

Exploring Latin America with WebQuests

Andrew J. Milson

One drawback to using the Internet as an instructional resource is the presence of inappropriate, inaccurate, and sometimes offensive material. Teachers who wish to allow their students direct access to Internet sources must consider a means of identifying appropriate sources and structuring on-line activities.

The WebQuest approach offers a solution to the issues of access, structure, and supervision. A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which students gather most or all of their information from Internet resources.¹ A teacher selects web sites that he or she believes to be most relevant and appropriate, and then creates a web page that guides students as they examine those sources. The web page created by the teacher can include five steps: Introduction, Task, Process, Evaluation, and Conclusion. Through these steps, students are given background information, a task to complete, links to resources for completing the task, and information about how they will be assessed.

Some teachers may find it difficult to create their own WebQuests due to time constraints or a lack of computer skills. Fortunately, there are many WebQuests developed by teachers and posted on the Internet. The two WebQuests reviewed here are examples of intriguing applications of this technique to the study of Latin America. Still, the best WebQuest on any topic is likely to be one that you, the teacher, design to meet the needs of your curriculum and your particular students.

Latin America Travel Brochure²

www.ufrsd.k12.nj.us/staffwww/mitchel/LATIN.HTM

Students work in small groups, pretending to be teams from a Latin American public relations firm charged with boosting tourism. Each team is assigned to one Latin American country and is expected to present information such as climate, arts and culture, food, outdoor recreation, historic sites, accommodations and transportation, maps, photographs, and travel tips. The students make use of sites such as The Electronic Embassy (www.embassy.org) the Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC) (lanic.utexas.edu), The Lonely Planet Guidebook (www.lonelyplanet.com), and Resources for Teaching about the Americas (RETANET), (ladb.unm.edu/retanet/links.html). This WebQuest is suitable for upper elementary or middle school students. The author provides specific guidance in the form of "Learning Advice," as well as a very detailed rubric for assessment.

Cinco de Mayo³

www.zianet.com/cjcox/edutech4learning/cinco.html

The Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo is commonly misunderstood to be Mexican Independence Day. In this WebQuest, second and third grade students begin by playing the role of

reporters for the local newspaper. Their task is to describe the historical importance of May 5th, the difference between Cinco de Mayo (marking a battle of May 5, 1862) and Independence Day (marking the Declaration of September 15, 1810), and the celebrations that occur on those holidays. Next, the students work in groups of four to create a presentation describing Cinco de Mayo from the perspectives of a Mexican soldier, a French soldier, a citizen born in a small village, and a child whose father was a soldier. The students gather information from sites such as Viva Cinco de Mayo (www.vivacincodemayo.org/history.htm), which provides information and links on the history of the date, and La Batalla de Puebla (www.nacnet.org/assunta/spa5may.htm) which provides a description of Cinco de Mayo in both English and Spanish. This WebQuest also includes a list of children's literature and links to additional sites such as ElMariachi.com (www.elmariachi.com/realaudio/default.asp), which includes selections of mariachi music.

Selecting a Quality WebQuest

The best WebQuests contain three key elements.

1. They engage students in a task that goes beyond merely collecting and reporting information. A WebQuest may very easily become an on-line worksheet, but this is not the best use of this strategy. Students should be required to synthesize the information they collect through a WebQuest into some creative product.
2. That they make use of the engaging features of the Internet such as graphics, sound, video, and/or audio. A WebQuest that only directs a student to sites with enormous volumes of text is unlikely to be engaging.
3. They work well as cooperative learning activities. The WebQuests described here involve students in role playing and team efforts.

It is not uncommon for a WebQuest to contain links that are no longer active. Thus, teachers should carefully review any WebQuest they intend to use with their students (all of the URLs above were active as we went to press). ☹

Notes

1. The WebQuest Page, which can be found at a San Diego State University website (edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html). See also Andrew J. Milson and Portia Downey, "WebQuest: Using Internet Resources for Cooperative Inquiry," *Social Education* 65, no. 3 (April 2001):144-146.
2. Lauren A. Mitchell, creator of the WebQuest, is a special education teacher at Allentown High School in Allentown, New Jersey.
3. Cheryl J. Cox, creator of the WebQuest, taught social studies at Hatch Elementary School in Hatch, New Mexico.

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