



# THE LATIN AMERICAN MERCADO: WHO MADE THIS?

Level: grade: 6, 7, 8  
Course: Spanish I or Social Studies

## Rationale

Because we live in an ever-shrinking complex world of multinational corporations, it is important that students begin to understand the complexities of the global marketplace. Students should be aware of their personal economic power and think about it the next time they visit the mall, invest in stocks or buy a handicraft.

In Latin America, small cooperatives, who once sold to the local market, are now expanding their sales to other countries. Many handicrafts, especially those from Mexico and Guatemala, are now available in the United States. Through a simulation of both a cottage industry and marketplace, students will gain an appreciation of their place in the global marketplace. Speaking Spanish for a real reason, buying and selling, in a real setting, the marketplace, is an intrinsic reward in itself.

## Lesson Overview

The mercado or marketplace in Latin America is a social and business event where both local gossip and goods exchange hands in a friendly, bargaining atmosphere. Through their participation in a simulated cottage industry and subsequent marketplace, students can begin to appreciate the effort and tedium involved in such work. They gain cultural understanding of the marketplace and its impact on traditional society. Hopefully, they can transfer newly acquired economic skills and global understanding to their purchasing power.

by  
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## Time Needed

5 class periods

## Materials

Marketplace background information for students, market handicrafts, market visuals (pictures or a video), craft directions, craft supplies, and market money.

## Objectives

- \* To learn about the market, a basic economic institution of Latin American culture.
- \* To demonstrate the concepts of barter, bargaining, exchange and work
- \* To determine the effects of economic development on traditional society (factories vs. artisans, supermarkets vs. markets, urban vs. rural sectors)
- \* To appreciate the effort and tedium of a cottage industry
- \* To acquire a handicraft skill
- \* To think about the origin of imported handicrafts sold in the U.S.
- \* To understand other cultures in relation to your own to gain a deeper understanding of how you think and behave
- \* To expand cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity
- \* To speak Spanish in a real setting for a real reason to real people

## Background Information

Markets play a very important role in the Spanish-speaking world. Not only are they places where people buy and sell a wide range of products, but they also provide a place where social events take place. Market day is that time when locals hawk their wares, entertain tourists, and discuss the week's events. Parents, children, and grandparents often attend together.

The market was the central economic institution in pre-Columbian times and continues to play an important role today, especially for small farmers and agricultural workers, artisans, traders and small business people. Today's mercados combine the past - handicrafts like weaving, tinwork, straw baskets - with the present - plastic toys, coca-cola, radios, etc. The markets exist today in the smallest villages to the largest cities, alongside modern supermarkets. Often mercados are held on a weekly basis while in some larger cities some mercados are open every day of the week.

Bargaining can be a sensitive issue with some people. Common courtesy is always important, but especially when dealing with other cultures. Always begin any transaction with a greeting and perhaps a comment about the weather or the quality of the merchandise. Spanish, of course, is preferable when dealing with Spanish-speaking people. Even if your vocabulary is extremely limited, the vendors appreciate your efforts to speak their first language.

Bargaining is a game, of sorts, played between the buyer and seller. Each has an expectation in mind. The seller wants the best price, but the buyer wants the lowest possible price. This is the dynamic interplay that could take a few seconds or several minutes. A rule of thumb is to offer about half of the first price named by the vendor. For example, if you want a bouquet of fresh of fresh flowers, you greet the seller and say what a nice day it is. Next you remark that the flowers are especially lovely. Then ask the price. If the vender replies 20 pesos, say you are willing to spend 10. Next he may say 18, and you offer 12. The dialogue continues until you both agree on a fair and equitable price. Another strategy is to ask, "what is your lowest price?" Remember that haggling over the equivalent of a couple of cents in American money does not reflect well. Be sure to think of the other person. A smile can be the deciding factor. Always be pleasant and people generally treat you the same.

It is not possible, however, to bargain in every market situation. When price tags are obvious, it is usually not appropriate to bargain, but not always. Sometimes a merchant will lower the price if you buy in quantity. Generally when items are not marked with individual prices, it is okay to bargain. The merchants expect it, and both buyer and seller can enjoy the strategy of bargaining.

Market day is very long for most of the vendors. They often have to travel long distances from their villages. Vegetables, fruit and/or handicrafts are usually packed the night before, but they must arise early to go by truck, foot or bus to the marketplace. Usually the first arrivals get the best positions to display their wares on tables, in the back of trucks, or even on the ground. Sometimes the fresh produce is all together and the jewelry and the other crafts are arranged in logical groupings. Markets open early, so buyers who want the best selections also arrive very early in the morning.

Recently large shopping centers have sprung up in Latin America. The stores are new and attractive, but the prices are higher and the fun and flavor of shopping in a typical market place are lost.

## Crafts

### *Notes to the teacher*

Most countries in Latin America have old craft heritages and they continue to be preserved, practiced and developed by members of the community. The crafts are usually bright and sunny like the countries themselves. Look at authentic artifacts, if possible, and then offer suggestions for homemade versions.

Many crafts items are quick, inexpensive and often easy to produce, but time and training are necessary to make the crafts well. Students can be given time to complete them in class or at home, depending on the amount of available time. The easiest require very simple skills and readily available materials. For greeting cards and bookmarks, use rubber stamps, stickers, markers and colored paper. Lamination adds durability. Ojos de Dios (God's Eyes) come from many countries, but especially from the Mexican state of Nayarit where the Huicholes (the name means healer) make God's Eyes to serve as protection from evil. To make a God's Eye, wrap yarn around pencil-size dowel rods tied in a cross. Use a variety of bright colors. Especially adept students can use popcicle craft sticks or even toothpicks to vary the size. Tissue paper flowers are always popular in a variety of colors and sizes. Amates (bark paintings) can be made using crumpled brown wrapping paper. They are painted with bright native designs on small pieces about 5"x7". A balero or



wooden toy can be replicated using a paper cup with thread tied through the bottom with a paper clip attached to the other end of the thread. Toss the line and paper clip and try to catch it in the cup. The longer the string, the harder it is to do.

Some craft items take more time and cannot be finished during a regular class period but add a great deal to the market's flavor. Students like to make piñatas with paper mache over an inflated balloon. Add tissue paper decoration; they can be sold without the candy filling. Friendship bracelets are popular, especially if made with intricate designs. Maracas are popular rhythm instruments often made from dried gourds. Homemade ones can be made from light bulbs with paper mache covering or sample cereal boxes filled with dried beans. Cascarones or fiesta eggs are confetti-filled eggshells often displayed in paper cones. They have been used as fiesta favors since the nineteenth century. They are the most popular craft items at mercados. Students love to surprise their friends with eggs broken over their heads.

## Procedures

### Day One

Brainstorm with the class the kinds of markets they have seen. Ideas might include: flea market, farmer's market, supermarket, garage sale.

Next ask what kind of things would be found in a Latin American market. Ideas might include: ready-to-wear clothing, food, and handmade items. Almost any answer is acceptable. Next have students predict what sights, smells and sounds would appear in a Latin American market. List on the board and then show the Video "El Mercado." If not available, use pictures of marketplaces.

After viewing, look at the prediction list again. Make changes as necessary. Discuss the following questions. Re-view the video if necessary.

- \* How is the space used in the market? Is it crowded?
- \* What interpersonal (person-to-person) interactions did you see?
- \* What is the distance between people? Are they closer together or farther apart than Americans?

Divide the class into small groups of 4-5 with no group larger than 5. Give one or two authentic craft items to each group. Items might include God's Eyes, paper banners, fiesta eggs, tissue paper flowers, bark paintings, piñatas, friendship bracelets, or maracas. (See Crafts) Their task is to answer the 5 W questions (who, what, where, when, why) about the items and how they are made. They share results with the class. Correct or add information as groups give their oral reports. Then assign the homework that groups can start in class.

### Homework

Decide on a name for your cooperative or cottage industry. It's a product made by hand usually in the home or small shop. Decide also what craft to sell and at what cost - think about labor and materials. Begin to collect craft materials for Day 3.



## Day Two

Show students the authentic craft items again and offer suggestions for homemade versions. Write down the name of the student's cooperatives or cottage industries and their craft choices. Try to encourage lots of variety. Discuss the rules of the workplace. Include break times, music while working, labor costs, and availability of craft materials. You could play latina music like Selena, Gypsy Kings, Jon Secada, Gloria Estefan, or Linda Ronstadt. You may wish to allocate resources for handicraft production on credit - to be paid back after the market to further demonstrate economic relationships. Students decide the price of the craft items. Post rules for everyone to see.

Students make posters or ads with provided materials. Display in class to advertise the mercado with the day and time. (day four)

Discuss the strategy of bargaining. See Background information.

Role play the market situation in either Spanish or English. List the vocabulary needed for an easy reference. The teacher is the first seller and then becomes the buyer for the second demonstration. Now the students practice in twos. Circulate to help with any difficulties. Begin the craft production if materials are available.

### Homework

Bring necessary craft supplies to class for work session in students' cottage industries.

## Day Three

Role play again the sales transaction, practicing bargaining. Remember to first greet the vendor. Students should practice both the role of buyer and seller. Suggest bartering as a form of payment.

Discuss the rules of the marketplace. Decide how much money each should have to start (if any), the exchange rates of dollars to pesos or another currency, courtesy, bargaining, and the role of the vendor and seller. Stress at this time that every student will play both roles at the marketplace.

Begin the work day. Replicate a real work place as much as possible. Allow students the prearranged break times, music, etc. and refer to the posted rules when necessary. Suggest a minimum of eight items of the same craft for market day.

### Homework

Finish craft items for market day.

## Day Four

Market Day. Set up market stalls as quickly as possible. Display posters on tables to label what group goes where.

Pass out play money if it was prearranged with the rules.

Set the time limits. For half of the available time, a student is the buyer. Then he/she becomes a seller to get the feel of the other position. Everyone should do both jobs within the time allowed.

Open the market. Circulate and help whenever necessary.

Close the market a few minutes before the end of class to clean up.

## Day Five

De-briefing. Ask students to individually respond to the following questions. They should write their answers and be prepared to turn them in. If they choose not to write their names, that would be okay.

- \* How successful was your cooperative?
- \* How successful was your market experience?
- \* Did you have enough background knowledge to do well? Why or why not?
- \* Did your group work well together? Why or why not?
- \* If you could redo the experience, what would you change and why?
- \* How has what you learned influenced your role as a consumer?
- \* Did you learn any Spanish?
- \* How did your market differ from one in Latin America? How were they the same?

After all papers are written, conduct a discussion of the same questions. Some students will be more vocal than others, but try to end the experience on a positive note with a listing of what students have learned. Frequently they are not aware of how much they learn, especially from a simulation.

## Related Activities

1. Expand the project with a greater emphasis on economics. Students could study multi-national companies and show their offices on a world map. Better yet, invite a guest speaker to class who has business connections with another country. Ask him/her the importance of culture and foreign language in international business. Set up key pals in Latin America and interview them about their experiences with shopping at the mercado.
2. Expand the project with a greater emphasis on speaking Spanish. Set up a nearby "jail" in which to deposit those students who speak English. They might have to recite a poem or sing a song in Spanish or pay a fine to exit. You could give prizes for the best booth or authentic craft - with the participants casting votes. You could set up an aduanero or customs table complete with fake passports. Ask a native Spanish speaker to play the part of the customs official. He/She would question everyone at the border (entrance to the market). Give market money to several visitors who could be spies in disguise. They could pay students who are "caught" speaking Spanish especially well. Finally, award a certificate of appreciation to those who participated especially well.

3. Have a speaker talk about craft cooperatives in Central America or invite a local artisan to demonstrate his/her trade to the class.
4. Have students visit and interview vendors at a local market. They could ask questions about the placement of booths or stalls, the cost of booth rental or their typical market day.
5. Have students create a background mural with or without the help of a local artist. They would have to do research, planning, drawing and finally painting.

## Bibliography

### Audio-Visual Sources

"El Mercado." Educational Video. 1990. 11 minutes

This video is a cultural view of the importance of markets in Latin American life. Shows the social aspects of the day as well as the key vocabulary words. In Spanish but a very slow and clear dialect. Great for junior high.

Latin American Curriculum Resource Center. Center for Latin American Studies. 105 Hebert Building, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118-5698. Tel: (504) 865-5164 Fax: (504) 865-6719.

This center has 5 slide sets of markets in Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico and Latin America. Each set has 10 slides & a guide.

"We are Guatemalans." Narrated by E.G. Marshall. Mary Knoll World Productions, P.O. Box 308, Mary Knoll, N.Y. 10545 Tel: (800) 227-8523

This video is a 28 minute documentary of 2,000 Guatemalans who returned to their homeland after 12 years of exile in Southern Mexico. Interviewers tell of the army massacre of over 300 people in 1982.

### Books

Bartok, Mira. Ancient Mexico. Glenview, Il.: Scott-Foresman, 1993.

This book includes six stencils that students could use for craft projects, a map of ancient cultures, descriptions of rituals and games, and myths. Excellent resource for students to use with very little supervision.

Culturegrams, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University. Center for International and Area Studies, 1992. Tel: (800) 528-6279

This is a series of 4 page leaflets about the countries of the world. It is native commentary and original, expert analysis but very clear and easy for students to use. Each report contains greetings, visiting, eating and gestures. It also gives an overview of the people, life-style, nation and traveler's advice.



Gibbs, Virginia G. Latin America Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee: Center for Latin America. 1985.

This source has two excellent activities - one is a classroom marketplace to simulate the Aztec version and the other is an economics activity to identify the origins of products made outside the U.S.

Gomez, Aurelia. Crafts of Many Cultures. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 1993.

This book has 30 authentic craft projects from around the world. The cultural significance of each project is discussed as well as its relevance today. The paper mola directions are especially clear with drawings of how-to. Students could follow these on their own.

Hoffman, Judith Corwin. Latin American and Caribbean Crafts. New York: Franklin Watts, 1992.

This book is a great source for easy crafts. It includes clear directions for bark paintings and god's eyes with drawings.

Hewlett, Margaret, editor. The National Gallery of Art. New York: Scholastic Art. March, 1993.

This issue is dedicated to Diego Rivera and his work. The color pictures of his murals in Detroit are included as well as directions for making a mural as a class project.

Krenz, Nancy and Byrnes, Patricia. Southwestern Arts and Crafts Projects. Santa Fe: The Sunstone Press, 1979.

This book has a very clear set of directions for ojos de dios and fiesta eggs.

Larsen, Jack Lenor. Folk Art From the Global Village. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico art Press, 1995.

This is a beautiful book of the Girard Collection at the International Folk Art Museum. The photographs give craft ideas of Latin America.

Lirse, Barbara and Dick Judd. Fiesta: Mexico and Central America. Paramount Communications Co., Frearon Teacher Aids, 1993.

This is a music, craft and recipe resource for fiestas.

Pettit, Florence H. and Robert M. Mexican Folk Toys. New York: Hastings House, 1978.

This is a beautifully illustrated book of folk toys arranged by seasonal celebrations.

Salinas, Norman. Indo-Hispanic Folk Art Traditions. Oakland, California: Pinata Publications, 1988.

This book gives directions for culturally-based, year-round activities with an emphasis on Christmas.

Illustrations are excellent. Papel picado (cut paper banners), luminarias (paper lanterns), ojos de dios (God's eyes) are included. A history and recipe for Mexican chocolate is included.

### Electronic Sources

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/region.html>

This is the University of Texas Latin American Studies main site. It is loaded with current up-to-date information like maps, weather and hurricane updates.

<http://www.folkart.com/~latitude/stsurin/ss008.htm>

Painting of a Haitian market

<http://www.folkart.com/~latitude/home/mex.htm>

This is a sampling of Mexican folkart and crafts.

<http://libwww.essex.ac.uk/.news.html>

This is a collection of 5 Mexican and one Costa Rican newspapers.

<http://www.versa.com/mader/ecotravel/ecotravel.html>

This is El Planeta Platica (The Earth Speaks) about ecotravels in Latin America. The spring '95 articles include a cooperative project in Guatemala.

<http://homepage.interaccess.com/~mar/openair.html>

Openair-Market Net: The World Wide Guide to Farmers' Markets, Street Markets, Flea Markets and Street Vendors

<http://mayaquest.mecc.com>

Mayaquest education project. This follows the travels of bicyclists in the Yucatan in March-April, 1995 as they discover Mayan ruins.

### Key-Pal Sources

<http://www.stolaf.edu/network/iecc>

Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections.

International Youth Services

PB 125, SF - 20101 Turku, Finland arranges international penpals.