



# Ethnic Studies Lesson 3A: Latino Americans—Pre-Columbian Period

**TOPIC:**

LATINO AMERICAN HISTORY

**GRADE LEVELS:**

11-12

**TIME:**

1½ HOURS

## California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

***Themes:***

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

***Values and Principles:***

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
3. Center and place high value on the precolonial ancestral knowledge, narratives, and communal experiences of Native People/s and people of color and groups that are typically marginalized in society.

## California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

***English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):*****Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text. (RI.11-12.3)

***Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):*****History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the historical development and major achievements of Meso-American cultures, including their impact on the borderland between present-day Mexico and the United States in the Aridoamerica and Oasisamerica regions before Spanish colonization. (History-Social Science Content Standard 4.2)

Understand the interactions and exchanges between different cultures in the Aridoamerica and Oasisamerica regions, including trade, migration, and conflict. (History-Social Science Content Standard 5.1)

## Lesson Purpose

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Students will understand major Meso-American cultures and how they impacted the borderland between present-day Mexico and the United States in the Aridoamerica and Oasisamerica regions before Spanish colonization.

## Essential Questions

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*What do we already know about Latin American culture, and what do we want to learn?*

*How did the predominant cultures of Meso-America impact Latin Americans in borderlands before Spanish colonization?*

*How has life changed for Latin Americans in the last 250 years?*

## Materials

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[KWL Chart for Unit 3](#)

[What's the Difference between Latino and Hispanic?](#)

[Culture Frontier: Pre-Columbian Era: Mexico Before European Contact](#)

[The Cultural Regions of Mexico, US Southwest and Central America](#)

## Vocabulary

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Pre-Columbian	Olmec	Aridoamerica
Latin American	Maya	Oasisamerica
Latino/Latina/LatinX	Mexeca (Aztec)	
Hispanic	Teotihuacan	
Mexican/Chicano		

## Lesson Steps

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### Step 1:

- As a whole class, present the KWL chart for this unit. Refer students to the use of Latin American, Hispanic, Mexican American, or Latino/Latina/LatinX. Just as with Native Americans, remind students that most people prefer to be addressed by the specific nation they come from. Asking someone what they prefer is usually appropriate. Have students watch [What's the Difference Between Latino and Hispanic?](#) (video 9 minutes 2 seconds). Only a small portion of Latin Americans approve of the gender neutral term LatinX (see [HERE](#)). See these personal examples from Duke Medical School ([HERE](#)). As the class is working through the KWL chart, make sure to suggest these questions:
  - Do all people who consider themselves Latin American or Hispanic come from Mexico?
  - What other countries or regions could someone come from who is Hispanic? Latino?

- How many Hispanic/Latino people do you believe are in the US?
- When and how did Hispanic/Latino people come to the US?
- What states have the largest Hispanic/Latino populations and why?
- What people from what countries might be unintentionally left out in a conversation about Hispanic/Latino cultures?
- What do you already know about ancient cultures in Central and Meso-America?

**Step 2:**

- Describe to the class what Pre-Columbian means. Break the class into 6 groups and give them chart paper. Ask students in their groups to read [Culture Frontier: Pre-Columbian Era: Mexico Before European Contact](#) and draw a map of their assigned group/region. Also, ask them to list six defining characteristics of this group/region. Let them know that the boundaries are not hard lines but rather overlapping regional areas and that they may have occurred at very different times. Groups/regions:
  - Olmec
  - Maya
  - Aztec/Mexico
  - Teotihuacan
  - Aridoamerica
  - Oasisamerica

**Step 3:**

- Have students walk through the displayed maps in a carousel style and have students return to the whole class discussion. Ask students what they have learned by looking at the maps. Have students watch [The Cultural Regions of Mexico, US Southwest and Central America](#) (video 3 minutes, 9 seconds). As students listen, students should take notes on how the information changes or adds to what they have learned so far.

**Step 4:**

- Ask students this lesson's questions, "What do we already know about Latin American culture and what do we want to learn? How did the predominant cultures of Meso-America impact Latin Americans in borderlands before Spanish colonization?" and this unit's question, "How has life changed for Latin Americans in the last 250 years?" Have students complete the "Learned" section of the KWL chart and make sure to note the citation for where it was learned.

## Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

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As time permits and for homework, have students review the resources from this lesson and note three things that were learned on the shared KWL chart. Students should write a short paragraph and include citations.

## Additional Readings and Resources

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Arana, Marie. *LatinoLand: A Portrait of America's Largest and Least Understood Minority*. Simon & Schuster, 2024.

Sowell, Thomas. *Conquests and Cultures*. Basic Books, 1998, 249-251.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 245.

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES:** America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

**Ethnic Studies 3A: KWL Chart**

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**KNOW****WONDER****LEARNED**

*What do we think we already know about this topic?*

*What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.*

*After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.*

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