

Sawdust Carpets

Description This lesson is designed for:

- 40 – 50 minutes
- 25-30 students
- Spanish or Social Studies class
- Grades 3-5
- Country of Origin: Guatemala and Mexico

Note: Although this lesson centers on sawdust carpets that are made during Holy Week, it is not a lesson about religion. The lesson can emphasize, or deemphasize, the religious aspect of the celebration. Students need to understand that Catholicism is very widespread in Latin America and so many of the holidays and celebrations they have come from this tradition.

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

- Identify what sawdust carpets are and when they are made.
 - Explain their importance in Guatemala and Mexico.
 - Practice new Spanish vocabulary related to Semana Santa and sawdust carpets.
 - Compare and contrast Semana Santa celebrations in these countries with Holy Week in the United States and similar celebrations in China.
 - Construct a sawdust rug.
 - Correctly use Spanish color words.
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Vocabulary

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|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • La Cuaresma | Lent; period of penance and fasting |
| • La Semana Santa | Holy Week |
| • Una Procesión | Procession |
| • La Calle | Street |
| • La Gente | People |
| • La Plaza | Plaza, Square |
| • El Costumbre | Custom |
| • El Barrio | Neighborhood |
| • Las Alfombras | Carpets |
| • Las Flores | Flowers |
| • El Aserrín | Sawdust |
| • La Fiesta | Party |
| • Color words in Spanish | |
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Materials

Related Files Provided with this Lesson

- Background Information
- Pictures of sawdust carpets and processions
<http://craigandstephsvacations.com/Guatemala/Guatemala2004/GuatemalaBelize2004toc.html>
- www.nuestraquetemala.com/volcano.htm
- www.semanasantaenguatmala.org/

Teachers Need to Provide

- Book, *Sawdust Carpets* by Amelia Lau Carling
 - Maps of Guatemala and Mexico
 - Flashcards with the Spanish vocabulary words
 - Brown paper
 - Crayons or torn pieces of colored paper
 - Video, "Destination Travel Guide DVD Central America: Antigua, Guatemala"
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Activities

3-4 min.

Introduction

- Identify Guatemala on a map. Share some basic information about the country and culture.
- Identify Mexico on a map. Share some basic information about the country and culture.
- List similarities between the two countries.

4-5 min.

Vocabulary Activity

- Give students flashcards with the Spanish vocabulary words.
- Review the words together, giving brief definitions.
- Ask students to hold up their card whenever the word is used throughout the lesson.

15 min.

Sawdust Carpets by Amelia Lau Carling

- Read the picture book *Sawdust Carpets* to the class.
- Ask students to compare Chinese and Guatemalan customs mentioned in the book. Compare and contrast these with Holy Week traditions in the United States.
- Optional: Show the video of Antigua, Guatemala to show students some sawdust carpets.

20 min. **Creative Carpets!**

- Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students. Each group represents a block in the *barrio* and will make an *alfombra* for la *procesión*. Brainstorm ideas of what they can draw.
- Give each group a sheet of brown paper. It can be placed on the floor for students to decorate.
- The team can create a geometric design or simple picture.
- After 5 minutes, students should begin to color the carpet using crayons or torn pieces of colored paper and glue.
- Hang carpets when done.

2 min. **Wrap Up**

- Ask students to summarize what a sawdust carpet is and make comments about what they have learned.
 - Allow for any final questions students have.
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**Developed for Classroom Presentations
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Background Information

- In Latin American most people celebrate Easter by going to church. Others celebrate with fiestas (parties) where there is singing, dancing, and firecrackers.
- In the U.S. people celebrate Easter in different ways. Christians go to church. Because spring is considered a season of renewal and rebirth, important traditions are the Easter egg and bunny (symbols of new life). Maybe the most famous egg rolling takes place on the White House lawn in Washington DC. Hundreds of children come with baskets filled with brightly decorated eggs and roll them down the famous lawn, hoping the President of the United States is watching the fun.¹ For Christians, the egg roll signifies the rolling away of the stone in front of Jesus' tomb.
- Lent (*Cuaresma* in Spanish) is the 40 days before Easter. The final week of Lent is called Holy Week (*Semana Santa*).
- In many Latin American cities, during Holy week believers parade through the streets (*las calles*) in slow, processions (*las procesiones*) which include large, heavy platforms with statues of Jesus and Mary that are carried on people's shoulders.²
- In Mexico City Holy Week has become less religious recently. *La gente* (people) often go to Acapulco or other resorts.³ Still, other people in Mexico and Latin American dress up as Jesus, Mary, Judas, or the Romans (people from Jesus' time) and act out the events of that week, called the Passion. For many children and adults, participating in the play is fun and exciting, whether they participate or just watch.
- On Saturday (the day before Easter) many Mexicans and other Latin Americans have a noisy demonstration. *La gente* make a figure of Judas out of straw, rags, or papier-mâché. It is wired with dozens of firecrackers. Christians believe that Judas was the false friend of Jesus; that is why the *Mexicanos* hang his figure up in the village plaza and light a match to him.⁴
- Guatemalan cities, including Antigua, have a beautiful custom (*la costumbre*). Each night during Holy Week people stay up late. They make carpets (*las alfombras*) along the route of the next day's procession. *Las alfombras* are made of sawdust (*el aserrín*) placed on the ground with a stencil. Patterns and flower (*la flor*) designs are

¹ Easter Eggs. <http://www.holidays.net/easter/eggs.htm> (visited 2/18/07).

² Bilingual Program of Education Service Center, Region XIII. (1986). *Information an Material to Teach the Cultural Heritage of the Mexican-American Child*. Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, Inc. p. 55.

³ Bilingual Program of Education Center, Region XIII. (1986). p. 55.

⁴ Perl, Lila. (1983). *Piñatas and Paper Flowers: Holidays of the Americas in English and Spanish*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, p. 32.

made so that they look like a “richly woven wool carpet that is as long as a city *calle*.”⁵

- The next day, *las procesiones* walk along *las alfombras*, destroying them. Despite the amount of work that goes into making the carpets, people are not unhappy because they are participating in the activities and are excited about *la procesión*. Easter Sunday celebrates the day Christians believe Jesus rose from the grave. Many towns in Latin America have candlelight *procesiones* at midnight the night before. Easter morning is a time of joy celebrated with singing, dancing, and more fireworks. For others, it is a day of quiet worship with serene music in churches.
- Kuan Yin is a Chinese goddess.⁶
- The Dragon Boat Festival is the fifth day of the fifth lunar month in China. There are races with boats that are brightly painted and have up to 80 rowers. Many people watch the races. During the celebration people believe they get protection from evil and disease for the rest of the year.⁷ There is a tradition that if a person can stand an egg on its end at exactly noon, the following year will be lucky.

Guatemala

- Guatemala has 22 *departamentos* (similar to states).
- It shares borders with Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. The Caribbean Sea is to the East and the Pacific Ocean is to the west.
- Guatemala is located in Central America.
- Most people are *mestizo*, that is, a mix of American Indian (*indígenas*) and the white race. Some are *indígenas*, with Maya being the main American Indian group.
- Spanish is the official language, but they speak 23 other American Indian languages (such as Quiche and Cakchiquel).
- The climate is mainly hot and humid, but cooler in the mountains. There are 37 volcanoes, but only 3 are active.
- Antigua, Guatemala is in the mountains. It is a famous colonial city because it has preserved the architecture from colonial times when the Spanish populated Guatemala).

Mexico

⁵ Perl, Lila. (1983). *Piñatas and Paper Flowers: Holidays of the Americas in English and Spanish*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, p. 28.

⁶ For more information, see Guan Yin. Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guan_Yin (visited 2/18/07).

⁷ For more information see Celebration of Dragon Boat Festival, <http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/festival/dragonboat/dragon.html>, (visited 2/18/07) and The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, <http://www.ncsu.edu/midlink/dec97/holiday/boatz.html> (visited 2/18/07).

- Mexico has 29 states.
- It is part of North America, just south of the United States.
- The Río Grande (Big River) forms the border between the U.S. and Mexico.
- Most people are mestizo, meaning their descendants are a mixture of American Indian and Spanish.
- Some people are indígena. Some groups are the Maya, Zapotec, and Nahua.
- Spanish is the official language, but 59 American Indian languages are also spoken.
- The climate ranges from tropical to desert, depending on the area of the country.

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http://www.travelyucatan.com/maya/mayan_holy_week_carpets.php. (visited 2/18/2007).

Vocabulary Cards

La Cuaresma Lent

La Semana

Santa Holy Week

Una Procesión Procession

La Calle Street

La Gente People

La Plaza Square

El Costumbre Custom

El Barrio Neighborhood

Las Alfombras Carpets

Las Flores

Flowers

El Aserrín

Sawdust

La Fiesta

Party

Rojo

Azul

Anaranjado

Amarillo

Verde

Violeta

Blanco

Negro

Rosado

Morado