

Migration From Latin America

Lesson Video: Grades 9-12

Overview

Teacher: Mavis Weir
Grade: 10
School: Casa Grande High School
Location: Petaluma, California

NCSS Standards-Based Themes: People, Places, and Environments; Power, Authority, and Governance; Production, Distribution, and Consumption; Global Connections

Content Standards: Civics, Geography, Economics

Video Summary

Since the 1960s, unprecedented numbers of Latin Americans have left their homes to move to other countries. Some risked their lives to escape dangerous conditions; others sought better opportunities. For the vast majority, their destination was the United States. But why did they choose to come to America? And how does America decide whom to welcome? Tenth-grade students in Mavis Weir's geography class explore these questions as they study the migration trends from six Latin American countries: Mexico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Cuba.

Ms. Weir divides the class into six groups, each representing a different Latin American country. Using both primary and secondary resources, students examine the economic, political, and environmental circumstances that cause people to leave one country for another. The groups are given a packet of informational materials on their assigned country and then asked to create a product that illustrates the conditions in that country and the reasons for migration. As the lesson concludes, each group presents their product to the class and answers questions posed by Ms. Weir.

(This lesson was designed by SPICE, the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education.)

Standards

Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies defines what students should know and be able to do in social studies at each educational level. This lesson correlates to the following standards for high school students:

III. People, Places, and Environments

Create, interpret, use, and synthesize information from various representations of the earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs; examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes; describe and assess ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.

Standards, cont'd.

VI. Power, Authority, and Governance

Analyze and explain ideas and mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, establish order and security, and balance competing conceptions of a just society; compare and analyze the ways nations and organizations respond to conflicts between forces of unity and forces of diversity; analyze and evaluate conditions, actions, and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations.

VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Compare how values and beliefs influence economic decisions in different societies; apply economic concepts and reasoning when evaluating historical and contemporary social developments and issues.

IX. Global Connections

Explain conditions and motivations that contribute to conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations; analyze the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as health, security, resource allocation, economic development, and environmental quality; analyze the relationships and tensions between national sovereignty and global interests, in matters such as territory, economic development, nuclear and other weapons, use of natural resources, and human rights concerns.

Content Standards: Civics, Geography, Economics

About the Class

Classroom Profile

“The best way to teach tolerance is not necessarily to teach it directly, but to have students learn it from their own experience. By putting themselves in the shoes of immigrants, they learn empathy. They move from seeing people through the stereotypes of a group, to seeing them as individuals with legitimate and complex needs.” —Mavis Weir

Mavis Weir teaches 10th-grade geography and world history at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma, California. Located an hour north of San Francisco, in the scenic, rural Sonoma Valley, Petaluma is considered a bedroom community mostly for professionals who work in San Francisco. The population is predominantly Caucasian, with a small but growing Hispanic community. Casa Grande is one of two high schools in the area.

Ms. Weir’s students spent the year studying world history in the age of democracy. The year began with a unit on the origins of democracy, followed by units on the Industrial Revolution, colonialism, the rise of the nation-states, the world wars, and country identification. In the final unit, on area studies, the class used their knowledge of world history to examine different countries and regions of the world.

Year at a Glance
What Is Democracy?
The Industrial Revolution
Colonialism
The Rise of the Nation-States
World War I
World War II
Country Identification
Area Studies

About the Class, cont'd.

Ms. Weir's students also participated in a global negotiations project sponsored by Stanford University. Fourteen classes took part in the yearlong project, with each class adopting the identity of a different country and working with other "countries" to debate issues, negotiate agreements, form alliances, and learn about global relationships. Ms. Weir's class represented the United Kingdom.

By the time students began the lesson on migration, they had a foundation in world history and experience simulating political identities. Working in groups, students took on the identities of six different Latin American countries in an effort to explain why people leave their homeland to live somewhere else. This lesson built on the online global negotiation project the class was already participating in, by allowing students to put themselves in the position of someone from another country. The lesson concluded with class presentations that illustrated what each group had learned about the factors that drive people from one region and attract them to another.

Lesson Background

Read this information to better understand the lesson shown in the video.

Content: Migration Trends in Six Latin American Countries

Cuba: The exodus from Cuba began in 1959, when Fidel Castro deposed dictator Fulgencio Batista in the Cuban Revolution. Unlike Batista's government, which had been friendly with the United States, Castro's Marxist regime alienated the American government and many Cubans. As the United States withdrew economic support, Castro turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. Between 1959 and 1962, 215,000 people fled Cuba. Most were landowners and professionals who had lost their property and businesses in the transformation to a socialist economy. In 1965, a second wave of 340,000 people left on so-called Freedom Flights before the airlifts were discontinued in 1973. The next great wave took place over the course of five months in 1980, when nearly 125,000 Cubans participated in what became known as the Mariel Boat Lift. Overall, nearly 700,000 Cubans migrated from the country between 1959 and 1980, with 85 percent of them settling in the United States. Many recent émigrés are *balseiros*—people who escape from Cuba on rafts in the hope of surviving the 90-mile open-water trip to Florida.

Dominican Republic: The Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, has experienced three distinct waves of migration in the second half of the twentieth century. The first period began in 1961, when a coalition of high-ranking Dominicans, with assistance from the CIA, assassinated General Rafael Trujillo, the nation's military dictator. In the wake of his death, fear of retaliation by Trujillo's allies, and political uncertainty in general, spurred a great migration from the island. In 1965, the United States began a military occupation of the Dominican Republic and eased travel restrictions, making it easier for Dominicans to obtain American visas. From 1966 to 1978, the exodus continued, fueled by high unemployment and political repression. Communities established by the first wave of immigrants to America created a network that assisted subsequent arrivals. Then, in the early 1980s, underemployment, inflation, and the rise in value of the dollar all contributed to a third wave of migration from the island nation. Today, emigration from the Dominican Republic remains high, facilitated by the social networks of now-established Dominican communities in the United States.

El Salvador: Decades of political and military tensions, capped off by an 11-year civil war that finally ended in 1992, resulted in the forced migration of roughly a third of El Salvador's population in the 1980s and early '90s. The El Salvadoran migrants fell into one of two categories: refugees, who left El Salvador for another country because they felt endangered at home; and displaced persons, who had to leave their communities but remained within the national boundaries (also called "internal refugees"). Approximately one million refugees sought asylum in the United States; nearly half a million fled to the neighboring countries of Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua; another 500,000 were displaced. After the war, the repatriation of refugees seemed hesitant, at best. Those who remained in Central America have largely returned to El Salvador—not on an individual basis but as whole communities. Others, especially those in the United States, have been sending money back to their families in El Salvador. These refugees are reluctant to return, as their families depend on them for financial support. Still others have chosen to settle permanently elsewhere.

About the Class, cont'd.

Guatemala: More than half of Guatemala's population consists of indigenous people, descended from the Mayans. Spanish is the official language, but more than 23 languages are spoken there. Differences in customs, traditions, and religious beliefs have divided the people along many lines. In seeking to modernize the country and integrate the indigenous communities, the government has encountered opposition from various factions. The army has clashed with various guerilla groups at different times throughout the 1980s, forcing many indigenous people—mostly women and children—to either cross the border into Mexico or seek asylum in the United States. As the situation became less dangerous, many refugees would return, creating a migration pattern that ebbed and flowed with the perceived level of safety in their home country. In addition to military actions, natural disasters such as mud slides and Hurricane Mitch in 1998 have also affected the population's movement.

Haiti: Migration has long been a part of Haiti's history. One of the least developed countries in the Western Hemisphere, a poor economy and political turmoil have led many to seek stability elsewhere. Interisland migration has always been common in the Caribbean, especially as the sugar industry grew and workers were needed in Cuba, the Bahamas, and other nearby countries. But the United States has also been the primary recipient of Haitian immigrants. In 1915, during a period of intense political unrest, U.S. marines occupied Haiti, and Haitians began coming to the United States in increasing numbers. Although the United States made vast improvements to the country's infrastructure by constructing highways, schools, and hospitals, and by creating a sanitation program that eradicated yellow fever, many Haitians resented U.S. involvement. The occupation forces withdrew in 1934, but turmoil continued. From 1957 to 1986, presidential dictators François and son Jean-Claude Duvalier maintained their power through violence and fear; the people referred to the secret police force as Tonton Macoutes, or "bogeymen." Haitian professionals joined those headed for security in the United States. The political landscape since then has been marred by military coups and failed democratic elections. Many Haitians left their country for political asylum in the United States, claiming their lives were in danger.

Mexico: Mexico's economic development in the twentieth century has not kept pace with its population growth, and many still live in poverty. Outdated agricultural technology and low wages motivated many Mexicans to leave their rural homes for urban centers, which quickly became overcrowded with people competing for scarce jobs. Others left the country searching for better opportunities, especially in the United States. Because of their shared border, the U.S. and Mexico share a heritage of movement between the two countries, both legal and illegal. Migrant labor from Mexico has long been important to the American economy, but changing immigration policy and the fluctuation of job availability has created an ebb and flow pattern, and is constantly redefining the relationship between the two nations. Economic crises in Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s, including national bankruptcy, harsh austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund, a severely lowered standard of living, and the devaluation of the peso, contributed to outbound migration. Now that Mexico is a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement and more focused on exports, its economic situation has generally stabilized, although Mexico's fortune remains closely tied to the economic climate in the United States. The topic of illegal immigrants continues to receive a great deal of attention in the United States today, even though most Mexicans enter the country legally, or claim citizenship through family reunification.

Teaching Strategy: Complex Instruction

Complex instruction is a teaching method in which students work together in small groups to enhance their learning experience and to ensure full participation by every member of the group. Each student in the group is assigned one of the following roles: a group facilitator who keeps the group on task, a harmonizer who ensures participation and civility, a materials manager who gathers materials needed for the group product, a reporter who explains the group process during the presentation, and a resource manager who gathers any additional resources or content materials needed.

Watching the Video

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions:

- Why is it important to understand the relationship between politics, geography, and resources when studying different regions?
- What can be learned by comparing the resources of different countries?
- What steps do you take to prepare students for small-group work and to ensure their full participation and success?
- What are your criteria for measuring success on a group project?

Watch the Video

As you watch “Migration From Latin America,” take notes on Ms. Weir’s instructional strategies, particularly how she uses complex instruction. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning in this lesson.

Reflecting on the Video

Review your notes, then respond to the following questions:

- What struck you about the classroom climate, background, preparation, strategies, and materials used?
- Think about the different parts of the lesson. What do you think was the purpose of each part?
- What do you notice about how Ms. Weir works with the groups as they examine the reasons why people migrate?
- How is this class different from yours? How might you teach your students about the reasons for migration? Why would you use those strategies?

Watching the Video, cont'd.

Looking Closer

Here's an opportunity to take a closer look at interesting aspects of Ms. Weir's lesson.



Using Group Work: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately two minutes into the video. Watch for about five minutes.

Students are introduced to the six Latin American countries they will study. Each group is assigned a country and begins to explore why people in that country migrate, using the resource packets Ms. Weir distributes.

- What are some of the ways that complex instruction supports student learning?
- What kind of teacher and student preparation are needed in order for structured group work to be successful?
- What do you notice about the resources students are using? How do these resources influence what the students are learning?



Presenting Student Work: Video Segment

Go to this segment in the video by matching the image (to the left) on your TV screen. You'll find this segment approximately 14 minutes into the video. Watch for about three minutes.

Students have completed the first round of research, including discussion and product creation. One group presents a tap-tap bus to demonstrate why people from Haiti have migrated to America.

- As you watch students present their work, what evidence of student learning do you see in the group's product?
- What evidence of student learning do you see as the group answers Ms. Weir's questions?
- How is complex instruction reflected in the group's presentation? How might it impact student learning as the group proceeds to the next step in the lesson?
- What role does this teaching strategy play in helping Ms. Weir achieve her instructional and content goals for this unit?

Connecting to Your Teaching

Reflecting on Your Practice

As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

- What are some specific strategies you have used to prepare students for group work?
- What are some topics in your course that lend themselves to using primary and secondary sources? To research and group discussion? To group presentations?
- What are some overarching themes that you stress or that repeatedly surface as you study different world regions?
- Why is it important to teach about migration?

Taking It Back to Your Classroom

- Ask students to interview family members about how and why they or their ancestors came to the United States. Work with students to develop interview questions that help determine the “push/pull” factors involved in their decision to relocate. Students may want to explore Ellis Island resources. Students could also interview people they know who have immigrated themselves.
- Have students participate in a model United Nations (UN) program, taking the role of a diplomatic representative to the UN from one of the member nations. Model UN programs can be conducted with as few as 15 students from a single classroom or with thousands of students from classrooms all over the world.
- After students have had an opportunity to study a teacher-created or commercially prepared set of primary and secondary resources about different regions, ask them to create such a packet of their own, with maps, photographs, art, poetry, cultural artifacts, and other documents.
- Identify a controversial issue in your course matter and invite students to develop a resource packet that provides background information on the issue and that explores the issue from different points of view. After using the materials, ask students to give two presentations: one in which they deliver an objective overview of the issue, and one in which they take a position and defend it.

Resources

Print Resources for Students

Hazen, Walter A. *Immigration*. Eye on History Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Instructional Fair, 1998.

Olmos, Edward James, ed. *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States*. New York: Little Brown and Company, 1999.

Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I Was Puerto Rican*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Print Resources for Teachers

Gonzalez, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin USA, 2001.

Romero, Mary, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Vilma Ortiz, eds. *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Suro, Roberto. *Strangers Among Us: Latino Lives in a Changing America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Web Resources for Students and Teachers

Center for Latin American Studies: <http://www.las.arizona.edu/outreach.html>

CLAS offers curriculum resources, teaching events, and multimedia materials on the subject of Latin American immigration.

Immigration and Naturalization Service: <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/index.htm>

The INS site features news updates, laws, regulations, information on visas, and other facts about the process of immigration.

The Latin American Data Base: <http://ladb.unm.edu>

LADB provides an online news service and resource center for Latin Americans in the United States, Central America, and South America.

The Latin American Network Information Center: <http://lanic.utexas.edu>

The LANIC site offers information and resources on Latin America as well as links to other resources on immigration from Latin America.

Powells.Com: Ethnic Studies: <http://www.powells.com/subsection/EthnicStudiesLatinAmerican.html>

This site contains hundreds of books, novels, and teaching resources on Latin America.

Notes
