

Grade Level:  
Upper Elementary

## Introduction to Belize

### Lesson Objective & Summary

**Objective:** Students will learn about the basic history, geography, and cultural heritage of Belize. Students will use a map to locate Belize and its capital (Belmopan), as well as identify some of the unique aspects of this Central American nation.

**Summary:** Students will identify Belize's location on a world map, and will explain some of the major geographic features of Belize. Students will read the [Mabriga & Welcome to Belize blog](#) and watch the episode, [A Quick History of Belize](#), and spend time previewing some of the other blogs and videos in ProjectExplorer.org's Belize section. Students will share their observations and questions about Belize. Finally, students will try to learn several Kriol and Garifuna phrases from the videos [Kriol for Travellers](#) and [Let's Learn Garifuna](#).

DURATION:  
1 - 2 Lessons

SUBJECTS:  
English Language Arts,  
Social Studies, Geography

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### Standards & Benchmarks

#### From the Common Core Standards for Language Arts in History / Social Studies

- Students will quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. (*Key Ideas and Details, Grade 5*)
- Students will draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently. (*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Grade 5*)

#### From the New York State Social Studies Standards, Standard 3: Geography

- Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live - local, national, and global - including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth's surface.

### Background Information for Educators

Although no one truly knows where the name "Belize" originated, the country of Belize has a colorful history spanning thousands of years. For nearly 3,000 years, much of Belize was inhabited by the Mayan people, who lived along the Yucatan Peninsula, spreading from Mexico southward into western Honduras.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese and Spanish explorers dominated much of the waters between West Africa and the Americas. However, the Treaty of Tordesillas, which was signed in 1494, divided the New World territories charted by Christopher Columbus between the Portuguese (east) and the Spanish (west), which gave the Spanish conquistadors

territorial claims to Belize. However, due to strong Mayan opposition and expanding interests elsewhere, the Spanish settlers decided not to cultivate a colony in Belize.

In 1638, British pirates (called buccaneers) entered the region now known as Belize City and established a logwood trading port from which they could attack Spanish ships in the region. The port was naturally protected by mangroves and shallow reef beds, with sandy island cayes that made it difficult for Spanish ships to enter harbor. In the 1720s, British settlers began introducing African slaves from West and Central Africa to Belize to help with logging efforts.

Conflicts between the British and Spanish settlers in the region escalated until the 1798 Battle of St. George's Caye, through which the British ultimately ousted the Spanish from Belize. By 1862, the Spanish had lost a majority of its territorial holdings in Central America, and the British declared Belize a "Crown Colony," naming it "British Honduras."

In 1964, Belize was declared a self-governing nation and established a parliamentary-led government. In 1981, Belize was granted independent sovereignty as a nation but is considered to be a part of the British Commonwealth, which means that the reigning British monarch (at present, HRH Queen Elizabeth II) is the official head of state, although the locally elected parliament makes all legislative decisions.

Belize is the only Central American nation whose official language is English, but Belizean Creole (also spelled Kriol) is commonly spoken. Belize's diverse population includes a large percentage of Mestizos (50%), who are ethnically of mixed European (often Spanish) and indigenous (Mayan) heritages. The Garifuna (also called Garinagu) people of Belize are the descendants of West African and Central African slaves who intermixed with the Arawak and Island Carib people.

Guiding Questions	Key Vocabulary
Where is Belize located? What is the capital of Belize? What languages are spoken in Belize? What are some of Belize's unique geographic features? What are some of the natural resources found in Belize? What type of government does Belize have? How does it differ from your home country? Why do the people of Belize have such diverse heritages? What factors have contributed to this diversity?	Diversity Mayan Spanish Cayes Piracy Heritage Mestizo / Mestiza Garifuna Self-governing Commonwealth Mangroves Reef

## Lesson Plan

1. Using a world map, ask students to locate Belize. Ask students to locate Belize's capital city (Belmopan). How do they know it is the capital? What usually happens in a capital city?
2. Have students look at some of the geographic features of Belize (coastline; barrier reef). Have students locate and identify some of the countries nearby. Ask students to think about how the geography of Belize might influence how the Belizean people live, or what their occupations may have traditionally looked like (i.e.: fishing, farming, etc).
3. Distribute the Belize Worksheet (pages 6 & 7) to students. Ask students to complete the information they have already discovered about Belize.
4. Read the [Mabriga & Welcome to Belize blog](#) and watch the [A Quick History of Belize](#) episode. Ask students to write what observations they made from the video. Encourage students to consider what other nations may have influenced the culture of Belize (i.e.: Mayans, Spaniards, British Pirates, African slaves).
5. Briefly explain the history of Belize. Ask students to consider what makes Belize different from some of its neighboring countries. Have students make comparisons between Belize and their home country.
6. Have students watch the episode entitled [I am Belizean](#). Have students consider why the population of Belize is so diverse. Ask students to compare what they observe with the people of their home country, or with people groups of other countries with which they are familiar.
7. Show students the episodes [The Science of Caves](#) and [The Belize Barrier Reef](#) in ProjectExplorer.org's Belize pages. You may also want to show the episode [Mighty Mangroves](#) from Malaysia's pages, as mangroves played a significant role in protecting Belize City from outside invaders. Have students add thoughts and observations to their Belize Worksheet (pages 6 & 7), particularly focusing on the geographical features.
8. In small groups, ask students to preview some of the other chapters, blogs, and videos on ProjectExplorer.org's Belize pages. Have students complete the Belize Worksheet (pages 6 & 7) with their learning and questions about Belize. Invite students to share their observations and questions on a class chart.
9. Watch [Kriol for Travellers](#) and [Let's Learn Garifuna](#). Have students practice speaking phrases along with the video.
10. Have students reflect on what they have learned about Belize so far. Write down additional questions students may have and encourage them to think about how Belize compares with their home country. Have students think about what they would like to see and do if they were to visit Belize.

## Assessment / Evidence of Understanding

- Student will identify the location of Belize and its capital city, Belmopan, using a world map.
- Student will identify the geographic features of Belize and make inferences about how the Belizean people live and what natural resources they have.
- Student will identify some of the major features and facts about Belize.

Assessment Rubric	Below Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Geography Skills	<p>With assistance, student can locate country and capital city on a map.</p> <p>Student may be able to identify some geographic features, but may require guidance to make inferences about people's daily life due to the geography.</p>	<p>Student can locate country and capital city on a map. With assistance, student can identify the longitude/latitude coordinates of the country. Student can identify some of the specific geographic features (islands, nearby nations) independently. Student can make basic inferences about how people's daily life is shaped by their geography.</p>	<p>Student can locate country and capital city on a map. Student independently identifies the longitude/latitude coordinates of the country, and can identify numerous specific geographic features (islands, nearby nations) independently. Student makes clear observations and inferences linking the geographical landscape with the way local people live their lives. Student may also be able to share other observations about how bordering nations may influence the local people, culture, and way of life.</p>
Belize Worksheet	<p>With assistance, student is able to complete the Belize Worksheet, completing all required sections.</p> <p>With assistance, student can identify several interesting facts about the country.</p>	<p>Student is able to complete the worksheet independently, using available resources in the classroom &amp; online (i.e.: Atlas, CIA Fact Book, ProjectExplorer.org).</p> <p>Student uses observations and resources to identify interesting facts about country. Student makes connections and asks questions that are grade-level appropriate.</p>	<p>Student completes the worksheet independently, using available resources in the classroom &amp; online (i.e.: Atlas, CIA Fact Book, ProjectExplorer.org), but student may make connections with other countries or with prior knowledge. Student uses observations and resources to identify interesting facts about the country while also making insightful inferences that reflect higher-level connections and thinking. Student makes connections and asks questions that exceed grade-level expectations.</p>

## Additional Resources

### **CIA World Fact Book, Belize**

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bh.html>

### **Lonely Planet: Belize**

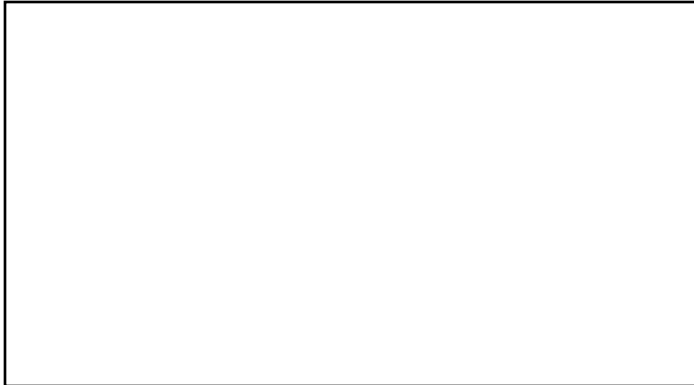
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/belize>

### **Chaa Creek**

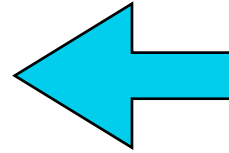
<http://www.chaacreek.com/short-history-belize>

\*\*\*\*\* Belize Worksheet follows on next page \*\*\*\*\*

## Belize Worksheet



Draw the flag of Belize here



CAPITAL CITY:	
CONTINENT:	
MAP COORDINATES:	
LANGUAGE(S):	
GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES:	
BORDERING COUNTRIES:	
NATURAL RESOURCES:	
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT:	
INTERESTING FACTS:	

What do I think I know about Belize?

What would I like to know about Belize?

What do I think I will learn about Belize from the ProjectExplorer.org team?

What other questions do I have Belize that I may need to research further?

If I visited Belize, I would like to see...