

Geography

Introduction

Nicaragua's history has been greatly influenced by its location in Central America, the oceans that sandwich it, the large lakes, and the mountains that divide it. It is the largest country in Central America with 129,494 square kilometers and a land area 120,254 square kilometers.

Nicaragua can be divided into three major geographic regions:

- The Pacific lowlands or western region is characterized by flat terrain broken by a line of active volcanoes between the Golfo de Fonseca and Lago de Nicaragua paralleling Pacific coast. Western Nicaragua is situated at the juncture between colliding tectonic plates, resulting in high incidence of earthquakes and volcanic activity. The two largest freshwater lakes in Central America (Lago de Managua and Lago de Nicaragua) are located in this region.
- The Caribbean lowlands (or eastern) region covers about half of the national territory; this region consists of tropical rain forest and pine savannas crossed by numerous rivers flowing to Caribbean.
- Between the Pacific lowlands and Caribbean lowlands are the central highlands, which are most extensive in the north.



The lessons in this section of the *Resource Guide* are structured to provide students with an essential understanding of Nicaragua's climate and geography. In addition, the lessons focus on the impact climate and geography have had on Nicaragua's growth and development.

Passport to Nicaragua

Objectives

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

- identify the major geographic features of Nicaragua.
 - utilize a map scale to measure distance.
 - analyze clues to develop critical thinking skills.
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Materials

- Teacher Map of Nicaragua
 - Available library or Internet resources.
 - Student Handout: **Blank Map of Nicaragua**
 - Student Handout: **Clue Sheet**
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Note to the Teacher

This geography activity is a discovery scenario that requires students to utilize research skills to identify significant features of Nicaraguan geography. Depending upon the resources available in your school, you may wish to conduct this exercise in the school library or computer lab.

Activity

1. Divide students into pairs or in groups, depending on size of class, grade level, and the nature of available resources.
 - a. Distribute the student handout entitled **Clue Sheet** and a **Blank Map of Nicaragua** to each student.
 - b. Read the directions for the activity aloud while the students read it to themselves.
 - c. Direct students to utilize identified resources to complete their maps.
 2. When students have completed their maps of Nicaragua, gather the students together as a group and ask them to share their findings as you review each of the 10 clues. (You may wish to display the Teacher Map on an overhead projector.)
 3. Once the map is completed, ask students to analyze the terrain features and answer the following questions:
 - a. Where are most of the major cities located? (**west coast**)
 - b. What appears to separate the west coast from the east coast? (**mountains and tropical rain forest**)?
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4. Concluding Activity

Based on their discoveries, ask students to hypothesize as to what impact geography may have had on the relationship between the people of the east and west coasts of Nicaragua.

Clue Sheet

Name _____

Period _____

Directions

You have been commissioned by the National Cartography Association (The Mapmakers of the World) to travel to the previously uncharted country of Nicaragua. Your mission is to delve into the terrain and come back armed with a detailed map of the cities, oceans, lakes, terrain, and infrastructure(roads) of this small but vastly intricate country!!! We have some clues and pictures, but the last people there did not take good enough notes. It is all a puzzle that needs to be put back together! Read each clue below and using the clue and picture, figure out where it is and chart it on the blank map. You will be given a basic map of what we know about the country and your mission will be to find out the answers to the questions that have boggled the minds of geographers, oceanographers, mapmakers and geologists everywhere!! Tread lightly and good luck!!!

Known Evidence

- **Clue #1:** We know there are two oceans, the **Atlantic** and **Pacific** that border Nicaragua, Find these and label them first to help you find your way.
 - **Clue #2:** There are two cities along the Pacific Coast. We know **Poneloya** is very rocky and that **San Juan Del Sur** is shaped more like a bay or horseshoe. Use the pictures we have of both to determine which town/beach is which. Poneloya is located about 20 miles from **Leon**.
 - **Clue #3:** The Capital of Nicaragua is **Managua**. It is the largest city in Nicaragua. You will know it is Nicaragua when you find a large city that was recently destroyed by Hurricane Mitch. It is located on **Lake Managua**.
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- **Clue #4:** We know there exists a land that is located in an area where there could have been influence from English explorers and Africans that may have stayed after slavery was banned in Nicaragua. They have an amazing culture that has Creole and African infused elements mixed in with the native culture. We believe it is called the **Bluefields**.
 - **Clue #5: San Juan Del Norte** a small town that is very sparsely populated that serves as a connection city if you wanted to go into Costa Rica.
 - **Clue #6: Granada** is a grand city that was destroyed by William Walker many years ago but rebuilt into a beautiful colonial splendor. It served as a port sometimes when the pirates used to travel up the **Rio San Juan River** into **Lake Nicaragua**. We know that when you find Granada you will be able to label both of these water bodies. But we careful, Lake Nicaragua is known to be one of the only freshwater lakes to have **sharks!!** It houses the bullshark which is known to be the most aggressive shark on earth! Beware when swimming these waters!
 - **Clue #7: Matagalpa** and **Esteli** are two of the most Northern cities that are right in the midst of coffee plantation land. Esteli is reportedly further East than Matagalpa. They are located in a rather hilly region as well.
 - **Clue #8:** We are pretty sure that the chocolate capital of Nicaragua, **Rivas**, is located approximately 25 miles from Granada.
 - **Clue #9: Masaya** is a town where everybody goes to sell their crafts. Look for the markets at every corner or hand made craft goods like pottery, hammocks and woven baskets. Masaya is very close to Granada.
 - **Clue #10: Leon** is an Eastern city known for its grand cathedrals. It is beautiful and everybody walks around at all hours and sometimes they gather in the city square for political demonstrations. It is located approximately 60 miles from Managua.

Note: Make sure you draw the roads between the cities. We know that most major roads run out of Managua. These go from Managua and on to the following cities like a spider--- to Granada passing through Masaya; to Leon passing to Poneloya; to Rivas and on to San Juan Del Sur; to the Bluefields; to Esteli and to Matagalpa.

Teacher Map



Name _____

Period _____



¿Qué puede decirnos una bandera? (What can a flag tell us?)

Objectives

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

- identify the elements of the Nicaraguan and U.S. flags.
 - analyze how these elements represent the country.
 - draw conclusions about the country based on these elements.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **¿Qué puede decirnos una bandera?** (for Spanish language classes)
 - Student Handout: **What Can a Flag Tell Us?** (for Social Studies classes)
 - U.S. and Nicaraguan flags (or pictures thereof)
 - Student Handout: **Vocabulario**
 - Student Handout: **Flag Research**
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Activities

1. Display the U.S. and Nicaraguan flags where all students can see them.
2. Distribute the student handout entitled **¿Qué puede decirnos una bandera?** and **Vocabulario** (or **What Can a Flag Tell Us? For Social Studies classes**). Direct students to read the dialogue. Ask comprehension questions, such as:
 - a. ¿Cómo se llaman los chicos?
 - b. ¿Dónde están?
 - c. ¿De dónde es Julia?
 - d. ¿De qué hablan?
3. On the chalkboard or overhead transparency, generate a list of characteristics of the Nicaraguan flag.
 - a. 3 stripes, 1 white between 2 blue
 - b. 1 triangle
 - c. 5 volcanoes
 - d. 1 rainbow
 - e. 1 cap with rays coming out of it
 - f. words: República de Nicaragua, América Central

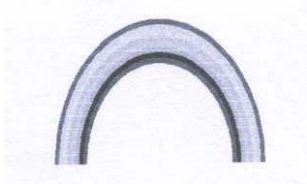
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**Activities
(continued)**

4. Ask students to explain the significance of each characteristic.
 - a. 3 stripes, 1 white between 2 blue = land between two oceans.
 - b. 5 volcanoes = 5 major volcanoes of Nicaragua and the 5 countries of Central America.
 - c. 1 rainbow = peace
 - d. 1 cap with rays coming out of it = freedom and liberty.
 5. Ask students describe what they know of Nicaragua based on this list. Student responses may include:
 - a. Nicaragua has many volcanoes.
 - b. The volcanoes have impacted the country and its history.
 - c. Being a part of Central America has been important to Nicaragua.
 6. Repeat the activity for the U.S. flag.
 - a. 13 stripes in red and white = 13 original colonies
 - b. 50 stars on a field of blue = 50 states
 - c. **Teacher's Note:** Although there are theories as to why red, white, and blue, were chosen for the U.S. flag, authoritative sources indicate that there was no official meaning.
 7. Ask students to explain which flag, in their opinion, provides more information about the country.
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Vocabulario

Nombre _____



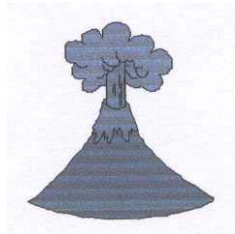
el arcoiris



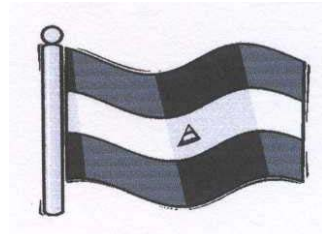
el gorro



una cordillera de montañas



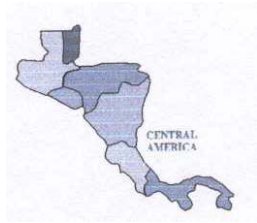
el volcán



la bandera nicaragüense



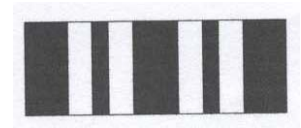
la bandera estadounidense



América Central



una onda del océano



las bandas



la estrella



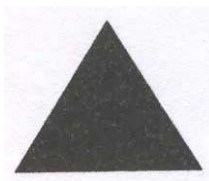
la biblioteca



encontrarse, saludarse



el escudo



el triángulo equilátero



esparcir



¿Qué puede decirnos una bandera?



Cuando dos chicos, Ahmed y Julia, entran en la biblioteca, encuentran a otra chica, Roberta.

- Roberta:** Hola, Ahmed.
- Ahmed:** Hola, Roberta. Quiero presentarte a mi amiga Julia. Es nicaragüense.
- Julia:** Much gusto conocerte, Roberta. ¿Como estás?
- Roberta:** Estoy fantástica, Julia. Gracias. ¿Y tú? ¿Qué hacen?
- Ahmed:** Hacemos una investigación sobre las banderas de nuestros países.
- Roberta:** ¿Oh? Yo sé que Nicaragua está en American Central, pero no más. ¿Cómo es su bandera?
- Julia:** Sabes, ¡puedes aprender mucho de Nicaragua si entiendes su bandera! Mira. Hay una banda blanca con un escudo entre dos bandas azules.
- Ahmed:** Estudiamos el escudo primero.
- Roberta:** Veo una cordillera de cinco montañas verdes en un triángulo equilátero.
- Julia:** Sí. Esos son volcánes. Hay cinco volcánes importantes en Nicaragua. Además, esas volcánes representan los cinco países de Centro America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, y Costa Rica.
- Ahmed:** ¿Por qué están estos países representados en la bandera de Nicaragua?
- Julia:** El 15 septiembre de 1821, esos cinco países proclamaron su independencia. Aun hoy, los países de América Central trabajan juntos. Y mira, hay aguna en los dos lados de los volcánes. Nicaragua, también, está entre dos mares.
- Roberta:** Right! The Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.
- Julia:** Un arcoiris cubre la cordillera, y bajo el arco está el gorro de la libertad esparciendo luces.
- Ahmed:** Afuera del triángulo, esas plabras indican de nuevo la unidad de la región. Dice, “República de Nicaragua. América Central.”
- Roberta:** Saben. La bandera de mi país, los Estados Unidos, también ensena algo del país.
- Ahmed:** Sí. Hay trece bandas blancas y rojas y había trece colonias originales.
- Roberta:** Y aquí, en la parte azul, hay cincuenta estrellas blancas.

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- Julia:** Conozco la razón: uno para cada uno de los estados que son unidos en el país.
- Roberta:** Sí. Al principio, había solamente trece estrellas. Pusieron otra estrella por cada estado nuevo.
- Ahmed:** Está bien. Conocemos más de Nicaragua. Ahora, ¡al trabajo! Estudiamos otras banderas para ver lo que podemos aprender de sus países.
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What Can a Flag Tell Us?



When two students, Ahmed and Julia, enter the library, they meet another student, Roberta.

- Roberta:** Hello, Ahmed.
- Ahmed:** Hello, Roberta. I would like you to meet my friend Julia. She's Nicaraguan.
- Julia:** Pleased to meet you, Roberta. How are you?
- Roberta:** I'm fine. Thanks. What are you doing?
- Ahmed:** We're doing some research about the flags of different countries.
- Roberta:** Oh? I know that Nicaragua is in Central America, but little else. What's its flag like?
- Julia:** You know, you can learn a lot about Nicaragua if you understand its flag. Look. There is a white stripe with a coat of arms between two blue stripes.
- Ahmed:** Let's look at the coat of arms first.
- Roberta:** I see 5 green mountains in an equilateral triangle.
- Julia:** Yes. These are volcanoes. There are 5 important volcanoes in Nicaragua. Also, these volcanoes represent 5 countries of Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.
- Ahmed:** Why are these countries represented on the Nicaraguan flag?
- Julia:** On September 15, 1821, these 5 countries declared their independence. Even today, the Central American countries work together. And look, there is water on both sides of the volcanoes. Nicaragua is also between two oceans.
- Roberta:** Right! The Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.
- Julia:** A rainbow is over the mountains. Below the rainbow is a cap of liberty with light shining out from it.
- Ahmed:** Outside the triangle are words that again show the importance of Central American unity. It says, "The Republic of Nicaragua. Central America."
- Roberta:** You know. The flag of the United States also teaches something about the country.
- Ahmed:** Yes. There are thirteen red and white stripes to represent the original thirteen colonies.
- Roberta:** And here, in the field of blue, there are fifty white stars.

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Julia: I know why. There is one star for each of the fifty states that make up the United States of America.

Roberta: Yes. Originally, there were only thirteen stars. One star was added for each state that joined the union.

Ahmed: Great. Now we know more of Nicaragua. Let's get to work. We need to research other flags to see what we can learn of their countries.

Geography and Population

Objectives

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

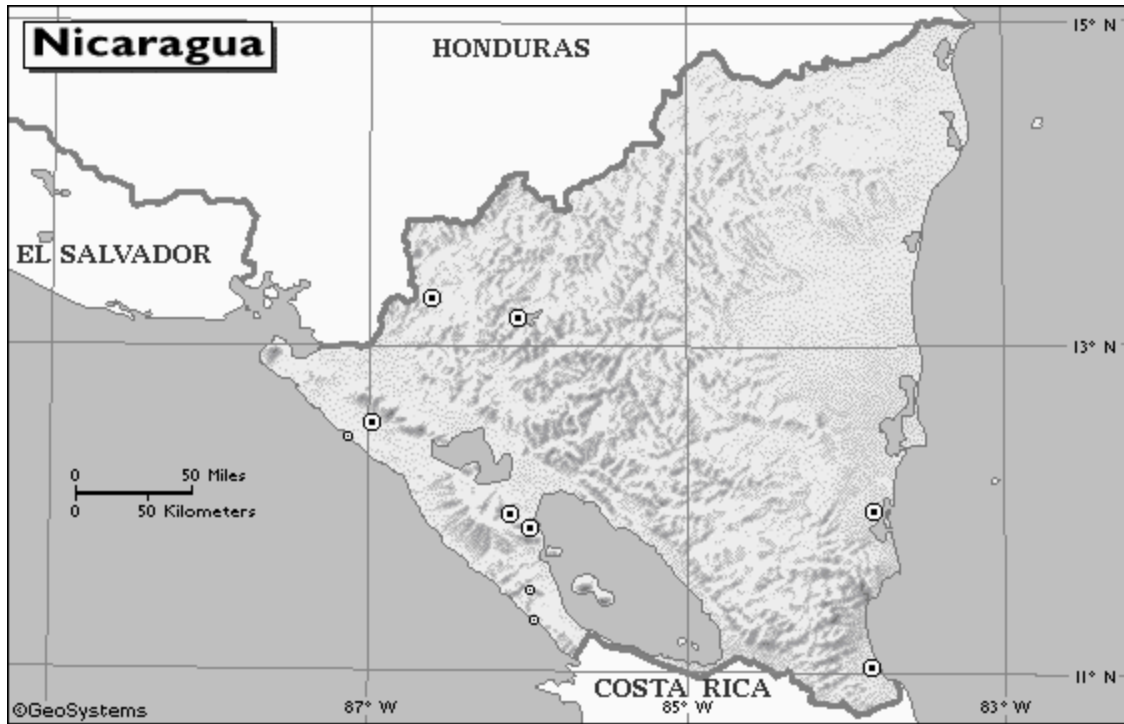
- label the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Lakes Managua and Nicaragua, the San Juan River, and cities (Managua, Leon, Granada) on a physical map.
 - describe Nicaragua's physical features.
 - infer where most people live based on a map.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Blank Map of Nicaragua** (Courtesy of Geosystems)
 - Student Handout: **Population Density Map** (Extracted from *Nicaragua: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture*. Interlink Books. 2002)
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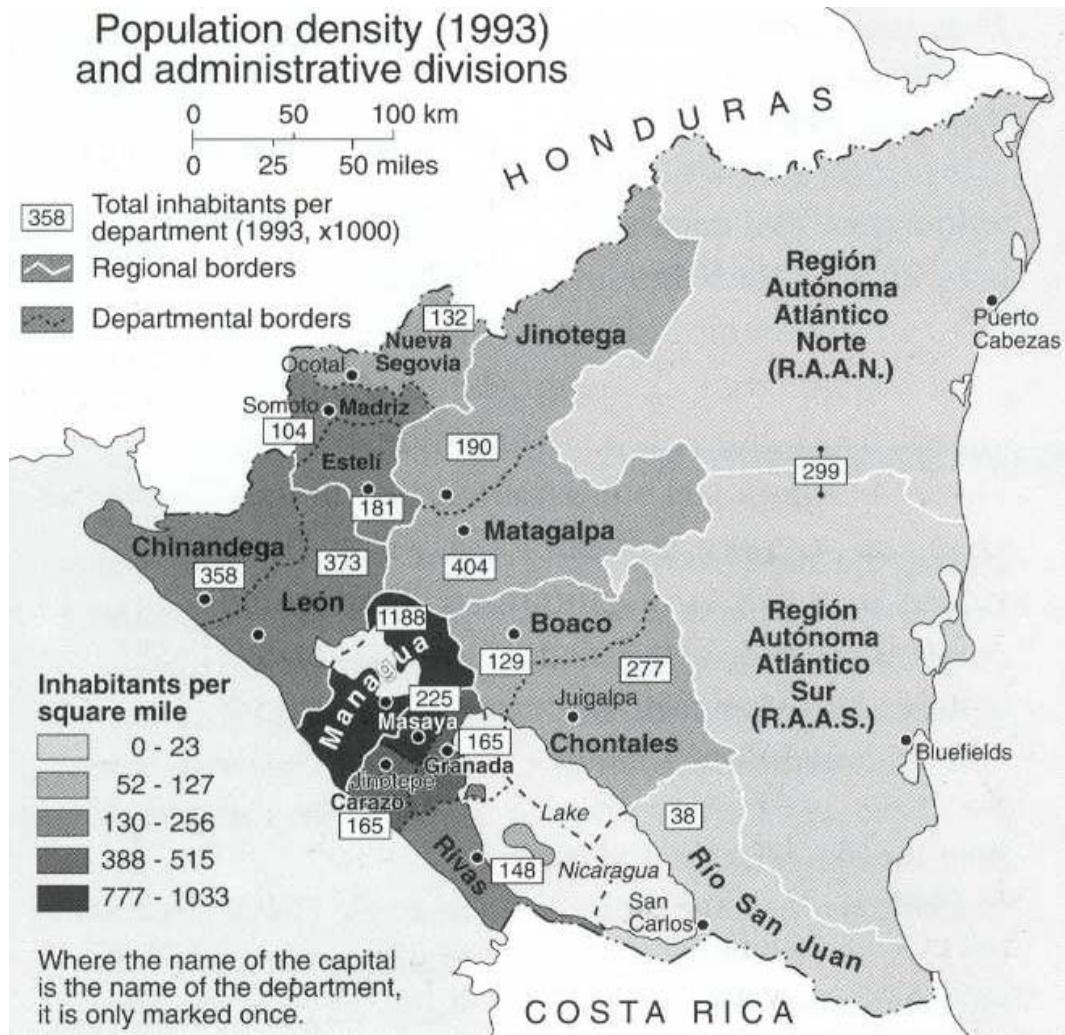
Activities

1. Distribute the s **Blank Map of Nicaragua** to each student. (You may wish to group students together for this exercise.)
 2. Direct students to label each of the following on their Nicaraguan map:
 - a. Atlantic and Pacific Oceans
 - b. Lakes Managua and Nicaragua
 - c. San Juan River
 - d. Cities of Managua (capital), León, and Granada
 3. Using the map, ask students to infer where most Nicaraguans live and to give evidence to support their beliefs. Example:
 - a. The three major cities are in the west.
 - b. There are mountains that divide the country almost in two.
 - c. The lakes are important for transportation, fishing, and water.
 - d. Therefore, most people must live in the western part of the country.
 4. Distribute the **Population Density** map to each student (or group).
 5. Direct students to answer the questions on the handout and to use the population map to check their inferences.
 6. Based on the population map, ask students to identify and explain other factors that appear to influence where people might live.
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1. Label each of the following on the map:
 - a. Atlantic Ocean
 - b. Pacific Ocean
 - c. Lakes Managua
 - d. Lake Nicaragua
 - e. San Juan River
 - f. City of Managua
 - g. City of Leon
 - h. City of Granada
-

2. Based on the map, where do you think most Nicaraguans live?
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1. Which two departments have the highest population densities?

2. Which three departments have the lowest population densities?

3. Which department has the most inhabitants? Which has the least?
