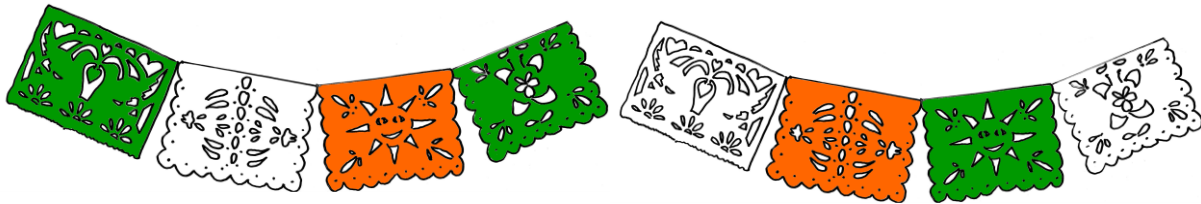


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# Introduction

## Description

Mariachi music, brightly colored costumes and decorations, the savory flavors of Mexican cuisine, and more are described in this thematic unit about the **Cinco de Mayo** holiday. Activities from this unit may be used within the everyday classroom **grades 3-8** and in introductory level **Spanish** classes. **ESL** and **dual-immersion** language teachers may also find this unit useful as many of the lessons are bilingual.

Activities are **cross-curricular**. They include mathematics, language arts, social sciences, art, music, food science, French, and Spanish. Students will learn more about a specific historical event while expanding global literacy and studying a variety of subjects.

In addition, lessons promote the use of **multiple intelligences** because students are required to sing, play, move about, read, write, listen, discuss, observe, calculate, analyze, research, create, and experience the activities using a variety of learning styles. This enhances learning of content and increases language skills in both Spanish and English.

## Purpose

The purpose of this thematic unit is to serve as a **resource** for educators and students who wish to learn more about the Cinco de Mayo holiday as well as other aspects of American and Mexican history, culture, and language.

## Organization

Some activities from this thematic unit may be used for a **one-day** study of the Cinco de Mayo holiday. For instance, instructors may choose to simply have their students read the text "What is Cinco de Mayo?" / "*¿Qué es el Cinco de Mayo?*," lead the students through the discussion questions, and then follow up with a song, craft, or literature activity that would reinforce learning. Educators can pick and choose from the activities, selecting the ones that will work best within their individual classroom settings.

**Elementary teachers** and **Spanish language instructors** who choose to lead an **in-depth study** of the Cinco de Mayo holiday may need to spend **1 to 2 weeks** in order to complete all of the activities within this unit. Individual activities may take anywhere from 5 minutes to 3 days to complete, depending upon the activity.

Biographical sketches, narratives, geography, and math activities help relay the history of Cinco de Mayo. They are paired with art, music, and food activities that demonstrate how the holiday is celebrated today. Many lessons end with **extension activities** that will expand learning and challenge students to research or create content of their own.

**Teacher resources** such as templates, maps, answer keys, and a bibliography of suggested materials are included at the end of this unit. All activities may be **reproduced** by instructors for use within their classrooms.

# **Why Celebrate Cinco de Mayo in the U.S.A.?**

## **To commemorate an important historical event--the Battle of Puebla**

Mexican President Benito Juárez declared Cinco de Mayo to be a public holiday in 1862 in honor of the Mexican victory over the French military that took place that year on May 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **To celebrate Mexican culture, language, heritage, and pride**

As people immigrate to the United States, they bring along with them many traditions and languages. By taking part in Cinco de Mayo festivities, we acknowledge the importance of the Mexican people, their culture, and their influence within American society.

## **To celebrate family & friends and to build community**

A *fiesta*, or party, can be a positive community event that draws people closer together. Dances and performances are enjoyed. People unite in a peaceful, joyful manner. And, it's the perfect excuse to eat Mexican food!

## **To pay tribute to the influential leaders of Mexican descent**

This is a special time of year that we can reflect upon the contributions of famous Latino leaders such as Cesar Chavez, Vilma Martinez, Benito Juarez, and Father Hidalgo.

## **To rally the voices of the Latino community living in the United States**

In the 1960's, civil rights groups, labor unions, and student organizations (such as MEChA = Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) voiced their concerns for equal rights. Movement leaders capitalized upon Cinco de Mayo to demonstrate Mexican culture, unity, pride and self-determination. The political actions of such civil rights groups helped lead to the establishment of the Bilingual Education Acts of 1968 and 1974, which endorsed educational rights for language minority students and granted governmental funding for language programs. Cinco de Mayo became a natural topic for studying Mexican heritage and language within the American classroom.

## **The timing is right**

American educators may elect to celebrate Cinco de Mayo over Mexico's veritable Independence Day, September 16<sup>th</sup>, due to its timing within the school year calendar. Mexico's Independence Day takes place at the beginning of the school year when teachers and students are often too busy to plan fiestas, whereas the warm weather of May 5<sup>th</sup> lends itself to outdoor activities and celebrations when the school year is winding down.

## **To celebrate historical and modern day ties between the U.S. & Mexico**

The United States played a small yet important role in helping its Mexican neighbors regain their freedom from the French Empire in the years that followed the famous Battle of Puebla in 1862.

In modern times, the United States continues to value and support its neighbors south of the border. The two countries are interdependent socially and economically through commerce, trade, and tourism. Cinco de Mayo celebrates our friendly ties and marks an appreciation for intercultural contributions, multiculturalism, and unity.

# Cinco de Mayo Activities

## Teacher's Note

This thematic unit begins with a KWL chart that may be used as an anticipatory set for introducing the topic as well as pre and post-assessment tools to evaluate student knowledge and learning. Students share with the instructor what they already know (or think that they know) about the Cinco de Mayo holiday. The class as a whole may ask questions about the holiday and add information to the chart as learning progresses. This is one of the many ways to assess student learning in this unit of study.

This is followed by a **timeline activity** which outlines important dates in Mexican American history from the 14th century through the 1860's. Students can engage their skills in sequencing and reading comprehension as they complete the timeline jumble.

A brief overview of the famous Battle of Puebla is described in the texts **What is Cinco de Mayo?**/*¿Qué es el Cinco de Mayo?* They retell the history of how the Cinco de Mayo holiday came about. All texts included in this unit may be read aloud by the teacher; by students in a round-robin, jig-saw, or choral fashion; in small groups; or individually. Discussion questions are included to help the instructor assess comprehension of the reading assignment and gauge student learning.

Next is a literary metaphor for the Battle of Puebla, a folktale entitled "**The Fly Who Protected His Treasure**"/*"El tábano que protegió su tesoro."* After reading these texts, students may discuss with the instructor various details about the story and compare the events from this fable to those mentioned in "What is Cinco de Mayo"/*"Qué es el Cinco de Mayo."* The answers to the discussion questions and word work may be written out by students or given orally.

Many Mexican folktales such as "The Fly Who Protected His Treasure"/*"El tábano que protegió su tesoro"* use animals and insects as the main characters. The craft idea which follows this fable allows for students to create their own characters for a story that they will write. Replicating the Mexican folk art called *Alebríjes*, students will sculpt and paint animals, insects, or fantastic beings to serve as models for their own tales.

The lyrics to the "**Cinco de Mayo**" song, written by Sarah Barchas, are included as a fun way to help students remember the facts about this Mexican holiday through music. It is recorded on the CD *¡Piñata! And more! Bilingual songs for children*. This song along with "**The 16th of September**" and many other catchy tunes may be played during various classroom festivities.

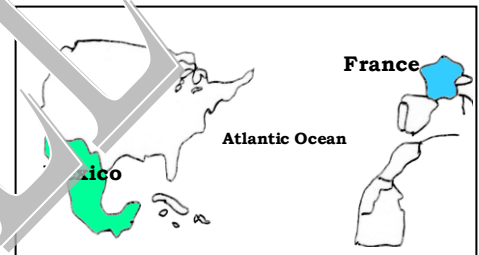
Social studies and mathematics combine in the graphing activity entitled **Charting the Mexican Invasion of 1861-62**. Students can practice reading graphs and practice estimating, rounding, and calculating skills as they learn details about the Mexican debts that eventually led to the French invasion.

# What is Cinco de Mayo?

*Cinco de Mayo* means May 5<sup>th</sup> in Spanish. It is a holiday that commemorates a battle that took place on May 5, 1862, between the French army and the Mexican people.

In 1862, Mexico was in a state of political and financial turmoil. For many years it had undergone numerous changes in government, civil wars, and wars against both Spain and the United States of America. As a result, large debts had accumulated to other countries such as England, France, and Spain.

When Mexico was unable to repay its debts to France, the French Emperor, Napoléon III decided to invade Mexico to make it part of his empire. Over 500 French soldiers sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to conquer Mexico --a land rich in silver, gold, and many other natural resources.



The French had one of the most powerful militaries in the world at that time. The soldiers were trained professionals who used modern weapons. They did not expect any resistance from the Mexicans.

The Mexican army was composed mostly of volunteers who had been recruited at the last minute. Many of them had little or no military training. Their canons and guns were outdated, and some of them only had rocks, farm tools, and *machetes*<sup>1</sup> to use as weapons.

When the French attacked the city of Puebla on May 5, 1862, they anticipated an easy victory. The French stormed up the hill toward Fort Guadalupe and the Mexicans fought back. Strategically, the Mexicans were better positioned for the battle, aiming down the hill at easy targets. There were many French casualties and soon their ammunition ran out. When a heavy rain and hailstorm flooded the valley below, the French army found themselves stuck in the mud. They were forced to retreat and postpone their plans for establishing a French empire in Mexico for over a year. Many Mexicans banded together that day and bravely defended their country. Proud of his people, President Juárez declared Cinco de Mayo an official holiday.

Today, Cinco de Mayo is an occasion to celebrate Mexican history, culture, and pride. Many Mexican Americans and other Latinos honor their heritage on this day.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is *Cinco de Mayo*?
2. What does it celebrate?
3. Why was this victory so important for the Mexican people?

### Cultural Note:

*Cinco de Mayo* is often believed to be Mexico's Independence Day, but it is not. Mexicans celebrate their independence from Spain on September 16<sup>th</sup>.



A Talavera street sign in Puebla, Mexico

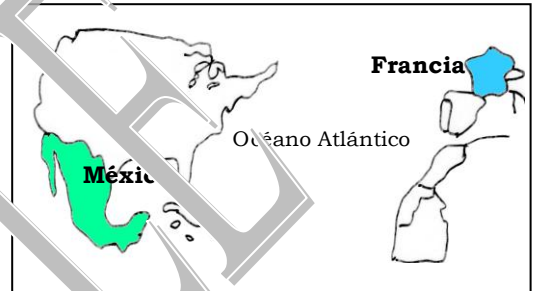
<sup>1</sup> *Machete* = A long knife used for cutting sugar cane.

# ¿Qué es el Cinco de Mayo?

El **Cinco de Mayo** es un día festivo que conmemora una batalla que se llevó a cabo el 5 de mayo de 1862, entre el ejército francés y la gente de México.

En 1862, México pasaba por disturbios políticos y financieros. Por muchos años México había experimentado numerosos cambios de gobierno, guerras civiles, y guerras contra España y los Estados Unidos de América. Como resultado México acumuló grandes deudas de otros países tales como Inglaterra, Francia y España.

Cuando México no pudo pagarle las deudas a Francia, el emperador francés, Napoleón III decidió invadir México para convertirlo en parte de su imperio. Más de 6,500 soldados franceses se embarcaron a través del Océano Atlántico para conquistar México. La tierra era rica en plata, oro, y muchos otros recursos naturales.



Los franceses tenían uno de los ejércitos más poderosos del mundo de esa época. Los soldados eran profesionales e hicieron uso de armas modernas. No esperaban ninguna resistencia de parte de los mexicanos.

El ejército mexicano se componía en su mayoría de voluntarios quienes fueron reclutados a última hora. Muchos de ellos tenían muy poco o ningún entrenamiento militar. Sus cañones y pistolas eran anticuados, y algunos de los hombres estaban solamente armados con piedras, herramientas de granja y machetes.

Cuando los franceses atacaron la ciudad de Puebla el 5 de mayo anticiparon una victoria fácil. Los franceses atacaron cuesta arriba por la colina, hacia la fortaleza de Guadalupe y los mexicanos les respondieron. Estratégicamente, los mexicanos estaban mejor situados para la batalla, apuntando cuesta abajo a presas fáciles. Hubo muchos heridos franceses y muy pronto se les acabaron las municiones. Cuando una lluvia torrencial y una tormenta de granizo inundaron la parte baja del valle, el ejército francés se vio atrapado en el lodo. El ejército fue forzado a retirarse y a posponer sus planes para establecer el Imperio Francés en México por más de un año. Muchos mexicanos se juntaron ese día y con mucha valentía defendieron a su país. Orgulloso de su gente, el presidente Juárez declaró el Cinco de Mayo un día festivo nacional.

Hoy día, el Cinco de Mayo es una ocasión para celebrar la historia mexicana, su cultura, y su orgullo. Muchos Mexicoamericanos y otros Latinos rinden honor a su herencia ese día.

## **Preguntas de Repaso**

1. ¿Qué es el Cinco de Mayo?
2. ¿Qué se celebra?
3. ¿Por qué fue tan importante la victoria para los mexicanos?

## **Nota Cultural:**

Muchos creen que el Cinco de Mayo es el día de independencia de México pero los mexicanos celebran su día de independencia de España el **16 de septiembre**.

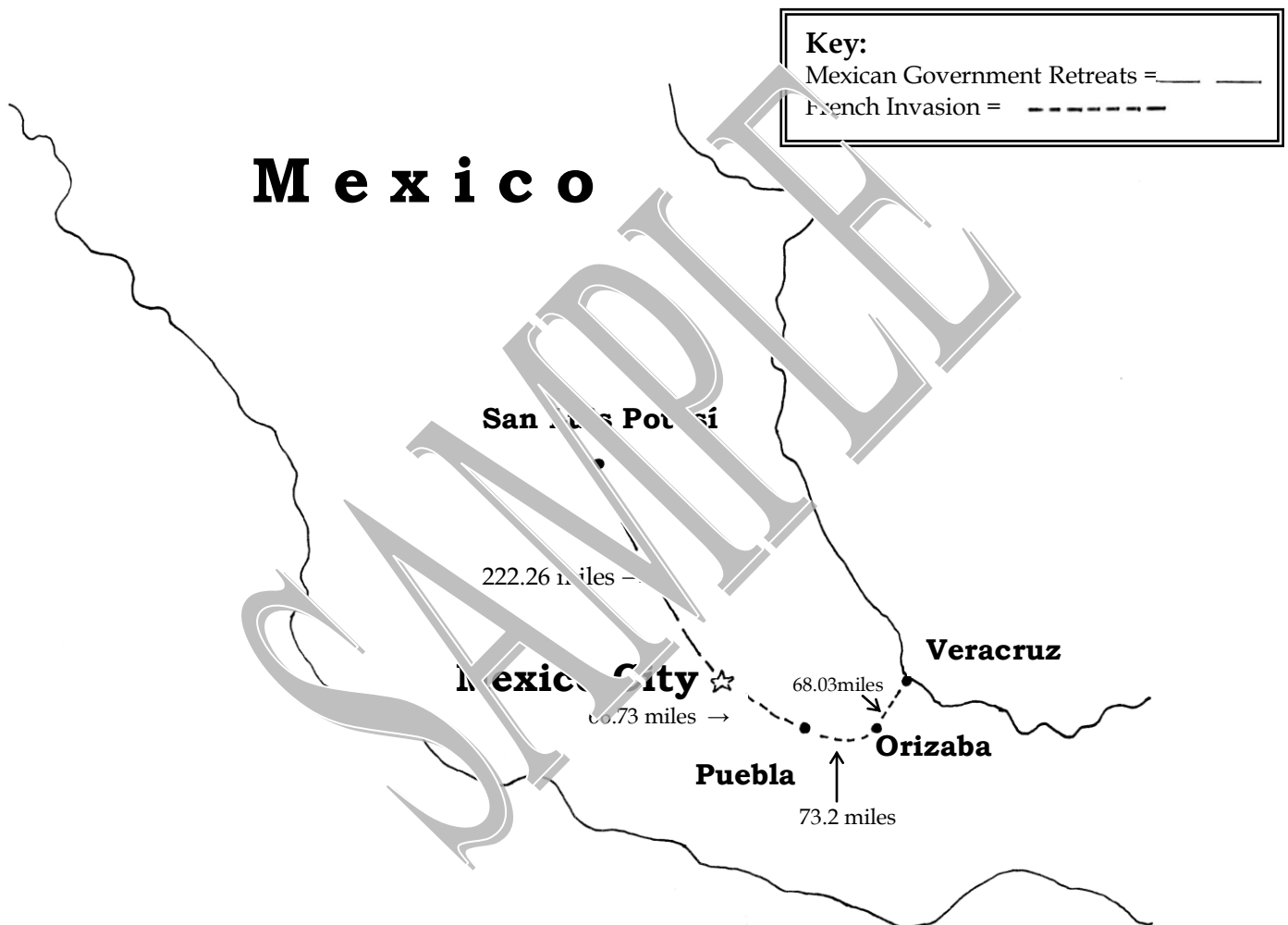


Un letrero hecho por Talavera en una calle en Puebla, México



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# The French Invade Mexico 1862-63



**President Juárez** evacuated government offices to San Luis Potosí after the French won the battle in Puebla, May 17, 1863. The Mexican government changed locations multiple times during the French invasion.

Based on the map above, **calculate** and **round to the nearest mile** the distances traveled between each of the cities.

1. What is the distance from Veracruz to Puebla? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the distance from Veracruz to Mexico City? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the distance from San Luis Potosí to Veracruz? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the distance from Orizaba to Mexico City? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the distance from San Luis Potosí to Orizaba? \_\_\_\_\_



# Craft Idea--Make Aztec Masks

Here's an art project that is simple enough for a preschooler to do! It takes about 20-30 minutes to complete.

## Masks

When Spanish explorers arrived in Mexico hundreds of years ago, they were greeted by the indigenous people there--the Mayan and Aztec Indians. These groups of Indians had their own languages, religions, calendar systems, art, and architecture. They built large temples and pyramids that housed an assortment of artwork such as masks, sculptures, paintings, jewelry, and pottery. Many masks have been discovered which reflect both Mayan and Aztec cultures. These masks were made out of ceramic, stone, wood, obsidian, and bones. Masks often had inlaid mosaics of turquoise, jade, cinnamon, gold pyrite, coral, shells, and shells as decorations. They were used as ornaments in religious celebrations of life and death.

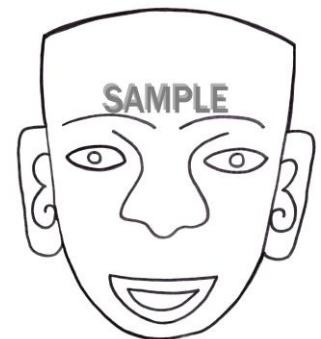
Today, you may see people dressed up as Mayan and Aztec Indians during a Cinco de Mayo parade or a *ballet folklórico* performance. Some will wear masks and some will have elaborate headdresses reflecting Mesoamerican Indian culture.

### Suggested materials

- Mask template on cardstock
- Glue sticks
- Stapler
- Colored construction paper
- Scissors
- Popsicle stick

### Directions

1. Cut out a template of the Aztec Mask.
2. Cut construction paper into small square shapes to be glued together on the mask. Blue, green, red, black, gold, and shell-colored papers may be used to represent the original materials that were used by the Aztecs and Mayans.
3. Cut out the eyes of the project if it is to be used as a real mask, and glue a Popsicle stick to the base as a handle.



Aztec Mask Template