

Mexico

In this section, you will learn about the history and culture of Mexico.

All questions require at least
THREE sentences on own paper.

PLACES & TERMS

Tenochtitlán Aztec capital city, the site today of Mexico City

Spanish conquest the conquest of the Aztecs by Cortés

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) political party that arose in Mexico in 1929

mestizo people of mixed Spanish and Native American heritage

maquiladoras factories in Mexico that assemble imported materials into finished goods for export

NAFTA North American Free Trade Agreement among Mexico, Canada, and the United States

Colonialism and Independence

The area that became Mexico was originally occupied by many different native peoples. There were the residents of Teotihuacán, an early city-state. The Yucatán Peninsula was home to the Maya. There were also Toltecs, Aztecs, and other smaller groups or tribes.

In 1519, Hernando Cortés landed on the coast. He and his men marched to the Aztec capital, **Tenochtitlán**. By 1521, Cortés, his soldiers, and their native allies had conquered the Aztecs. This is known as part of the **Spanish conquest**. For three centuries, Mexico was part of Spain's empire.

In 1821, Mexican soldier Agustín de Iturbide helped Mexico achieve independence. Beginning in the mid-1800s, Benito Juárez led a reform movement and became president of Mexico. He worked for separation of church and state, better educational opportunities, and a more even distribution of land.

A corrupt politician named Porfirio Díaz took over from Juárez. Díaz ruled Mexico for 30 years. His harsh rule led to revolution and civil war. A new constitution was adopted in 1917.

In 1929, a new political party arose in Mexico. This was the **Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)**. It helped to introduce democracy and maintain political stability for much of the 20th century. However, *fraud* and corruption hurt the democratic process. In 1997, two parties opposed the PRI and won a large number of seats in the congress. In 2000, Vicente Fox was elected president of Mexico. Finally, Mexico was a democratic state with more than one political party.

1. For how long was Mexico part of Spain's empire?

Answer in at least **THREE SENTENCES** on own paper.

A Meeting of Cultures

Before the Spanish arrived, Mexico was home to many advanced native cultures. The Aztec Empire arose in the Valley of Mexico. Their capital of Tenochtitlán held temples, palaces, gardens, and lakes. Canals linked the city. People grew food on islands in Lake Texcoco. When the Spanish conquered the Aztec Empire, they destroyed the capital and built Mexico City in its place.

The Spanish brought their language and Catholic religion, both of which dominate modern Mexico. However, Mexico's native heritage remains strong. In fact, the name of the country comes from *Mexica*, an older name for the Aztecs. Mexico has a large population of mestizos—people of mixed Spanish and Native American descent.

Mexico has a long heritage of architecture and art. The Native Americans constructed temples and public buildings. The Spanish built simple but beautiful missions throughout the territory.

In the 20th century, many of Mexico's best painters portrayed Mexico's history on the walls of public buildings. Among the most important of these mural painters were José Orozco, Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and Juan O'Gorman. Frida Kahlo was an important painter known for her self portraits.

2. Where did Mexico's name come from? _

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

Economics: Cities and Factories

Mexico is attempting to close the gap between rich and poor. Mexico has been an *agricultural* society, but it started to industrialize in the mid-20th century.

Mexico's population is young and growing rapidly. The population of about 52 million in 1970 almost doubled by 2000. Mexicans are moving to cities because they see economic opportunities there.

Mexico has a large industry based on its oil reserves. Profits from oil have helped to finance development. Many new factories are located in Mexico's north. Maquiladoras are factories where imported materials are assembled into finished goods for export, mostly to the United States.

Mexico is a member, along with the United States and Canada, of NAFTA. This agreement has created a huge zone of cooperation on trade and economic issues. It is expected to contribute to the prosperity of the member nations, creating jobs for millions of people.

3. What is NAFTA expected to accomplish?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.

Mexican Life Today

A rapidly growing population and misguided government policies have contributed to a shortage of jobs. Many workers leave Mexico and travel to the United States in search of work. Often, after a year or two working in the United States, they return to Mexico. They use the money to improve conditions for their families.

Without education and training, young workers cannot find good jobs. In recent years, attendance of eligible students at schools has improved. Mexico will have to invest money in education to provide a better life for its citizens. Education will become even more important as Mexico becomes more industrial.

4. Why is education important to Mexico?

Answer in at least THREE SENTENCES on own paper.