

Between Two Worlds: Mexico at the Crossroads



THE CHOICES PROGRAM

Explore the Past... Shape the Future

History and Current Issues for the Classroom

WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
BROWN UNIVERSITY WWW.CHOICES.EDU

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ELIZABETH BAKEWELL

Former Assistant Professor of Research
Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Brown University

THOMAS BIERSTEKER

Professor of Political Science, Curt Gasteyger Chair in
International Security and Conflict Studies
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

KATRINA BURGESS

Associate Professor of International Political Economy
The Fletcher School, Tufts University

VIKRAM CHAND

Senior Public Sector Management Specialist, World Bank
Former Visiting Scholar in International Relations (Research)
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

CINDY COLLINS

Former Research Assistant
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

R. DOUGLAS COPE

Associate Professor of History
Brown University

JANICE GALLAGHER

Postdoctoral Fellow
Watson Institute for International Studies
Brown University

ELLEN MESSER

Visiting Associate Professor
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Brandeis University

JULIO ORTEGA

Professor of Hispanic Studies
Brown University

KENNETH C. SHADLEN

Professor of Development Studies
Development Studies Institute
London School of Economics and Political Science

THOMAS SKIDMORE

Professor of History Emeritus
Brown University

GUSTAVO VEGA

Professor of Research, Centro de Estudios Internacionales
El Colegio de México, Mexico City

All maps by Alexander Sayer Gard-Murray.

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The Choices Program

Director

Susan Graseck

Curriculum Writer

Susannah Bechtel

Administrative Manager

Kathleen Magiera

Curriculum Development Director

Andy Blackadar

International Education Intern

Jessica Fields

Communications & Marketing

Jillian McGuire Turbitt

Professional Development Director

Mimi Stephens

International Education Intern

Danielle Johnstone

Video & New Media Producer

Tanya Waldburger

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Introduction: Mexico in the 21st Century

In 1991, Walmart, a U.S. corporation that runs a chain of discount department stores, opened its first store in Mexico. Today, Walmart operates more than two thousand stores in Mexico and employs more than 209,000 people, making it the largest private employer in the country.

Walmart's rapid expansion is part of a larger trend of economic change in Mexico. Since the 1980s, Mexico's leaders have focused on increasing Mexico's ties to the global economy. In the last three decades, Mexico has seen a massive influx of multinational corporations and foreign retail stores. Parts of the country are now almost indistinguishable from the United States, a jarring change to many Mexicans. This economic change has been matched with political reform. In 2000, for the first time in seventy-one years, Mexicans elected a president who was not a candidate of the leading party, the PRI.

But as the country focuses on entering the global marketplace, inequality continues to pull Mexican society apart. Mexican business executives jet from continent to continent while poor people in the cities are caught in a widening web of crime and drug trafficking. At the same time, much of Mexico's rural indigenous population lacks basic services such as running water, sanitation, and access to primary education.

Walmart's presence in Mexico highlights another important feature of Mexico today—the country's evolving relationship with the United States. Despite an uneasy past, the United States and Mexico ushered in a new era of integration and cooperation in 1994 with the North Ameri-

can Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which dramatically increased trade among North American countries. Today about two-thirds of Mexico's trade is with the United States, and about one-tenth of U.S. trade is with Mexico. At the same time, growing U.S. concerns about immigration, drug trafficking, crime, and border security have strained this relationship. Mexican leaders have often been frustrated by U.S. policies toward Mexican immigrants in the United States.

In this reading, you will be asked to step into the shoes of Mexicans and consider Mexico's future. The readings trace the history of Mexico, from its precolonial past to its most recent political and economic changes. You will be asked to consider the same questions that the people of Mexico are now debating: What principles should guide the development of Mexico's economy? How should Mexico define its relationship with the United States? How should it define its relationship with the rest of the world? How should Mexicans address their country's inequality and poverty? How should they address increasing rates of crime and violence?



This photograph shows the U.S.-Mexico border. On the right is the Mexican city Tijuana. On the left are the outskirts of San Diego, California in the United States.

Sgt. 1st Class Gordon Hyde, U.S. National Guard.

Between Two Worlds: Mexico at the Crossroads

Teacher Resource Book



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Expressing Political Views through Art

Objectives:

Students will: Analyze the relationship between art and politics in Mexico.

Explore the styles and techniques of Mexican street artists.

Express the political views of invented Mexican characters through art.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part III of the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB 28-29) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-30).

Handouts:

“Politics and the Paintbrush in Mexico” (TRB-33)

“Murals A-D” (TRB 34-37)

“Your Political Mural” (TRB-38)

In the Classroom:

1. Focus question—Write the question “What is a symbol?” on the board. Establish a definition with the class. Can students think of examples of how symbols are used to represent or remember historical events?

2. Art and Politics—Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute “Politics and the Paintbrush in Mexico” and one of the murals to each group. Have the students read the handout and answer the questions for their painting. After they are finished, have the groups share some of their answers. What symbols can they identify in the murals? What do they think the artists’ messages are?

3. Defining Roles—Emphasize that the connection between politics and art is strong in Mexico today. Opponents of the government often express their criticism through elaborate banners and sidewalk drawings in Mexico’s large cities. Tell the students that they are going to plan a mural. Explain that groups are expected to make a sketch of a small-scale mural that conveys the hopes and concerns

of an individual in Mexico. Urge them to discuss what kinds of ideas and attitudes different people in Mexico may have about their government. In what ways could events have shaped their views of their country? What would they wish to say through their murals to passers-by about Mexico today? Distribute “Your Political Mural” to each group and tell the groups to follow the instructions on the handout, inventing a muralist character.

4. Spurring Creativity—Invite students to take another look at the street art to develop ideas for their murals. How can abstract concepts be expressed visually? For example, what symbols, styles, or colors could they use to illustrate hope for the future or anger at the government? Where could they display the image? Students should focus on symbolically representing the political opinions of their character as they sketch their mural.

5. Sharing Expressions—Invite each group to share their sketch with the class, pointing out how the symbols in their mural represent particular values, desires, and feelings of their imagined character.

Homework:

Students should read “Options in Brief.”

Note:

A Powerpoint presentation of the murals is available to project in your classroom at <<http://www.choices.edu/mexicomaterials>>. Free videos by Ian Alden Russell that can help students think about art and politics can be found at <http://www.choices.edu/resources/scholars_Russell.php>

You may also wish to show your students some of the paintings that made Mexico’s mural tradition world famous in the 1920s and 1930s. An Orozco mural called “American Civilization” can be viewed at <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/digitalorozco/app/>>. The mural does contain some depictions of nudity and violence. Teachers should review the site to ensure it is suitable for their classes.

Politics and the Paintbrush in Mexico

Introduction: Art and politics have been closely connected in Mexico, especially since the Mexican Revolution. The struggle and ideals of the Revolution gave rise to a generation of muralists who sought to tell the story of Mexico through their paintbrushes. The legacy of these famous muralists, like José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, can be seen in the work of Mexican street artists today.

Street art has become a way that many young political artists express themselves, and the murals seen across Mexican cities often reflect common topics in public debate. Mexican street artists have focused on corruption, the Chiapas rebellion, and economic troubles. Sometimes the artists use emotional depictions of historic figures to imply what these people would think about the current political situation. When they present heroic views of the past, it is often to highlight the great failings of the present. Street artists embrace using public spaces as a canvas, even if this is often illegal. In this way, their art is not only visible but is also an act of defiance against the government.

Instructions: You are going to consider examples of Mexican street art. With your group, review your assigned mural and answer the questions below.

Questions

Assigned Mural: _____

1. Describe the people and/or images in this mural.
2. What kind of mood does this mural project? For example, does it express fear, anger, pride, optimism, empowerment, etc.?
3. Can you make any connections between this mural and the history of Mexico that you have read?



Photograph by Jay Galvin (CC BY 2.0).

Mural A:

This mural was photographed in Puebla. The text on the right reads “Que trato te hubiera gustado recibir para que tu se los des a tus hijos,” which means, “The treatment you wish to receive, pass it on to your children.”



Photograph by Jay Galvin (CC BY 2.0).

Mural B:

This mural was photographed in Puebla. The stone animal on the left is a depiction of a snake god, a deity of early Mexican societies. It also includes an image of Christopher Columbus on the right.

Name: _____



Photograph by Christopher William Adach (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Mural C:

This mural was photographed in Tepoztlán. It features an image of Emiliano Zapata. Translations of the text are, “Wake up Tepoztlán! The voice of the town is the law, it’s not up for debate, it is defended and respected,” (left) and “No to the extension of the highway!” (right).

Name: _____



Photograph by Jay Galvin (CC BY 2.0).

Mural D:

This mural was photographed in Tulancingo. It features an image of Miguel Hidalgo.

Your Political Mural

Instructions: You are going to sketch a mural from the perspective of an imagined Mexican person. Decide on a “character” or person your group will embody when creating your mural and answer the following questions about them.

1. What is your character’s age and gender? How else would you describe them?
2. What is your character’s main concern about the political, social, or economic conditions in Mexico?
3. If your character had a hero from Mexican history, who would it be?
4. What do you think your character values most? (circle one)

freedom	justice	tolerance	community	stability
cooperation	self-reliance	security	democracy	
5. What are some symbols that can be used to represent your character’s particular political values, opinions, or attitudes?