

Making links between the US and Chiapas through common fruit and vegetables found in a school garden (Part 1)

Objectives: This lesson aims to explore the Mexican origins of fruit and vegetables, which are commonly eaten in the US, such as corn, vanilla and avocados. Learners will make connections between these and those cultivated and used by indigenous communities in Chiapas, including the Zapatistas. It will address:

- a) Learners' knowledge of commonly used food products, which originate in Mexico or Central America.
- b) How indigenous populations have adapted wild plants for domestic cultivation.
- c) The globalization of common food products through colonization.

Learners will be able to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the main ingredients of Mexican foods they eat?
- b) Where do these ingredients originate?

Note: This lesson plan does not include a first introduction to the Zapatista movement. It would be best to use it in conjunction with other lessons that give the students some basics on the Zapatistas.

This lesson plan can be used as the first block of a two-block lesson, which culminates with the students making a small window-box style garden with some edible plants commonly farmed and eaten by Zapatista farmers.

Lesson Plan

1. Mexican Recipes and foods: Making the personal link (10-15mins)

This first activity can be carried out in small discussion groups (3-4) to see what the students already know about commonly eaten Mexican dishes as well as food products that originate in Mexico and Central America. The key questions to be answered can be posted on the board or on a large piece of paper. Each group should elect someone to write the answers (on large or small pieces of paper) and report back to the class at the end of the activity.

Key questions to answer:

- What types of Mexican dishes do you like, if any?
- What are the main ingredients used in them?
- Do you know where these food products originally come from?

After 5-7mins discussing in groups, ask the elected person in each group to report back to all, but trying not to repeat what previous groups have already mentioned (to save time and avoid repetition), just acknowledging that they also mentioned certain foods etc. Depending on class size this activity time allowed for this activity could vary. Once all the groups have presented their findings, the teacher can decide to add information on certain food products, which the students may not have identified correctly.

It is not necessary for the teacher know where all the food products mentioned come from, but at least be familiar with some main products from Mexico and Latin America like corn from Mexico, potatoes from the Andes and tomatoes originally from the Andes but first used in cooking in Mexico. If food products come up with which the teacher is unfamiliar with the origin, they can be left as research homework. (see websites below).

2. Appreciating the culinary heritage of Mexican indigenous peoples (25-30mins)

Following on from the previous discussion, those food items identified as originating in Mexico can be focused on. The teacher may wish to expand on just a few examples of these products using the same websites as in part 1 to research them, with some colorful photos to show the class. Different aspects of these food products can be focused on depending on the teacher's needs/subjects being covered, and depending on the level. For example, the biological aspects of how indigenous people's have adapted wild plant specimens for human consumption can be looked at for science classes, or the historical aspect of how these plant species have spread throughout the world, after the colonization of Latin America.

Ask the students to shut their eyes and imagine for a few minutes at the end what the world would be like without some of the main food products that come from Mexico and Latin America. What would they no longer be able to eat today or this week if Mexican people had not cultivated these foods products? Briefly ask them to share how they would feel if they could not eat their favorite dishes?

3. Link-up to part II of Lesson plan

As a lead into the second block of this lesson plan, the teacher may wish to leave the class some research homework so that the students can look into what type of foods the present-day Zapatistas eat on a daily basis, and which of these they produce themselves, and how.

Resource material

Websites

Part 1 and 2:

<http://americanfood.about.com/od/whatisamericanfood/tp/Foods-America-Gave-the-World.htm>

<http://www.cambridge.org/us/books/kiple/mexico.htm>