

The Heritage Continues

Lesson #18: INDEPENDENCE DAY, September 16

TIME

Two 50 minute class periods

MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Worksheet #26 - The Mexican Flag

Graphics #5, 25-32

Objects - Sombrero, serape, blouse, flag

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED

A bell with a clapper. Students may want to bring appropriate clothing from home. Paper and markers for making banners. Materials needed for specific craft activities are located in the "Craft" section of this manual.

TEACHER PREPARATIONS

- Prepare or purchase Mexican American food. Recipes can be found in the "Recipe" section of this manual.
- Make copies of worksheet #26, the Mexican flag.
- If the class plans to parade through the building, contact faculty and administration.
- For directions for a Mexican dance, see the lesson "La Raspa."

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) define independence
- 2) compare the Mexican and Mexican American celebration of independence with the United States Fourth of July
- 3) identify aspects and events that are part of celebrations
- 4) demonstrate a Mexican celebration

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

El Grito de Dolores is the celebration of Mexican Independence, similar to the United States Fourth of July. On the morning of September 16, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo (ee-DAHL-goh) freed the prisoners held captive by Spanish authorities. By ringing the church bells he called his parishioners together. When the people came to see what he wanted, the priest told them that Mexico should belong to the Mexicans; that they should overthrow the Spanish government and bring an end to its despotic rule over Mexico and the rest of Central America. Then the people of Mexico would be independent. He called out, as loudly as he could, "Viva la independencia!" This day marked the beginning of Mexico's long struggle for independence as the Mexican people answered Hidalgo's appeal and began to fight for freedom. This day is celebrated in many Kansas towns and cities.

In many Mexican towns at 11:00 p.m. each September 15 the bells peal in memory of the passionate struggle for the country's independence, and the cry "Viva la independenciam!" is heard. The return shout from the crowds of "Viva la independenciam!" is often followed by fireworks, parades, mariachi bands, and dancing. Churches and marketplaces are decorated. Pinatas are made and broken. The celebration of independence is shared by all.

On September 16-17, 1922, Garden City celebrated its first official Mexican Fiesta. It celebrated Mexico's independence and also marked the end of some of the harvest work. Earlier, unrecorded fiestas may date to 1909. The Mexican Fiesta began as two separate fiestas staged in private backyards. Early fiestas offered a little relief from much heavy work in the daily routine of the Mexican and Mexican American laborer. The fiestas began at 6:30 a.m. with raising the flag and singing the national anthems of the United States and Mexico. Over the years activities have included family picnics, baseball contests, crowning queens, parades through town, dancing, attending mass, and patriotic speeches.

By 1925 the celebration of Mexico's independence in Garden City was two days long, "unbroken even by the circus." Wednesday's festivities began with a sunrise concert by the Mexican band. The Star Spangled Banner and the Mexican national hymn began the service when flags of both countries were raised. The celebration continued with addresses, plays, recitations, instrumental music, a parade, orchestra music, and forty-four program numbers. A dance took place each evening at the celebration grounds south of the Santa Fe yards. People came from Oklahoma, Colorado, Dodge City, Minneola, and other points to enjoy the festivities.

In 1943 the unity of Mexico with the United States and other allied nations was enthusiastically demonstrated through programs arranged by officials of the Santa Fe for railway workers of Mexican descent. Celebrations were held every place on the Santa Fe system where units of workers were engaged.

"Employed on the company's Eastern Lines, some 1,200 Mexican Nationals were likewise given a holiday on September 16. While a number of these men are assigned to section crews, in approximately seventy communities the majority work on extra gangs and are housed and fed in special cars equipped for this purpose. All members of the extra gangs were provided with a special dinner on the night of September 15. The dining cars were decorated with United States and Mexican flags, souvenirs of the event were given to each man, and prominent speakers delivered patriotic talks. Arrangements were made for a large number of Mexicans in the vicinity of Kansas City to attend a special celebration in that city's fine municipal auditorium under sponsorship of La Union Cultural Mexicana." (From "Mexican Independence Day Celebration Observed Along the Santa Fe," *Santa Fe Magazine*, October 1943.)

VOCABULARY

- **Celebration** = Ceremonies and other activities that observe or honor a special day or event.
- **Culture** = The arts, beliefs, and customs that form a way of life for a group of people at a

certain time.

- **Independence** = Freedom from the control of others.

ACTIVITY

- 1) Show the class graphic #32 the map of Mexico and Spain. On the map have the class find both Spain and Mexico in 1810.

Tell the class the story of Hidalgo's call for independence.

On the morning of September 16, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo (ee-DAHL-goh) stood on the steps of his church and rang the bell. When the people came to see what the noise was about, the priest told them that Mexico should belong to the Mexicans and that they should send the Spanish away. In this way they could be independent. He called out, as loudly as he could, "Viva la independencia!" This day marked the beginning of Mexico's long struggle for independence. The Mexican people answered Hidalgo's appeal and began to fight for freedom.

Ask the class what the word independence means and whether they think Mexico was right in wanting to be independent from Spain. Why or why not?

Independence is freedom from the control of another or others. Refer to the history of Mexico, its conquest and rule by Spain, and its rich and complex history and culture before Spanish rule.

- 2) Ask the class if they celebrate independence in any way.
The Fourth of July.

Have the class give examples of how they celebrate the Fourth of July.

Fireworks, family and friends getting together, cookouts, parades, etc.

Would it be possible to celebrate this holiday in other ways?

Yes. Probably not all the students in class celebrate the Fourth of July in exactly the same way. Celebrations are dictated by what is being honored and not by how it is honored.

- 3) Mexico's Independence Day is a holiday that is celebrated by Mexicans in Mexico and also by Mexican Americans in the United States. Many Kansas communities have fiestas in mid-September celebrating Mexico's independence and their Mexican heritage. Show the class graphics #5, 25-31.

Give examples of how this holiday has been celebrated in Kansas. Examples may include celebrations from the class's community, Garden City's fiestas, and the Santa Fe railroad celebration during World War II.

- 4) Tell the class how this holiday is often celebrated in Mexico.
In some Mexican towns this holiday begins with the mayor ringing a bell and calling out "Viva la independencia!" The people shout back "Viva la independencia!" This is followed by fireworks, parades, mariachi bands, and dancing. Churches and marketplaces are decorated. Pinatas are broken. The celebration of independence is shared by all.

Explain to the class that they are going to reenact Hidalgo's call for independence. Have the students make banderitas and Mexican flags. (Directions for banderitas can be found in the "Craft" section of this manual, and [worksheet #26](#) can be used for making Mexican flags.) Posters and banners saying "Viva Mexico," "Viva Hidalgo," or "Viva la Independencia" can be made and hung around the room. The flag from the trunk may be used.

On the day of the reenactment some students may want to wear the serape, sombrero, and blouse provided in the trunk. Others may want to wear brightly colored clothing.

- 5) On the day of the reenactment ring the bell and shout "Viva la independencia!" Have the students answer by shouting "Viva la independencia!"

Lead the students in a procession. Ring the bell and continue shouting "Viva la independencia!". If the procession is to parade through the school, prepare the other teachers and classes by explaining the reason for the reenactment and perhaps inviting them to participate.

- 6) You may choose to end the procession by dancing the La Raspa and eating Mexican food. (Directions for La Raspa are in the lesson "La Raspa." Recipes can be found in the "Food" section of this manual.)

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) See the complementary lessons in this manual: all the lessons in the section "The Heritage Continues."
- 2) Have the class research independence celebrations from various countries and compare their findings. Are there similarities to the festivities? Differences? Hold independence celebrations from various countries. Examples include the United States Fourth of July; Syttende Mai on May 17, Norway's Constitution Day; Greek Independence Day on March 25; France's Bastille Day on July 14; and Sweden's Constitution Day on June 6.