

**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.

**CARIBBEAN**

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CATEGORY: CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICA: NOW

CONCEPTS: POVERTY, revolution, human rights, urban/rural, education

ACTIVITY: STUDYING VITAL STATISTICS AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE.

Sometimes it is difficult for all of us to understand the human reality that is revealed in statistical evidence. While statistics never tell us a complete story, and can even be used to hide or twist the truth, they can often help express broad trends. This exercise presents a series of key statistics which give us some idea of the quality of life in two Central American and one Caribbean nation.

OBJECTIVES: Students will become familiar with certain selected types of statistics and discuss how these relate to real human experience.

MATERIALS: None

PROCEDURE: Present each type of statistic. Discuss first its meaning, then write the statistics for each country on the blackboard. Discuss the meaning in human terms and compare these numbers.

1. Life expectancy at birth (\*)

Costa Rica	74 years
Cuba	75 years
Guatemala	60 years

- a) What things contribute to increasing life expectancy?
- b) What does this statistic for each country lead you to believe about health care, nutrition, amount of poverty, level of violence, and government programs in each country?

2. Infant mortality rate

Costa Rica	19 per thousand
Cuba	15 per thousand
Guatemala	66 per thousand

- a) What contributes to high infant mortality rates?
- b) Compare life expectancy rates with infant mortality rates. Do you see a trend in each country?
- c) What do these statistics make you suppose about education and other things for children in each country?

3. Percentage of Literacy

	<u>total</u>	<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>
Costa Rica	94%	94%	93%
Cuba	95%	96%	95%
Guatemala	55%	63%	47%

- a) Why is literacy important? What causes illiteracy?
- b) Compare the male and female percentages. Why are there differences in one country?

4. Percentage of agricultural and urban populations

	<u>urban population</u>	<u>population in agriculture</u>
Costa Rica	44%	56%
Cuba	69%	31%
Guatemala	35%	65%

- a) What do you think these figures indicate about industrial development?
- b) Do you think you see any connection between these statistics and life expectancy, literacy and the other statistics?

5. Annual rate of population growth

Costa Rica	2.9%
Cuba	0.9%
Guatemala	2.3%

- a) Population growth is the result of more people being born than those who die in a country. What factors other than a population's health would affect growth? (Birth control? A war? Late marriages?)
- b) Is population growth good or bad for a country? Does it depend on other factors? Which?

6. Some of these statistics deal with types of human rights: the right to health care, the right to education, the right to healthy nourishment. Many Latin Americans who favor revolution of one type or another think these rights are more important than free speech, free enterprise, etc.

Here are a list of freedoms. Have the students choose five that they would pick if they could only have five.

free speech	freedom to learn
freedom from hunger	freedom of religion and/or belief
freedom from fear	
freedom from disease	freedom from cold
free enterprise	freedom from unemployment
freedom to vote	freedom of assembly

Some Latin Americans feel that several of these freedoms prevent other of the freedoms. Can students see any conflict in the idea of "total freedom"?

VOCABULARY: life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy, population growth

(\*Statistics are for 1988.)