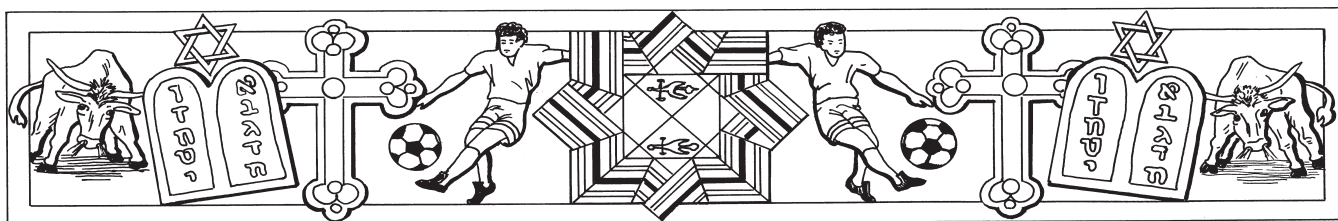


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Spain

Imagine yourself climbing the spires of an impressive cathedral, looking down upon the port from where Christopher Columbus began his journey to the “West Indies.” Imagine that you are watching a matador lure a thousand-pound bull with sharp horns to within inches of his body. Imagine that you are in Spain, a land full of rich history and colorful people. Exploring the Spanish people’s culture and past will help us to understand a country which has helped shape much of the modern world.

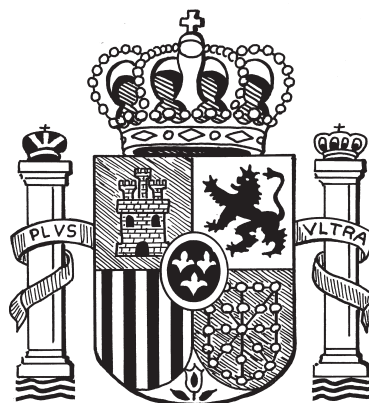
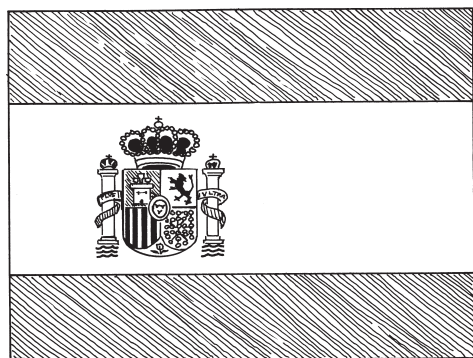
Area—194,885 square miles (504,752 square kilometers), covering 5/6 of the Iberian Peninsula, and including the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea.

Population—There are approximately 39,770,000 people living in Spain. Ninety percent of them live in cities, while only ten percent live in the country.

Capital—The capital of Spain is Madrid, which lies directly in the center of the country.

Major Cities—Madrid: population 2,984,000
 Barcelona: 1,643,540
 Valencia: 752,910
 Seville: 683,030
 Saragossa: 594,000
 Málaga: 522,110

Flag—The Spanish Flag consists of three stripes (*red, gold, and red*) and the Coat of Arms, which includes symbols of Aragon, Castile, León, Navare, and Granada, five important provinces of Spain.



Government—Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. King Juan Carlos is the Head of State, but he plays no direct role in the running of the country. A Parliament (*Las Cortes Españolas*) elected by the people makes the laws, and the leader of the majority party is elected Prime Minister.

Religion—There is no official state religion in Spain, but 95 percent of Spaniards are Roman Catholic.

Language—Castilian Spanish is the official language of the country, but three other languages—Catalan, Euskara, and Galician—are spoken widely in different provinces.

In Your Classroom

Make a model of Spain's flag from construction paper. Discuss with your students the significance of the different parts of the flag.

Trace a map of Spain onto a large piece of paper and mount it in your classroom. Don't forget the Balearic and Canary Islands.

Ask children how they would like to live in a country where people in different parts speak a different language. Is that similar or different to our situation in the United States?

Land and Climate

Spain, the second largest European country, occupies 80 percent of the Iberian Peninsula. Bordered by France to the northeast and by Portugal to the southwest, Spain is surrounded by water on three sides. Its geography and its climate vary from one region of the country to another, making Spain a beautiful mixture of mountains, plains, and coastal regions.



The Meseta

The huge Meseta covers most of Spain. A high, flat plateau 2000 feet (600 meters) above sea level, the Meseta is dry and mostly infertile. Most of the country's rivers find their origin in the Meseta. A harsh, dry climate is typical of this region. It is known for its extreme temperatures: sweltering summers and freezing cold winters. A famous saying describes the climate on the Meseta: "Nueve meses de invierno y tres meses de infierno" (*Nine months of winter and three months of hell*).