

Facing Challenges

Introduction

Throughout the years, Nicaragua has experienced a series of disasters--natural, political, and economic. Due to earthquakes, hurricanes, dictators, revolutions, corruption, and economic crises, Nicaraguans have endured countless setbacks. Depending on the source quoted, from 72% to 82% of the population now lives in poverty; of those, from 48% to 52% live in extreme poverty.

The most dire yet interconnected problems facing Nicaragua today are extreme poverty, lack of basic education past the sixth grade for a majority of people, unemployment, and government corruption. Together, these problems impact the daily lives of Nicaraguans in ways unimaginable to most North Americans. In spite of the difficult daily reality these intertwined problems create, one senses a pulsing hope in Nicaragua for the future, as its people are its most powerful resource. Their deep desire to discuss and address these problems permeates their society from the most poor to the most wealthy.



The lessons in this section of the *Resource Guide* are structured to provide students with an essential understanding of the challenges being faced by the Nicaraguan people and an appreciation for their resiliency and spirit.

Nicaragua Nicaragüita

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze Nicaraguan a song and poem to interpret their meaning.
 - Compare and contrast different perspectives represented in the song and poem.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Nicaragua Nicaragüita**
 - Student Handout: **Worksheet A**
 - Audio clip: *Nicaragua Nicaragüita*
 - Student Handout: **Nicaragua**
 - Student Handout: **Worksheet B**
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Notes to the Teacher

- Perhaps the most famous of Nicaraguan songs, *Nicaragua Nicaragüita* was written directly after the Sandinista revolution in 1979 as the first song of the *Canto Epico al FSLN*. The *Canto Epico* is an epic song series written and performed by Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy celebrating the revolution and recounting the events leading up to it.
 - Nicaragüita is also the name of the national flower, frangipani.
 - Diriangén was an Indian chief who resisted the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century.
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Activities

1. Distribute the student handout entitled **Nicaragua Nicaragüita**.
 - a. Direct students to underline cognates and known words.
 - b. Play the audio clip (*Nicaragua Nicaragüita*) and direct students to follow along by reading the stanzas on the handout.
 - c. Ask students to interpret the emotional tone of the song. What feeling about Nicaragua does the vocalist convey?
 2. Distribute the student handout entitled **Worksheet A**.
 - a. Divide the class into small groups to translate the song and to complete **Worksheet A**.
 - b. Once students have completed the worksheet, ask students to report their findings and interpretations.
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Activities

3. Distribute the student handouts entitled **Nicaragua** and **Worksheet B**.
 - a. Ask students to follow along as you read the poem. (Alternately, you can ask for student volunteers to read various stanzas.)
 - b. Again divide the class into small groups to discuss the meaning of the poem and to complete **Worksheet B**.
 - c. Once students have completed the worksheet, ask students to report their findings and interpretations.
 4. Conclude Activity by summarizing the students' findings and asking students for final impressions.
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Nicaragua Nicaragüita

Ay Nicaragua, Nicaragüita
la flor más linda de mi querer
abonada con la bendita, Nicaragüita
sangre de Diriangén.

Ay Nicaragua sos más dulcita
que la mielita de Tamagás
pero ahora que ya sos libre, Nicaragüita
yo te quiero mucho más
pero ahora que ya sos libre, Nicaragüita
yo te quiero mucho más.

Nicaragua

by Marco Morelli

I am in love with a woman raped
because in the sordid anguish of her wound
she has learned to love
and because her deepest need,
like my own,
is love.

I have opened my heart to disillusionment.
I am drowning in the catatonic waters of her eyes,
where dreams once splashed,
where independence torches marching in the night
once reflected.

Now she is mud and disease,
she is chaos and blood,
she is a hurricane of drunkenness and exploitation.

Still she is beautiful.

I sit alone at night
listening to her mountains howl,
and think . . .

I swing her barefoot children
in giggling wild circles
and fall dizzily smiling in the grass.
without machine, I dig her colorful earth
and lay, with blistering hands, an intimate foundation.

I let the flooding rivers of her disappointment spill over me
when there's no money for the operation,
when the application to escape the hopelessness
has been denied,
when the relief aid hasn't trickled down
and she's hungry, hungry, hungry . . .

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And I read her poems,
where she sings with fists and guffaws
her insurrection,
her solidarity,
her love.

I love a woman who was raped,
who continues to be raped
and who is not the rapist's only victim.
oh, and though I haven't known my lover long,
I know the rapist well.
I know the rapist well.

Worksheet B

1. Why do you feel the poet has chosen to represent Nicaragua as a woman?
 2. How is the atmosphere in the poem different from that of the song?
 3. How does the violence in the poem mirror what has happened in Nicaragua?
 4. Who is the rapist that the author knows so well?
 5. Combining the information from the song and the poem how does it affect your image of Nicaragua?
 6. Through this song and poem we see two different views of a spectacular country. According to the information that has been presented to you in this activity what are your final impressions of Nicaragua
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Contemporary Nicaragua: The Economic Dimension

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Compare standards of living in high income, middle income, and low income nations.
 - Compare the apparent needs of low-income nations to those of middle income and high-income nations.
 - Determine whether Nicaragua is a high income, middle income, or low income nation.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Analyzing Development Data**
 - Student Handout: **Development Data Statistics (1998)**
 - Teacher Handout: **Nicaraguan Development Data (1998)**
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Activities

1. Place the terms “high income,” “middle income,” and “low income” on the chalkboard.
 - a. Explain that nations, like individuals, can be classified by the amount of income they generate. In the case of nations, this can be seen by such statistics as GNP Per Capita (Gross National Product divided by the total population, which gives a total amount of GNP generated per person in a given year.)
 - b. Write the number \$4,890 on the chalkboard. Explain that this is the average global GNP Per Capita, taking all of the wealth generated by the world’s economies and divided by the total global population.
 - c. Ask students to hypothesize, based on this average, what a “high income” GNP Per Capita might be. (Write the consensus figure on the chalkboard.)
 - d. Follow the same procedure for “middle income” and “low income” averages.
 2. Distribute the student handout **Analyzing Development Data**.
 - a. Explain that the World Bank gathers and publishes statistics that enable analysts to compare relative standards of living in various nations around the world.
 - b. Review with students the meanings of each of the statistical categories listed in the handout.
 - c. As you review each statistic, ask students to hypothesize how the data might differ between “high income,” “middle income” and “low income” nations.
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- d. Direct students to record their hypotheses in the margins of the handout.
3. Distribute the student handout **Development Data Statistics (1998)**.
 - a. Explain that the United States is an example of a high income (HI), highly industrialized **developed** nation.
 - b. Direct students to analyze the statistics for the United States as listed on the handout.
 - c. Ask students to compare the statistics to the hypotheses they created for a “high income” nation. What are the similarities and differences?
 - d. Ask students to identify those statistics that they believe are the most significant in illustrating America’s standard of living and to explain why they consider them the most significant?
 - e. Direct students to locate the other high income (HI) nation on the chart (Australia) and to compare their statistics with those of the United States. What are the similarities and differences?
 4. Direct students to analyze the statistics for the Mexico and Botswana as listed on the handout.
 - a. Explain that Mexico and Botswana are both examples of upper middle income (UMI), partially industrialized **developing** nations.
 - b. Direct students to compare the statistics for Mexico and Botswana to those of the United States and Australia. What are the similarities and differences?
 - c. Ask students to explain which statistics they believe indicate the most significant differences between upper middle income and high income nations. How to they account for these differences?
 5. Direct students to analyze the statistics for the Peru and Iran as listed on the handout.
 - a. Explain that Mexico and Botswana are both examples of lower middle income (LMI), partially industrialized **developing** nations.
 - b. Direct students to compare the statistics for Peru and Iran to those of Mexico and Botswana. What are the similarities and differences?
 - c. Ask students to explain which statistics they believe indicate the most significant differences between upper middle income and lower middle income nations. How to they account for these differences?
 6. Direct students to analyze the statistics for the Chad and Nepal as listed on the handout.
 - a. Explain that Chad and Nepal are both examples of low income (LI), less industrialized **underdeveloped** nations.

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- b. Ask students to evaluate the degree of difference between the high income and low income nations.
 - c. Ask students to explain which statistics they believe indicate the most significant differences between the three categories of nations?
 7. Divide the class into discussion groups.
 - a. Ask students to discuss what they know or have heard about Nicaragua and to hypothesize, based on that information, if Nicaragua would be a high income, upper middle income, lower middle income, or low income nation.
 - b. After the groups have reached a consensus, ask a spokesperson for each group to report that consensus to the class and to explain the reasoning behind it.
 8. Using the teacher handout entitled **Nicaraguan Development Data (1998)**, provide students with all of the relevant statistics except "Type."
 - a. Ask students to work in their groups to determine, based on the statistical data, which type of country Nicaragua actually is.
 - c. After the groups have reached a consensus, ask a spokesperson for each group to report that consensus to the class, and to explain the reasoning behind it. Was it similar to or different from their original hypothesis? Why or why not?
 - d. Share with the class Nicaragua's actual classification (LI). [**Note:** If the class consensus has not identified it as such, ask them to reexamine the data for telltale statistics. GNP Per Capita is a key statistic.] Explain to the class that Nicaragua, along with Haiti, are the only two nations in the Western Hemisphere that are classified by the World Bank as low-income countries.
 9. Ask the class to examine Nicaragua's GNP Per Capita.
 - a. Direct students to divide the GNP Per Capita (\$370) by the number of days in the year.
 - b. Ask students how many of them think that they could have a comfortable life if all they had to spend each day was \$1.01. What would they have to change in their current life? What does this tell them about the average standard of living of the typical Nicaraguan family?
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Development Data Statistics (1998)

	World	USA	Chad	Mexico	Iran	Nepal	Botswana	Peru	Australia	Nicaragua
Population (millions)	5,897	270	7	96	62	23	2	25	19	
Population growth	1.4%	0.9%	2.7%	1.6%	1.7%	2.3%	1.9%	1.7%	1.2	
Population/sq. km	45	30	6	50	38	160	3	19	2	
Life expectancy	67	77	48	72	71	58	46	69	79	
Fertility Rate	3	2	6	3	3	4	4	3	2	
Infant mortality rate	54	7	99	30	26	77	62	40	5	
Under 5 mortality rate	75	9*	172	35	33	107	105	47	6	
Child malnutrition	--	1%*	39%*	14%**	16%*	57%*	--	--	0%*	
Urban population	46%	77%	23%	74%	61%	11%	49%	72%	85%	
Illiteracy (male)	18%	--	51%	7	18%	43%	27%	6%	--	
Illiteracy (female)	32%	--	69%	11%	33%	78%	22%	16%	--	
Net primary school enrollment	--	100%*	48%*	100%*	90%*	78%*	80%*	94%*	100%*	
Net secondary school enrollment	--	96%*	18%*	66%*	81%*	55%*	89%*	84%*	96%	
Telephone main lines	146	661	1	104	112	8	65	67	512	
Personal computers	71	459	--	47	32*	--	25	18	412	
Paved roads	43%*	59%*	1%**	30%*	50%*	42%*	24%*	13%	39%*	
GNP per capita	\$4,890	\$29,240	\$230	\$3,840	\$1,650	\$210	\$3,070	\$2,440	\$20,640	
GDP annual growth	1.7%	3.9%	8.1%	4.8%	1.7%	2.3%	3.5%	0.3%	5.1%	
Trade as share of GDP	28.3%	19.9%	7.2%	32.9%	8.4%	6.5%	42.4%	13.1%	27.8%	
Trade growth	--	5.6%	-2.0%	9.3%	-5.4%	8.6%	-3.7%	-3.8%	4.6%	
Type		HI	LI	UMI	LMI	LI	UMI	LMI	HI	

Nicaraguan Development Data (1998)

Population (millions)	4.8
Population growth	2.7%
Population/sq. km	39.6
Life expectancy	67
Fertility Rate	4
Infant mortality rate	40
Under 5 mortality rate	50
Child malnutrition	12%
Urban population	56%
Illiteracy (male)	34%
Illiteracy (female)	34%
Net primary school enrollment	79%*
Net secondary school enrollment	--
Telephone main lines	30
Personal computers	8
Paved roads	9%*
GNP per capita	\$370
GDP annual growth	4.1%
Trade as share of GDP	--
Trade growth	-3.7%
Type	LI

Analyzing Development Data

Child malnutrition	The percentage of children under the age of five whose weight for age is more than two standard deviations below the average.
Fertility rate	The number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children in accordance with current age-specific fertility rates.
GDP annual growth	The one year growth rate in real gross domestic product (gross value added by all resident and non-resident producers in an economy, plus indirect taxes.)
GNP per capita	The gross national product (final value of goods and services produced by the residents of an economy) divided by the nation's total population.
Illiteracy	The percentage of adults (male or female) who cannot, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement about their everyday life.
Infant mortality rate	The number of infants who die before reaching one year of age, per 1,000 live births in the same year.
Life expectancy	The number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of birth were to stay the same throughout its life.
Net primary school enrollment	The ratio students actually enrolled in primary school, regardless of age, of the total population eligible to be enrolled in primary school.
Net secondary school enrollment	The ratio students actually enrolled in secondary school, regardless of age, of the total population eligible to be enrolled in secondary school.

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Paved roads	Those surfaced with crushed stone (macadam) and hydrocarbon binder or bituminized agents, with concrete, or with cobblestones, as a percentage of all the country's roads, measured in length.
Personal computers	The estimated number of self-contained computers (PCs) designed to be used by a single individual, per 1,000 people.
Population growth	The one-year rate of growth in total population.
Population per square kilometer	The total population divided by land area in square kilometers.
Telephone mainlines	Telephone lines connecting a customer's equipment to the public switched telephone network, per 1,000 people.
Trade as share of GDP	The sum of exports and imports of goods and services expressed as a percentage of the gross domestic product.
Trade growth	The difference between the annual growth in trade of goods and services and the growth of GDP from 1988 – 1998.
Under 5 mortality rate	The probability that a newborn baby will die before reaching the age of five, if subject to current age-specific mortality rates.
Urban population	The midyear population of areas defined as urban in each country and reported to the United Nations.

Data courtesy of the World Bank (www.worldbank.org)

Through Nicaraguan Eyes: Struggles and Values

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze the daily challenges faced by two Nicaraguans from different walks of life.
 - Infer and list perceptions about the values of these two people.
 - Describe underemployment and its impact on family life.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **The Life of Carlos Herrada Aguilar**
 - Student Handout: **The Life of Graciela Guzman Romero**
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Activities

1. Divide the students into pairs
 - a. Distribute the student handout entitled **The Life of Carlos Herrada Aguilar** to half the pairs, and the student handout entitled **The Life of Graciela Guzman Romero** to the other half of the pairs.
 - b. Direct the students to read their description aloud with their partner.
 - c. Instruct students to prepare a written paraphrase of the description that they read.
 - d. Select a few pairs to share their paraphrases aloud.
 2. Lead a short discussion to define what “values” are.
 - a. Ask students to continue working in their pairs to infer and record in a list what they perceive to be the values of these two Nicaraguans.
 - b. Have students share aloud the values lists that they generated. (The teacher can paraphrase similar value statements on the chalkboard or on a transparency.)
 3. Ask students to refer to the written descriptions and identify aloud the top 3 challenges that Carlos and Graciela face on a daily basis. (**Note:** the goal is to get them to mention working too hard without sufficient pay to meet basic survival needs.)
 - a. Guide students to define the concept of “underemployment.”
 - b. Lead a discussion in which students explain how working so hard for substandard pay affects the family lives of both Carlos and Graciela.
 4. Concluding Activity:
 - a. Assign students to write a comparison between their own family’s life and the lives of these two families to demonstrate how the standard of living is directly linked to earning power.
 - b. **Option:** Ask students to share their writings and lead a discussion on what they believe would have to occur in Nicaragua for Carlos and Graciela to attain more just employment and a higher standard of living for their families.
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The Life of Carlos Herrada Aguilar

Carlos Herrada Aguilar is a teacher/principal/potter who lives in the small town of San Juan del Oriente, a town well known for its pottery in Nicaragua. His house is off to the side of an unpaved, steep road. He does not own a car. He and his wife, Luisa, have three children, ages 9, 7 & 3. They are poorly dressed in donated clothing. Their house is made out of cement block and consists of one large room for living and sleeping, one room containing the potter's wheel, one room containing the kiln for firing the pottery and displaying it. The small kitchen is outdoors, under a tin and cane roof. There is neither a stove nor a refrigerator. Luisa cooks on an outdoor iron grill, which is supported by huge boulders. Ingredients for meals are purchased at the market daily. There are very few dishes, silverware, or glasses. The family does not have a kitchen table to sit down and eat together. A few mattresses lie on the floor behind curtains in the room with the potter's wheel. Like most Nicaraguan families that live in poverty, the parents don't have the luxury of having a bedroom apart from their children. There isn't any other furniture for storing clothes, shoes, or other items. There is very little natural light, due to an absence of windows; and the walls and floors are unpainted cement. The main room contains a small, old-fashioned TV and few folding chairs. No other furniture is visible. Finally, the bathroom is an outhouse fashioned out of a kind of plastic wrapping around poles. The toilet itself is a huge cement block with a hole in it. Lime is used to disintegrate waste. Carlos has been a teacher for 22 years. He does not have a university degree, as a high school degree is all that is required for elementary school teachers in Nicaragua. He is passionate about his profession, however, and interested in learning the newest research about teaching and learning. He is now serving as the principal of the "Jesus El Buen Maestro" School, a small, dilapidated building about one quarter of a mile from his house. After two years, another teacher from the school will be designated to be the principal. Carlos begins work by 7:00 a.m. and is finished by 12:30 p.m. Carlos makes approximately \$1,000 cordobas per month, which equals \$71 US. (The base salary for teachers is \$800 cordobas per month, or \$57. Teachers receive a \$10 cordoba increase, or \$0.70, for each year of service). At 1:30, Carlos leaves school as the second shift of teachers and upper grade students arrive. Carlos must now dedicate himself to his second job, making pottery, since \$71 US per month is not enough to meet the basic needs of his family. Luisa is the main potter, and Carlos takes the pottery to fairs on the weekends to sell.

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Carlos and Luisa are committed to their work and their children. They want their children to obtain a good education. It is an intense daily struggle to find the money needed to send them to school with the required supplies (uniforms, notebooks, and pencils at the elementary level) while at the same time meeting the basic bills for food, clothing, transportation, and electricity. Carlos and Luisa also don't want their children to have to resort to selling items on the street in order to meet the family's basic needs. Among those Nicaraguan children who attend school (many never go at all), a good number must work before or after school to help their families survive. The most common work is selling items (gum, lollipops, bags of peanuts, ceramic vases, etc.) by the basketfull by walking for hours through the streets of the town trying to find customers. The Herrada Aguilar family is dedicated to work, school, studies, and home life in order to create a brighter future for their children. There is no time or money left for recreation. San Juan de Oriente consists of a string of small houses similar to that of Carlos and Luisa, most of which are owned by families of potters. There is nothing else to do there, and it is expensive to travel to Masaya or Managua even though they aren't that far away. One has to stand on the highway and wait for a passing bus (old school buses from the U.S. serve as the main mode of transportation in Nicaragua) to travel from town to town. The buses can be very crowded, and the pace is slow as they make many stops along the way.

Carlos and Luisa continue their struggle on a daily basis. In 2000, San Juan de Oriente suffered an earthquake that damaged nearly all the pottery kilns in the town as well as the pottery that was ready for sale. International aid helped to bring the potter business back to life. In addition, a youth group from Deep Creek, Maryland, helped the Herrada Aguilar family to build a cement walkway up the hill from the road to their property (keeping them from walking in the mud), as well as a big room to keep the pottery that is for sale.

Carlos is concerned about his children's future and how he will afford to pay for their basic supplies to keep them in school. He also worries about paying for transportation to the nearest secondary school once they have completed the sixth grade. He does not think about vacations, cars, new furniture, nice clothes, dinners in restaurants, or buying the latest computer gadgets. His immediate concern is to win the daily struggle to feed, shelter, and educate his family on the limited income he earns as a teacher and the "extra" that he and his wife earn as potters.

The Life of Graciela Guzman_Romero

Graciela lives in Chinandega, Nicaragua, where she has lived her entire life. Chinandega is a small town near the city of Leon. Graciela has five children. The father of her children is a dockworker. He and Graciela were never married. He also drank excessively during their years together, and was verbally abusive to Graciela and her children. Sometimes he was even violent.

Graciela raised her children on the meager earning of her husband (or what was left after the amount he spent on alcohol, approximately \$600 cordobas a month—about \$43 US. Her husband did not permit her to work outside of their home. They lived in a small, three-room cement block house with very sparse belongings—a few chairs and mattresses on the floor. They did not have indoor plumbing although they had electricity. Graciela made wood fires outside to prepare meals. The family had never been to the movies nor taken a vacation. Life was about the daily struggle to eat and to stay in school.

One day when her son, Alejandro, was twelve, he needed a notebook to be permitted to complete the current semester at his school (in Nicaragua, school is “free,” but children must pay for their uniforms, notebooks, and textbooks in secondary school). Graciela had no money and told Alejandro to ask his father, who turned him away saying that school was a waste of money. Alejandro, an excellent student who had already won many academic certificates, was desperate to continue school. Graciela found a one-cordoba coin in her purse, purchased a few sheets of wrapping paper, cut them into squares, and sewed a notebook for Alejandro. When Alejandro was thirteen, he was selected as one of the top students in the nation to be sent to Pittsburgh, PA, to play baseball with little league teams in Pittsburgh in a special home-stay visit and tournament arranged by KDKA radio! He spent two weeks in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1994, and began a friendship with a Pittsburgh family that continues to this day.

Finally, after years of living with a man who was often drunk and unreliable, Graciela asked the father of her children to leave. She found another small, cement house in an equally poor neighborhood of Chinandega where she currently lives. She does not feel very safe in this neighborhood as gangs of teenagers are often on the street sniffing glue. Sometimes these teenagers act menacing and ask for money. Graciela’s daughter, Lucrecia, who lives nearby, is afraid to be home alone.

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Graciela found herself faced with the dilemma of trying to provide for her children while at the same time helping them to continue their education. She has always believed that education is the only way for her children to escape lives of dire poverty like hers. With a sixth grade education and no particular skills, Graciela fought to earn enough money to support her family by creating her own “micro businesses,” such as cleaning and washing for others, buying and reselling household items, making desserts to sell, and cooking for families having large parties. Finally, with help from her relatives in New York and her friends in Pittsburgh, she has been able to stay afloat by selling basic necessities out of her home, like eggs, sugar, toilet paper, laundry and dish soap, etc.

One night, Graciela saw an advertisement on their small, black and white television for scholarships to study in a university in Cuba being offered to excellent Nicaraguan high school students. Miriam woke up Alejandro, and took him on a long bus journey to Managua to the Cuban Embassy the next day, the last day to apply. Graciela and Alejandro waited in a line several blocks long for Alejandro’s turn to submit his application. Graciela continued to call the Cuban Embassy everyday for a few weeks. One morning, a car pulled up in front of their house, and a man delivered a message that Alejandro had been selected and needed to be ready to go to Cuba in three days! He would receive a full scholarship and the University of Havana as long as he kept good grades! Alejandro, who was facing a future without further education or a job in Chinandega, was ecstatic. He is now in his fourth year of medical school in Cuba, and has helped his brother, Oscar, to secure a scholarship as well. Oscar is studying sports medicine.

Graciela has suffered many tragedies along the way—one daughter was treated for tuberculosis and another lost an eye in a sudden accident, resulting in the need to purchase a false eye and glasses to strengthen the good eye. Graciela herself has been in the hospital for heart problems related to stress. She does not have any health insurance. At one point, her daughter was told to leave the clinic, because they could not afford to pay for the bed. The TB medicine and false eye cost more money than Graciela makes in a year.

In spite of her difficulties, Graciela’s faith in God and love for her children has sustained her through the years. She believes that God will provide what her family needs, and that one must always be grateful for what one has. She is a strong woman who refuses to relinquish her hope for a better future for her children and grandchildren. She has been and continues to be a solid rock for her family through their many struggles, always counting on God and their love for each other to meet the future with hope and anticipation for a better life.

Contemporary Politics

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

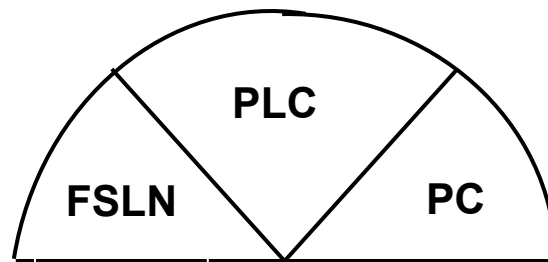
- identify the three major political parties in contemporary Nicaragua.
 - compare the political philosophies of the PLC and the FSLN.
 - evaluate the role of the United States in the most recent Nicaraguan elections.
 - evaluate the struggle of the Nicaraguan government to tackle the problem of corruption.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **The Political Climate**
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Activities

1. Distribute the student handout entitled **The Political Climate**.
 - a. Direct students to read the first section entitled *Overview*.
 - b. Ask students to identify the three main political parties in Nicaragua.
 - c. Place the following political spectrum on the chalkboard:



- d. Explain to the class that the political parties on the right side of the spectrum tend to get more support from businesses and the upper classes while those on the left tend to get their support from the lower classes.
 - e. Ask students hypothesize, based on their positions in the spectrum, how likely or unlikely it is that the PC and FSLN would cooperate with each other politically? Why?
2. Direct students to read the next two sections, entitled PLC and FSLN respectively, and to outline the basic differences between the PLC and FSLN.
 3. Direct students to read the next section, entitled *Election Results*.
 - a. Ask students to evaluate the results of the election. How much of a mandate does President Bolaños have?

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- b. Ask students to evaluate the position of the Sandinistas in the government. How much influence will they have with 42.1% of the vote and holds 38 seats in the National Assembly?
 4. Direct students to read the next section, entitled *The U.S. and the Election of 2001*.
 - a. Ask students to hypothesize why the United States might have such a strong interest in the results of the Nicaraguan election.
 - b. Ask students to evaluate the advertisement placed by Florida Governor Jeb Bush. What portrait does it paint of the Sandinistas and Daniel Ortega? What does it imply about the U.S. attitude toward Ortega?
 - c. Ask students to speculate on how much influence the U.S. commentary may have had on the Nicaraguan election. What does it imply about American influence in Nicaragua?
 5. Direct students to read the final section, entitled *The Fight Against Corruption*.
 - a. Ask students to speculate on why President Bolaños has focused on corruption, and the allegations against former president Aleman, as a priority.
 - b. If the Nicaraguan government is successful at fighting corruption, would it make foreign investment in the country more or less likely? Why?
 - c. Explain to the class that many Sandinista supporters rallied in support of the government's crackdown on former president Aleman. What does that imply about popular support for Bolaños' approach?
-

The Political Climate

Overview

Nicaragua is a constitutional democracy with executive, legislative, judicial, and electoral branches of government. Both the president and the members of the unicameral National Assembly are elected to concurrent five-year terms. The National Assembly consists of 90 deputies elected from party lists drawn at the department and national level, plus the defeated presidential candidates who obtained a minimal quotient of votes.

Although 35 political parties participated in the 1996 elections, under new, more restrictive electoral laws passed in 2000, only three parties participated in the 2001 national elections: the PLC, the FSLN and the PC.

- **Partido Liberal Constitucionalista** (Constitutional Liberal Party or PLC)
 - **Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional** (Sandinista National Liberation Front or FSLN)
 - **Partido Conservador de Nicaragua** (Conservative Party of Nicaragua or PC)
-

The PLC



**Liberal Party
Rally, Leon**

Enrique Bolaños leads a center-right coalition based on capitalism, more foreign investment, and cooperation with Washington. (**Note:** Mr. Bolaños, who was briefly imprisoned and had his assets seized when the FSLN came to power in 1979.) The Constitutional Liberal Party bases its principles on freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice and equality of opportunities. According to their public declarations, they are dedicated to seeking a careful balance between strong civil society, democratic government, free trade and international cooperation.

The FSLN



Daniel Ortega led the revolutionary FSLN government from 1979 to 1990. The Sandinistas tried to introduce revolutionary reforms in land ownership, economic and social policies. Ortega is trying hard to shake off the image of a Nicaraguan Fidel Castro and has now dropped his left-wing rhetoric, claiming to want to promote reconciliation and moderate social reform. The Sandinista leader enjoys considerable support from people in Nicaragua's shantytowns and among the rural poor.

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**Election Results
(November 4,
2001)**



**Presidente
Bolaños**

- The PLC won 53.2% of the popular vote and holds 53 of the 92 seats in the National Assembly. The leader of the party, Enrique Bolaños, was elected President.
- The FSLN won 42.1% of the vote and holds 38 seats in the National Assembly. The leader of the party, Daniel Ortega, holds one of those seats.
- The PC won only 2.1% of the vote and holds only 1 seat in the National Assembly. While historically Nicaraguan politics has swung between the Liberals (based in Leon) and the Conservatives (based in Granada), the Conservative Party has not been major factor in recent years.

**The U.S. and
the Election of
2001**

In the early stages of the election campaign, FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega was receiving a considerable amount of popular support. It was conceivable that the leader of the Sandinistas could once again govern the nation he had led in the 1980s. The United States government let it be known that they would not look favorably on such an outcome.

According to a July 18, 2001 article in the Nicaraguan newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*, the head of the Conservative Party met with several members of the U.S. Congress in Miami. Reportedly, they encouraged the existing Conservative Party candidate to resign so the party could then throw its support to the Liberal candidate, Enrique Bolaños to ensure an Ortega defeat.

This was reinforced by a State Department official on July 24, 2001 who stated that “we will continue to have serious concerns about the Sandinistas, absent clear commitments from candidate Ortega that he is now prepared to embrace democratic policies.” This implied that the United States would not change its hard-line policy toward the Sandinistas.

In addition, Florida governor Jeb Bush, the brother of the President, took out an advertisement in Nicaraguan newspapers which stated

“The past and present of Daniel Ortega clearly indicate that he neither understands nor accepts the basic principles of freedom, democracy and the free market . . . Daniel Ortega is an enemy of everything the United States represents. Further, he is a friend of our enemies. Ortega has a relationship of more than 30 years with states and individuals who shelter and condone international terrorism.”

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**The Fight
Against
Corruption**

According to Dr. Jose Antonio Alvarado, former Minister of Education and Defense, corruption is a major problem that the new government must address. (Dr. Alvarado was removed as Minister of Defense in the administration of Arnaldo Aleman because he began challenging his chief's autocratic methods.) Nicaragua is dependent on foreign aid, but the public sees money being diverted into the pockets of politicians rather than being spent on economic development and education. He believes that foreign investment will not flow into Nicaragua until the political system has been stabilized.

President Bolaños has made targeting corruption a priority. A primary example is former Nicaraguan President Arnaldo Aleman. In August 2002, Aleman was charged with fraud and money laundering for allegedly siphoning off millions of dollars of state funds during his term in office in the late 1990s. Prosecutors accused Mr. Aleman - as well as 14 of his close relatives and friends - of transferring over \$10m of public money to private bank accounts in Panama.

Aleman enjoyed immunity from prosecution as chairman of Nicaragua's congress and denied the allegations. In September 2002, however, the National Assembly voted to remove Aleman. His removal - and that of his supporters in the governing board of Congress - paved the way for a vote on whether to remove his immunity from prosecution. Half a million people signed a petition urging that his immunity from prosecution be lifted.

In December, Aleman was been placed under house arrest after the country's legislators voted to strip him of immunity from prosecution. The vote paved the way for Aleman to face charges of embezzlement and money laundering. A recent poll suggested that up to 90% of Nicaraguans supported putting Mr. Aleman on trial.

Contemporary Problems: A Case Study Approach

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify political orientations of each Nicaraguan in the case studies.
 - compile a list of problems facing Nicaragua based on the case studies.
-

Materials

- Student Handout: **What Are the Major Issues Facing Nicaragua Today?**
 - Student Handout: **Summary Chart**
 - Teacher Handout: **Summary Chart: Key**
-

Activities

1. Introduce the case studies explaining that the interviews were conducted with Nicaraguans from various socio-economic groups.
 2. Divide students into small groups.
 - a. Direct them to read and summarize the information from the case studies using the summary chart.
 3. Pull the class back together to discuss the results.
 - a. Ask students to analyze the chart and to point out the similarities and/or differences that it reveals.
 - b. (**Note:** One of the most striking aspects is how similar the respondents' answers were despite differences in political orientation and socio-economic status.)
 4. Concluding Activity
 - a. Direct students to write a brief essay summarizing the significant challenges faced by the Nicaraguan people and comparing these challenges to those faced by people in their own community. What are the similarities and differences?
-

What Are the Major Issues Facing Nicaragua Today?

During a visit to Nicaragua in July 2002, interviews were conducted with various Nicaraguans asking each what s/he thought was the first issue the government ought to address. In addition, some basic information about their lives was gathered. All names in the case studies below have been changed to protect the individual's privacy.

Marta López,
75

Señora López lives in a large, well-appointed house in León. As is true of many people in León, Señora López is a Liberal. Married to a well-known and well-respected professional, she is one of the elite. She and her family have always had money. Nonetheless, her life has not always been easy. During the revolution and counter-revolution, a lot of heavy fighting happened in and around León. She told stories of being stuck in the house hearing bullets and fighting in the street outside. Many necessities became scarce during this time, even for people who could pay for them.

Señora López said that the biggest problems facing Nicaragua today are lack of work and political corruption. She said that the situation today is worse than before the revolution. Although many people were poor (as they are today), at least they had work. She added that today there are many multinational companies in the country, but it is the companies who win and the Nicaraguans lose. The companies dictate the terms for their setting up factories. These terms often include paying little or no taxes, paying very low wages, and the right to leave with little or no notification. The people get jobs, but do not earn a living wage and have little job security. Still, the government benefits from "gifts" and political contributions, so they are willing to accept these terms.

Alberto Socorro, 40

Señor Socorro is a policeman in León. He is also a liberal, although his standard of living is much lower than Señora López's is. A policeman's salary is the equivalent of about \$80 a month. He has completed high school and had some additional training. When asked about the problems facing Nicaragua, he talked about gangs. Because many young people are very poor and can find no work, they band together in to gangs. They roam the streets and rob tourists when they can. They sometimes intimidate other Nicaraguans.

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Jorge Salgado,
50

Señor Salgado is a laborer in the community of Subtiava, near León. He is considered an indigenous person, although that means something a little different in Nicaragua than in other Latin American countries. Because of its history, in western Nicaragua, there are no truly indigenous groups left who can trace their ancestry back to pre-Colombian times. The groups that exist speak Spanish, having long ago lost their traditional languages. Even though members of the group consider themselves indigenous, they will also say that they are mestizos since some of their ancestors were Spanish. Still, in a Subtiava, there are still lands that belong to the group and people who do consider themselves indigenous. They are now studying their heritage and culture and even trying to revive an indigenous language. Señor Salgado is one of this group. He is also a strong supporter of the Sandinistas. He didn't learn to read until after the revolution. Although he has now completed high school and all six of his children are educated, they have low paying jobs and, at times, have no work.

When asked to identify the most pressing issues in Nicaragua, Señor Salgado first identified corruption in the government and next the lack of work. He went on to say that because of corruption, the government cannot help the poor people enough. Social programs are too limited. Señor Salgado explained that in the 60 years before the revolution, first the Conservatives then the Liberals were in power. They did nothing for the people. In the ten years after the Sandinista Revolution, many schools, clinics, and other services for poor people were started. New houses were built. There was land for poor people. Now because politicians have taken so much of the money that should be the governments, those programs have been cut back or eliminated. He also mentioned that there are young thieves because they can find no other way to get what they need to live. Many social problems exist because people can't find work.

Señor Salgado suggested that the country still needs international aid, but that those governments and non-governmental organizations need to send supervisors so that the money doesn't go into individuals' (and the government's) pockets. He said that there are people who don't like Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinista Party, because they say he was also involved in corruption. So, Señor Salgado says, they should find another leader, but continue to support the party who has helped the people the most.

Continued on next page

Teresa Meza,
50

Señora Meza is a highly educated Liberal feminist. She is living and working in Ponaloya, a town on the Pacific Ocean, while completing a dissertation through a university in the US. She works with women, organizing women's clinics, preschools, and other programs that make their lives easier. She is also developing libraries of books by women authors to put in the women's centers so that the women can have easier access to books and ideas.

When asked about the biggest issue facing Nicaragua today, she said it is the need for social democracy. She explained that the government and society are paternalistic. Under the old system of governments, the rich landowners took care of poor people who worked for them as a father might care for his family. Landowners made clothing, food, and housing available (although families were charged for the services). They did not allow the workers to develop independence or individual resources so they were stuck in the same positions and places for their entire lives. Throughout Nicaragua's history, the society, too, has tended to be paternalistic. The men were the members of the family who worked outside of the house to earn money. The women cared for children, cooked, did laundry and other household work. Social democracy would enable all people, rich or poor, to be educated and to work in jobs of their preference. Nicaragua, today, however, is far from social democracy.

Señora Meza explained that global issues such as garment factories are reeking havoc with the lives of many people and the economies of many countries. While the multinational companies bring money into the country, they often do it at the expense of the people and region. They negotiate leases and deals that meet all of their demands but few of the needs of the communities. Some money comes into the region, but the companies prefer to hire women so that they can pay lower wages. Then, at the least demand or inconvenience, the companies leave for another more advantageous (for them) country or region. Their equipment is portable enough so that it can be removed with little difficulty. Since the women are now working outside of the home, it disrupts the traditional family patterns. Men, who often can't find work, must accept that the women work. The men, however, do not help more around the house. They spend time with friends or get drunk. The burden of caring for the house and family still tends to fall on the women. She believes that social democracy will help ease these problems as well.

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Pedro Ramirez,
45

Señor Ramirez recently bought a van in which he can drive tourists to various sites around the country. He is from Managua. His standard of living is relatively low, although he was able to put together the money needed to buy the van and to provide basics for his family. He graduated from high school and began attending college, but had to drop out because of lack of funds. He is a supporter of Sandinista ideology, even though he does not believe Daniel Ortega and the current Sandinista party are leading in positive directions. For this reason he did not vote for Ortega in the last election.

Señor Ramirez said that the number one problem in Nicaragua today is unemployment. Too many people who want to work can't. Even people who are educated cannot find jobs. When asked how people can live, he said that women take in laundry or make foods to sell in the street to earn money. Men and children sell whatever they can to make some money. Some sell music CDs, others, gum, nuts, or other small items. Some boys shine shoes. Señor Ramirez said that even people who work don't always make enough money to live. He gave the example of policemen. Their monthly salary is low. To augment their income, they stop drivers along the roads (usually between cities). Although they say the drivers were being careless, or that there was a problem with the vehicle, often they want a bribe and will stop drivers for very little reason. It is best, he said, to pay what they ask to avoid trouble (especially if one is making a living by driving tourists around!) Señor Ramirez suggested that the employment situation would improve if all of the Nicaraguans who have money invested in their country instead of overseas.

Nicolás Pinto,
60

Señor Pinto is a newspaper editor in Managua. He is highly educated and has a high standard of living. When he spoke, he was careful not to say which political party he supports. Rather, he talked about how the newspaper tries to be impartial, presenting both sides. He explained that there have been changes under the different presidents, but that the atmosphere is good now in Nicaragua for newspapers. There is only one law governing newspapers currently so they have freedom of the press. Publication costs, however, are high, so circulation is down since people can't afford to buy papers. Nonetheless, people from all walks of life are now reading the newspaper and those who can't afford papers often read papers of those who have bought them.

When asked to name the number one problem facing Nicaragua today, Señor Pinto said that the "mother problem" is poverty. From that problem, many others come. Nicaragua (and Palestine) lead the world in lost chances, he said. Nicaragua 1979 revolution is a good example. Much good was started. A dictator was deposed, but for many people, living conditions are worse today than they were before the revolution. Still, the problem of poverty cannot be attacked in only one way. Foreign investment can't do it. Many Nicaraguans are currently investing outside of the country causing instability and high costs. He would like to see these people investing in their own country. In order for that to happen, though, stability is needed. Taxes and costs must be lowered. Señor Pinto said that the last three governmental administrations wanted to solve problems through international cooperation. Instead they should create conditions for work and production. In addition, there must be a fight against corruption. Education is also important. Nicaragua must take advantage of the opportunities it has to advance.

David Mejia, 45 Señor Mejia is the principal of a school and a potter. He lives in San Juan de Oriente. He has been a teacher for more than fifteen years and the principal of this small school for just over a year. In addition, he works with his wife to make and sell pottery. She throws the pieces on a potter's wheel. He then decorates and sells them after they are fired.

Señor Mejia talked mostly about education-related issues although he said that poverty and corruption are also major problems. Illiteracy is still high in Nicaragua because there are not enough schools and trained teachers. Because of crowded conditions, most schools run two sessions, one from 7 a.m. until noon and the other from 12:30 until 5:30 p.m. Different teachers teach different students in the sessions to alleviate some of the overcrowding. Also, teaching half a day enables the teacher to do some other kind of work to make a living wage. The basic teacher's salary is about \$80 a month. With 15 years experience, he is now earning about \$100 a month. Fortunately his family also sells pottery! Classes in San Juan de Oriente average about 35 students. In many schools there are 50 or more students per class. According to the constitution, education is compulsory and free. Nonetheless, students must buy uniforms, books, and all of their own school supplies. There are still many children who are not in school, either because they cannot afford the expenses or because their families need them to be selling items on the street to bring in some needed cash. Señor Mejia said that in some schools students are charged 5-10 cordobas a month to attend. This money is used to cover some of the schools costs or to help pay the teachers. Even though this is the equivalent of \$0.80-\$125, many families cannot afford to pay. The school in San Juan de Oriente has been having structural problems. The area was hard hit by an earthquake in 2000. (Earthquakes are common occurrences in Nicaragua.) The government doesn't have the money to fix the roof and classroom problems. Señor Mejia has been able to get the community to help him rebuild a library and three classrooms. Two brothers from California then paid for shelves, tables, a computer, overhead projector, and some books to go in the library. The literacy rate will not improve until teachers are able to earn a living wage, teach in adequate schools to much smaller classes, and get the training they need.

Summary Chart

Name *	Age +	Occupation	Standard of Living #	Level of education #	Political Orientation	Town	Problem(s) facing country
Marta López							
Alberto Socorro							
Jorge Salgado							
Teresa Meza							
Pedro Ramirez							
Nicolás Pinto							
David Mejia							

* All names have been changed.

+ Ages are approximate.

Based on Nicaraguan, not US, Standards

Summary Chart, Key

Name *	Age +	Occupation	Standard of Living #	Level of education #	Political Orientation	Town	Problem(s) facing country
Marta López	75	Housewife	high	high	Liberal	Léon	Lack of work; Corruption in government
Alberto Socorro	40	Policeman	low middle	medium	Liberal	Léon	Youth gangs
Jorge Salgado	50	Laborer	low	low	Sandinista	Subtiava, near Léon	Corruption in government; No work
Teresa Meza	50	Organizer, women's centers	high	high	Liberal feminist	Ponaloya	Need for social democracy; Paternalistic government and society
Pedro Ramirez	45	Tourist Chauffeur	low middle	medium	Sandinista	Managua	unemployment
Nicolás Pinto	60	Editor	high	high	Trying to present a balanced view, personal position unknown	Managua	Poverty; corruption
David Mejia	45	School Principal/ Potter	low	medium high		San Juan de Oriente	Poverty; corruption; illiteracy

* All names have been changed.

+ Ages are approximate.

Based on Nicaraguan, not US, Standards

In Their Shoes

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- interpret how each case study person would advocate for change.
 - construct an argument using supporting evidence in a role-playing situation.
-

Materials

- Case studies (from *Contemporary Problems: A Case Study Approach*)
 - Summary Chart (from *Contemporary Problems: A Case Study Approach*)
 - Student Handout: **Summit Task Sheet**
-

Note to the Teacher

Because this lesson builds upon information obtained about Nicaragua in the previous lesson (*Contemporary Problems: A Case Study Approach*), please be certain that that lesson has been completed before beginning the activities contained in this lesson.

Activities

1. Divide the class into 7 groups of 3 or 4 students each (depending on the size of the class).
 - a. Assign each group a different Nicaraguan case study from the previous lesson (*Contemporary Problems: A Case Study Approach*)
 - b. Explain that they are to put themselves into the Nicaraguans' shoes to imagine how they would prioritize and address problems.
 - c. Review the directions worksheet to be sure each group understands the task.
 - d. Provide time for the groups to meet and plan.
 2. Bring the groups to a "summit." Each must argue for their perspective based on information as "their" person sees it.
-

Summit Task Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

The situation: The United Nations is very concerned about the situation in Nicaragua. They propose a one-time grant of US\$5,000,000 to get the country on the right track. A council of 7 Nicaraguans has been convened to decide how to use the money.

Group Members:

Nicaraguan you are representing:

Your task:

- Think as “your” Nicaraguan would.
- Develop a proposal of how to best spend the UN’s money to improve Nicaragua and the live of Nicaraguans.
- List evidence and arguments to support the position you are taking.
- Be realistic.
- In about 20 minutes, you will be expected to attend the UN/Nicaraguan summit to convince the council to accept your proposal.

At the summit:

- Be respectful of others as you speak.
- Do your best to convince others to accept your plan.
- Use lots of evidence to support what you say.
- Ask questions of others to get clarity (and maybe to try to persuade the others that their position is really very close to yours).
- You may respectfully challenge others’ positions by presenting counter-evidence.
