

South America

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES
Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985/1989.

CATEGORY: WRAP-UP

CONCEPTS: INTERDEPENDENCE, government, U.S./Latin American relations

ACTIVITY: A MINI-ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES. The Organization of American States is a major part of the inter-American system and its institutions. This exercise can be viewed from two perspectives, stressing either the conflict resolution nature of the OAS or the basic common identity of its member states.

OBJECTIVES: Students will become aware of the workings of the OAS and will simulate their own mini-session of a General Assembly.

MATERIALS: Small flags of each country (paper, crayons)
Cardboard signs with country names

PROCEDURE: Explain the OAS to the students (see following brief description). Now assign each student or pair of students one of the OAS countries:

| | | | |
|------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Argentina | Dominican Republic | Jamaica | Trinidad and |
| Barbados | Ecuador | Mexico | Tobago |
| Bolivia | El Salvador | Nicaragua | United States |
| Brazil | Grenada | Panama | Uruguay |
| Chile | Guatemala | Paraguay | Venezuela |
| Colombia | Haiti | Peru | |
| Costa Rica | Honduras | Surinam | |
| Cuba | | | |

Students will act as representatives of their assigned countries and prepare short statements for the General Assembly. This assignment should be made at least a month before the actual recreation of the Assembly--even better, at the beginning of the Latin American Unit or school year. There are three suggested ways to set up the simulation, based on age and research abilities of the students.

1. Celebration of a common holiday or event. This would stress the common goals, background and harmony of the Americas. Each country would prepare a statement concerning an event such as the following:
 - The anniversary of Columbus' landing in the Americas
 - Messages of hope for the New Year
 - Pan American Day (April 14)

The teacher or one of the students can then introduce a resolution to commemorate the event. Example:

"The member states of the Organization of American States, in celebration of the birth of Christopher Columbus, resolve that the OAS rededicate itself to the goals of peace and justice in the Americas."

Members can vote on the resolution to make it official and then adjourn for a banquet or other activity.

2. Discussion of a relatively non-controversial project.
 All members would be called upon to make a statement concerning some issue or project that might concern the OAS. For example:
- Using OAS funds to set up an Inter-American Museum of folk art. Discussion could include countries wishing to house such a museum.
 - Establishing a project to study refugees in the Americas.
 - Asking Canada to join the OAS.

Resolutions can be presented, discussed and voted on. (In reality, the above topics may be quite controversial, but at least in principle they can reflect common interests.)

3. Debate on a more controversial subject. This would require quite a bit of preparation on the students' part but can be very rewarding. The point is not to have students make statements they simply imagine typical of a country but to obtain enough information to make an educated statement close to reality.

For sources on a nation's position they can consult recent books, embassies and consulates, newspapers, magazines, people from the nation (with care to get the official view not the individual's personal view), Center for Latin American Studies, people with expertise on an area (professors, clergy, travelers, human rights groups). If students are given plenty of time and guidance they can learn the nation's position.

A subject of recent importance will be easier to trace and also meaningful. Here are suggestions:

- Efforts for peace in Central America, including U.S., Contadora nations and Cuban proposals.
- The Falklands/Malvinas war.
- The U.S. invasion of Grenada.
- U.S. support of the "contras" in Nicaragua.
- Nuclear weapons in Latin America.

It is likely that by the time this collection of materials reaches your hands there will be other topics of concern to choose from.

For each of these projects you will need to have a secretary-general to lead the proceedings and keep order. Each student should also prepare his/her own flag and identification card.

RESOURCES: Department of Public Information, OAS General Secretariat,
Organization of American States: A Handbook, Washington, D.C.: 1977.

A Brief description of the Organization of American States

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the regional organization of the Western Hemisphere created to maintain the peace, ensure freedom and security, and promote the welfare of all Americans. After some attempts to create such an organization in 1890 (International Union of American States) and in 1910 (Pan American Union), the OAS was founded in 1948.

The Charter of the OAS is the basic document of the organization. Similar to a constitution it sets forth the principles, purposes, and policies of the OAS and defines its structure, functions and operations.

The major accomplishments of the OAS have been its contribution to settling inter-American disputes by peaceful means and the promotion of cooperation in the economic, social, scientific, educational, and cultural development of member nations.

The General Assembly is the supreme organ of the OAS. During its meetings the governments may discuss any matter of common interest to the member states-political, economic, social, cultural, or legal. Delegations of foreign states are usually headed by their foreign ministers. In recent years the foreign ministers have preferred informal dialogue as opposed to formal debate in full, or plenary sessions.

Other important governing bodies exist: the Permanent Council (which serves provisionally as the Organ of Consultation in emergency situations), the Inter-American Economic and Social Council, and the Inter-American Council for Education, Science and Culture. Every member state has the right to be represented on all three councils, and each has equal voice and vote. There are also a series of special organizations within the OAS:

- Inter-American Juridical Committee
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- Inter-American Committee on Peaceful Settlement
- Pan American Health Organization
- Inter-American Children's Institute
- Inter-American Commission on Women
- Pan American Institute of Geography and History
- Inter-American Indian Institute
- Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences
- Inter-American Defense Board
- Inter-American Statistical Institute
- Inter-American Nuclear Energy Commission
- Inter-American Emergency Aid Fund

A group of non-member but cooperating countries participate in the OAS as Permanent Observers. These are: Belgium, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Guyana, Israel, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Spain, The Netherlands and Egypt. These nations contribute to the development of Latin America through the OAS.

The staff and programs of the General Secretariat are financed by the regular budget. All of the member states contribute to the regular fund; the amount assigned to each government is determined by a scale of quotas. These quotas are based on the size and population of the country. Some specific projects are financed by the nations' voluntary contributions to special multinational funds.

The four official languages of the OAS are English, Spanish, Portuguese and French.

(Information from Organization of American States: A Handbook, Department of Public Information, OAS General Secretariat, Washington, D.C., 1977.)

