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## **The Counting Train: Windows to Mexico**

Curriculum Unit 94.02.10  
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In this paper I would like to explore ways in which poetry can be integrated into a unit helping us to see pictures of places and people in Mexico. Using poetry as a vehicle, I want the children to discover the rich cultural diversity found in Mexico's past and present. Ancient civilizations played a major role in shaping the history of the past and blending into present social life and customs. From these ancient civilizations a rich array of poetry developed which today can help us recreate the lives of these ancient people.

I would like to emphasize the active participation of my children in order to see through "windows" to Mexico. The unit will be composed of ten lessons revolving around the Spanish words for counting from one to ten. Each lesson will give an overview of a theme or subject that is being discussed along with an introduction to a poem pertaining to the lesson's theme. In addition to reading and illustrating poetry, lessons will contain activities such as games, sampling food, compiling student books, etc., all pertaining to each lesson's theme.

My unit will also indicate poetry from past and present authors that is suitable for integration into a unit about Mexico. More specifically, the unit would consist of a collection of poetry and activities suitable for children in grades kindergarten through third grade. Along with reading and the language arts, the lesson plans will cover curriculum areas such as math, social studies, science, music and art.

I teach first grade in a self-contained classroom at L. W. Beecher School. My classroom contains children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with varying abilities in the six to eight year old age range. Focused activities will be implemented in the classroom throughout a two week period. A culminating activity will follow in which the children share their finished works on a special school-wide "International Fiesta Day."

Introduction: Let's take a spellbinding journey through Mexico from north to south. Hop on our little "Counting Train" and choose a seat next to the window. Press your face tightly against the window and watch the countryside dazzle and change before your eyes. Watch as hundreds of miles of lovely seacoast bask in year-round warmth. Don't forget to see the tiny fishing villages dotted along our path. Now our train climbs mountains to green lands where spring seems to never end. Watch closely as we ascend to peaks covered with snow. Descending down the mountain and heading inland brings us to rocky deserts. Finally our trip ends in the south with thick, tropical jungle.

Did you enjoy your journey? I heard someone say that it was too short, that you really did not have time to form a clear picture or explore the contrast and diversity that one finds in Mexico. Next time our "Counting Train" will stop along the way and we will explore the exciting history of ancient civilizations, learn about an

ancient legend that helped to form the national emblem, participate in a colorful Christmas fiesta, and taste some of the interesting Mexican foods.

Mexico, rich in culture, geography and history, is like a timeless train traveling across many yesterdays. Traveling throughout this country that stretches for a thousand miles, one soon becomes acutely aware that this is a large, rich and complicated country, filled with much diversity. 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. Yesterdays still bring brightly colored fiestas to the streets containing half Christian and half pagan activities and practices. Sometimes, Mexican culture can only be viewed as a contradiction. 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.

My own excitement and love for this country and its people became apparent when I, along with my family, took a trip to Mexico several years ago. Our first stop was a few days in Mexico City where we helped a missionary deliver lunches and give children's programs on the sidewalks of slum areas. The vastness of the city (e.g., one has to travel a day's journey by car to go from one end of Mexico City to the other) and its contrasts were unbelievable. We found just as much contrast and diversity when we ventured into the Yucatan Peninsula of Cancun. There the vast empire of modern hotel buildings stood in sharp contrast to the thatched roofs and roaming pigs on the streets of Talum.

Objectives My overall objectives for the course of the unit are:

- To provide an interactive experience through the use of poetry in helping to create a picture of Mexico.
- Helping the children to expand their experience of and exposure to poetry and poets of the past and present.
- To increase the children's critical thinking skills in analyzing ideas given by the poets.
- Helping the children to improve in their oral reading skills through reading and memorization of poetry.
- Encouraging the development of self-assurance in reading and analyzing poetry in a group setting.
- To integrate poetry into the curriculum through the teaching of language arts and reading, math, social studies, science, music and art.

Strategies: I have chosen ten lessons which center around various aspects of the Mexican culture — — its history, people and way of life. The lessons will stress the interconnectedness of past and present. Poetry will be integrated into lessons helping us to understand and form a clearer picture of Mexico and its diverse

culture.

Each lesson title will contain a Spanish number beginning with number one and continuing to number ten. The lessons will be introduced on a daily basis with a time period of about forty-five to sixty minutes for each lesson, with the exception of lessons three and five, which will require an additional day. I anticipate the unit covering about a three week span of time.

The children will compile individual books which will contain brief written summaries related to each lesson, illustrated poetry sheets, and arts and crafts pertaining to the material studied in class. Story webs will be used extensively in helping us to write our stories. (See lesson plan section.) In addition to the written numbers in the children's books, the Spanish numbers will be written on chart paper and recited in class. By the end of the unit all of the children will be able to recite the Spanish numbers.

An Appendix is included at the end of the unit giving a brief summary of the background material that will be covered in class.

Most children entering first grade have a difficult time distinguishing between country, state and city. Therefore, we will take the effort and time necessary to insure that all children know about the location of their city, state and country before we proceed to study about the country of Mexico. After the children have assimilated this information, we will begin lesson one by locating Mexico on the globe and looking at its proximity in relation to where we live. One important thing for the children to understand is that the Rio Grande River separates most of Mexico from the United States. Also, that Mexico City is the largest city in the world and the capital of Mexico. We will compare its size to that of New York City and explain that whereas our president lives in Washington DC. the president of Mexico lives in Mexico City.

In his book *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, Beckett presents a poem written by Carlos Pellicer, "Prodigal" (177) which gives a description of Mexico - - palm groves, sparkling water, antelope, dancing girls, fruits and flowers. The poem will be read in class and the children will single out descriptive words pertaining to Mexico. A beautiful poem entitled, "Moonlight on the Rio Grande" written by Americo Paredes will be introduced to the class. Paredes compares the Rio Grande River with an aged peon (i.e., someone from the landless laboring class in Spanish America.) Just as an aged person is stooped and slow in movement so the Rio Grande is slow, bent and brown. Another simile compares the brightness of the moon shining upon the water to that of a round hat with little silver bells on it. (Paredes, *Between Two Worlds*, page 28)

Along with the introduction of the two poems, we will look at a large array of pictures depicting various aspects of Mexican culture and its environment. It will be interesting to contrast the beautiful shoreline with its sparkling emerald blue water to the colors of the Rio Grande. The children will draw and color their own impressions of Mexico as they begin to formulate a picture of this beautiful country.

The Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes and his conquest of the Aztec nation will be introduced in lesson two. This lesson will also tie into lesson three as we discover that the Mexican people are descendants of two ancestral backgrounds - - Spanish and Indian.

There is an Aztec poem entitled "The Weeping Spreads." This poem speaks about the Spaniards conquering the ancient Aztec city which is present day Mexico City. The poet gives a vivid picture of the Mexicans taking flight across the water as they flee their city. Descriptive words such as fleeing, smoke rising and haze spreading in the city will be discussed in class. (Bierhorst, *In The Trail Of The Wind*, page 147)

Three ancient civilizations helped to mold the life styles and influence the culture of present day Mexico. The Olmecs, Aztecs and Maya Indians will be introduced in lesson three. A brief background is given in the appendix paying special attention to the customs of the children in the homes of these ancient people. Little is known of the Olmecs, but there are many books written on the Aztecs and Maya Indians.

William Stark in his book, *My Song Is A Piece Of Jade* presents two poems (34-45) about children and their way of life in ancient Mexico. We will use these poems as a basis for our discussion about the social roles of boys and girls in ancient times and how they contrast to present day expectations. These two poems, "My Son" and "My daughter," give insight into the distinct tasks that were required of boys and girls as they were growing up in the home. For example, boys were admonished to cut wood, work the land, plant and gather food. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to sweep, spin, weave, embroider, help their brothers and cook food. Both were taught to respect their elders and each other, as well as their future companions. This is in contrast to our present politically-correct climate where social roles are not as clear-cut or do not have to be played by boys and girls.

An interesting ancient legend tells how an eagle holding a snake was chosen for the Mexican national emblem. (See appendix.) Lesson four will introduce the Mexican flag, its colors and the eagle affixed in the center. In addition to illustrating the flag, the children will contrast the flag of the United States with that of the Mexican flag.

A poem written by Americo Paredes entitled, "Ahi nomas" will be introduced as we pay special attention to descriptive lines about the eagle's nests and the eagle's scream. Paredes compares the height of the eagle nests to that of the Indian's search for his dream. For so long the Indians have been masked in bitterness and despair, but one must always search for that distant dream, with eyes raised upward to the heights where the eagles scream. (Paredes, *Between Two Worlds*, page 22)

In and out of class, one might suggest to the children to keep their eyes on their distant dreams. They too will find the road difficult, rocky and hard to travel as peer pressure and society make pressing demands. However, one must keep their eyes on their distant dreams and answer, "Ahi nomas," or "Just over there." It will help to keep one going on the rocky road of life if we can accept that our dreams are "just over there." Also, Paredes' poem will be used to lead a discussion about our own dreams. What are our dreams? How will we obtain them? Why did Paredes stress in his poem that people must always keep their eyes raised upward?

Lesson five will focus on an ancient Mexican poem in Gerez's book *2-Rabbit 7-Wind* (27) where we receive a glimpse into these ancient people's attire for war and the celebration surrounding the preparation for war. The author speaks about warriors dressing like copper and gold birds, green and black thrushes, and red parrots. They wore garlands of wild clover and flowers with tassels that looked like blood. We can see similarities in today's fiestas which are celebrated throughout the year in Mexico commemorating a national holiday or something of religious significance. They also feature bright colors, music and feasting.

After they have read the poem depicting the war garments, the children will be asked to use watercolor or tempera paint to recreate a scene on paper from the poem. It will be interesting to see if the children will be able to grasp the vivid color description given in the poem.

The children will enjoy their own fiesta in the classroom. We will read Marie Hall Ets' book "Nine Days To Christmas." An art lesson will be presented in which the children will make their own pinatas and stuff them with candy. In addition, we will enjoy breaking a pinata in class.

Lesson six introduces the white-tailed deer, coyote, ocelot, fox, jaguar and mountain lion. Many of these animals are found in the rain forests and mountains of Mexico. In addition to reading the book, *Who Is The Beast*, we will study two Haiku poems, "The Toads" and "The Monkey" written by Jose Juan Tablada. (Strand, *New Poetry Of Mexico*, pages 207 and 209) These poems will introduce us to two additional animals found in Mexico.

In the poem "The Toads," Tablada describes toads as chunks of mud that hop down an unlighted path. Perhaps the unlighted path is in the heart of the rainforest where little light penetrates the floor of the jungle. But suppose the author had said chunks of chocolate instead of mud? I wonder what path the toad might have used then. After presenting the poem in class, we will write a class poem followed by the children writing their own individual poems. I have found while writing a class poem instinctively children come up with scores of ideas that stimulate and helps the child who finds it rather difficult to come up with an idea for a writing assignment. The children will use similes other than chunks of mud and describe a path for their toads.

Tablada's poem, "The Monkey" describes a little monkey "throwing a look" and wanting to "say something." However, the monkey can't think what he wanted to say. After reading the poem, the children will guess what the monkey might be thinking.

Recreational sports are popular in Mexico. Soccer seems to be the most popular with bullfighting attracting the largest crowds. In lesson seven, we will look at pictures pertaining to bullfights and note that this sport was introduced by the Spaniards. We will also talk about the vaquero (i.e., a ranch hand or cowboy) and how almost every aspect of the cowboy's craft had its roots in Mexico. A poem from a scene in the movie, "Giant," written by Tino Villanueva vividly depicts life on a ranch. (Villanueva, *Scene From the Movie Giant*, page 21) Although the setting takes place on a Texas ranch, the poem gives a beautiful description of a cowboy, (i.e., Old man Polo, head vaquero on Rock Hudson's Reata Ranch) his dress and his chores while rounding up the cattle on the open range. The Mexicans brought horses, cows and music across the Rio Grande. That music also brought us what we call cowboy culture. Pictures from a video "The Real American Cowboy" written and presented by Roger Kennedy will be used to contrast scenes from a Mexican rodeo to that of a rodeo where we will see African Americans. After the civil war, newly freed slaves joined American Americans who had been working on cattle ranches in the west all along.

Mexicans are very good at Long distance running and Olympic-style "walking". Our lesson will culminate by forming teams and participating in walking relay races.

Many popular foods that we eat today originated in Mexico. Lesson eight will center on eight of these foods, some dating back to ancient civilizations. Corn was a staple food product during ancient times, and today many corn dishes are prepared just as they always were.

The ancient Indians believed that life came from corn. In fact, they felt that just as a seed of corn dies and life forms from it, so it is very honorable to give one's life during a sacrifice or war with one's enemies. They believed that death in this manner assured instant passage into heaven. Therefore, they believed that corn, embodying this code of restorative honor, was very sacred. One ancient poem, "Ear of Corn," speaks about corn being our flesh and bones. The poem also presents a simile likening corn to a precious jade bracelet. The jade stone on the bracelet becomes a focal point and everything else on the bracelet surrounds it. So corn becomes the center of life and everything pertaining to life surrounds the seed of corn. (Gerez, *2-Rabbit 7-Wind*, page 39)

Another Aztec poem, "The Song Of A Dream," speaks about corn giving new life in spring and refreshment

when ripened (Bierhorst, In The Trail Of The Wind, page 127). Yet another poem from ancient times speaks about the bounty of the crops. A poem written in My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (24) speaks of yellow pumpkins round and heavy, ears of corn so big that a man could carry only one, and amaranth leaves (herb or flower leaves) so big you could climb on them. Tall tales are familiar with many poets and storytellers from various cultures. I will ask the children why they think poets and storytellers like to exaggerate.

The poems mentioned above will be read and discussed in class. In addition, the class will enjoy a Mexican meal along with Mexican music. As the children enjoy their Mexican meal, we will read a short poem written by Leroy V. Quintana, "Hot Chile." In his poem Quintana finds a humorous outlet from the years of suffering amongst the Chicanos. He says that Chicanos are so used to their suffering that they can even enjoy it as when eating hot chile. (Daydi - Tolson, Five Poets of Aztlan, page 122)

Lesson nine will introduce nine natural resources found in Mexico today. In addition to recording these in our daily book of stories, we will look at some Mexican crafts. We will discover that some of the crafts (e.g., pottery, weaving, paintings, jewelry, clothing, etc.) date back to ancient days. Many of the carvings and paintings on pottery, jewelry or weaving can be found on the ancient sculptures in the ancient ruins of Mexico.

A poem written by Ramon Lopez Velarde, entitled, "My Cousin Agatha" will be read and discussed in class. Velarde gives a vivid description of his cousin Agatha coming to his house and sitting in the corridor clicking her knitting needles. One can almost hear the echoing of the knitting needles which Velarde says gave him the chills. The art of weaving has been handed down from generation to generation since ancient times. Like Cousin Agatha sitting in the corridor and knitting, one can see Mexicans sitting at the markets today knitting and weaving many beautiful crafts. (Strand, New Poetry of Mexico, page 185)

Mexico has many beautiful birds. In fact, there are as many as 1,000 different species of birds that one can find in Mexico. Lesson ten will center around two ancient poems that tell of bright colored birds. One such poem recorded in My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (20) speaks about birds that were rare and beautiful, birds with feathers of green and yellow and breasts of fire color. Another ancient Aztec poem, "Songs of Birds" speaks about the birds coming during the rains and singing among the flowers. (Bierhorst, In The Trail Of The Wind, page 111)

The Mexican Indians have enjoyed painting these beautiful birds for centuries. They used bark from the trees and dyes from herbs to make their paintings. Even today one can find beautiful paintings on woven plaques and barks in the market places. In addition to discussing the poems in class, the children will paint pictures of birds on brown crumpled wrapping paper resembling the bark of ancient times.

A school-wide "International Fiesta Day" will culminate our study of Mexico. On this day our class will display their books and crafts made during our study of Mexico. Our classroom will be decorated with Mexican crafts, paper flowers and streamers. Mexican music will play in the background as the children from other classes are invited to our room to sample Mexican food.

Lesson Three

*Poems:*

"My Son" and "My Daughter"

*Summary:*

The poems speak about the social roles of boys and girls in the home during ancient times. Boys were expected to cut wood, work the land, plant and harvest the food. Girls were expected to keep the home clean, spin, weave, embroider, help their brothers and cook the food that was gathered. They were both encouraged to respect the sick, poor and elderly.

*Vocabulary:*

“My Son” - - - ancestors; pocholtl (A large tree.); ahuehuatl (A tree that grows near the rivers and is enormous.); insult, neglect.

“My Daughter” - - - idleness; embroider; noble; turquoise.

*Procedure:*

1. Begin by giving a summary of three ancient civilizations (i.e. Olmecs, Mayas and Aztecs.) Along with the summary show pictures depicting people and their customs from ancient days as well as the present.
2. Read and discuss the poems, “My Son” and “My Daughter.” Ask questions such as: Who does the father tell the son to respect? How does he tell his son to respect them? How does the father tell his son to work? Why? Why does the mother tell her daughter that she is like fine stones? How does the mother tell her daughter to treat her husband?”
3. Go over the vocabulary words with the children.
4. Create a story web on chart paper showing the social roles of boys girls from ancient times. (figure available in print form)
5. The children will write a story using the story webs created in class.
6. The children will illustrate their poetry sheet and attach the poem and story to their book which they are making in class.

Lesson Five

*Poem:*

An ancient poem from Gerez’s book 2-Rabbit 7 Wind (27)

*Summary:*

The author speaks about warriors preparing for war. In their preparation they are dressing like copper and gold birds, green and wild clover and flowers with tassels of blood.



*Vocabulary:*

thrushes; garlands; sacred; tassels.

*Procedure:*

1. Begin by giving a summary of Mexican fiestas. Show pictures and read Ariella Ets' book, *Nine Days to Christmas*. The book is about Christmas posadas (parties) in Mexico. It depicts the preparation for the posadas, including shopping at an old Mexican market. Also, it gives a vivid description of a procession in the village streets along with breaking a pinata.
2. Read the ancient poem from Gerez's book and contrast the ancient preparation for war with the brightly colored costumes worn in today's fiestas.
3. Show pictures from a book depicting colorful costumes worn at fiestas. In the book, *Cultures Of The World: Mexico*, (page 92) there is a beautiful example of a colorful dance. The costumes contain an array of colorful feathers.
4. Children will give their own impressions on paper using watercolor or tempera paint to illustrate the brightly colored costumes described in the poem.
5. Plan an art lesson where the children make their own paper pinatas and stuff them with candy. (figure available in print form)
6. Plan a party with the breaking of a pinata.

Lesson Eight

*Poems:*

"Ear of Corn", "The Song Of A Dream"; a poem written in *My Song Is A Piece Of Jade*, (24); and, "Hot Chile"

*Vocabulary:*

"Ear Of Corn" - - crystal "The Song Of A Dream" - - ripened, refreshment "My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (24) - - metlatl, ( a three- legged grindstone on which the women grind corn and chocolate), amaranth leaves, (flowers or herbs); "Hot Chile" - - Chicanos, suffer

*Procedure:*

- 1 Give a summary of popular foods found in Mexico today. Refer to the appendix section for background information.
2. Read and discuss the four poems in class. Ask questions such as: "Ear of Corn" - - Why did the



poet refer to corn as precious stones? Why did he call the corn our flesh and bones?; "The Song Of A Dream" What does the corn do in the spring? What does the poet mean when he says the corn gives us refreshment?; A poem in the book My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (24) - - How heavy were the pumpkins? How big was the corn? What colors were the ears of corn?; "Hot Chile" - - Why does the poet say hot chile is like suffering?

3. The children will write a summary, illustrate their poetry sheets and attach them to their books.
4. Prepare a Mexican dinner and serve in class. Play Mexican music while dinner is being served.
5. Dinner will be served restaurant style. The children will design and make menus. They will order from their menus, add the prices together, and tell how they arrived at the total cost. Figure available in print form

## Lesson Ten

### *Poems:*

A poem from My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (20); "Songs of Birds"

### *Vocabulary:*

My Song Is A Piece Of Jade (20) - - Tollan, (A place called Tollan is Tula today. It is located in the high central plain of Mexico, north of Mexico City) "Songs Of Birds" - - foams, intoxicated.

### *Summary:*

The poems speak about birds that are rare and beautiful with colors.

### *Procedure:*

1. Read and discuss the poems in class. Begin by giving a brief summary found in the appendix section. Show pictures of birds from paintings or crafts from Mexico. Ask questions such as: My Song Is a Piece of Jade (20)- - What colors were the birds? What color do you think the poet was referring to when he said the birds had breasts of fire?; "Songs Of Birds" - - What season do you think the poet was referring to in the poem? When do the birds come?
2. The children will write a summary, illustrate their poetry sheets and attach them to their books.
3. Plan an art lesson. Show bark with paintings of birds. Have the children paint pictures of birds on crumpled brown wrapping paper resembling the ark of ancient times.

(figure available in print form) Appendix - “Background Information”

### *UNO (one)*

Mexico is the one country in Latin America that shares its northern border with the United States. The Rio Grande River separates most of Mexico with its northern neighbor. Most of Mexico has mountainous terrain. A sleeping snow-capped volcano called Popocatepet is near Mexico city. Most of the northeastern part of Mexico is desert land. The southern part contains lush tropical forests.

Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. It is the largest city in the world. The city occupies a valley that is surrounded by mountains. Mexico City was built on the ruins of an ancient civilization. It contains a large central square where the National Palace is located. The National Palace is the home of the present day president.

### *DOS (two)*

The Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes came to Mexico in 1519 along with his 700 soldiers. For two years he fought the Aztec nation. Cortes finally defeated the Indians and set up his own government in what is now Mexico City.

Most Mexicans today are the descendants of two peoples — Spanish and Indian. Therefore, they are called mestizos (mes-TEEZ-ohs) which means they are a people of mixed blood. In other words, they have inherited the customs and traditions of two very different cultures and civilizations.

### *TRES (three)*

Three ancient civilizations, Olmecs, Aztecs and Maya Indians helped to influence the culture and customs of many Mexican people today.

#### **1) The Olmec**

The Olmecs are known as the mother culture who gave birth to the great Indian civilizations that later built large and splendid cities. They are best known for their large stone sculptures. They discovered the concept of our numeral zero and worked on an elaborate calendar system. Their development began in the southern part of Mexico around the year 2,000 B.C. and was succeeded by the Mayan civilization.

#### **2) The Maya**

The Mayan civilization is known for its magnificent cities with elaborate temples and carvings. The Maya Indians were chiefly an agricultural people whose chief crop and primary food staple was corn. The Maya farmers were known as the common people and were responsible for supporting the minority population which consisted of the noble clergy. The agriculture land surrounded the ceremonial centers where the priests lived, conducted religious ceremonies and governed the people. Another Mayan group was known as the craftsmen. They were responsible for serving the nobility, building their houses and making their clothes.

The Mayan Indians worshipped many gods. They sacrificed birds and small animals to their nature gods. Human sacrifices and cannibalism were also a vital part of their religious ceremonies.

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. If a baby was born with crossed eyes it was felt that the baby was blessed by the gods. 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. Although these practices seem very harsh to us today, the Mayan parents felt that they were making their babies beautiful. (McKissack, *The Maya*, pages 22-24.)

Mayan parents taught their children at home. The children of the nobility were the only ones who received a formal education. The Mayans excelled in art, architecture, mathematics and the measurement of time.

A Mayan house contained one room made of four stucco walls and a thatched roof. Today many Mayan Indians live in this same type of dwelling.

### **3) The Aztec**

The Aztec Indians called themselves Mexica (me-SHEE-ka). The Aztec name is shared by the civilizations of several Indian groups who had similar language and customs.

By 1500 the Aztec Indian civilization stretched across central Mexico. Though cruel by nature, the Aztec nation became a great one. They practiced human sacrifices in their religious worship and enforced strict upbringing.

If a boy was lazy or misbehaved he was punished by being pricked by cactus spines, beaten or held over hot coals. In fact children at a very young age were expected to help with chores around the house. Girls had to get up by dawn and spend the day doing housework, including sweeping the street outside the house. Boys were taught how to handle a canoe, build a fire and catch fish. Royal children were very unhappy. They did not see their parents unless they were called into the royal court. If they raised their eyes from the ground, they were punished severely. (Berdan, *The Aztecs*, page 25.)

Boys and girls attended different schools. They were taught subjects useful to them such as being a warrior and making a living. Music, singing and dancing were important subjects in school because they were important in religious worship. (Berdan, *The Aztecs*, page 28.)

Bright colors were enjoyed by the Aztecs. Girls were taught how to dress and wear make-up. Along with face paint, the teeth were also painted.

The Aztecs worshipped many gods. They were not afraid of death. They felt the most honorable way to die was by sacrifice or in a battle. This kind of death gave them instant entrance into Paradise.

Most Aztec Indians made a living by farming. However, there were other occupations including craftsmen, fishermen, scribes, government officials and priests.

Despite many centuries of foreign rule, the Aztec Indians have kept their sense of beauty and pride in their craftsmanship. "In many respects the life in present-day Aztecan villages is not very different from the life in the Aztec Empire. The homes are still crowded together in a village some distance from the out-lying fields. These are still one-room houses with simple fireplaces for cooking indoors and for warmth in cool weather." (Bleeker, *The Aztec: Indians of Mexico*, page 136.)

### *CUATRO (four)*

The Mexican flag consisting of vertical stripes of equal width contains the colors green, white and red along with a yellow eagle in the center of the white portion. The color white stands for religion, green for independence and red for union.

An ancient legend tells how a group of Aztec Indians were looking for a better place to live. Their chief god told them to look for a cactus growing from a stone. After wandering into a valley in central Mexico they came across an eagle perched on top of a cactus growing from a stone. The eagle was holding a snake in his beak. The Aztecs were sure that this was the place that they were to settle. Today that place is Mexico City. The national emblem of Mexico today is an eagle perched on top of a cactus holding a snake in its beak.(Beck, The Aztecs, page 10.)

#### *CINCO (five)*

Fiestas are a time of excitement and celebration. They commemorate a national holiday or something of religious significance for the local village. Fiestas usually include five important events such as a church mass, music and dancing, fireworks, feasting and a special display of horsemanship.

One of the most colorful of all the Mexican fiestas is the celebration of Christmas. The Christmas celebration begins on December 16 and lasts until Christmas Eve. The celebration begins with families setting up a nativity scene in their homes. Posada parties are held almost every evening by Mexican families. Posada means inn or night lodging. Costumed singers parade through the village streets dramatizing the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem and seeking shelter. After being turned away from several homes, the host family invites them in, and there they bow and pray before the nativity scene. The highlight of the posada party is the breaking of the pinata.

#### *SEIS (six)*

Many wild animals are found in the mountains and deserts of Mexico. Six animals that are hunted for game are white-tailed deer, coyote, ocelot, fox, jaguar and mountain lion.

#### *SIETE (seven)*

Seven recreational sports that are popular in Mexico are soccer, baseball, football, basketball, bullfights, jai alai and the rodeo.

Soccer is the most popular of all sports with bullfighting attracting the largest crowds.

#### *OCHO (eight)*

Eight popular foods that we eat today actually originated in Mexico. Caraco, a seed from which chocolate is made was harvested by Mexican Indians hundreds of years ago. Other popular foods given to us by Mexico include turkeys, corn (maize), beans, tomatoes, chili peppers, peanuts and vanilla flavoring.

As it was for hundreds of years, corn still remains the most popular and important food item in Mexico. A thin, flat pancake called the corn tortilla accompanies most Mexican meals today. It can be toasted, fried, rolled and stuffed with meats and vegetables or topped with all sorts of sauces.

When Mexican cooks shop for meats, fruits and vegetables they usually go to an open-air market. The shoppers bargain over prices and fill their bags from a large selection of neatly piled vegetables and fruits.

#### *NUEVE (nine)*

Nine natural resources — oil, coal, sulfur, magnesium, silver, gold, zinc, copper and lead — abound in Mexico.

Mexico is the leading producer of silver in the world.

*DIAZ (ten)*

Mexico has the most dense population of birds in the world. Over 10 times 100 species of birds can be found in Mexico.

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