But Papa never gets off the bus. Yesenia's big sister, Yara doesn't believe that he is ever coming back. As the last bus speeds past, the family experiences feelings of total despair. However, after walking only a short distance, a car races past them, then screeches to a stop. Papa jumps out and the family reunites.

Today is the Day is found in Friday's Mexico box and read in class. Many of the children can identify with the girls in the story. There are times that parents have to go long distances to find work or travel within their jobs. Did you ever feel like Yara that mother or father would not return? How does it feel? How does one feel when parents return? Papa brought Yesenia a pair of shoes? Why were these important to her? Do your parents ever bring things home to you from their travels? How do you feel? Why?

We will look at the pictures in the book and see that many of the illustrations resemble the descriptions of the ancient Mayan way of life. For example, mother is making a tortilla on the outside veranda. The drawings depict houses with thatched roofs. Mother carries the baby on her back, and bathes the children in basins.

Today our "quick write" will be a written story telling of an event when our parents came home from an extended leave.

Today is the Day will be performed by our drama group, and can be found in the appendix section of the unit.

## ***The Twenty-Five Mixtec Cats***

Gollub presents an original story based on folklore from Oaxaca, a mountain village south of Acapulco. The local healer of the village returns from market with a litter of kittens. No one in the village has seen a cat and begin to imagine wild things about them. Some believe that the cats will eat all of the cows. Others believe that they will set fire to the fields. The neighbors demand that the healer get rid of the cats. However, the cats help to break an evil spell in the village and win the hearts of the villagers.

## Week Three - Day Three

Friday will help the children find the village of Oaxaca on a Mexican map. He will explain to the children that many folklore stories originated in Mexico just as we have many fairy tales and folklore stories from Europe (e.g. Cinderella) and Africa (e.g. Anansy the Spider.)

After the children have listened to the story, they will complete their final story mapping for their evaluation. In addition, they will fill in their own smiley face rubric. This is an assessment where the children will color in a face that shows how well they have done. For example, "terrific," "good," or "I can do better."

## Lesson One

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Book: ***The Spirit of the Maya: A Boy Explores His People's Mysterious Past***

Objectives: Students will...

- listen to a story read to them by Friday, (a classroom puppet.)
- interact in a group by telling stories about their families.

Procedures:

1. Friday will assist in reading *The Spirit of the Maya: A Boy Explores His*

*People's Mysterious past.*

2. Questions for discussion: Why do you think Kin preferred Spanish instead of the Mayan language. Do you think people living in the United States today who can speak both Spanish and English prefer English? Why? Why does Kin prefer soccer instead of making clay figures? Do you think it would have anything to do with the fact that soccer is a popular national sport in Mexico? Would that make Kin more popular with his classmates if he chose soccer? Why?

3. Homework assignment: The students will interview a family member, writing something interesting from their past.

## Lesson Two

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Book: ***Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico***

Objectives: Students will...

- listen to the story read by Friday.
- interact in a group with song and dance.
- give an illustrated response by drawing and painting.

Procedures:

1. Puppet Friday will assist in reading the story, *Nine Days to Christmas: A Story of Mexico*.
2. The students will make a pi-ata following the instructions in the book, *Look What We've Brought You From Mexico*.
3. The children will participate in a Posadas by marching through the hallway, knocking on nine doors. At the first eight doors we are turned away. The ninth door is opened, and the fiesta begins with songs, food and dancing.
4. The children will use watercolor to illustrate the Aztec warriors preparing for war.

## Lesson Three

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Book: ***The Little Red Ant and the Great Big Crumb***

Objectives: Students will...

- listen to a tale read to them by Friday.
- give a written response with a story may.
- research information from the Internet about ant colonies.

Procedures:

1. Friday will assist in reading the book, *The Little Red ant and the Great Big Crumb*.
2. Friday will assist in giving information about planting corn and how it grows.
3. Students will complete a story map including the characters, setting, a problem from the story, and the solution.
4. Students will research information from the Internet about ant colonies, and set up an ant farm in the classroom.

## Appendix

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### After School Program

The After School Program meets for approximately six to eight weeks, two days a week for an hour session. Children may sign up for this program on a voluntary basis with their parent's permission. They are chosen on a first come basis until enrollment reaches approximately fifteen children.

First term's children will study the art of puppetry. They will make their own puppet creations, study three falsetto voices suitable for puppets, write their poems, (one modeled after Jose Juan Tablada's poem, "The Monkey"), and recite their poetry with their puppets.

Second term's children will study the art of acting on stage, and rehearse a play suitable for production on stage.

*Script - Adapted from **Today is the Day** by Nancy Riecken*

(Mexican music plays softly in the background.)

#### **Scene I**

Narrator: Today is the day for Yesenia's father to come home. Yesenia's father had gone up north to find work so that he could bring money back for food, clothes, and hopefully shoes and books for school.

Yesenia: Get awake, Yara! Today is the day that Papa is supposed to come home!

Yara: Please be quiet Yesenia. I am tired and want to sleep.

Yesenia: Did you forget Yara? Today is the day! Papa will be here any minute. (Yesenia runs outside scattering the chicks in the yard. Children hold signs with chickens and chicks on them, and move around Yesenia.)

The scene ends with Yesenia looking out into the audience and calling: Papa, I'll meet you at the bus stop!

#### **Scene II**

Narrator: Yesenia and her family have breakfast together. Then they begin their daily chores.

Mama: Breakfast is ready girls! Yesenia and Yara come onto the stage and sit with their mama at the table.

Yesenia: Mama when will Papa arrive? Do you know what bus he will come on? May I go to meet...

Yara: Yesenia, you know that Papa is not coming back!

Mama: Of course, Papa is coming back, Yara. Don't be a foolish girl. Eat your breakfast and stop talking such nonsense.

(The two girls frown at each other, and stop eating their breakfast.)

(A row of children line up on the stage as Yesenia and Yara carry a basket of clothes. They begin to hang them

on the line, i.e. the row of children.)

Yesenia: How could you say that Papa will not come home?

Yara: Yesenia, look around our village. Many men leave their families and never come back. Do you think that Papa is any different than them?

Yesenia: Yes, Papa loves us!

Yara: Oh, I want him to come back so much. But I am afraid.

### **Scene III**

Narrator: Yesenia ran down the road to the bus stop looking for Papa. She was determined to bring him home. However, the sun became hot, Yesenia was hungry. So she went home to Mama and Yara.

Mama: Where have you been Yesenia? You did not finish your work.

Yesenia: I've been waiting for Papa. Please Mama, let me go back and wait for Papa.

Yara: I've been working while you were playing!

Yesenia: Please, Mama!

Mama: All right, go on Yesenia. But you will be the one to sweep, wash and feed the animals tomorrow.

(Actors freeze. Yesenia goes to the edge of the stage and looks into the audience for Papa.)

Yesenia: (As a boy in a sombrero and a suitcase walks down the aisle. Yesenia becomes very excited, jumps up and down, and waves wildly.)

Peddler: I suppose you want to buy something from me today. (Opens up his suitcase.) How can I help you today?

Yesenia: I'm...I'm...sorry, I thought you were my Papa.

Peddler: Children! Get out of my way. I have customers to see, today.

### **Scene IV**

Narrator: Yesenia runs home to her mother who is waiting for her in the doorway. There is one last bus into the village. Mother decides to take the family to see if Papa is on that bus. By this time it is dark. The bus has come and gone. Papa is not on the bus.

Suddenly a car comes speeding down the road, loud music is blaring from the inside. And then...Papa jumps out and runs toward them.

Papa: Hey, what are you all doing out here.

Mama: Is it really you Manuel?



(The family hugs and stands on stage. Mexican music plays in the background.)

Neighbors: Manuel Rodriguez is back. We are glad to see you. Welcome home Manuel.

Narrator: Papa told the family that he had enough money for awhile. Yesenia was trying to imagine walking to school in her new shoes. But better than the new shoes was having her Papa home.

## Children's Bibliography

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book for children with brightly colored pictures giving background

information about the Aztec resistance to the Spaniards and its influence

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A beautiful reference book with pictures for young children.

Olawsky, Lynn Ainsworth. *Colors of Mexico*. New York: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.,

The book uses different colors to talk about the history and culture of

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A beautiful story about a family who waits for their Papa to come home

from working up north.

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The book contains beautiful colored pictures and a wealth of information about

Christmas traditions in Mexico. The book contains recipes for Mexican food,

directions for making ornaments and a star pi-ata.

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Julian Messner, 1992. This book illustrated in black and white

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and other cultural activities about Mexico.

## **Teacher's Bibliography**

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resource book about the early Mayan Indians with black and white pictures.

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Casagrande, Louis B. *Focus on Mexico: Modern Life in an Ancient Land*.

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life.

Gerez, Toni De, ed. 2-Rabbit, 7-Wind: Poems From Ancient Mexico. New York:

The Viking Press, 1971. Poems depicting life amongst the ancient Indians.

Strand, Mark, ed. New Poetry of Mexico. New York: Warwick Press, 1980.

A collection of poems written by Mexican poets and translated into English.

## Teacher Resources

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“Kids Explore Mexico” – The video shows a group of children exploring Aztec and Mayan ruins; joining a family for a Mexican meal; joining festive guitar players and dancers; discovering maps and Mexican treasures, etc. Contact: Encounter Video, Inc.

2580 N.W. Upshur

Portland, OR 97210

“Fun With character Voices” – The video gives examples of using various character voices with puppets. Contact:

One Way Street, Inc.

P.O. Box 2398

Littleton, CO 80161

(303) 790-1188

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