

SNOW PACKET
"Mexico"
Day #1

Name _____

Class period _____

Read pages 1-3 and answer the fill-in-the blank questions.

1. Mexico is part of _____, even though it identifies culturally with Central and South America.
2. Mexico City is the _____ largest city in the world.
3. Spanish, the official language of Mexico, is spoken by _____ percent of the population.
4. Mexican Spanish differs from Spain Spanish in terms of pronunciation and sound. This is due to words from the _____ (Nahuatl) being incorporated.
5. What word did we borrow from the Aztecs? _____
6. What are the three colors of the Mexican flag? _____ and _____
7. What is the most important icon which represents Roman Catholicism?

8. Between 1846 and 1848, Mexico lost _____, _____, and _____ to the U.S., reducing Mexico's territory by half.
9. In 1862, the _____ invaded Mexico. They were defeated in 1867 under Porfirio Diaz.
10. Under the Diaz regime, Mexico experienced political stabilization and economic development. A _____ network was created strengthening the nation's economy and infrastructure.

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Mexico

Network Access Message: The name

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Culture Name

Mexican

Alternative Names

Cultura mexicana (sometimes referred to as mexicanidad)

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Identification. The word "Mexico" is derived from Mexica (pronounced "Me-shee-ka"), the name for the indigenous group that settled in central Mexico in the early fourteenth century and is best known as the Aztecs.

Mexicans make several cultural subdivisions within the nation. The most common one identifies northern, central, and south or south-eastern Mexico. The extensive and desertlike north was only sparsely populated until the middle of the twentieth century, except for some important cities such as Monterrey. It has traditionally housed only small indigenous populations and is generally regarded as a frontier culture. Densely populated central and western Mexico is the cradle of the nation. Highly developed Indian cultures populated this region in pre-Columbian times and it was also the heart of the colony of New Spain. Many prominent colonial cities are major urban and industrial centers today. Southern Mexico has a tropical or subtropical climate and some rain forest. It is characterized by a strong indigenous heritage and is also the poorest part of the country.

Another relevant cultural division is that between the central temperate highlands (the altiplano) and the much more humid mountainous regions (the sierras) and coastal plains. In many parts of Mexico this division parallels the relative presence of indigenous populations, with the sierra regions being the most indigenous.

On a smaller scale the Mexican nation has traditionally been characterized by strong provincial and local cultural identities. People identify closely with their own state; stereotypes about people from other places abound. Strong regional and local identities have given rise to the idea that there exist "many Mexicos." Nevertheless, even though Mexican culture is diverse, there is also a strong identification with the nation-state; nationalism is vigorous.

Location and Geography. Mexico is situated in North America, although culturally, it is identified more closely with Central and South American countries. It borders the United States in the north, Guatemala and Belize in the south, the Pacific Ocean in the west, and the Gulf of Mexico in the east. The national territory measures more than 750,000 square miles (nearly two million square kilometers) and contains a wide range of physical environments and natural resources. Two huge mountain chains—the Western Sierra Madre and the Eastern Sierra Madre—run from north to south and meet in central Mexico. East and west of the mountain chains are strips of humid coastal plains. The entirely flat Yucatán peninsula in the southeast is an exception in mountainous Mexico. The possibilities and limitations of this topographic and climatic system have had a strong influence on Mexico's social, economic, and cultural organization.

The national capital is Mexico City, situated in the heart of central Mexico. In pre-Columbian times it was the site of the capital of the Aztec Empire and during the three centuries of colonial rule it was the seat of the viceroys of New Spain. Mexico City today is the second largest city in the world with 17 million inhabitants as of 1995. Most administrative and economic activities are concentrated in Mexico City. A ring of cities—Puebla, Cuernavaca, Toluca, and Querétaro—surrounds the capital. Other major cities are Guadalajara in the west and the industrial city of Monterrey in the north. In the late twentieth



Mexico

century, major urban centers developed along the border with the United States.

Demography. The preliminary results of the 2000 population census calculated the total number of Mexicans as 97,361,711. In 1950, the total population amounted to approximately 25 million, with the figure reaching nearly 50 million in 1970. These numbers demonstrate the rapid rate of demographic growth that was so characteristic of Mexico during the second half of the twentieth century. The growth rate has slowed, but the population is still very young. The average life expectancy in 1999 was estimated at sixty-nine years for men and a little over seventy-five years for women; the infant mortality rate was almost twenty-five per one thousand. In the late twentieth century, emigration to the United States (mainly of the illegal variety) became a significant phenomenon.

Mexico's population still contains many Indian groups. Depending on the definition used, the total number of Indians varied from 6.7 million to 10 million in 1995. The most significant groups are the Nahuas, Otomís, Mayas, Zapotecas, Mixtecos, Tzeltales, and Tzotziles.

Linguistic Affiliation. Spoken by more than 95 percent of the population, Spanish is the official language of Mexico and was introduced through conquest and colonization. Mexican Spanish has its roots in the Spanish of Spain. In terms of grammar, syntax, and spelling there are no important differences between the two, but the pronunciation and sound are

different. Certain words from the principal Indian language (Nahuatl) are incorporated into Mexican Spanish, especially in the domains of food and household. Some of these words have also been incorporated into other languages such as the English 'chocolate' from the Nahuatl 'chocolatl'. The national culture of Mexico boasts sixty-two indigenous languages. In 1995 at least 5.5 million people spoke an indigenous language. The level of bilingualism, however, was high at 85 percent.

Symbolism. The most prominent symbols that express and reinforce national culture belong to the domains of state, religion, and popular culture. As a product of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917), the Mexican state has been an important point of convergence for national identity. Because it was a widely shared process that profoundly refashioned the country's social, political, economic, and cultural characteristics, the revolution itself has become an important source of national identity. The postrevolutionary state has been very active and effective in nurturing national symbols and heroes. Children who attend public schools honor the national flag and sing the national anthem every Monday morning. The flag consists of three vertical strips in the colors green (representing "hope"), white ("purity") and red ("blood"). In the central white strip is the image of an eagle standing on a cactus plant and eating a snake. This image represents the myth of the foundation of Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec Empire.

The most important icon of Mexican national culture is the Virgin of Guadalupe, which illustrates the pervasive influence of Roman Catholicism in the national culture. She is viewed as the "mother" of all Mexicans. The dark-skinned Virgin is the Mexican version of the Virgin Mary and as such represents national identity as the product of the mixing of European and Meso-American religions and peoples. Her image was used in the struggle for independence against the Spanish.

Mexicans have developed a particular sense of uniqueness, which is expressed in the popular saying *como México no hay dos* (Mexico is second to none). This sense is also expressed in numerous elements of popular culture such as food and music.

History and Ethnic Relations

Emergence of the Nation. Mexican national culture slowly emerged from a process of accommodation between the indigenous cultures and the Spanish colonial domination that lasted three centuries. Mexico gained independence in 1821. In the nineteenth century, the formation of the national culture and polity remained a difficult task mainly due to political instability, military uprisings, and foreign invasions. In these years Mexico lost large portions of its original territory. Most important in this respect was the war with the United States between 1846 and 1848, which broke out when the United States attempted to annex independent Texas. The war ended with U.S. forces defeating the Mexican army. The 1848 peace treaty ceded Texas, California, and New Mexico to the United States and reduced Mexico's territory by half. Despite this tragic loss, the war did contribute to the development of a genuine nationalism for the first time. In 1853, in a contradictory decision, the Mexican government sold present-day southern New Mexico and Arizona to the United States in order to solve budgetary problems. The relationship between Mexico and the United States has remained difficult and ambivalent ever since.

Mexico was invaded again in 1862, this time by the French, who installed a monarchy in coalition with conservative Mexican elites. Civil war ensued until the French were defeated by Mexican liberals in 1867, which inaugurated a new republic that was finally becoming a nation-state. These were years of nascent economic, infrastructural, and political modernization. Political stabilization and economic development were also the hallmarks of the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910). The years of the Díaz regime were also the time when Mexico became increasingly connected in a railroad network. These processes fostered the political, economic, and social integration of different groups and regions within the nation and strengthened state and nation building. These profound transformations, however, also created many tensions and conflicts between rich and poor, peasants and large landowners, Indians and non-Indians, and the politically influential and the aspiring middle classes. This instability eventually led to the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which drove Díaz out of power and then developed into a harsh and violent civil war. It is estimated that 1 million people were killed during the revolutionary period (of a total population of a little more than 15 million in 1910). Armed struggle formally ended with the adoption of a new Constitution in early 1917, but it still took several decades more before a new nation-state consolidated. Postrevolutionary reconstruction affected all domains of society and gave an entirely new meaning to the nation.