

The Heritage Continues

Lesson #16: QUINCEAÑERA

TIME

30 minutes

MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Video - *The Hispanic Face of Kansas*

Worksheet #27 - Quinceañera

OTHER MATERIALS

Television and VCR

TEACHER PREPARATION

Advance the video to counter #80, footage of a Quinceañera. Make a copy of worksheet #27 for yourself and each student. For a better understanding of culture and biculturalism read the historical background sections in lessons "What is Culture?" and "Existing Side by Side: Bicultural Communities."

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) define culture and biculturalism
- 2) relate celebrations to culture
- 3) compare a Mexican American "coming of age" tradition with similar traditions in their lives

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although Mexican Americans may be of any denomination or faith, many are Roman Catholic. This is part of the Spanish influence on Mexico. In many Mexican towns the church is in the center of the main plaza and thus serves as the center of the community.

The church served as a haven for Mexican Americans a place where all needs were met. As in Mexico, churches in the Mexican sections of Kansas towns usually were built in the center of the neighborhood. The church became a place where their religious and cultural heritage could be preserved. In a sense, the customs and traditions of Mexico emanate from the church. Garden City had no Catholic church prior to the development of the sugar beet industry and the resulting heavy use of Mexican and Mexican American migrant labor in the sugar beet fields.

A number of important church events have a place in the lives of Mexican Americans: baptism, first holy communion, confirmation, and marriage. All of these are also important in the lives of any devout Roman Catholic; however, many of these events in a Mexican American church contain elements that are part of their Mexican heritage. One ceremony is

only Mexican American: the Quinceañera.

When a Mexican or Mexican American girl reaches the age of fifteen (quince años), she may have a church celebration a Quinceañera, marking this occasion. In a special ceremony she is introduced to the community as a responsible church member. This custom began long ago in Mexico. The Maya and Toltec Indian tribes did not consider a child a "person" until the age of fifteen. At this time a boy was considered an adult warrior. He was given a shield and a sword as symbols of his manhood. A girl was looked upon as a woman, a powerful person in the tribe because of her power to be a mother. Her tribe held a ceremony for her, and she became an adult member of the tribe.

Many Mexican Americans celebrate the Quinceañera, and in doing so carry on the ancient Indian tradition in a Christian setting. Not everyone can afford or wants a Quinceañera; it is usually a fancy and expensive celebration. The people who come to the ceremony are important to the young woman. In the ceremony she declares to the people that she understands the values, problems, and responsibilities of the Christian community.

She receives symbols that represent her Christian commitment: a medal, crown, ring, and flowers. The religious medal, usually containing a picture of a saint, is an outward expression of her faith. The ring represents her responsibility to the community and God. The crown symbolizes her victory in trying to live a Christian life in the midst of everyday problems. The flowers represent the newness of her commitment. After the church celebration there is usually a party. The girl's friends and relatives gather in the spirit of fiesta.

VOCABULARY

- **Biculturalism** = The existence of two distinct cultures in one nation.
- **Celebration** = Ceremonies and other activities that observe or honor a special day or event.
- **Ceremony** = A formal act on a special or important occasion such as a wedding or graduation.
- **Culture** = Shared world view and beliefs of a particular community transmitted through their arts, beliefs, and customs.
- **Quinceañera** = A combination of a Native American coming-of-age celebration and a religious ceremony marking a girl's entrance into the church as an adult, with all the responsibilities this includes.
- **Rite of passage** = A ritual associated with an individual's change of status.
- **Ritual** = An established form for a ceremony such as the order of words, the specific phrases, or the use or exchange of items such as wedding rings.

ACTIVITY

- 1) Begin the lesson by reviewing the meanings of the terms ceremony, ritual, and rites of passage.

Ask the class what a ceremony is. Have them give some examples.

A formal act occurring on a special or important occasion such as a wedding or graduation.

After the meaning of ceremony is clear ask the class what ritual means. Have them give examples of rituals.

An established form for a ceremony such as the order or types of words used or the use or exchange of specific items or songs. Examples of rituals that are part of many wedding ceremonies include exchanging vows or rings, lighting candles, or the father "giving away" the bride.

On the board write the words "rites of passage." Ask the class what this term means and for examples. Write their examples on the board to refer to later.

A "rite of passage" is a ritual associated with a change of status for an individual. Events in our culture include "sweet sixteen" birthday parties, receiving a driver's license, being allowed to begin dating, or ceremonies dealing with birth, marriage, and death.

- 2) Tell the class they will learn about the Quinceañera, a rite of passage in many Mexican and Mexican American communities.

Show the class the Quinceañera portion of the [video *The Hispanic Face of Kansas*](#) (counter #80).

After watching the video talk about what a Quinceañera is, its origins in the cultures of Native Americans of Mexico and the Roman Catholic religion, and the role or importance of this ceremony in today's Mexican American communities.

It is a combination of a Native American rite of passage celebration and a ceremony marking a teenage girl's entrance into the Catholic church as an adult. It is important in some Mexican American communities today because it is part of their Mexican heritage. It is an important event in the life of a girl and her family, just as graduation ceremonies are important to people graduating from high school.

Review the rite of passage gifts the girl receives as symbols of her commitment.

Medal - an outward expression of her faith

Ring - represents her responsibility to the community and God

Crown - symbolizes her victory in trying to live a Christian life in the midst of everyday problems

Flowers - the newness of her commitment]

- 3) Hand out [worksheet #27, Quinceañera](#). Read this newspaper article about the Quinceañera to the class to help them better understand the meaning and significance of the celebration.

- 4) Have the class discuss what they have learned about the Quinceañera and compare it with rites of passage in their community.

What is a Quinceañera?

It is a celebration about coming of age; it is a rite of passage.

At a Quinceañera the celebrant receives items symbolizing her coming of age (a religious medal, crown, ring, and flowers). What items symbolize a rite of passage in our society or community? The class may want to refer to their rites of passage of list on the board for ideas.

Symbols may include a driver's license, class ring, letter jacket, baptismal gown, wedding ring, etc.

- 5) After the class has an understanding of rites of passage, have them discuss their feelings about what it means to them personally. Use the following questions to lead the discussion.
- Are the milestones the class listed as rites of passage in our society important to class members personally, or are they symbols that our society has labeled as important?
 - Would the class like to change the symbols or celebrations marking rites of passage in our society? If so, how could these be changed?
 - How does the class feel that rites of passage in their community compare with the Quinceañera celebration? Are they more elaborate, less elaborate; more formal, less formal; related to a religion, or not; etc.?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) Invite someone from the Mexican American community to discuss aspects of his/her Mexican heritage and how it survives in his/her home in the United States.
- 2) Have the class research rites of passage ceremonies from various cultures and compare their findings.
- 3) See the complementary lessons in this manual: lessons within the "The Heritage Continues" section explore various aspects of the Mexican American culture, and lessons in the "An Exploration of Culture" section examine culture and biculturalism.
- 4) Have each student choose a rite of passage in his/her life and write a newspaper article about this event. In this article the students should try to communicate what the celebration is about and its role or importance in their lives.