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Mexico

Many countries in the Western Hemisphere have been greatly influenced by this Spanish-speaking country. When we share the richness and diversity of the Mexican culture with children, we enable them to appreciate an important part of our heritage, and we strengthen their interest in cultural and ethnic pluralism.

Area—761,602 square miles.

Capital—Mexico City. Its current population of 19,750,000 (2000 est.) makes Mexico City one of the largest cities in the world.

Population—106,202,903 (July 2005 estimate)

Race—The peoples of Mexico are descendants of both the Spanish settlers and the indigenous populations.

Religion—Predominately Roman Catholic with an integration of Indian religions.

Language—Mexico is the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Spanish is the official language. Varieties of Indian languages are also spoken.

Currency—The peso. 1 peso = 100 centavos (cents).

Natural Environment

Mexico is a country of great geographical diversity. The Sierra Madre are an extension of the Rocky Mountains of the United States. They reach more than halfway to the southern tip of Mexico. These mountainous ranges reach elevations of more than 6,000 feet, forming the highlands of the Tierra Fria (cold land). The Central Plateau and parts of the highlands that are between 3,000 and 6,000 feet in elevation are known as the Tierra Templada (temperate lands). The lowland areas of the Tierra Caliente (hot lands) border the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

The agricultural products of Mexico reflect the country's climatic zones and altitudes. For example, cotton, sugar cane, and tropical fruits such as papayas and mangoes are grown in the lowlands. Coffee and maize (corn) are grown in cooler climates at higher altitudes.

The Flag of Mexico

The Mexican flag has three vertical stripes consisting of green (which stands for independence), white (religion), and red (union). The coat of arms, located in the center of the white stripe, is based on an ancient Aztec prophecy. In about 1325, when the Aztecs were looking for a secure place to build their capital, they sighted an eagle perched on a cactus on an island in a lake. In its talons, the bird held a snake. The leaders of the tribe took this as a good omen. They named their great city, Tenochtitlan. Their city was destroyed by the Spanish conqueror, Cortes, and their culture eventually collapsed. Out of the ruins emerged Mexico City, which took its name from the Mexican tribe of the Aztec Nation.

In Your Classroom:

Explain the legend of the Aztec's search for the eagle-serpent. Display the flag of Mexico with its emblem.

Have the children compare their own state flag to the flag of Mexico. Ask if they know the origins of the coat of arms on their state flag.

Have the children design a coat of arms for their family, incorporating ideas about the family, its members, where they live, and what they do.

A Key to Spanish Pronunciation

Say *a* as in *father*.

Say *e* as in *met*.

Say *i* as in the *e* in *me*.

Say *o* as in *go*.

The *h* is never sounded.

Both *j* and *x* are sounded like *h*.

Say *ll* like a *y* in *you*.

Say *n* like the *ny* in *canyon*.

