

---

History through Art: Mexico

Lesson Plan: Middle School Social Studies

Fulbright–Hays Group Projects Abroad Program 2006  
Project on the Performing Arts in Mexico

Rebecca Reynolds  
Liberty Hill Middle School  
Killeen ISD

---

**Purpose:**

Students will examine the cultural and economic changes that occur in Mexico after the conquest of the Spanish. Using this basic historical knowledge, students will examine how later artists in Mexico portray their history through their craft.

**Goals:**

- ❖ Identify the points that typify native Aztec culture.
- ❖ Evaluate the influence of Spanish culture on Mexico.
- ❖ In the final activity, students will compose their own artistic project in the style of Mexico to convey the historical information being presented.

**Sequence of Activities:**

- ❖ The opening activity has students compare geographic maps of Mexico. Students compare ancient cultures maps to current maps of Mexico, specifically Mexico City. Using the maps, facilitate a class discussion on the influence of central Mexico's relative location to the native cultures and later Spanish culture.
- ❖ Direct teach—Students need a historical base for their later research. Students will evaluate the coming of the Aztec nation to central Mexico. Students will compare the reigns of Moctezuma I and Moctezuma II. Students will look at the economic, cultural and governmental aspects of the Aztecs just before the arrival of Cortes.
- ❖ Lifestyle—Students will view pictures and artifacts to gain a greater understanding of native life in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This activity will be presented in stations with comprehension questions.
- ❖ Primary Source Analysis—Students will analyze various primary source documents from natives and Cortes.
- ❖ Internet Research—Students will divide into groups to research various people and events related to the Spanish Conquest. The class will be divided into groups with varying perspectives: half of the students will research native views and the remainder will research the Spanish side. Students have to present their findings to their classmates in an effort to persuade them to take their point of view.

The second set of activities uses varying art forms to depict historical events. The following activities introduce the students to the arts as well as their history:

- ❖ Music—primarily mariachi. Students receive a brief history of mariachi. They will listen to various songs and read the lyrics.
- ❖ Dance—Students receive an overview of varying forms of dance in several regions.
- ❖ Murals—Students will receive a basic biography of the artists Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera. Students will view various murals of historical events by the aforementioned artists.
- ❖ The final assessment has students create their own art for the Spanish Conquest.

---

**Key Questions:**

- ❖ How did the region of Central Mexico (Mexico City) affect the evolution of the Aztec Empire?
- ❖ How did the Spanish Conquest change the culture of the native groups?
- ❖ How have artists kept their history alive through their craft?

**Standards:**

This unit addresses the following Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Grade 7 (History of Texas):

(1) History. The student understands traditional historical points of reference in Texas history:

(C) explain the significance of the following dates: 1519.

In 1519, Mexico, including Texas, became a base of Spanish explorers. Piñeda explored the Texas coast and created the first map of the region. Also, Hernan Cortes sailed from Cuba with hundreds of men on 11 ships toward Mexico to challenge the Aztecs at their capital, Tenochtitlán. Building on unrest among the Aztecs, Cortes allied with thousands of Indians in opposition to their leader, Moctezuma. Moctezuma finally drove the Spanish from the capital on June 30, 1520, but Cortes responded by seizing the city. The Aztecs surrendered August 13, 1521.

(2) History. The student understands how individuals, events, and issues prior to the Texas Revolution shaped the history of Texas.

(A) compare the cultures of Native Americans prior to European colonization;  
(B) identify important individuals, events, and issues related to European exploration and colonization of Texas, including the establishment of Catholic missions.

(8) Geography. The student uses geographic tools to collect, analyze, and interpret data.

(20) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the impact of scientific discoveries and technological innovations on the political, economic, and social development of Texas.

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas.

(22) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

---

(23) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings.

This lesson also follows the following National Curriculum and Content Area Standards for Social Studies for Middle Grades:

**Culture**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity, so that the learner can:

- a. explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;
- b. explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture;
- c. explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs;
- d. articulate the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups;
- e. compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns.

**People, Places, and Environments**

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places and environments, so that the learner can:

- a. elaborate mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size, and shape;
- b. create, interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs;
- c. use appropriate resources, data, sources, and geographic tools such as aerial photographs, satellite images, geographic information systems (GIS), map projections, and cartography to generate, manipulate, and interpret information such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps;
- d. estimate distance, calculate scale, and distinguish other geographic relationships such as population density and spatial distribution patterns;
- e. locate and describe varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, rain forests, deserts, and oceans, and explain their relationships within the ecosystem;
- f. describe physical system changes such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle and identify geographic patterns associated with them;
- g. describe how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like;
- h. examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes;

- 
- i. describe ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings;
  - j. observe and speculate about social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought;
  - k. propose, compare, and evaluate alternative uses of land and resources in communities, regions, nations, and the world.

---

## Lesson 1: Geography of Mexico

Middle school children need many opportunities to practice their basic geography skills. This lesson looks at geographic, physical and economic maps of both current and ancient Mexico.

**Requisite skills:** basic map reading, absolute location, relative location, physical features

**Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ use maps to identify the absolute and relative location of Mexico.
- ❖ examine the physical features that affect the cultures in the Central regions.
- ❖ analyze vegetation and economic resources available due to location.
- ❖ develop an understanding of the formation of Tenochtitlán and the use of a system of *chinampas*.

**Materials:** various maps identifying physical and economic features of both current and ancient Mexico; photos (included) of Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlán, and the canal system

**Lesson:**

The beginning of the lesson starts with a review of land features. Next, the students have a whole class discussion over the maps of Mexico. They should focus on the central Mexico–Mexico City area.

**Key questions:**

- 1) How does the mountainous terrain affect settlement in the area?
- 2) What natural resources would be available to live off of?
- 3) How does its relative location make this area the best choice for the development of the Aztec Empire?
- 4) How did the area influence the development of native cultures?

**Direct teach:**

Formation of Tenochtitlán—ancient city in the central valley of Mexico, built AD 1345. It is the capital of the Aztec Empire. Many historians believe the city had a population of between 200,000 and 300,000 people. The city was built on a marshy island in Lake Texcoco. It was a flourishing city connected with the mainland by three great causeways. Massive dams were constructed to prevent the salty floodwaters of the eastern lake from mingling with the freshwater surrounding the island city. The dams protected the unique system of lake agriculture known as *chinampas*. Canals within the *chinampas* served to

convey traffic throughout the city, including to and from the bustling, highly organized market at Tlatelolco.

**Pictures:**

Use pictures to give students a visual idea of what the area looked like.

**Comprehension closer:**

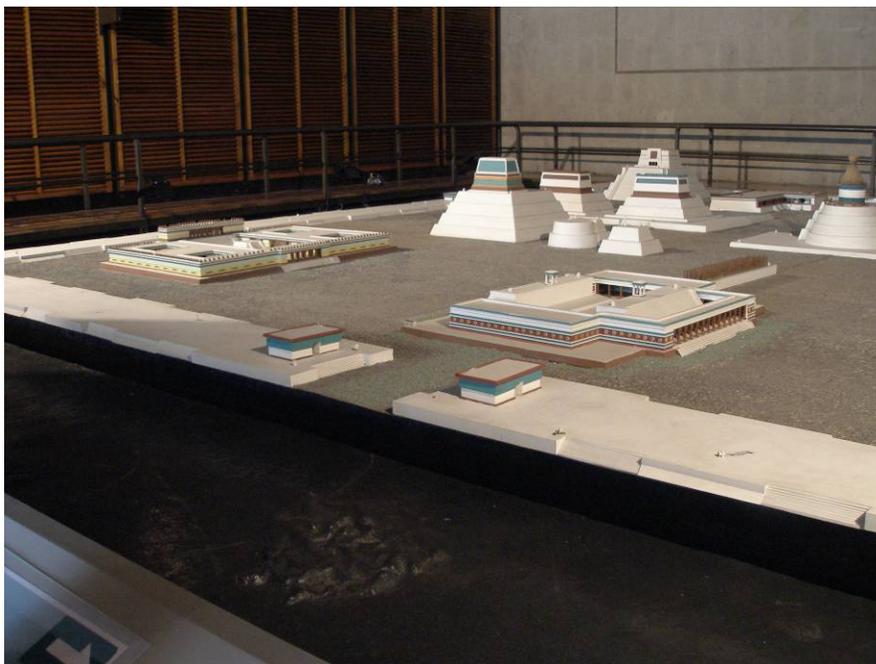
Answer individually or as a whole class:

- 1) How did the Aztecs change their surroundings to suit their needs?
  
- 2) What are the advantages and disadvantages to living in this manner in regards to invaders, natural disasters, or crop failures?
  
- 3) Predict how the Spanish will use this formation to their advantage/disadvantage during the invasion of the city.

## Pictures by Rebecca Reynolds



Model of the Templo Mayor Complex





Map of Tenochtitlán by L. Covarrubias, Painting from the Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City



Canals on the *chinampas*



Canals





Canal

---

## Lesson 2: Basic History of the Aztecs

The Aztec Empire was one of many native cultures that influenced the Mexico we see today. It is very important for the students to understand that the clash of native cultures and the Spanish can still be seen today in class segregation, economy, and government. The following lesson gives students a basic historical knowledge.

### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ identify Moctezuma I and Moctezuma II.
- ❖ examine the events during the reigns of MI and MII that create a great empire.
- ❖ create a timeline of events from MI to the appearance of Hernan Cortes.
- ❖ analyze the events that led to the capture of MII and the eventual devastation of the Aztecs by warfare and smallpox.

**Materials:** textbook, sentence strips, personal photos

### **Lesson:**

Jigsaw—Divide the basic text between various groups. Each group will present their section to the rest of the class.

Sentence strip timeline—Use sentence strips, like those for elementary handwriting practice, to create a timeline of major events that led to the eventual takeover of the Aztec Empire by Spanish Conquistadors.

Class discussion of pictures.

### **Key questions:**

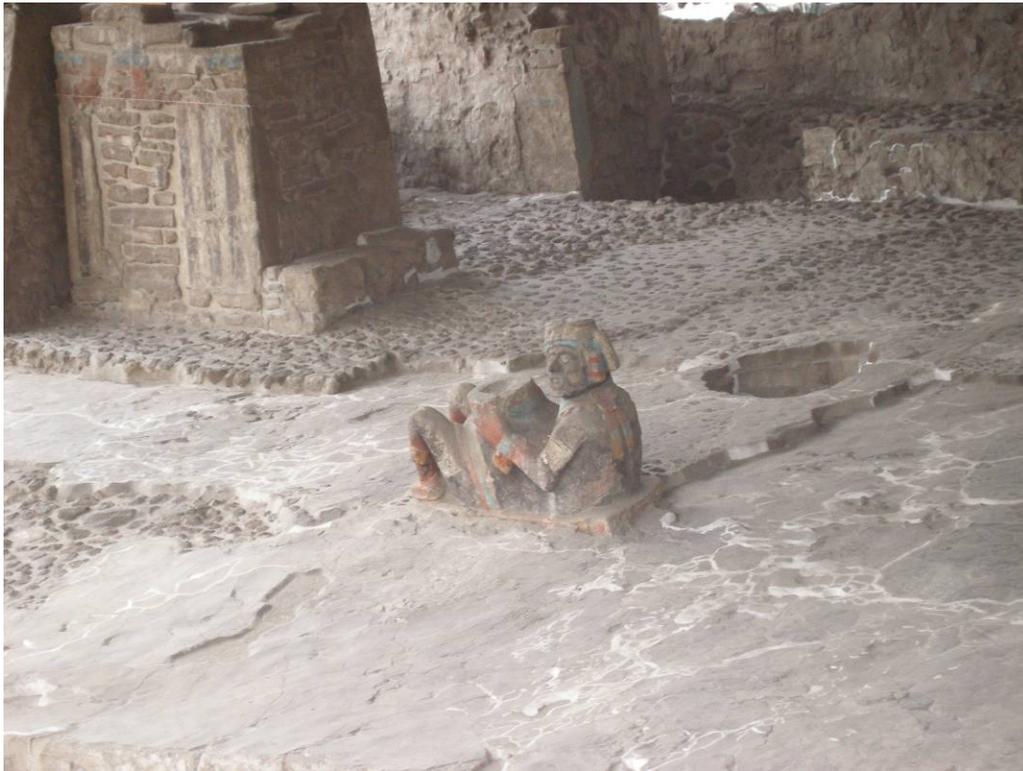
- 1) What are the various items made of?
- 2) What do you think they were used for?
- 3) How would the natives have made the color that was used on many of the objects?

## Pictures by Rebecca Reynolds

### Templo Mayor

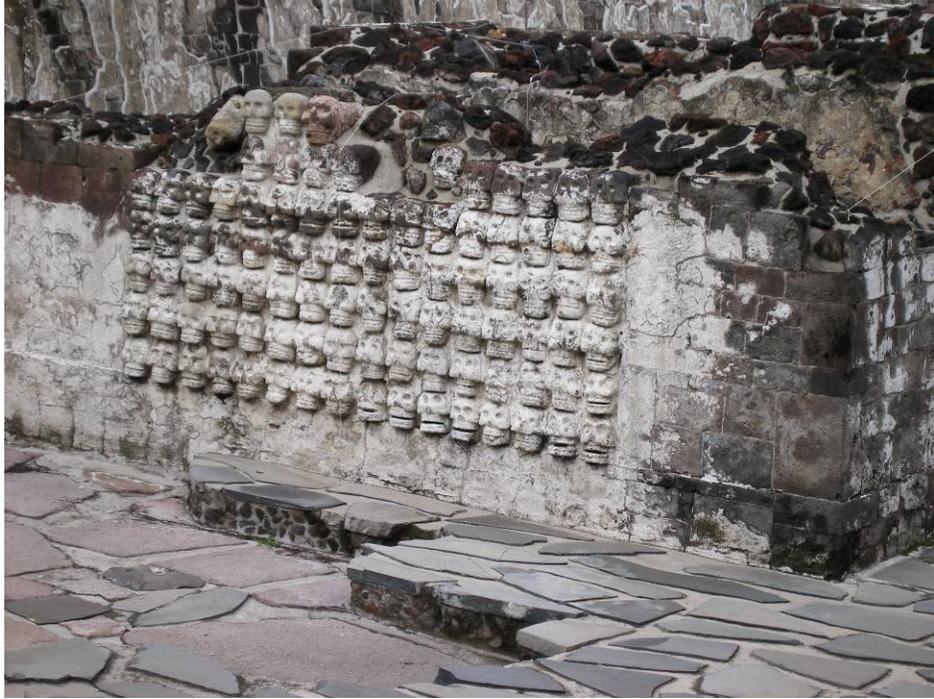


Three statues found between layers of various palaces.



Ancient sacrifice altar, Templo Mayor

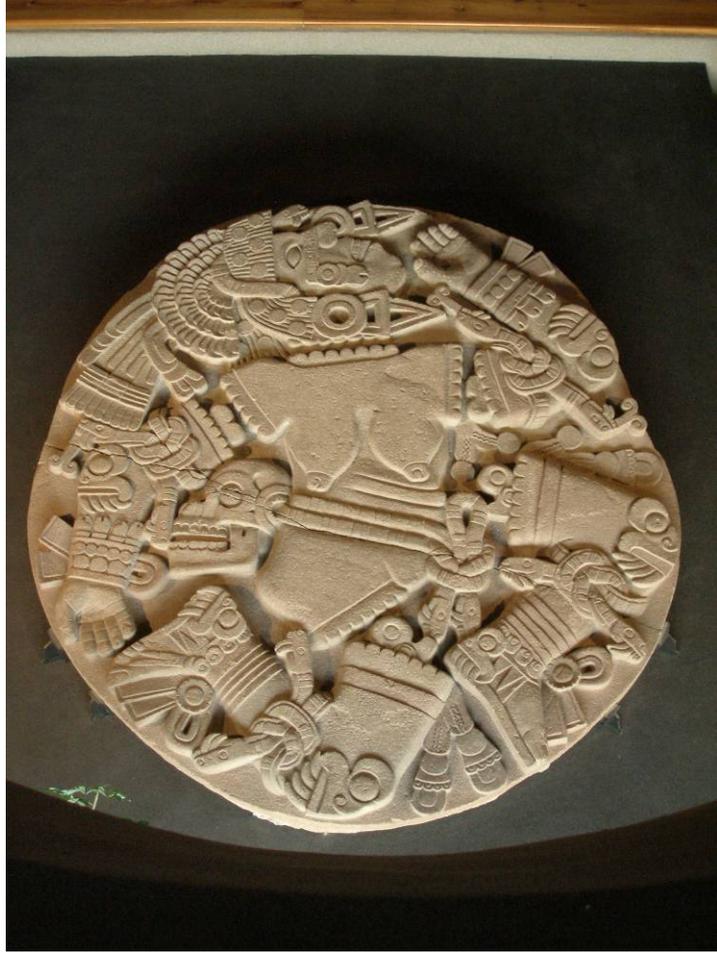




Sacrificial skulls







Coyolxauhqui Stone

---

## Lesson 3: Native Lifestyle

Native lifestyle changes drastically with the invasion of the Conquistador. This lesson explores many of the items that survived this culture shock. Students will be able to see how cultures were able to produce many items from simple ingredients such as corn, wool and cactus.

### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ examine common tools that were used during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- ❖ compare these items to those used today.
- ❖ judge the items' importance in the daily life of a native family.

**Materials:** Several examples of native tools, pictures of those tools as true artifacts (included), group questionnaire

Note: All items can be purchased online from various shops specializing in native tools.

### **Lesson:**

Several stations are set up with a variety of tools. Students will visit each station in small groups. The groups will analyze each of the items. Most of these tools are used today in Mexico.

Present PowerPoint 1: Native Cultures. After students visit stations, they view the slides of ancient artifacts of many of these items. Slides show many of the products that come from the use of these products.

Station 1: Molcajete

Made of volcanic rock.

Used for grinding herbs, spices, vegetables and/or nuts.

Station 2: Oaxacan whisk

Made of wood.

Used for any production where a metal whisk would be used.

It is a typical tool used in making Mexican hot chocolate. Oaxacan women commonly have local rivalries to see which woman can create the greatest amount of foam using the whisk. It is an honor to claim that title.

Station 3: Bowl

Made of wood.

Used as any other bowl. Question the students about the use of wood with liquid objects. Why do these bowls not swell?

Station 4: Native arrowheads and spears/bone scrapers

Made of rock, wood, and bone.

Used for cutting meat, scraping skins, spearing animals.

Station 5: Metate

Made of volcanic rock.

Used for grinding corn.

Anthropologists have discovered that large numbers of skulls have had visual signs of tooth decay due to the grinding of corn on stone tools such as the metate.

Station 6: Comal

Made of stone.

When heated over fire, it cooks tortillas.

## Native Tools of the Aztecs

Directions: Use the objects on the table to answer the questions that follow. Many items are fragile. Be careful!

### Station 1: Molcajete

- A. What is the object made of?
  
- B. What do you think this item is used for?

### Station 2: Oaxacan tool

- A. What is the object made of?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. What is it used for?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- C. Is there an object at your house that looks like this? What is it?

### Station 3: Bowls

- A. What are they made of?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. How were they used?

Station 4: Native arrowheads and spears/bone scrapers

A. What are the objects made of?

B. How are they used?

C. What do we use today instead of these items?

Station 5: Metate

A. What is the item made of?

B. How is it used?

Station 6: Comal

A) What is it made of?

B) How is it used?

C) What do we use today that is similar to this?

Molcajete



Metate



# Oaxacan Whisk



# Wooden bowls



## Arrow heads/Spears



---

## Lesson 4: Primary Source Analysis

There is a growing emphasis on the use of primary sources and critical thinking associated with these documents. The writings of Hernan Cortes and various anonymous natives are some of the earliest reports of what life was like in Americas.

### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ analyze primary source documents from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- ❖ compare information to that given in their textbook.

**Materials:** primary source documents

AncientMexico.com: The History Art and Culture of Ancient Mesoamerica,  
[http://www.ancientmexico.com/content/documents/moctezuma\\_cortes.htm](http://www.ancientmexico.com/content/documents/moctezuma_cortes.htm)

### **Lesson:**

Have students read the sources. They should answer the questions that follow. Once the document has been analyzed, ask students if this document coincides with the history they have learned in their text. Facilitate discussion on the point of view of Cortes toward the Aztecs.

## Letters from the Americas Primary Source Analysis

- 1) Who is writing the document?
- 2) Who are they writing to?
- 3) When was it written?
- 4) What is the purpose of this document?
- 5) Summarize the document in at least 5 sentences.

---

## Lesson 5: Internet Research

Quality research is a skill that has become a prerequisite for entry into high school. This lesson gives students practice finding research from reputable sites.

**Requisite skills:** Web site analysis, basic Aztec history, Web documentation

**Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ analyze Web sites for quality information.
- ❖ assess historical accuracy.
- ❖ persuade students of their researched point of view.
- ❖ design promotion to gain as many followers as possible.

**Lesson:**

The class should be divided between Aztec and Cortes. The students will research the various goals of each group. The students need to create a “promotion” to prove who should rightfully control central Mexico, either the Aztecs or the Spanish. Pretending we do not know the outcome of this war, students need to persuade their classmates that their side will win. Students will debate their findings with their classmates.

Students should research:

*Adaptation to central Mexican geography*

Who was better suited to this land?

*Defense of the region*

Who was more capable of defending the city?

*Sustainable food production*

Which group was better able to feed itself?

*Government structure*

What type of government did each group have?

## Lesson 6: History through the Arts

Art takes many forms in Mexico. There are many areas still specializing in native crafts. These regions strive to create their wares using many of the same methods as their forefathers. Dance and music from many of the same regions can be heard in local *zocalos* (town squares) throughout the nation. Painting, sculpture and architecture has quite a wide variance. Many areas ascribe to the notion of preserving their past. There has been an uprising in the art world since the 1930s, which has brought many modern forms of art into the country. Whether it is a notion of securing the past or the arrival of the modern, artists of all forms show their deference to their history through their art. It is essential to stress that the following is a very small amount of what can be found to illustrate the arts in Mexico.

### Music

#### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ analyze the various themes and history that makes up mariachi music.
- ❖ listen to various forms of mariachi and classify the history it illustrates.

**Materials:** various examples of mariachi music or any other music from Mexico depicting historical events or lifestyle. You will need the lyrics for those that do not speak Spanish.

### Dance

#### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ analyze the various forms of dance by history and region.
- ❖ (After viewing various dances,) classify dances by region and time in history.

**Materials:** DVD of Ballet Folklórico, pictures and history of Oaxaca's Guelagueta ([http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/travel/mdiaz/guelagueta.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/travel/mdiaz/guelagueta.html)), ALEGRIA - The Mexican Folklórico Home Page (<http://www.alegria.org/danzdir.html>), Ballet Folklórico de México Amalia Hernández (<http://www.balletamalia.com/>).

### Murals

#### **Objectives:**

The students will:

- ❖ identify the elements that are needed for a mural.
- ❖ analyze various murals by the artists Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco for historical context.

**Materials:** pictures of murals by artists Rivera and Orozco  
Orozco, Clemente. *Jose Clemente Orozco: Graphic Works*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Pages 59 *Turistas y aztecas*, 62 *Zapatistas*, 105 *Hidalgo*.

*Personal* photos of Rivera's work from PowerPoint 2, Mexican History.

**Lesson:**

The first question to ask students is: What is art?

Have students explore the various forms of art from all over the world. The lesson can incorporate any form of art that is best for your students. Dance, music, and painting/drawing tend to be the three most popular forms of art for students. After learning the basic history of these art forms, students will use these forms to create their final project.

The final project has students combine the history they have learned with the art they have been shown. Students will depict the historical events from the time of Moctezuma II to the eventual conquest by the Spanish Conquistador Cortes. Students can choose which form of art they want to use to display these events.

Students can create a dance, music (rap), or draw a mural. Students are placed into groups with other like-minded students. Since most students are comfortable with modern forms of music, they are allowed to portray their history in that form (e.g., rap, country, hip-hop, etc.).

## The Art of History

- 1) What type of art will your group use?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) Each of the following events should be presented in your art
  - a. Moctezuma II comes to power
  - b. Cortes lands on coast of Mexico
  - c. The Aztecs believe Cortes to be Quetzalcoatl
  - d. Cortes begins torment of various native groups
  - e. Moctezuma II captured by Cortes
  - f. Aztec people stone Moctezuma
  - g. Spanish soldiers fight Aztec warriors over the various dams of the city
  - h. The Aztec empire eventually falls from warfare and smallpox
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Give a written description of your art. Use your own notebook paper.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) Any additions such as costumes or visuals will give your project extra points.

# History through Art: Mexico

## Mural, Dance, Music

Teacher Name: **Mrs. Reynolds**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY	Master=4 points	Apprentice=3 points	Novice=2 points	Untrained=1 point	Score
<b>Planning/organization</b>	Student can describe the intent and plan of completed art and how his/her part will contribute to the whole. Works with team to come up with general plan of what will be done before beginning.	Student has carefully planned his/her part of the completed art and can describe how s/he will get the work done and a vision for his/her part. Gets team input on plan for his/her contribution before beginning.	Student has planned his/her part of the completed art and can describe how s/he will get the work done and a vision for his/her part. Does not solicit much group input when making plan.	Leaps into action without any evidence of planning or focus.	
<b>Collaboration and Teamwork</b>	The group worked well together with all members contributing significant amounts of quality work. All group members participated in discussion and actively listened to others.	The group generally worked well together with all members contributing some quality work. All group members participated in discussion and actively listened to others.	The group worked fairly well together with all members contributing some work. Most group members participated in discussion and actively listened to others.	The art work appeared to be the work of only 1-2 students in the group AND/OR there was little discussion, working together or active listening.	
<b>Historical Events</b>	The student's portion of art fits the theme of the assignment and all of the team's items are accurately placed on the background. Example: Student has drawn a dwarf palm and has placed it in the understory layer in a rainforest mural.	The student's portion of art fits the theme of the assignment and most of the team's items are accurately placed on the background.	The student's portion of art fits the theme of the assignment.	The student's portion of art does not fit the theme of the assignment.	
<b>Use of Mexican Art Example</b>	Choice of art medium is recognizable and detailed accurately. Overall, the art is original and skillful.	Choice of art is recognizable and colored accurately. Overall, the art is original and done with some skill.	Choice of art is recognizable and reasonably accurate. They are copied, printed or traced, rather than original.	Choice of art is difficult to recognize AND/OR not accurate	