

# The Heritage Continues

## Lesson #14: HOLDING A FIESTA

### TIME

The length of this activity depends upon the size and extent of the fiesta held.

### MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Objects - Serape, hat, blouse, flag, bolo toys, calendar containing saints' days

Graphics - #5, 11, 12, 25-30

Worksheet #26 - The Mexican Flag

### OTHER MATERIALS

This will depend on the type and size of fiesta the class decides to hold. Craft directions and food recipes in the "Craft" and "Recipes" sections of this manual contain individual lists of materials needed.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

This will depend on the type and size of fiesta the class decides to hold. If worksheet #26 will be used make some copies of it. For preparation instructions and supply lists for specific foods and crafts see directions in the "Crafts" and "Recipes" sections of this manual.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) describe the significance of a celebration and fiesta
- 2) compare and contrast celebration aspects between the Mexican American culture and theirs
- 3) plan, organize, prepare, and hold a fiesta

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A "fiesta" is the Mexican word for a happy, joyful celebration. Traditionally fiestas were held to honor a saint's day or religious holiday or to commemorate an important historic event. Many church celebrations such as baptisms, Quinceaneras, or weddings are fiestas. Today there are other reasons to celebrate with a fiesta.

Often, Mexican communities in Kansas have a day or a series of days called "The Fiesta." Its purpose is usually to raise money for the church or to celebrate pride in Mexican heritage and tradition, or a combination of both. Activities include baseball games, races, carnivals, Mexican dances, crafts, food, parades, and crowning a queen. On special occasions, such as fiestas, Mexican Americans often will dress in clothing from their native regions in Mexico.

Garden City officially began to celebrate its Mexican Fiesta in 1922, but it might have been unofficially celebrated as early as 1909. In mid-September 1922 many Mexican farm laborers settled in the Garden City area. September 16-17 were set aside for the celebration

of Mexico's Independence and also marked the end of some harvest work. The Mexican Fiesta began as two separate fiestas staged in private backyards. Early fiestas offered a little uplift from the daily heavy work routine of the Mexican and Mexican American laborer. The fiestas began at 6:30 a.m. with raising the flag and singing the national anthems of the United States and Mexico. Over the years activities have included family picnics, baseball contests, crowning a queen, parades through town, dancing, mass, and patriotic speeches.

## VOCABULARY

- **Banderitas** = Decorative tissue paper cutouts.
- **Celebration** = Ceremonies and other activities to observe or honor a special day or event.
- **Fiesta** = A happy, joyful celebration.
- **Piñata** = A decorated container filled with candies, toys, and other "goodies;" hung; and then broken as part of a party game.
- **Saint's day** = Each day of the year has a saint associated with it. Children are sometimes named for the saint on whose day they were born. Some churches have special celebrations or fiestas for saints that are special to them.

## ACTIVITY

- 1) Find out how many students in the class have experienced a fiesta either by participating in or attending one.

Show the class graphics #5, 11, 12, and 25-30. Ask the class to look at the photos closely and then open up a discussion about fiestas by using the photos and asking the following questions:

What is a fiesta?

*A happy, joyful celebration. Traditionally fiestas were held to honor a saint's day or religious holiday or to commemorate an important historic event. Today there are other reasons to celebrate with a fiesta.*

What is included in a fiesta?

*It varies from one fiesta to another but typically included are special food and clothing, a parade, fireworks, and games.*

Describe the atmosphere of a fiesta.

*Happy, festive, fun, active, busy, loud, and noisy.*

For what reasons, or on what occasions, would a fiesta be held? Show the class the calendar containing saints' days.

*Religious or national holidays; family celebrations such as baptisms, weddings, and birthdays; community celebrations such as an anniversary or local success or triumph.*

If your community has an annual fiesta talk about this event and the memories that students have of it.

- 2) Continue the discussion by having the class define celebration.  
***Ceremonies and other activities that observe or honor a special day or event.***

Compare the concept of a fiesta with a celebration in your community that has accompanying rituals and traditions. Examples of comparable community celebrations include Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.

What are the similarities?

***Usually general things such as special food and clothing, the gathering of friends and family, and music.***

What are the differences?

***Usually the specifics such as the types of food, music, and clothing; the types of activities or entertainment; and the reason for the celebration.]***

- 3) Have the class plan a fiesta. Decide on the fiesta's purpose. Whom or what will the fiesta honor? If your fiesta will take place close to May 5 you may want to celebrate Cinco de Mayo, or if it is around September 16 it may be a celebration of Mexico's Independence Day. Consider looking at the calendar of saints' days (included in the trunk) and choosing a specific date to celebrate.

Discuss with the class what is needed to hold a fiesta (food, music, clothing, dancing, decorations, etc.). They may want to use the serape, hat, blouse, flag, and bolo toys from the trunk for their fiesta. Encourage students to wear brightly colored clothing; have the boys tie colorful crepe paper around their waists as sashes and have the girls pin colorful tissue paper flowers in their hair. Decorations could include banderitas (tissue paper cutouts), piñatas, and Mexican flags. Entertainment might focus on a dance or breaking a piñata. Directions for making some items can be found in the craft section of this manual. Worksheet #26, the Mexican flag, contains an image of the Mexican flag to color and use.

Decide who will be invited to your fiesta. This will help to determine the amount of work involved in holding your fiesta. Will it be limited to the class or will parents and relatives, another class, or the entire school be invited? Consider having one or two classes plan and hold a fiesta for the entire school or for a group of classes (perhaps one of the younger grades).

- 4) Once the class has decided what will be included in the fiesta and how many people will be invited, make a list of preparations and how the work will be divided among class members. Jobs may include buying, making, or asking for donations of food; making decorations; and planning the entertainment or a parade.

Decorations can be made as part of art class, and traditional dances could be learned during a physical education or music class. If additional clothing is desired serapes can be made from

burlap or other types of fabric pieces. Students can bring clothing from home if they have some. Consider asking for a Mexican American dance group to perform for the fiesta. To locate dancers try contacting a local Catholic church or a school with a large Mexican American membership. For additional ideas see other sections in this manual especially "The Heritage Continues," "Crafts," and "Recipes."

### **EXTENDED ACTIVITY**

- 1) See the complementary lessons in "The Heritage Continues" section of this manual.
- 2) Have the class view and discuss the fiesta portion of *The Hispanic Face of Kansas* video (counter #91).
- 3) Mexican Heritage Alive and Well in Kansas

#### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- a) collect data on cities and towns in Kansas that hold Mexican American festivals
- b) discover the historical roots of these festivals

#### Activity:

- a) Have the students or groups collect data on cities and towns in Kansas that celebrate festivals based on the Mexican origins of their citizens, past and present. Students may want to contact schools in these areas for additional information.
- b) Students can present their data to the class.
- c) After the students have collected their information, it may be presented as follows:
  - Make bulletin board displays showing where Mexico can be "visited" without leaving Kansas.
  - Report on or demonstrate to the class crafts, customs, or styles from Mexico that can be found in Kansas.
  - With a large map and appropriate pictures, indicate where Mexican American celebrations are located in Kansas.
- d) From the above activities have the class discuss any of the following questions:
  - In what part of Kansas did Mexican Americans tend to settle?
  - What visible influences have these people had on the areas they settled?
  - What reasons can be given for choosing these places?