

CATEGORY: WRAP-UP

CONCEPTS: INTERDEPENDENCY, U.S./Latin American relations

ACTIVITY: SIMULATION - THE MEANING OF "AMERICAN." One seemingly small detail of vocabulary is the root of much annoyance to many Latin Americans in their dealings with people from the United States. This is the use of the word "American" to designate only those who are citizens of the 50 states in the United States, and "America" to mean a geographical area north from Texas and South from the Canadian border (Alaska and Hawaii excepted). We need to be sensitized to the fact that people from all the Americas are Americans, be they from Wisconsin, Canada, Mexico, Jamaica or Chile.

OBJECTIVES: Students will be sensitized to the inclusive and exclusive uses of "America" and "American."

MATERIALS: Copies of the simulation.

PROCEDURE: Have the students act out or read through the simulation, which ends before a final resolution is reached. Have the students discuss or write the answers to the following.

1. Why do you think Isabel was offended?
2. What is Pepe explaining to John?
3. How can John correct these bad feelings, now and in the future?

It would be a good idea for students to write down Pepe's explanation of the meaning of America and American to people from outside the United States.

They might also want to recreate the simulation, this time avoiding the misunderstanding.

For further discussion, the class may want to consider the broader implications of this linguistic "goof," i.e., American politicians who greet Latin Americans "on behalf of the American people," etc.

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.

An International Encounter
Simulation

John is from Chicago, Isabel is from La Paz, Bolivia, and Pepe is from Madrid, Spain. They all meet at a party and a misunderstanding soon arises.

Pepe: Isabel, I'd like to introduce my friend, John.

Isabel: Hi, John. It's nice to meet you. Where are you from?

John: I'm an American.

Isabel: Oh, that's nice. What country are you from?

John: I told you. I'm from America.

Isabel: Well, so am I. I'm from Bolivia.

John: Then you're not American!

Isabel: I'm as American as you are! (To Pepe) Pepe, you'd better have a word with your friend before he insults anyone else. (She walks away.)

Pepe: John, I think I should explain why Isabel is upset. Come on over here and let's look at a map.



What's in a Name?

AMERICA

The Americas, North, South and Middle, have had a series of names since their discovery by Europeans almost 500 years ago. Christopher Columbus, who had set sail to discover a sea route to the Orient, believed that he had found India on October 12, 1492. The fact that he was mistaken did not prevent "Indies" from becoming the common name of a continent for centuries, and "Indian" the name we use even now to describe the original people of the "New World."

Only 15 years after Columbus' first voyage, a German monk, Martin Waldseemuller, wrote a book claiming that Americo Vespuccio had discovered "one fourth of the world." He suggested that these lands be called "America," in honor of their discoverer. Vespuccio, an Italian navigator working for Spain, was indeed the first to draw a map--incomplete--of what we now call South America. He was not, however, its discoverer. The honor of first discovery must, of course, go to the first inhabitants, the Indians. The European rediscovery must be credited to Columbus, who thought he was someplace else! When Martin Waldseemuller became aware of his mistake a few years later, he tried to correct it. But...it was too late. The name "America" had become widespread.

"New World" is another term first used by Americo Vespuccio and popularized by Father Waldseemuller. The Americas were, of course, not new to the Aztec, Mayan, Incan and other civilizations which had occupied these lands for centuries. For the European soldiers, missionaries and settlers, however, America was new with its different plants, animals and cultures. It was also a place where they could escape from European villages exhausted from disease, poverty and wars, and begin a new life. "New World" meant to them a place where all their dreams might come true.

With the independence of America, both North and South, new names were invented. While the United States and Canada became just plain "North America," the lands to the South have been called "Latin America," "Indo America," "Ibero America," as well as "South America," "Central America" and "Meso America." Both "Latin" and "Ibero America" were created to reflect a pride in the Spanish and Portuguese roots of the cultures of nations from Mexico to Argentina. Indo America was also coined to show pride in the Indian contribution to South America's culture and racial make-up. However, some South Americans are unhappy with these names. They feel that the names make them seem different and perhaps inferior. They ask, "if North America is not Anglo or English or British America, why should we be called Latin American?" Despite these doubts, Latin America has become the most common name of the combined nations to the south of the United States.

The words "America" and "American" are used in different ways in North and South America. To people in the United States, "America" usually means only their own country. For people in South and

Central America, this same word often means the nations of South and Central America combined. In Spanish there is a word for a person from the United States: "estadounidense," which means something like "United Statian." As you can see, there is some room for confusion, and misunderstandings may even arise. Can you think of any solutions? Being aware of how we use "America" in our different countries is certainly one step towards better communication.



AMERICO VESPUCCIO

(Special thanks to Professor Rubén de Hoyos, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, whose article "Del significado político de los nombres de América" provided information for this reading.)