

CATEGORY: VENEZUELA: NOW

CONCEPT: LIFE STYLE, family, women

ACTIVITIES: MINIDRAMA CONCERNING "MACHISMO."

Although we have borrowed the words "macho" and "machismo" to refer to aggravated masculinity and male domination, in Latin America, the words refer to a somewhat different set of characteristics because masculinity is often understood differently. This lesson deals with these differences with a reading, a mini-drama, and a comparative exercise.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the difference between the Latin American concept of "macho" and the U.S. version of the word. They will also discuss the role of "machismo" in both cultures.

MATERIALS: Copies of the general reading on machismo
Copies of the minidrama
Paper and pen/pencils

PROCEDURE: Introduce the lesson with a class discussion of the term "macho" as we understand it. Some possible questions include:

1. In your opinion, what famous men are "macho"?
2. Which are definitely not? Why not?
3. What qualities does a "macho man" possess?

Have students read the information sheet on machismo. Then have them read and/or act out the minidrama, and discuss the questions.

Next, have the students consider the following list of characteristics of a Venezuelan "macho." On a sheet of paper or on the blackboard have them write down how these characteristics compare with our idea of "macho."

1. A Venezuelan "macho" is never afraid of anything.
2. He is a good provider for his family.
3. He is the boss at home.
4. He is not necessarily "muscle bound."
5. He may or may not like sports.
6. He is often an intellectual.
7. He reads and sometimes writes poetry.
8. The macho defends his family, but is also a "womanizer."
9. He is very devoted to his mother and over-protective of sisters.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES
Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1987.

10. He is not ashamed to cry when in love, a child is born, etc.
11. He must not cry at a personal problem i.e. the boss yells at him, he hurts himself, he is insulted, etc.
12. Embracing other men as a greeting is normal. Kissing his parents is normal.
13. Public shows of affection for a wife or girlfriend are a loss of "macho cool."
14. He likes power--political, economic and social.
15. He is not usually an "outdoors" type.

VOCABULARY: macho, machismo, abrazo

MACHISMO: MAN'S PLACE, WOMAN'S PLACE

Hispanic society, like our own society, has been traditionally male dominated. The concept of "machismo," or maleness, has played an important role in determining what is acceptable behavior for a man. According to this concept, a man must show strength in all situations. He must protect his family; any show of weakness or cowardice is unacceptable.

It is difficult to generalize about "machismo" in Latin American countries. Times are changing, just as in the United States. While most older people accept "machismo" as a natural way of life, many young people question all or some of the rules of the "machismo" game. The strength of "machismo" varies from country to country and from individual to individual. In Peru, for example, it remains strong, while in Argentina and Chile many women have long been outspoken in their opposition to male domination. In countries like Nicaragua, where there have been many years of war, men and women have learned to struggle together and male domination is weakening. However, just as here in the United States, both men and women find it easier to accept women in new roles than to accept changes in the self-image of men.

"Machismo" can be defined as the cult of male superiority. Since "machismo" is one of the roles that Latin American culture traditionally imposes upon men, many Venezuelan males consciously or unconsciously feel that they must live up to this image. The concepts of honor and self-pride are two of the most important ingredients of "machismo." The Venezuelan male has traditionally prided himself on being "the boss" in his family; he is domineering, protective, and able to support his wife and children. In addition, "machismo" says he must give the impression of being fearless, self-confident, cocky and unhesitant about making decisions, regardless of the outcome. Is this a great deal different from a traditional father in the United States?

Often the "macho's" manhood is measured by the number of female hearts he can break, and in marriage by the number of children he has. The "macho" is not afraid to show his feelings of love, tenderness and love of beautiful things. These sentiments he expresses with tears, "abrazos" (hugs), poetry, and love songs. While in some cultures these sentimental actions are considered "sissy," in Venezuela they are the mark of a true "macho."

In the past, Latin men believed it was the man's duty to provide for the family while the woman stayed at home caring for the children. He made all the decisions concerning the family's finances, the children's education and other matters. Now, more women are becoming professionals and/or are demanding to share decisions and responsibilities. But, in Venezuela as in the United States the idea of "machismo," is slow to change since it is the way our cultures teach us to behave. It is the identity men are given as children, and women are taught to expect.

MINIDRAMA
What Is Macho?

Andrea Culver, a high school student from Milwaukee, has just arrived in Caracas as an exchange student. She is walking downtown with Carmen and Luis Alberto Moraña, daughter and son of the family she is going to stay with for several months.

Carmen: It's so nice to be able to show you our city. Would you like to stop and have a Coke at one of these sidewalk cafés?

Andrea: Yes that would be very nice.

Luis Alberto: Hey, look over there, it's Rafa!

Rafa: (Approaching) Hi, everybody! How's it going? (He embraces Luis Alberto and both pat each other on the shoulders heartily and with great affection.)

Luis Alberto: I want to introduce my "new sister" from the United States. Andrea, this is my best friend, Rafael Tejeras. Rafa-- Andrea.

Rafa: What a pleasure! I hope you're coming to the party tonight. I'll show you some great Venezuelan dances.

Andrea: (Rather coldly) Pleased to meet you.

Carmen: We were about to go to the café over there and have a Coke. Won't you join us Rafa?

Rafa: I was just going to buy a new record to take to the party. Come help me choose one, Luis. (Rafa puts his hand on Luis Alberto's shoulder.)

Luis: We'll be back in a few minutes. (Luis and Rafa walk off.)

Carmen: Rafa is such a great guy. You didn't seem to like him, though.

Andrea: Well...It's just that he didn't seem very "macho."

Carmen: Rafa? He's one of the most "macho" guys I know. He's sooo romantic...sings like a dream and writes poetry, too.

Andrea: Oh, dear. I just don't know...

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Questions:

1. What has made Andrea think Rafa isn't "macho"?
2. What do you think Carmen, Luis Alberto, and Rafa's opinion might be of Andrea's reaction?
3. How might Andrea have acted differently in this situation?
4. Andrea was obviously bothered by Rafa's constant touching of Luis Alberto. In the United States people of the same sex rarely touch. Can you think of exceptions? (What about football players?)