

SOUTH AMERICA

V-34

B

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1999.

CATEGORY: VENEZUELA: NOW

CONCEPTS: URBANIZATION, Geography

ACTIVITY: LET'S TOUR CARACAS.

OBJECTIVES: To provide the students with a general idea of what the capital city of Venezuela is like. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to describe Caracas briefly, as they imagine it, after breaking any stereotype created by the media, in which all Latin American cities are "pueblos" full of "bandidos."

MATERIALS: Post cards, magazines, illustration boards, rubber cement, scissors, markers; a map of the city of Caracas and reproduction of the following text.

PROCEDURE: Have the students look for post cards and magazine pictures of the city of Caracas and bring them to class. A good source of these would be travel agencies, the Venezuelan Embassy (see Introduction Exercises for address) and magazines such as National Geographic. On an illustration board glue the pictures, include some general information (population, etc.) and post it near a map of Caracas. What do the students see? Had they thought of Caracas as a big city? Could Caracas be compared with an American city? Why? Distribute the hand-out to the students and read it with the students. The reading may be occasionally interrupted to point out some of the places mentioned in the reading.

If available, a film strip of this city should follow the reading. To conclude, ask the students to describe orally their idea of Caracas. How do they imagine it now? Did their idea change before and after they read?



Caracas, 1804

Let's Tour Caracas

It's summer! Vacation time. Where shall we go? South America!
Venezuela! Caracas!

Caracas is Venezuela's largest and most beautiful city. To reach Caracas, we would have to travel by ship or plane to La Guaira. La Guaira is both the seaport and the airport for Caracas. We arrive by ship.

After our ship docks at La Guaira, we drive to Caracas. The straight-line distance between La Guaira and Caracas is about six miles (10 km). The old road between these cities is about twenty-three miles (37 km) long. This is because the mountains surrounding Caracas rise almost at the water's edge. The old road zig-zags up the steep mountainsides; it twists and winds around nearly 400 sharp curves, and the trip from La Guaira to Caracas used to take an hour and a half. However, these two cities are now linked by a four-lane freeway, which is much safer, straighter and shorter than the old road. The trip from La Guaira to Caracas now takes only fifteen to twenty minutes on the freeway.

As we travel along the freeway, the climate becomes cooler. The average yearly temperature at La Guaira is about 27°C (81°F), while the average yearly temperature at Caracas is about 21°C (69°F). These two cities are only six miles apart, but the difference in temperature is 6°C (12°F). Why? Because La Guaira is at sea level, while Caracas is more than 914m (3,000 F) above the sea.

We see below us the city of Caracas nestled in a lovely valley at the foot of high mountains. As our car winds down into the valley, we see shacks and adobe houses on the outskirts of the city. In recent years, many old adobe houses have been replaced by large apartment buildings. The number of these modern buildings is increasing rapidly.

The size of the city's population is growing very fast. Just a few years ago Caracas had a population of 500,000. Now, including the suburbs, Caracas has over 3,200,000 people, which means that this is one of the fastest-growing cities in Latin America. About one in every five Venezuelans lives in Caracas. This is because the country's industrialization process has attracted people from other regions to the coast.

In downtown Caracas we see giant skyscrapers, modern stores and office buildings, and large, busy factories. Bolívar Center is a huge area in the heart of the city. It covers several blocks and it houses hundreds of offices and stores. Bolívar Center is built on three levels: above the ground are tall buildings, underground is a large parking lot where hundreds of cars can be parked, below the parking lot is a four-lane highway connecting two other busy boulevards.

Next, we visit some of the large government buildings and the National Capitol. Caracas is in a federal district because it is the capital, just as Washington, D.C., in the U.S.

We tour the campus of the University of Venezuela, where there are many new buildings and a splendid sports center. We also drive to a hill where a statue of Columbus stands. This statue reminds us that Columbus explored the mouth of the Orinoco River in 1498, and that Venezuela was the only land in South America that he reached.

Next we visit the house in Caracas where Bolívar was born, which is now a National Museum. Travelers from many places visit this house, just as travelers to the U.S. visit Mount Vernon. Then we take a short trip to the place where Bolívar is buried. In the U.S., national heroes are buried in Arlington Cemetery, a few miles from Washington, D.C. In Venezuela national heroes are buried in a magnificent building known as Panteón Nacional, where the body of Bolívar lies in a beautiful white tomb.

There is a lot to see in Caracas, much more. But our short trip is now over. We must go to our hotel, pick up our luggage, and go back to La Guaira, our exit point.



Official Seal of Caracas