

CATEGORY: MEXICO: NOW

CONCEPTS: ECONOMICS, work, urban/rural, interdependence, food

ACTIVITY: CLASSROOM "TIANGUIS" OR MARKETPLACE

OBJECTIVES: To learn about "the market," a basic economic institution of both pre-Columbian and present day Mexican (and Latin American) culture. Economic concepts such as barter, money, value, exchange and work can be taught in the context of history and hands-on activities for the students. In addition the concept of interdependence between urban and rural sectors and between individuals can be demonstrated. Moreover, if the teacher desires this project can lead to worthwhile learning in the related areas of: math (simple calculations, standards of measurements, etc.), food and nutrition (what people eat, influence of the "coca-cola culture"), and/or the effects of economic development on traditional society (factories vs. artisans, supermarkets/department stores vs. markets).

BACKGROUND: The Aztec word for market is "tianguis" [tēangēs] and many markets or "mercados" throughout Mexico still have the word "tianguis" in their title. The market was the central economic institution in pre-Columbian times and continues to play an important role today, especially for the campesinos (small farmers and agricultural workers), artisans, traders and small business people. The "Aztecas" or "Mexicas" used either barter or a medium of exchange of cocoa beans, copper in the form of a T, pieces of tin, feathers of birds or gold powder. Today's markets combine the past - artisan pottery, copperwork, weaving, etc. - with the present - plastic toys, coca-cola, radios, Levis, etc. The markets exist today in the smallest pueblos (villages) to the largest cities. Often markets are held on a regular basis once or twice a week, while in the larger cities some markets are held seven days a week.

MATERIALS: Tables, blankets or sheets to display projects.
Plastic, sheets, poles, ropes to construct awnings to protect sellers from rain and sun.
Craft books to generate ideas on simple crafts.
Nutrition-conscious children's cook book.
Variety of construction paper, tissue paper, string, yarn, paints, crayons, etc.
Rulers, scissors, glue, etc.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1989.

PROCEDURE: The teacher should provide information to the class orally and visually about "markets" - their history, how they work, and their importance, etc. - with the emphasis and orientation he/she has planned for the project. The Center for Latin America has a series of slides on markets. The class should discuss things they think would be sold at a market during certain epochs. (e.g. Aztec pre-Columbian market-no bananas!; or a market held this week in Mexico City). Members of the class could role play bartering and/or bargaining-with a follow up discussion of key economic issues.

Explain to the class that this project is to create a market scene which will be "put on" for other students either in the hallway, the classroom, auditorium (as part of a festival) etc. The teacher should adopt the mechanics of the markets to fit their needs, the maturity of the students and the rule of the school. One might wish to go the route of having it more of a play/presentation with various students explaining or acting out concepts through small stories. Another alternative-which is more work, but has been successful-is to have your students make various handicrafts (see below) or healthy snacks and have them actually "sell" them to other students. Not for money, of course! Your students would make the money-bird feathers out of construction paper perhaps-and you would give a set quantity to other interested teachers to distribute to their students. You might want to give some kind of reward to the students in your class who "earn" the most "money." Having your students work in groups to create different "puestos" or stands/booths in which they will "sell" a certain type of product, can be beneficial. Also, you may wish to allocate resources for handicraft construction on credit-to be paid back after the market day-to further demonstrate economic relationships. Naturally, on market day the number of buyers needs to be strictly controlled and certain rules established.

HELPFUL HINTS: Examples of things that can be sold at a tianguis:

- 1) paintings
- 2) crepe paper flowers
- 3) yarn designs
- 4) colored sand designs
- 5) jewelry-popcorn necklaces, pendants, etc.
- 6) nutritious snacks
- 7) simple games
- 8) books (donated, that students have written for younger students, etc.)
- 9) house plants (that you might have started in a science unit).
- 10) anything your imaginations can come up with and your resources allow!