

Overview:

- Students investigate and research a country in Central or South America.
- They work cooperatively during their research to gather information from a variety of sources.
- After exhausting the information network, students decide what information might be essential and should be passed on to younger readers.
- After selecting a genre and audience, students write a children's book for a younger reader, and incorporate all of the important information they feel their audience will be able to retain.
- Upon completion of the books, students share their books with their audience.

Essential Question:

Are we products of our culture or do we produce our culture?

Guiding Questions:

- ◆ **Who are Americans in the global society?**
- ◆ **How do the distinctive geographic features and natural resources of a country influence the way people meet their needs?**
- ◆ **How does where we live affect how we live?**
- ◆ **How can we pass on what we have learned to younger readers?**

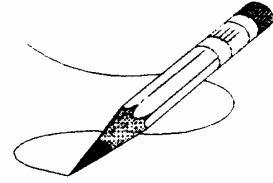
Essential Questions and Guiding Questions became the driving force for this unit of study. In fact, because of their scope, these questions guided the year long social studies curriculum through the study of the Western Hemisphere, and focused classroom conversations during many lessons.

To introduce my students to the time management process, I gather them together in a common meeting place and explain "We are going to write books for younger readers. We need to plan our time so that we have enough time at the end of the project to celebrate with the class and to read our books to our audience. What parts do you see this project broken into? (Research?, Writing?, Word processing the text?, Creating the final book?) Together we set realistic goals for accomplishing each part of the project. A summary of this process is presented below:

- ◆ Start backwards and decide with the group when the project should be completed and approximately how many weeks will be necessary.
- ◆ Break the project down into steps: for example - research (notes), rough draft, bibliography, word processing and/or final copy, page blocks, cut and paste into books, illustrate, share.
- ◆ Estimate how many days each part should be allotted.
- ◆ Schedule with specialists (librarian, computer lab, art teacher etc.) the days and times you will need. (Check school calendars, special assemblies etc. and factor that into your calendar.)
- ◆ Once the class has decided on the plan - make a calendar and keep it posted in the classroom and give each student a copy to mark off as the project progresses.
- ◆ The calendar is only a working tool and is not etched in stone - revisit it at each reflection time and discuss with the class whether it is realistic or whether it has to be adjusted.
- ◆ If the students keep their assignments in a planner, record the deadline dates for the different parts of the project. For example when the bibliography is due, final draft, final copy of the text etc.

** Note : it cannot be stressed enough that the calendar is a working tool. It is created with the students and its creation becomes a contract. The class can decide through consensus whether their plan is realistic or attainable.*

Name _____



Recipe for Success - Latin American Project Checklist

Text - Narrative: Designed and written for a specific audience.

Audience _____ Genre _____

Text Due: _____

- The text must have a strong **story line**. Have I created **complex characters**, described the **setting** that the story takes place in carefully, and solved a problem that was created in the story?
- You must use the facts that you have learned about the country you studied in the narrative through descriptions of the setting and characters.
- The facts which you researched should be embedded in your story (**land, food, clothing and shelter - plus 2 additional topics of your choice.**)
- Your **facts must be accurate**.
- The text must be **spell checked**.
- The text must be carefully **revised** - does it make sense? Have I used the same words repeatedly? (Use a revision checklist.)
- The text must be **edited** for proper grammar usage. Have I paragraphed when necessary? Do sentences have proper punctuation?
- The **title page** must be complete. It must include a title, author's complete name, illustrator, publisher (Colton's Corner), and place of publication (Manhasset, NY).
- **Page breaks** should not break up the flow of the narrative.

5. **Student Reflections:** I believe it is important for all of us to take a step back and reflect on an experience or moment in our lives. When we reflect we take the time to grow and learn from the experience, to look at what worked and/or how it could be better. It is difficult to make time for reflection, however, the time is well spent. When we take a few minutes and write, then share what we have written with another person, we see things differently.

Student's reflections on writing their own books -

"My book came out better than I thought it would. In the beginning, when I was glueing all the text down. It came out all lumpy. I waited overnight and in the morning everything wasn't bumpy anymore, it was like a miracle had happened. When I was doing my final revision, Mrs. Colton showed me I had the apostrophe disease. I had to wait all week to erase the apostrophe's because the computer room was filled. That's when everything got out of hand. While almost everyone was illustrating, I was pasting. But over the 1 week I got everything finished. I was filled with happiness, just to see a book that I wrote and illustrated in my hands. I had wished for years to make a book. And there it was, lying in my hands."

Kristina

(Kristina wrote a beautiful story in Diary format of a girl in Argentina.)

Ariana moves from diary format into narrative very gracefully. The diary format served her purpose when she wanted to communicate the facts that she had learned to her family in the U.S..

July 10 Panama Canal, Panama

Dear Mom and Dad,

I told you I would write to you again. Today we went to the Panama Canal. That's a waterway that cuts across the Isthmus of Panama. We took the railroad of Panama to the city of Gamboa, that's a country along the canal. Then we worked our way up to the Gatun Dam. As we traveled upward we got to see all the big cargo ships and other ships as well. I bet Brian would love to see that because I know he loves boats. Grandma and I stopped to eat lunch. We had rice with meat and vegetables. Grandma bought me a book on The Panama Canal. I read most of it while we were on the train. Did you know the United States built the canal? It was completed in the year 1914. Thousands of people worked on it for about 10 years, using steam shovels and dredges to cut through the jungles, hills, and swamps. I guess they got really dirty. The purpose of building this waterway was to make the trip from New York to San Francisco shorter by cutting through the canal instead of going all around South America. By doing that, it made that trip 7,800 miles shorter, isn't that a lot! Well it helped so much, it ranks as one of the greatest engineering achievements in the world. We are going home now so I'll see you later!

Your Panama Canal GENIUS!,

Kate!!

