

SECTION
2

Reading for Understanding

▶ Key Ideas

BEFORE, YOU LEARNED

Mexico's history reflects the impact of ancient civilizations, colonial powers, and the modern world.

NOW YOU WILL LEARN

These three influences affect the culture and daily lives of the Mexican people.

▶ Vocabulary

TERMS & NAMES

Plaza of the Three Cultures plaza in Mexico City that shows parts of Aztec, Spanish, and modern influences in Mexico

colonia a neighborhood in Mexico

squatter person who settles on unoccupied land without having legal claim to it

mural a wall painting

Diego Rivera famous muralist who painted the history of Mexico on the walls of the National Palace

fiesta a holiday celebrated with parades, games, and food

Day of the Dead holiday to remember loved ones who have died

REVIEW

urban having to do with a city

rural having to do with the countryside

push factor a reason that causes people to leave an area



Visual Vocabulary fiesta

▶ Reading Strategy

Re-create the chart shown at right. As you read and respond to the **KEY QUESTIONS**, use the chart to summarize each of the main sections of Section 2.



See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R5

SUMMARIZE

SECTION	SUMMARY
People and Lifestyle	
Mexico's Great Murals	
Celebrations and Sports	



GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

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SECTION
2

CULTURE

A Blend of Traditions

Connecting to Your World

When you look around your community, do you see the influences of different cultures? Are there places that date back many years and places that are modern? Mexico today reflects a blend of different cultures, both traditional and modern. The **Plaza of the Three Cultures** in Mexico City displays this blend. The plaza contains the ruins of an Aztec city, a Spanish colonial church, and modern government buildings. Other parts of life in Mexico also reflect these influences.

People and Lifestyle

KEY QUESTION How do urban and rural life in Mexico differ?

Mexico today is a living blend of Indian, Spanish, and modern influences. The majority of Mexican people are *mestizos*. Almost all Mexicans speak Spanish, the nation's official language. Many Mexican Indians also speak their Indian languages, such as Maya and Náhuatl. Most Mexicans are Roman Catholics, but some belong to other religions.

The Plaza of the Three Cultures This plaza in Mexico City reflects the influences of the Aztec, Spanish, and modern cultures.

Spanish colonial cathedral

Modern-day apartments

Ruins of Aztec temple

City and Country Life Today, over three-fourths of Mexico's people live in **urban** areas. More than 22 million people live in and around Mexico City, making it one of the largest cities in the world. Mexican cities include high-rise office buildings and modern apartment buildings, as well as older houses built in the Spanish colonial style.

The cities' neighborhoods are called **colonias**. Wealthy people generally live in prosperous neighborhoods, away from the city center. Poorer people live closer to the center of the city, sometimes in neighborhoods with unpaved streets and no running water. Some people work in factories or as street vendors, but many are unemployed.

In contrast to city life, people in Mexico's **rural** areas live in villages or on farms, near their fields. Homes are small, often having only one room and a dirt floor. Rural areas have few health-care services, roads, and schools. The Mexican government is working to improve the public services in rural areas.

The poor conditions in the rural areas are the **push factors** that cause people to move to cities. But once there, they become **squatters**, people who settle on unoccupied land without having legal claim to it. Over time, these areas develop into new *colonias*. Some rural Mexicans migrate to other countries, including the United States.

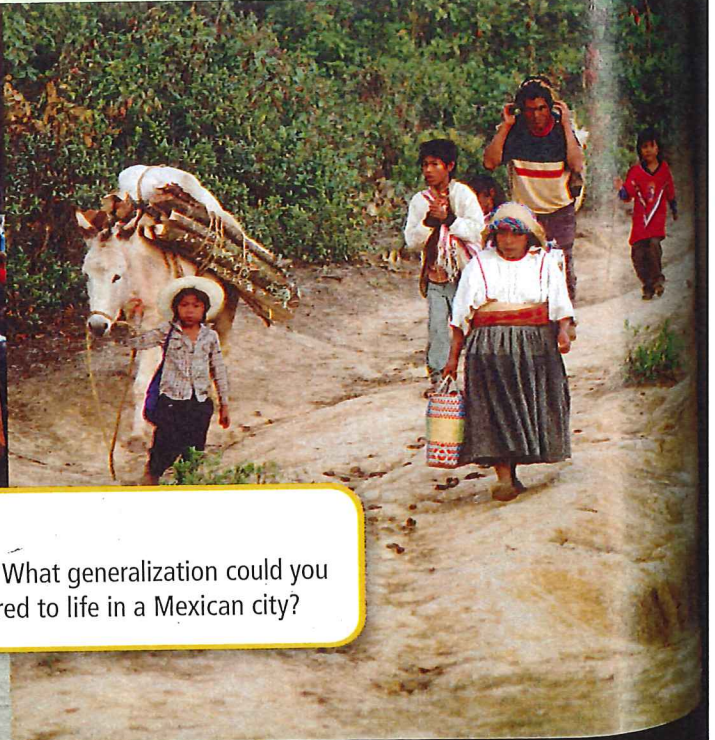
COMPARING Urban and Rural Life

URBAN

- Densely populated; about 75% of the population
- Primary schools, secondary schools, and universities
- Major source of energy is electricity
- Clothes similar to those worn in the United States; bought in stores

RURAL

- Less densely populated; about 25% of the population
- Primary schools; almost no secondary schools; no universities
- Major source of energy is firewood
- Clothes often traditional; sometimes homemade



CRITICAL THINKING

Make Generalizations What generalization could you make about rural life compared to life in a Mexican city?

Family Life Family life is important in Mexico. In some families, several generations of family members may live together. Older members of the family are honored. Children are taught to respect adults.

The social life of many Mexicans centers on the family. Families gather together to celebrate birthdays and other kinds of holidays.

Mexican children are required to attend school for nine years—six years of primary school and three years of middle school. Some continue their education in a three-year high school and then a university. In some rural areas, students attend classes in one-room schools. They often travel to nearby towns to go to middle school or high school.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST Describe the differences between urban and rural life in Mexico.

Mexico's Great Murals

KEY QUESTION What common subjects do Mexican artists and writers focus on in their works?

Creating art has a long history in Mexico. The Olmec carved sculptures. The Aztec wrote music and poetry. The Maya created paintings in their pyramids and the Spanish in their colonial churches. Mexican art today blends these influences.

After the Mexican Revolution, Mexican art experienced a great awakening. Just as ancient artists had created paintings on their pyramids, Mexican artists created **murals**, or wall paintings, that often depicted scenes from Mexico's history. Many important painters portrayed such scenes on murals in Mexico's public buildings. The most famous Mexican muralists are José Orozco, David Siquieros, and **Diego Rivera**. Frida Kahlo, another important Mexican painter, is known for paintings that show her personal feelings about events in her life.

Mexican writers have often written about Mexico's social and political problems. Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, and Laura Esquivel are three well-known Mexican writers. Paz won the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature; he was the first Mexican to win this award. Fuentes writes novels about Mexican history. In one popular novel, Esquivel described life for rural Mexican women during the Mexican Revolution.

SUMMARIZE Describe the subjects that Mexican artists and writers focus on in their works.



Self-portrait with Monkey Frida Kahlo is known for her self-portraits. Monkeys and other animals roamed the gardens around her home and were often included in her artwork.



Fun Facts!

PIÑATAS

Piñatas are part of many Mexican fiestas. But where did piñatas come from? Some historians believe Marco Polo brought them from China to Italy in the 1200s. The Spanish brought them to Spain and then introduced them to Mexico.

Celebrations and Sports

KEY QUESTION What kinds of holidays do Mexicans celebrate?

Mexicans celebrate many holidays and events with a fiesta. A **fiesta** is a celebration with fireworks, parades, music, dancing, and foods. At some fiestas, children enjoy themselves by trying to break open a piñata. A piñata is a decorated container filled with candy and toys, usually hung from the ceiling. Children are blindfolded and given a stick to break open the piñata and gather its treats. Fiestas bring people together to have fun.

Celebrations Mexicans celebrate Mexico's Independence Day on September 16. Mexicans also celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5), which is the day in 1862 when the Mexican army defeated the French.

Mexicans celebrate religious holidays such as Easter with church services and processions. They celebrate the **Day of the Dead** on November 1 and 2 to honor family members who have died.

La Quinceañera is a celebration of a Mexican girl's 15th birthday. The girl dresses in a full-length gown. She first takes part in church services with family and friends. After church, everyone goes to a reception where a huge fiesta takes place.



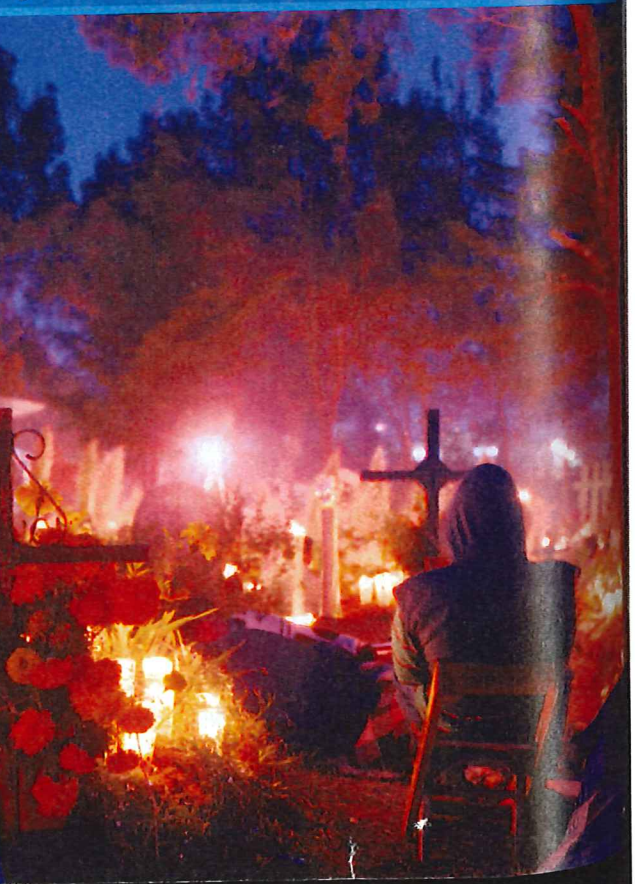
CONNECT

History & Culture

Day of the Dead This holiday has its roots in an ancient Aztec celebration, in which people remembered dead ancestors. Today, particularly in rural areas, relatives celebrate the Day of the Dead by gathering in cemeteries to decorate family graves with candles and flowers and to share stories about loved ones who have died.

CRITICAL THINKING

Make Inferences How does this holiday show the importance of family to Mexican people?



Sports The number one sport in Mexico is *fútbol*, or soccer. Mexicans enjoy playing it and watching it. Fans cheer on their favorite teams in stadiums located in several Mexican cities. Aztec Stadium in Mexico City holds 114,000 fans! Mexicans also enjoy playing baseball and watching their professional baseball teams.

Many Mexicans enjoy bullfighting, a sport brought to Mexico by the Spanish. The number of bullfights has decreased in recent years because some people have led campaigns to ban them. However, people still attend bullfights in the bullrings found in many Mexican cities.

A sport growing in popularity in Mexico is jai alai, a fast-paced ball game played in a three-walled court. The equipment includes a hard rubber ball and wicker-basket scoops, which players use to catch and throw the ball.



Soccer in Aztec Stadium Fans watch as a player from the Mexican team (left) battles for the ball in a game with a player from Argentina.

FIND MAIN IDEAS Identify the kinds of holidays that Mexican people celebrate today.

Section 2 Assessment

ONLINE QUIZ
For test practice, go to
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TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of

- Plaza of the Three Cultures
- *colonia*
- mural
- fiesta

USE YOUR READING NOTES

2. Summarize Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

What are some ways Mexicans spend their leisure time?

SECTION	SUMMARY
People and Lifestyle	
Mexico's Great Murals	
Celebrations and Sports	

KEY IDEAS

3. What two cultures have influenced modern Mexico?
4. Where do most Mexican people live today?
5. What is the subject of many Mexican murals?

CRITICAL THINKING

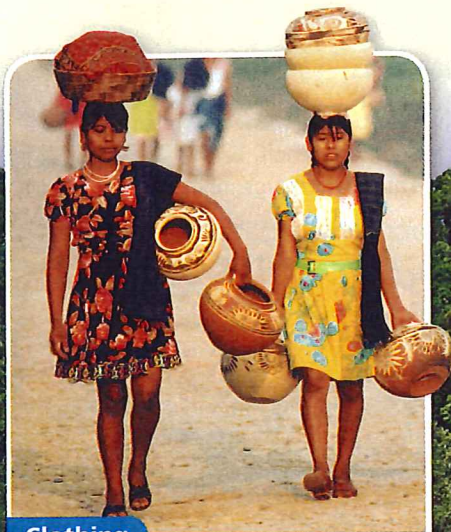
6. **Draw Conclusions** Why do many people in Mexico's rural areas move to cities?
7. **Form and Support Opinions** What problems of urban and rural life do you think are most important for Mexico to address?
8. **CONNECT to Today** Some people have led campaigns to ban bullfighting. What kinds of campaigns does your area have on behalf of animals?
9. **ART Create a Mural Panel** Work with a group to research an important event in the history of your community. Decide what aspect of the event you want to illustrate. Then create a mural panel to depict the scene you have chosen.

COMPARING Mexico's Cultural Traditions

Mexican culture is a blend of both Indian and Spanish traditions. The influences of both cultures are evident in Mexico today.

Indian Traditions

Before the Spanish conquest in 1521, Mexico's Indian groups had well-established, unique cultures. Indian groups created cities with huge structures. They held celebrations, such as festivals to remember those who died. Crops such as corn, chilies, and tomatoes contributed to their flavorful diet.



Clothing

These girls wear handmade, colorful dresses.

Food

Tortillas, a popular Mexican food made from corn, date back to the ancient Aztecs.



Festivals

Mexican children of Indian ancestry dressed in traditional clothing participate in a local festival.



▲ Ruins of Mayan temple at Palenque, Mexico



Food

Mexican sweet breads are made from wheat, which the Spaniards brought to Mexico.

Spanish Traditions

The Spanish conquest brought European customs and traditions to the region. The Spanish built their traditional square cities that surrounded plazas and included government buildings and churches. They honored their dead on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in November. They introduced foods such as oranges, wheat, beef, pork, sugar cane, coffee, and onions to the Mexican diet.



Clothing

These dancers are dressed in traditional Spanish clothing from the colonial period.

Festivals

Mexican children participate in a procession celebrating Easter, a Roman Catholic holiday.



▲ Spanish colonial church in Taxco, Mexico

CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Evaluate** Why are Mexican traditions today a blend of Native American and Spanish traditions?
- 2. Compare and Contrast** Based on the large photos, how do Native American and Spanish architecture compare?