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neh summer institute: oaxaca, méxico

high school social studies (11th-12th grade)

introduction

The curriculum for Advanced Placement Human Geography (APHG) spans many aspects of culture, including language, gender identity, agriculture, and economic development. Our Mesoamerican studies fit nicely into these sub-themes; however, the course is not designed to cover these topics in just one unit. Thus, I have breakdown my unit on Mesoamerica into several block lessons (1.5 hours, each) to make up one part of the respective unit. These lessons will represent case studies that attempt to explain the larger themes of the APHG curriculum. Because I teach in an all-girls school, women’s perspectives play an especially important role in all of these units, not just the unit on culture and gender.

Below, you will see some of the essential questions discussed in each unit. On pages two and three, you will find a description of each lesson and links (they are underlined) to the appropriate resources, including videos, articles, maps, and Google Slides lectures. To access the lectures, you can sign in to [Google](http://www.google.com/slides/about/) and then copy my lecture into a new file. From there, you may alter the content as needed to suit your curriculum.

essential questions for each unit

culture and gender identity

* What is culture? How does one define cultural identity? In what ways does culture shape who we are? In what ways do we shape our cultural identity? How do localized communities like the Zapotec and Mixtec in Mesoamerica strengthen their cultural ties in the face of an increasingly globalized—and homogenized—world?
* What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man? How do these ideas change across cultures? Where do these ideas originate and how are they perpetuated? Do we need a gender lens to study the world? What can we learn about gender identity in classical period Mesoamerican cultures through codices, art, and *mapas*? How does that identity change post-contact with the Spanish? Are there gender identities that do not conform to the binary female-male scale?

language

What is the purpose of language? What are the different roles that written and spoken languages play in communication? How have languages and writing systems developed over time, that is, how has language diffused? What are the languages in greatest danger of extinction? How do localized communities—especially those in Mesoamerica—strengthen the use of their language? Should there be an absolute lingua franca?

agriculture

What are the major hearths for agriculture? How did the domestication of flora and fauna impact the development of culture in those hearths? What types of agricultural practices dominant the landscape in LDCs compared to MDCs? What role did agriculture, specifically corn, play in the development of Mesoamerican societies? How do modern farmers wishing to maintain heritage seeds and techniques resist a consolidating, homogenizing agricultural system?

economic development

How did the Industrial Revolution change the ways in which countries develop economically? What are the major economic indicators that indicate positive development? What are the major sectors of the modern economy? What is sustainable development? How do localized economies with niche industries fit into the global economy? Do we help those communities by buying their wares, or do we trap them in a cycle of poverty? How do micro-loans and micro-finance projects change the ways in which women create economic opportunity?

plan for each lesson

culture and gender identity

day 1

This lesson will begin by asking students to first describe their own cultures and discuss what characteristics are unique to them. We will then define material and non-material culture and provide examples for each in both pop and folk culture settings. Next, we will read an excerpt from an article about “The Nacirema” to clarify how an outsider’s perspective can greatly change the original intent of a cultural practice. Finally, I will introduce Mixtec culture and we will discuss how Mesoamerican groups maintain their cultures in the face of globalizing forces.

*Resources*

* [Mixtec culture](http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~mixtec/index.html)
* [Nacirema culture](https://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html)
* [Lecture](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wWy_ulqhu3ro2lpuZUJcTealLphwVhP6V_C7orM8N0c/edit?usp=sharing)

day 2

This lesson will begin by asking the students to determine if we need gender as a lens to study geography. After, we will define what it means to be “male” and “female.” We will then look at a photo series (including images from codices and *mapas*) to attempt to describe what these terms mean in different parts of the world and describe from where these narratives develop, perpetuate, and change over time. We will then focus specifically on Mesoamerican women to describe their current challenges. Finally, we will end class with a categorilla on the non-binary nature of gender by mapping cultures that recognize genders other than female-male. Of course, the [Muxe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muxe) will be the primary focus.

*Resources*

* [Non-binary gender map](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/two-spirits/map.html)
* [Lecture](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1XZORHxQOih-I3SZ0qwUhnr8-RsBh0ZIG3RLYhas0bY4/edit?usp=sharing)

language

This lesson will open with a lecture and discussion on the nature of disappearing languages in the world using two Natural Geographic resources: “[Vanishing Voices](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CBwQtwIwAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fngm.nationalgeographic.com%2F2012%2F07%2Fvanishing-languages%2Frymer-text&ei=TgnMU5edAcfv8AHp74C4Dw&usg=AFQjCNGkfPTcA3aqbYy8jYhQrCTPJ_hKJA&sig2=0zJRvF7vPo4bQ0iuPKVRcQ&bvm=bv.71198958,d.b2U)” and “[Enduring Voices.](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CBwQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftravel.nationalgeographic.com%2Ftravel%2Fenduring-voices%2F&ei=OwnMU8TLMcLC8QHi_4BQ&usg=AFQjCNFvKu8DFTuknPBuFLFvPGMpAvcePQ&sig2=XTGhVgMUAm-uYURjvAdcIA&bvm=bv.71198958,d.b2U)” Students will then use the Enduring Voices project to map endangered languages across the world and determine what processes have contributed to their decline or subsequent resurgence (Chinatec video, too). Then we will read two articles about Mesoamerican languages in the US: one will describe the difficulty Mixtec and Zapotec speakers face when Americans expect them to speak Spanish, and the next will describe the revival of those languages through social media. Students will then complete a writing exercise comparing and contrasting the articles. Finally, we will discuss how languages have evolved over time by completing the glyphs exercise (day 2).

*Resources*

* [Whistling language video](http://vimeo.com/57291304) in Chinatec.
* [Glyph exercise](http://whp.uoregon.edu/uploads/2010/mesofiles/DecipheringMayaGlyphsNEW.docx)
* [Mixtec dictionary](http://mixtec.nativeweb.org/)(possible resource)
* [NYT Article on non-Spanish speaking immigrants from México](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/nyregion/immigrants-who-speak-indigenous-mexican-languages-encounter-isolation.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&version=HpSumSmallMediaHigh&module=second-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news)
* [Reviving Indigenous languages using social media](http://m.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0401/A-like-for-linguistics-Can-social-media-save-Mexico-s-unwritten-languages)
* [Lecture](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1xtlO4qEHNCQC9ZMF3ucwYc9NhO8FkJ4_KdJpSgHXVYE/edit?usp=sharing)

agriculture (gmo debate in oaxaca)

As part of a larger unit on agriculture, this lesson will focus specifically on the GMO debate in Oaxaca. The students will read for homework two articles presenting the anti-GMO side of the argument. In class, students will be responsible for developing counter arguments to that narrative through investigative research. At the end of their research, they will write a short essay arguing for or against the following statement: “GMO seed research and implementation is a serious threat to the native corn crops of Mexico.”

*Resources*

* [Contamination of Native Mexican Maize Varieties…](http://maiznativodeoaxaca.wordpress.com/2014/04/27/the-contamination-of-native-mexican-maize-varieties-by-genetically-modified-strains/)
* [Genetic Mutation of Mexican Maize](http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/07/10/genetic-mutation-of-mexican-maize/)

economic development

The lesson will begin by asking the students to imagine themselves in a small Mixtec village and think about their economic opportunities. In lecture, I will introduce the students to the *Fundación EnVía* and we will investigate their micro-finance lending programs (each group will focus on one program, or one woman, and present their findings to the class). After investigating *EnVía’s* information, we will read a short article about microfinance’s efficacy as a tool to battle poverty. We will end the lesson by discussing the roots of neocolonialism and how voluntourism—something my students do quite a bit—might not be helping as much as we think.

*Resources*

* [EnVía](http://www.envia.org/)
* [What do we really know about Microfinance’s impact?](http://www.microfinancegateway.org/p/site/m/template.rc/1.26.11408/)
* [Is voluntourism the new colonialism?](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/5341384?utm_content=buffer8df03&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)