

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: ARGENTINA: PERONIST YEARS

CONCEPTS: GOVERNMENT, women

ACTIVITY: DISCUSSING POLITICAL CHARISMA AND PERON IN ARGENTINA.

The Peronist movement in Argentina is complex enough that most adults have difficulty in understanding it from any objective standpoint. One aspect of Peronism, however, can be rather easily discussed by students. This is the idea of charisma and how it relates to the figures of Perón and Evita. Perhaps the major difficulty in understanding Peronism is precisely in the preponderance of its charismatic side. Instead of concrete ideas, Perón sought and received blind faith in his figure as national leader. Spiritual adhesion and patriotic fervor replaced political and economic programs. Perón could thus be all things to all people, which is at least in part why Peronism soon evolved into a movement that contained far left, far right and centrist groups in conflict for control. In the short reading we are reproducing, Evita herself speaks of the faith required by Peronism. Students can easily compare this with their own expectations of a political leader.

OBJECTIVES: Students will become somewhat familiar with two of the most important political figures in twentieth century Latin America: Juan Domingo and Evita Perón. They will also learn the concept of "charisma."

MATERIALS: Copies of Evita's speech.

PROCEDURE: Begin by having the students divide into groups and prepare short class reports on the following, using encyclopedias or other basic resources: the lives of Juan Perón, Evita, and Isabel Perón; Perón's government; Perón's ideas; Argentine history after Perón.

Using several dictionary entries introduce the term "charisma." Students can discuss people they feel are charismatic.

Read to the students or have them read Evita's ideas on Peronism which we are including. Have the students discuss their ideas of the reasons and consequences for a political movement to:

- a) place one charismatic man above concrete ideas
- b) reject intelligence and use the "heart" for political judgments.

Discuss the role of charisma in U.S. politics. Remind the students that Evita's words are an extreme case of emotional politics and that charisma normally plays different roles, not always necessarily negative. Does the use of television create more of a need for charisma. Have students choose from the following list the five most important characteristics of a political leader. Ask them to explain their choices or have them write an essay on their first choice:

toughness
being religious and moral
being a good speaker
being a nice person
having the same ideas about important issues
intelligence
knowledge of important issues
honesty
leadership
patriotism

VOCABULARY: Peronism, Justicialism, charisma, doctrine

RESOURCES: Frederick C. Turner and José Enrique Miguens, eds.,
Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina, Pittsburgh:
University of Pittsburgh, 1983. Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd
Webber, Evita: The Legend of Eva Perón, New York:
Drama Book Specialists, 1979. George E. Blanksten,
Peron's Argentina, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Eva Perón Describes the Peronist Faith

I am encouraged to let my thoughts be known because, as an Argentine woman and the most faithful and passionate Peronist [follower of Perón], there is nothing greater than to speak of Perón and his extraordinary doctrine.

Many times I have heard General Perón say that men disappear and only their ideas remain. Just a few days ago he told us that the moment had arrived to replace Perón the man with the doctrine of "justicialism" [Perón's doctrine and also his political party].

I have thought a lot about his words, and I want to believe in them; I want to accept them, because Perón, whose word is holy to all true Peronists, spoke them. Yet my heart doesn't want to believe that Perón can be replaced by his ideas!

I know that it is necessary and even urgent that "justicialism" be known, understood and loved by all, but no one will become a member of our group if they are not real Peronists, and to be a Peronist one must love Perón with all one's soul.

Here in Argentina we don't need intellects, we need hearts, because "justicialism" is learned more in the heart than with intelligence.

General Perón is one of those extraordinary men who change world history. We realize that he has all the good characteristics great men possess, and he has none of the bad traits often found in great men.

We know perfectly, although Perón, in his humility, will not speak of himself, that he is everything. He is the soul, the courage, the hope and the reality of the Argentine people. We know that there is only one sun in the heavens, and that here, in our movement, there is only one man with his own brilliance: Perón. We all are nourished by his light.

We have only Perón; we only see through Peron's eyes; we only feel through Perón; we only speak through Perón's mouth. This must be our great goal, and if we stray from his path the marvelous Argentinian people will cast us into night, despising us for not having the moral, political and patriotic courage to accept that a genius cannot be compared with any other figure of the century.

(From Eva Perón's Historia del Peronismo; Buenos Aires, 1953.)