



MEXICAN COOKING

Level: middle school / grade 8

Course: computer science, Spanish,
social studies, home economics

Rationale

For the vast majority of middle school students living far from the Southern United States border, Mexico is reduced to a few simple stereotypes: tacos, sombreros, and piñates. From the cultural perspective we intend to dismantle stereotypes that students hold concerning Mexico and its cuisine. Mexico may be far away but quickly accessed by the Internet. In addition, one can never overestimate the impact that good computer skills will have over the lifetime of today's student. This lesson plan incorporates computer skills with the teaching of Mexican culture providing students with an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

Lesson Overview

This is a lesson in which students learn how to use the Internet (World Wide Web or gopher) to visit Mexico and learn more about its cuisine and the foods used to prepare that cuisine.

Time Needed

4 or 5 class periods.

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Materials

Pencil and paper; large sheets of poster paper, masking tape and markers, CD-ROMs, cookbooks and other materials. Computer, projection device, telecommunications software, modem, telephone line and Internet access. Bulletin board display - Cocina Mexicana with postcards of a few Mexican recipes. These postcards were purchased in New Mexico and contain recipes as well as a picture of the food. Students could create the same thing by using a word processor to type the recipe and a picture from a Mexican cookbook. Chile ristra hanging in classroom. In the hot desert climate of the Southwest, hot chiles are used in preparing many dishes and is a kitchen staple. When the chiles are harvested, they are tied in bunches called ristras. They are hung to dry and can be used for decorative purposes or in food preparation.

Objectives

Students will become aware of how superficial their thinking is relative to Mexican foods.

- * Students will become aware of the ingredients used in Mexican cooking and traditional Mexican menus.
- * Students will understand that all cultures use food as a means of celebration either as holiday traditions or religious ceremonies.
- * Students will understand how to log on to the World Wide Web and use Internet resources.

Procedures

Day 1

Writing for ideas activity: instruct students to write everything they know about Mexican food - write continuously for two minutes, don't worry about spelling, no stopping to think - write everything that comes into your mind. When time is up, students will call out their suggestions, and key words will be written on the board. At the same time two students will use poster paper to record names of dishes on one and a shopping list on the other (ingredients).

Questions to pose to students: Has anyone been to the Southwest or Mexico? Does anyone cook this food in their family? How many like this food, how many people don't, how many people have never tried Mexican food? Do you think that the food we eat in Mexican restaurants in the city is the same as what Mexicans really eat? Why or why not? How can we learn more about what food is really like in Mexico?

The posters and Cocina Mexicana bulletin board will remain on the wall for the duration of this learning activity.

Discuss preparation for tomorrow's lesson: group activity, some recipes will be in English, some in Spanish, announce group assignments making sure that there are some Spanish students in each group. Discuss how we can find these recipes.

Assign homework - read history of Mexican food.

Day 2

Searching for information. Review procedures for accessing information from CD-ROM. Demonstrate how to access the world wide web and mail recipes to school account. Assign the following roles: Spanish expert; Internet expert; CD-ROM expert and Print materials expert. Internet expert will be responsible for taking notes on how to access the Internet. Assign a specific meal to each of the groups - 6 groups of 4 students - two groups will research breakfast foods, two groups will research lunch foods and two groups will research dinner foods. Students will meet in groups to discuss group assignment and process for completing same. CD-ROM and print materials experts will research the ingredients in Mexican recipes based upon shopping list and find printed Mexican recipes.

Meanwhile, teacher meets with Internet experts and ensures accuracy of notes taken during teacher led demonstration. Internet experts receive index card with url addresses which are: <http://www.udg.mx> and <http://www.wiskit.com/beyondtacoscontents.html>; and an appointment time to log on to the Internet. During Internet time Spanish expert finds cooking section of University of Guadalajara and leads group to an appropriate menu item. The recipe will be mailed to the school account and printed at this time (both English and Spanish versions). Other members of the group will be using print materials from cart in classroom and accessing CD-ROMs.

Day 3

Same as Day 2

Day 4

Results of research - names of recipes and ingredients will be added to the poster lists. Each group shares menus. Discuss poster lists, pointing out the vast array of new material, and ingredients that are not locally available. Menus and recipes are added to the Cocina Mexicana bulletin board.

Culminating activity

Each student will write what he or she learned from this activity. Questions to pose to students: What ingredients are used most in Mexican cooking? Where are these ingredients grown? Were these ingredients used in pre-Hispanic Mexico? Were these foods indigenous to Mexico or introduced to the culture by Europeans? Are these foods still being used in Mexican cuisine? Are these foods used for celebration either as part of holiday traditions or religious ceremonies? What foods are new to you? How has your thinking changed as to what you thought was Mexican food, and what really is? Have native Mexican foods contributed to cuisines of the world?

Follow-up activities

Extra credit for groups that prepare the recipes and bring into class. Field trip to an authentic Mexican restaurant if there is one in your area.

Extension Activities

Coordinate with home economics teacher so that recipes may be prepared in the home economics lab. Students could determine nutritional values of various menus. Coordinate with social studies teacher so that Mexican history could be taught/reviewed.

Create an old world/new world display. Resources: "Good as Gold: Foods the Americas gave the World" poster can be ordered from the National Museum of American History, Publications Division, Room MBB-66, MRC 646, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560 (202) 357-1965. Another poster applicable to old world/new world foods is "Seeds of Change," National Museum of Natural History, Room 212, MRC 158, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

Create an old world/new world garden.

Handout

History of Mexican Cooking

from University of Guadalajara Home Page URL: <http://www.udg.mx>

Written by Garrett D'Amore (freely redistributable)

Food and Cooking in Pre-Hispanic Mexico

Corn: A new world plant, corn has been a staple in Mexico for centuries. Archeologists have even encountered prehistoric remains of tiny ears of corn in the Valley of Tehuacn. Because of its importance, corn became an object of worship in pre-Hispanic times. According to one tradition, before cooking it, cooks would heat the corn with their breath so it would not suffer shock from the change in temperature. Before eating it, the corn would be treated with delicacy and reverence. If a loose kernel was found on the floor, it would be picked up and prayer would be said begging pardon for the neglect to avoid the gods' vengeance.

Beans and Chili: Beans, together with corn and chili have been staples of the Mexican diet for centuries. While beans were used for sustenance, chili is a spice and condiment.

Squash and Pumpkin: Used for both everyday purposes and special occasions, squash and pumpkin pulp was often cooked seasoned with chili. From the seeds an oil was extracted from which pepin was prepared. Hollowed out gourds were also used as serving vessels and for decoration.

Turkeys and Dogs: The turkey, a new world animal, was the only domesticated bird in Mexican pre-Hispanic civilization. A certain kind of hairless dog was also bred for slaughter, although its meat was less of a delicacy than turkey meat. Sometimes both meats would be eaten together, the former for taste and the latter for volume.

Maguey: Ancient pre-Hispanic codices speak of both dietary and religious importance of this cactus for their civilizations. The maguey produced the sacred temetl - a while liquor drunk by warriors and cthli, a drink of

the lower classes that became known as pulque after the conquest. Maguey was also used to produce thatch for houses, thread, paper, needles, clothes, footwear, rope, medicine, vinegar and as wraps for meat and fish dishes.

Water Life: The Valley of Mexico was rich with water resources and residents of the valley exploited these for food; fish, insects, frogs, tadpoles, fresh water shrimp and a naturally occurring pasta called ahuate were all delicacies gathered from lakes and rivers. Groups living near the sea ate fish, turtles, crabs and oysters.

Desert Fruit: In desert areas of Mexico grow a cactus called the nopal. Its leaves may be cooked and eaten, and in certain seasons of the year it bears the red prickly pear fruit.

Cacao: Cacao was so valued in Pre-Hispanic civilizations that it was sometimes used as a form of money. Chocolate was often prepared mixed with water, corn, honey and vanilla and then drunk from a gourd.

Food and Cooking in Post-Independence Mexico

Following independence in 1821, Americans and Europeans arrived in Mexico in increasing numbers. They introduced new recipes and styles to Mexican cuisine, although lower classes adopted few of the techniques.

France: The French established themselves in various parts of Mexico and opened restaurants serving French dishes, cheese, wine, liquors, and deserts. The French also brought pasteleras, or pastry shops, which are still very common in Mexico today.

Spain: During the colonial period, Spaniards introduced nixtamal mills (a process using water and calcium) for corn, from which tortillas are produced and wheat mills producing the flour that we use for bread.

England: From England has come tea - never totally embraced in Mexico - and roast beef with sauce, which is enormously popular among Mexicans.

United States: Since the Declaration of Independence, Americans have enjoyed visiting their southern neighbors, and during the invasion of 1847, American soldiers accommodated themselves in bars where they drank tequila and introduced whiskey.

Germany: Germans planted coffee fields in regions of Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz. They introduced some beer brewing methods and forms of preparing pork.

China: During the second half of the past century, Chinese immigrated to Mexico principally from San Francisco. They settled principally in Northern Mexico and established cafes where coffee and boiling milk are served for breakfast with biscuits and "pan de chino."

Mexican Food Today

Even after the Revolution, coal remained the principal cooking fuel, and tortillas continued to be made by hand. However, with the arrival of petroleum and petroleum products, things change in the kitchen. Gas

and oil gradually replaced coal, and plastic kitchen utensils replaced wood and clay instruments. Most importantly however, the radio entered the kitchen allowing Mexican chefs to listen to their radionovelas (radio soap operas) while cooking.

Bibliography

Bermudez, Maria Teresa, Mexican Family Favorites Cook Book, Phoenix, AZ: Golden West Publishers, 1983.

Cook book of Mexican cuisine including basics of Mexican cookery and recipes for everyday dishes organized by menu type.

CD-Roms

Compton's Electronic Encyclopedia (CD-ROM), 1994.

Encarta Electronic Encyclopedia (CD-ROM), Microsoft, 1995.

Grolier's Electronic Encyclopedia (CD-ROM), 1994.

Listserv:

Bilingual Education and ESL Resources. Join list by sending electronic mail to listproc@listproc.wsu.edu "sub beslist (your name)"

World Wide Web Sites:

University of Guadalajara Home Page

URL: <http://www.udg.mx>

Classroom Connect, Wentworth Publishing Company

URL: <http://www.classroom.net/>

A printed magazine and web site especially for educators that provides resources such as how to use the Internet to find instructional materials; lesson plan stockpiles, easy to follow directions to access sites and requests for keypals and participants in a wide variety of Internet projects by subject area.

The Mole Page

URL: <http://www.slip.net/~bobnemo/mole.html>

Bob Nemerovski's home page with hot links to Mexican recipes in English. One hot link is Daniel German's Mexican Cooking Page at the University of Guadalajara which includes Mexican recipes and what people believe is Mexican food, but is not.

Beyond Tacos

URL: <http://www.wiskit.com/beyondtacoscontents.html>

Mexican Recipes in English

Mark Coleman's home page

URL: <http://www.grfn.org/~mpc2/>

Mark Coleman's home page that includes links to Latin America/Spanish Speaking Countries, Mexican newspaper; music and much more.