

Grade Level:  
Upper Elementary

## An Introduction to México

### Lesson Objective & Summary

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

**Summary:** Students will identify México's location on a world map, and will explain some of the major geographic features of México. Students will read the [¡Bienvenidos a México!](#) blog, watch [Mexico in World History](#), and spend time previewing some of the other blogs and videos in ProjectExplorer.org's México section. Students will share their observations and questions about México. Finally, students will learn some phrases in Spanish through the episode [Hableme de Usted](#).

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

Estados Unidos Mexicanos, or the United States of México, has been recognized as a sovereign nation since it gained independence from Spain in 1821, yet México's history spans more than 13,000 years.

For millennia, México was inhabited by hundreds of different indigenous groups, many of which became advanced civilizations, including the Toltec, Olmec, Aztec, Zapotec, Maya, and Teotihuacán people. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish conquistadors followed in the footsteps of Hernán Cortés, who defeated the Aztec civilization with a mere 500 men. Spain ultimately colonized much of México, conquering most of the Meso-American peoples and ushering

in 300 years of Spanish colonial rule. The former Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán became the foundations for modern day Mexico City.

In 1821, after decades of unrest, the Treaty of Cordoba was signed between the Spanish crown and representatives from the Mexican people, and México declared its independence from Spain. However, continued disputes erupted among the different factions across México, and some ultimately ceded to become their own republics (the Republic of Texas, Republic of the Yucatán, and the Republic of the Rio Grande).

From 1844-1846, the Mexican-American war was fought over territorial and border disputes. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1846, ceding more than half of Mexican territory to the United States, including what was later to become the states of California, New Mexico, and Texas. Arizona and southern New Mexico were later acquired through the Gadsden Purchase of 1854.

The last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by upheaval, civil unrest, wars, and disputes, mainly over government structures and dissension among the indigenous Native American people and their mestizo (Spanish-Mexican mixed race) counterparts. From 1864-1867, México was even under French military rule, as Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian tried to establish the Second Mexican Empire with the support of elite Mexican nobility. However, his attempts ultimately failed as Porfirio Díaz rose to power and ultimately controlled México for 31 of the next 34 years. In 1917, the Mexican Constitution was revised and ultimately established the present system of government.

Today, México is the nation that boasts the largest population of Spanish speakers in the world. México is divided into 31 states, stretching from the southern border of the United States to the northern borders of Guatemala and Belize. Although México continues to experience ongoing disputes among political and social factions, it nonetheless boasts a colorful, diverse history, rich with architecture, traditions, and cultures that have endured for centuries.

Guiding Questions	Key Vocabulary
Where is México located? What is the capital of México? What are some of México unique geographic features? What are some of the natural resources found in México? What type of government does México have? How does it differ from your home country?	Meso-American Civilization Maya Aztec Olmec Teotihuacán Toltec Conquistadors Colonialism Conquest Independence

## Lesson Plan

1. Using a world map, ask students to locate México. Ask students to locate México's capital city (Mexico City). 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 México (coastline; peninsulas; Sierra Madre mountain range). Have students locate and identify some of the countries nearby. Ask students to think about how the geography of México might influence how the Mexican people live, or what their occupations may have traditionally looked like (i.e.: fishing, farming, hunting, etc.).
3. Distribute the México (pages 6 & 7) Worksheet to students. Ask students to complete the information they have already discovered about México.
4. Read the [¡Bienvenidos a México!](#) blog and watch the [Mexico in World History](#) episode. Ask students to write what observations they made from the video. Encourage students to consider what other nations and people groups may have influenced the culture of México (Spaniards, Mexicans).
5. Briefly explain the history of México. Ask students to consider what makes México different from some of its neighboring countries. Have students make comparisons between México and their home country.
6. Show students the episodes [The Mexican Flag](#), [Las Piñatas](#), and [The Quinceañera](#) in ProjectExplorer.org's México pages. Have students add thoughts and observations to their Country Profile Worksheet, particularly focusing on aspects of culture and history that are unique to México.
7. In small groups, ask students to preview some of the other chapters, blogs, and videos on ProjectExplorer.org's México pages. Have students complete the Country Profile Worksheet with their learning and questions about México. Invite students to share their observations and questions on a class chart.
8. Watch [Hableme de Usted](#) to learn a few simple phrases in Spanish. Have students practice speaking phrases along with the video.
9. Have students reflect on what they have learned about México so far. Write down additional questions students may have and encourage them to think about how México compares with their home country. Have students think about what they would like to see and do if they were to visit México.

## Assessment / Evidence of Understanding

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

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 (volcanos, rain forests, 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 (rain forests, volcanos, 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>
México Worksheet	<p>With assistance, student is able to complete the México 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, México**

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

### **Lonely Planet: México**

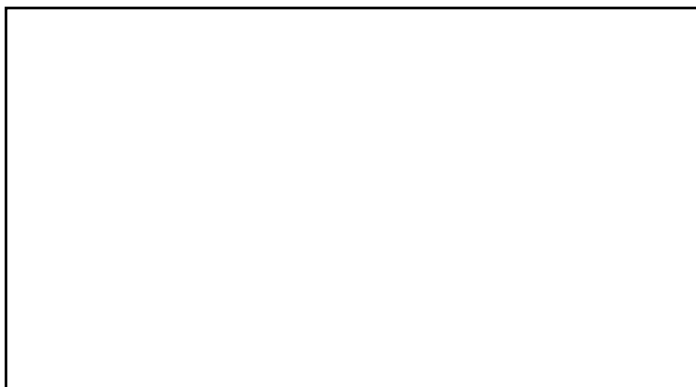
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>

### **Visit México**

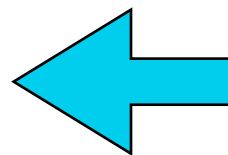
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>

\*\*\*\*\* México Worksheet follows on next page \*\*\*\*\*

## México Worksheet



Draw the flag of México 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 México?

What would I like to know about México?

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

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

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