

Central America

Level: High School/College

"Mental Cartography"

# Latin America and the Caribbean from a Global Perspective



## A Resource Guide for Teachers

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(In gray loose-leaf binder)

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Perspective Consciousness

MENTAL CARTOGRAPHY

**Rationale**

A basic knowledge of geography is essential to understanding an interdependent and rapidly changing world. Unfortunately, many students today have distorted images of people and places that are of vital importance to the United States. This lesson attempts to have students critically compare their "mental" maps of Latin America to some of the geographic realities of the region as a means to initiate thinking and learning about the relative location, size, diversity, and importance of Latin America to the United States and the world.

**Objectives**

The student will:

1. use maps, globes, charts and graphs to explain the relationship of geography to historical and current events;
2. evaluate his/her knowledge of the geography of Latin America;
3. discuss the relative importance of Latin America to the United States and the world.

**Key Concepts**

Location, place, movement, regions, geographic perspective, cartography

**Infusion Area**

World history, American history, world geography

**Materials Needed**

Map of World  
Map of Latin America

**Suggested Time**

One to two class periods

## Learning Activities

### *Suggested Activities for Day 1:*

1. Before beginning this activity it is important that students do not have access to any world or regional maps. If there are any wall maps in the classroom, close or cover them during the course of the activity. Also ask students to clear their desks of any textbooks or materials that may include maps.

Begin the lesson by distributing a blank sheet of unlined paper and informing the class that today they will become "mental cartographers"--that is, that they will draw a map using the knowledge they have in their mind about a region of the world. Now ask them to draw the most accurate map they can of Latin America. Tell them that their map should include as much detail (rivers, mountains, countries, capitals, etc.) as possible and that it should show the general location of the region with respect to the rest of the world. Allow as much time as students may need to complete this task (most students will probably not need more than 15-20 minutes).

2. After the class has completed the task, ask students to share their maps with the rest of the class by pointing out the specific information that they were able to identify and include in each of their maps. Ask students to postpone judgment of these maps until every student sharing his/her map is finished. Encourage as many students as possible to share their maps with their classmates. After this part of the lesson is completed, ask the class to make observations about the accuracy of the maps presented.

Conduct a general discussion based on the following questions:

- a. How accurate are these maps likely to be?
  - b. How accurate should they be?
  - c. What things might affect the accuracy of our maps?
- You might want to include some of the following factors into the discussion of this question: student knowledge, geographic proximity of Latin America to school's location, media coverage of events in Latin America, ethnic and cultural makeup of students in class, students who may have travelled to the region, etc. At the end of the period, collect all "mental" maps so that they will be available for use in the following day's activities.

*Suggested Activities for Day 2:*

1. Distribute a map of the world or have students look at one from their textbooks. Point out the relative location of Latin America and its four subregions: Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.
2. Distribute a map of Latin America. Ask students to use it (and any other available classroom maps) to evaluate their "mental" map of Latin America. At this time, return "mental" maps to each student. Students should use the following questions to evaluate their "mental" maps:
  - a. Location: Did you locate the region accurately with respect to its true location as it appears on the world map?
  - b. Size: Did you draw the region accurately in terms of its true size with respect to other regions of the world they might have included their "mental" maps?
  - c. Shape: Did you draw the region in its true shape?
  - d. Detail: How many countries, cities, rivers, mountains were you able to identify and label?
  - e. Exclusions: Were there any parts of Latin America that were missing from your "mental" map?
3. Conduct a general discussion based on the following questions:
  - a. Overall, how accurate would you say our "mental" maps of Latin America were?
  - b. How might the accuracy of our "mental" maps affect what we know and how we feel about events and developments in Latin America?
  - c. What new things did you learn about Latin America from this lesson?
  - d. What are some of the things that make Latin America an important region for the United States and the world?

In discussing this question, you might want to bring in some of the following factors: trade, political conflicts, democratization, environmental concerns, migrations, cultural contributions, development, etc.

## **Assessment**

Have students conduct a media search and select an article from a newspaper, magazine, or a television report that expresses the importance of Latin America for the United States and/or the world. Have each student present a written and/or oral report to the class and identify the country in question on a map of Latin America.

## **Additional Activities**

Ask students to select a Latin American country and conduct research on one (or several) of the following geographic themes: relative location, physical and human characteristics, relationship between humans and environments, movement, regions. See reference of "Content and Process of Geographic Education" in Teacher Resources. Another activity might be to ask students to find out something that happened in a Latin American country on their birth date or birth year.