



Cinco de Mayo

STUDY GUIDE



The fifth of May or Cinco de Mayo is a celebratory and significant date for Mexicans as well as for many United States citizens who join them in observing this critical chapter in Mexico's struggle for independence. *Cinco de Mayo* outlines the historical events that sparked this holiday and continue to inspire contemporary celebrations throughout Mexico and the United States. This hour-long program examines the Mexican military victory against France and the creation of this national holiday which is heralded with patriotic passion from Puebla, Mexico to New York. Surprisingly, the national holiday that represents the coming together of the Mexican people has not only developed importance for Mexicans in their homeland, but also for those who have migrated abroad and for people throughout the country who enjoy the festive spirit the holiday evokes.

Although thousands of people celebrate Cinco de Mayo, not all understand the meaning behind the holiday and its significance. This documentary details the dramatic historical context leading up to the military victory of May 5, 1862. The French had been occupying Mexican territory and were rapidly expanding toward a takeover of Mexico City in the years leading up to this climactic battle. In a pivotal showdown in Puebla, troops defeated the French and solidified the independence they had won from Spain decades before. The documentary gives students

the historical background necessary to understand the outpouring of celebration behind Cinco de Mayo, a date and holiday that grows in prominence from year to year. Teachers will find this program to be a wonderful addition to Hispanic Heritage Month activities, giving students new insights into the holiday many of them celebrate each May.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Cinco de Mayo is appropriate for History, World Cultures, Social Studies, and interdisciplinary courses on World Civilizations. It is an excellent resource for Hispanic Heritage Month activities and celebrations. It is appropriate for middle school and high school students and fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: Human Interaction with the Environment, Comparative History of Major Developments, and Civilization, Cultural Diffusion, and Innovation. A Spanish version of this guide can also be found on our **The History Channel en español** website at <http://www.historychannel.com/espanol/> as well as on our Hispanic Heritage Month website at <http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/hhm/>.



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KEY TERMS FOR IDENTIFICATION

Benito Juarez
Mexican Constitution
Zapotec Indians
economic debt
General Ignacio Zaragoza

Napoleon III
Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg
Puebla, Mexico
republic
independence

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What does Cinco de Mayo represent for the Mexican population? Why do you think this has become such a significant holiday worldwide?
2. Why did the French decide to reconquer Mexico? What was Napoleon III and Maximilian's mission?
3. Where did the largest battle in the struggle between the Mexican military and the French take place? Why did it start in this city? Why was the battle between the Mexicans and French so important?
4. Just one year prior to the Cinco de Mayo victory, Mexico was struggling with a civil war and a national debt. Why did Juarez want to prolong paying off the national debt? How did the French, Spanish, and Italians react to his decision? What advantage did Napoleon III see in this situation?
5. Why do you think the French were so shocked, prior to their defeat, when they attacked the Mexican military? With what were the French confronted with upon engaging in this battle?
6. Before the Mexicans fought against the French, they felt weary and insecure of their ability to drive out the French. Zaragoza gave a speech

and stated a very important motto or phrase that motivated the Mexican army to overcome their fear in confronting the French. What was the phrase used by Zaragoza?

7. The Mexican army finally won the battle of Cinco de Mayo. At what point did the French decide to back down and surrender?
8. With the help of the Americans, the Mexicans were finally able to beat the French Empire. Why do you think the Americans decided to help out the Mexican army? Why did the French surrender once again?
9. What are some of the reasons Cinco de Mayo is so widely celebrated in the U.S.?
10. Do you think Cinco de Mayo will eventually be regarded as important and celebrated with such worldwide participation as Oktoberfest or the Chinese New Year?



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EXTENDED ACTIVITIES



Photo Credit: Corbis

1. For this activity, create your own map of Cinco de Mayo events. At the library or using the Internet or a textbook, find a map of Mexico from the 19th century. Locate on this map where the French first arrived by boat and where Chapultepec, Puebla and Mexico City are located. Then, on a posterboard or a piece of construction paper, draw your own map of Mexico and pin on the map the locations of these important cities and events. You can further illustrate your map with images of important generals or quotations relevant to Cinco de Mayo, and include significant events in writing or create a key on the side of your map.
2. Break up into groups of four or five. For this activity, you will create a flag or

poster in celebration of Cinco de Mayo. You can be creative in your approach to designing this flag or poster. For example, your poster could include a slogan related to the military victory or a festive display of some of the symbols or images associated with the holiday. For your flag, you could include symbols relevant to Cinco de Mayo or re-create a historical flag from Mexican history. (*Note to teachers: these flags and posters would be a nice way to decorate your classroom or hallway during Hispanic Heritage Month.)

3. Imagine a soldier during the battle of Cinco de Mayo. You can choose to be either a Mexican soldier, or one fighting on the French side. Using what you learned from watching this documentary, write a journal entry explaining your experiences, your emotions, and your perspective on the war.
4. Break up into groups of four or five. Pretend that it is your responsibility to organize a Cinco de Mayo celebration. At the library, using the Internet, or using what you know based on watching this program, write up a proposal for the party including costumes, activities, and menu. Include in your description where the event will take place and offer activities relevant for all age groups.



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RESOURCES

Books:

Meier, Matt and Feliciano Ribera. *Mexican Americans, American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos*, (Hill and Wang, 1994).
Menard, Valerie. *The Latino Holiday Book: From Cinco De Mayo to Dia De Los Muertos : The Celebrations and Traditions of Hispanic-Americans*, (Treasure Chest Books, 2000).
Palacios, Argentina. *Viva Mexico!: The Story of Benito Juarez and Cinco De Mayo* (Stories of America series), (Steck-Vaughn, 1992).
Urrutia, Maria Cristina. *Cinco De Mayo: Yesterday and Today*, (Groundwood, 2002).

Websites:

An excellent site for younger students with activity ideas for Cinco de Mayo:

<http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/cinco/history.html>

Background on the history and contemporary significance of Cinco de Mayo:

<http://www2.worldbook.com/wc/popup?path=features/cinco&page=html/cinco.htm&direct=yes>

An interesting site lesson plan in English and Spanish, with useful links and activities:

http://fc.bigwalnut.k12.oh.us/~Laura_Laidley/cinco-demayo.htm

Additional background information on the history of the holiday and its contemporary celebration:

http://www.fiestacincodemayo.com/usa_history.htm



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