

LATIN AMERICA ONLINE: Internet Resources and Web-Based Lessons

BY ANDREW J. MILSON

The Internet offers a vast repository of resources for teaching about many topics. Unfortunately, teachers must often engage in a great deal of searching to locate quality online materials. A first step for making use of Internet resources is to identify "web portals," or sites that provide extensive directories and links to additional sites on a specific topic. One might think of a web portal as being similar to a phone book for the Internet.

There are at least four excellent web portals that provide guidance for exploring Latin America online. These resources may serve as a starting point for teachers seeking to expand their knowledge of Latin America or for teachers looking for supplemental instructional materials. Because these portals provide access to countless online resources, I will not repeat the extensive list of sites here. Rather, I encourage teachers and students to make use of one of the portals I have described below when beginning a search for information on Latin America.

Gateways to Internet Resources for Latin America

Latin American Network Information Center
lanic.utexas.edu

The Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC) is a comprehensive, searchable directory of Internet resources on Latin America. LANIC's goal is to facilitate research and academic endeavors, as well as to provide "an important gateway to Latin America for primary and secondary school teachers and students, private and public sector professionals, and just about anyone looking for information about this important region." The site, affiliated with the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, has been in operation since 1994 and currently provides users with links to more than twelve thousand sites. The directory is organized into the following divisions: Countries, Economy, Education, Government, Humanities, Internet & Computing, Libraries & Reference, Media & Communication, Recreation, Regional Resources, Science, Social Sciences, Society & Culture, and Sustainable Development.

La Guia: Internet Resources for Latin America
lib.nmsu.edu/subject/bord/lagua

This portal, compiled by Molly Molloy of New Mexico State University, includes helpful annotations to the links listed, as well as guidance for conducting more specific searches using online catalogs, such as Signpost and the Librarians Index to the Internet. In addition to providing links to other web directories, La Guia offers access to a wide variety of databases, such

as the Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI), which contains the contents of more than four hundred periodicals from and about Latin America spanning the past thirty years, and the Library of Congress Handbook of Latin American Studies (HLAS), a comprehensive bibliography selected and annotated by Latin America scholars. Additionally, La Guia links users to the websites of nineteen organizations that provide information from and about Latin American countries, or issues relating to Latin America. One distinguishing feature of La Guia is the inclusion of links to current events resources and online news directories.

Zona Latina
www.zonalatina.com

This commercial portal focuses on media and marketing in Latin America. Teachers will find links to more than eight hundred newspapers, 1250 magazines, eight hundred radio stations, and seven hundred television stations. Additionally, the site provides links to information on Latin American countries, music, and children's resources, as well as a Latin American photo gallery and book reviews. One portion of the site is devoted exclusively to Internet resources. This section links users to numerous news sources and recent online articles on communications and technology in Latin America.

Resources for Teaching about the Americas (RETANET)
www.ladb.unm.edu/retanet

The Latin America Data Base (LADB), affiliated with the University of New Mexico, contains a section devoted to resources for teaching about the Americas (RETANET). The purpose of RETANET is to make resources and curriculum materials about Latin America, the Spanish Caribbean, and the U.S. Southwest accessible for secondary teachers, educational specialists, and scholars. Although not as comprehensive as LANIC or La Guia, the site includes access to more than sixty-five lesson plans written by secondary teachers, a searchable resource materials database, contact information for teacher partners, links to Latin American embassies, and sixty additional online resources. Teachers may also subscribe to LADB electronic news bulletins about Mexico (SourceMex), Central America and the Caribbean (NotiCen), and South America (NotiSur).

WebQuests on Latin America

Many teachers may feel uneasy about the prospect of turning students loose in cyberspace. Although the use of web portals, such as those mentioned above, increases the chances that

TABLE 1
Evaluation of WebQuests for Latin America

TITLE	URL (ALL BEGIN WITH HTTP://)	GRADE LEVEL
The Galapagos	fs_gorman.tripod.com/galapagos/index.htm	6-8
Latin America	cte.jhu.edu/techacademy/fellows/Jones-S/webquest/swjindex_htm3.html	6
Travel to Latin America	www.lr.k12.nj.us/site/cherokee/library/stokes.htm	6-8
Latin America Quest	riverview.mints.more.net/rodenborn/latinam/latin_america.htm	6-8
A Quest to Save Machu Picchu	coe.west.asu.edu/students/lfitzgerald/webquest.htm	6-8
El Camino Real: Back to the Future	education.nmsu.edu/webquest/wq/camino/camino.html	6-8
Pinochet and Human Rights: Reevaluating Policy	oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~ts130093/edci632/	11-12
Mexico City Earthquake	students.itec.sfsu.edu/edt628/mexquake/earthquakers.html	9-12
Nicaragua Quest	www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/student/contrquest/	9-12
Vamos a Viajar	coe.west.asu.edu/students/purton/webquest.htm	9-12
Rise of the Aztecs	webby.umeedu.maine.edu/coehd/aztec/	9-12
Bullfighting	www.manteno.k12.il.us/mzasada/webquest.htm	6-8
Before and After the Encounter	www.dcbooces.org/teachers/gzinsley/	9-10
Update on Ecuador	www.richmond.edu/~ed344/webquests/ecuador/jwmupdateon.htm	11-12

students will find accurate information, the risk of students stumbling on inappropriate content remains. Furthermore, teachers may not want to waste valuable class time allowing students to conduct broad searches for online information. The WebQuest approach is proving to be a very popular format for addressing these drawbacks of web-based learning.¹ A WebQuest offers students an opportunity to explore Internet resources that have been identified by the teacher, and it provides a structure for making use of those sources within the context of an inquiry-based lesson.

A recent search revealed many WebQuests on topics related to Latin America for elementary through high school students. As with any lesson plan, these WebQuests vary in quality. There are several essential elements that one should consider when evaluating the quality of a WebQuest. For the purposes

of this review, I have chosen to focus on the following criteria to evaluate each WebQuest:

Task

- ▶ Are students required to synthesize multiple sources of information?
- ▶ Are students required to develop a creative product?
- ▶ Are students required to collaborate?

Process

- ▶ Are there clearly stated, step-by-step instructions?
- ▶ Are students engaged in a variety of activities?
- ▶ Are students assuming various roles and perspectives?

Resources

- ▶ Are a variety of resources provided?

Note. ★★★★★ = excellent, ★★★ = good, ★★ = fair, ★ = poor.

TASK	PROCESS	RESOURCES	EVALUATION	VISUAL APPEAL	OVERALL
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
★★★	★★	★	★★★	★★★	★★
★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★
★★★★★	★★★	★	★★★★★	★★	★★★
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
★★★	★★★	★★★	Missing	★★★	★★★
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★
★★★★★	★★★	★★★	Missing	★★	★★
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
★★★	★★★	★★★★★	Missing	★★★★★	★★★
★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★
★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

- ▶ Are the online resources current, accurate, and useful?

Evaluation

- ▶ Are students given detailed instructions regarding how their final products will be evaluated?

Visual Appeal

- ▶ Are the images, colors, fonts, and other visual elements appropriate?

As shown in Table 1, many WebQuests have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. Teachers may wish to consider how the strengths and weaknesses match with their goals for a particular lesson. Some teachers may find the kernel of a great idea embedded within one of these WebQuests and decide to expand on the idea in a new WebQuest of their own.²

In the remainder of this review, I provide a brief description of each of the WebQuests on Latin America designed for middle school and high school students.

WebQuests for Middle School (Grades 6-8)

The Galapagos—Islands Suspended in Time
fs_gorman.tripod.com/galapagos/index.htm

In this WebQuest, students are asked to consider, “To what degree and how should the Galapagos be protected from further encroachment from man? Or should there be any protection at all?” Students choose the roles of scientist, tour operator, or creature and are given a list of questions to consider from these various perspectives. Students have access to several excellent Internet resources, such as Terraquest: Virtual Galapagos (www.terraquest.com/galapagos/intro.html), Galapagos Islands: History and Cartography (www.galapagos.to), a

TIME magazine article (www.time.com/time/magazine/archive/1995/951030/environment.html), and the International Galapagos Tour Operators Association (www.igtoa.org). The group must then come together to propose a “Fair Use” policy that addresses the needs and wants of each of the roles. The scientist seeks to promote a total ban on further intrusion on the fragile ecosystem, the tour operator wishes to remove any restrictions on increased tourism, and the creatures fear that further encroachment will bring irreversible harm to the island’s habitat.

Latin America

cte.jhu.edu/techacademy/fellows/Jones-S/webquest/swjindex_htm3.html

This WebQuest also makes use of the “travel-to-a-country” lesson. Students are told that they can win a trip to any country in Latin America, but that they must first provide a persuasive presentation about the country they choose to the bank hosting the competition. Rather than provide students with particular sites to visit, this WebQuest provides links to guidelines on searching the Internet.

Travel to Latin America

www.lr.k12.nj.us/site/cherokee/library/stokes.htm

The task for this WebQuest is to design a travel brochure for a specific country within Latin America. The brochure must appeal to four different personality types or interests: “athletic,” “cultural,” “party-goer,” and “tourist.” Students make use of sites such as Travel Notes (www.travelnotes.org/LatinAmerica), the Latin American Travel Advisor (www.amerispan.com/latc), the EcoTravel Center (www.ecotour.org/chat/chatjrn1.htm), and Latin World (www.latinworld.com). The designer of this WebQuest suggests that teachers post the brochures on a travel bulletin board and then have the class vote for the “best trip.”

Latin America Quest

riverview.mints.more.net/rodenborn/latinam/latin_america.htm

Students play the roles of staff members for an ambassador to a Latin American country. The staff roles include historian, geographer, economist, cultural expert, and futurist. The staff must come together as a team to present information about the country to a new ambassador. Although this task is unique, creative, and authentic, only a few online resources are provided for students. With additional links and added graphic elements, this WebQuest could be very engaging.

A Quest to Save Machu Picchu

coe.west.asu.edu/students/lfitzgerald/webquest.htm

Students work as a team to organize a PowerPoint presentation in protest of a proposed commercial development near the ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu. The purpose of their presentation is to “convince this greedy bunch of developers that what they are planning should not happen.” Students must address information such as the location, terrain, climate, architecture, and the purpose of Machu Picchu in Incan society. The WebQuest links students to sites such as GORP: Great

Outdoor Recreation Pages (www.gorp.com/gorp/location/latamer/peru/machu.htm), Education Planet: Cuzco and Machu Picchu (www.educationplanet.com/search/redirect?id=30404&mfcoun=20&mflw=Inca), and a Machu Picchu Photo Gallery (www.geocities.com/archaeogeo/machu.html). This lesson would be enhanced if students were allowed to debate multiple perspectives on the issue rather than forcing them to assume one stance.

El Camino Real: Back to the Future

education.nmsu.edu/webquest/wq/camino/camino.html

In 1598, hundreds of colonists led by Don Juan Onate traveled El Camino Real (The King’s Highway) through Northern Mexico and present-day New Mexico. In this WebQuest, students imagine that Don Juan Onate has come back to explore the route today. The students are divided into two groups, “conquistadores” and “land rovers.” The conquistadores are responsible for creating travel brochures that describe El Camino Real as it was in 1598. The land rovers are responsible for creating travel brochures that depict the route as it exists today. Students explore links for cities such as Mexico City; El Paso, Texas; Las Cruces, New Mexico; and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Each of the brochures must include information such as how the town was named, physical features of the land, population, original settlers, shelter and/or architecture, food, art, and celebrations or festivals. Although the idea for this WebQuest is excellent, it is lacking a rubric for assessing the final product.

WebQuests for High School (Grades 9-12)

Pinochet and Human Rights: Reevaluating Policy

oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~ts130093/edci632

This WebQuest opens with the question, “How can the U.S. maintain a strong commitment to human rights and at the same time protect its national interests?” Students play the roles of people called to testify before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Students may choose to be the parent of a child who has disappeared, a businessperson who had property nationalized by the Allende government, a civil rights worker in Chile in the 1970s, or a State Department official. This WebQuest makes excellent use of a variety of online sources, such as QuickTime movies; interactive maps; and historical documents from the CNN *Cold War* series (www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war), the Chile Documentation Project (www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/latin_america/chile.htm), and a Chilean human rights organization, Derechos Chile (www.derechoschile.com/html/). This last site is in Spanish, so the WebQuest author has included a link to a document translation site (world.altavista.com).

Mexico City Earthquake

students.itec.sfsu.edu/edt628/mexquake/earthquakers.html

Students play the roles of a photojournalist, a city planner, an emergency volunteer, a college student in a collapsed dormitory, and a news reporter. They are asked to prepare a video interview and a magazine article depicting the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. This WebQuest was written for students in a Spanish class, and thus the final products are to be in

Spanish. Students are provided with links to sites that explain earthquakes such as the USGS site Earthquakes in History (pubs.usgs.gov/gip/earthq1/history.html), as well as a site that briefly describes the Mexico City earthquake (www.geo.lsa.umich.edu/~MichSeis/Newsletters/Fall95new/mexicoeq.html).

NicaraguaQuest

www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/student/contraquest
This WebQuest focuses on the Nicaraguan Sandinista Revolution. Students assume the roles of a human rights activist, an art historian, a U.S. senator, a Nicaraguan contra, an international worker for the Nicaraguan government, and a Nicaraguan teacher. Each character is given an online dossier that explains that person's perspective, poses questions to explore, and provides links to Internet resources. Several excellent and varied resources are used in this WebQuest, such as the Sandino Page (www.pagumundi.com/sandino/sandino.htm), the (Spanish) FSLN page (www.fsln.de), a biography of Nicaraguan painter Julie Aguirre (www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/discovery_eng/artists/aguirre/aguirre.html), a report from Witness for Peace (www.mfrr.org/compages/cjca/presente/9611.html), U.S. State Department Notes on Nicaragua (www.state.gov/www/background_notes/nicaragua_0398_bgn.html), and the journal of an International Civil Rights Worker (www.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/student/contraquest/don.html).

Vamos a Viajar

coe.west.asu.edu/students/purton/webquest.htm
This WebQuest offers another twist on the "travel-to-a-country" lesson. Here, members of a Spanish club are asked to create a travel brochure for one of the Spanish-speaking countries of the world. The students play the roles of treasurer, secretary, vice-president, and president. Each role includes specific responsibilities, such as determining currency exchange, investigating the climate and geography, exploring entertainment activities, and locating historical and cultural sites. Although the WebQuest purports to focus on the Spanish-speaking world, the options for student exploration are limited to Spain, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

Rise of the Aztecs

webby.umeedu.maine.edu/coehd/aztec
Students assume the roles of theologian, museum curator, linguist, and anthropologist. Each person is given two artifacts and a specific set of questions to investigate. The artifacts include a picture of a god, a knife of carved stone, arrow points made of obsidian, a stone with pictograms and hieroglyphics, a map of an archeological dig in Mexico, and a drawing of an island. All of these artifacts are supplied as images within the descriptions of each role. By proceeding through a set of ten clues, the team works together to decipher the meaning of the artifacts. Each clue contains a list of Internet links for students to use to gather information and report to the class.

Bullfighting

www.manteno.k12.il.us/mzasada/webquest.htm

In this WebQuest, students consider questions such as, When and from where did the idea for bullfighting come? Where does a bullfight take place? Who are the participants? What happens during a bullfight? What rules do participants follow? and How popular is bullfighting? Additionally, students investigate the roles of torero, banderillero, picador, and toro bravo. Students gather their information using sites such as The Mexico File (www.mexicofile.com/bullfightinghistory.htm), Andalucia.Com (www.andalucia.com/bullfight/home.htm), and CyberSpain (www.cyberspain.com/life/toros.htm). The final product for this activity is a brochure that advertises a bullfight and answers the questions listed above.

Latin America—Before and After the Encounter

www.dcboces.org/teachers/gzinsley

The task for students completing this WebQuest is to create a timeline that depicts life for indigenous cultures of Latin America before and after their encounter with Europeans. Working in pairs, students search for documents that describe the political, economic, and social life of indigenous cultures. Students must locate at least six sources, complete a document summary sheet for each source, place the document on the timeline, and present the timeline and any resulting generalizations to the class. This WebQuest makes use of a few unique sources, such as The European Voyages of Exploration Page from the University of Calgary (www.acs.ucalgary.ca/HIST/tutor/eurvoya), the City University of New York's World Civilization Page (www.humanities.cuny.cuny.edu/history/readercont.htm), and the Internet Modern History Sourcebook (www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/aztecs1.html), but the WebQuest would be enhanced if additional sources were available to students.

Update on Ecuador

oncampus.richmond.edu/academics/as/education/projects/webquests/ecuador/jwmupdateon.htm

Students assume the role of a television news team assigned to produce a video newscast in Spanish about Ecuador. The team consists of reporters of news, sports, weather, and culture. Each character is given specific questions to explore such as, What subjects are used for the leading stories of these (listed) papers? Which Ecuadorian sports figures appear to have attained the status of Michael Jordan or Mark McGwire? and Which movie currently playing in Ecuador do you believe Ecuadorians would want to see and why? The WebQuest makes use of general reference sites, such as Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com), as well as more specific links, such as an online Ecuadorian newspaper (www.eluniverso.com) and Futbol clubs in Ecuador (www.ecuadornostalgia.com/futbol/contenido.html). Students are encouraged to consider differences between American and Ecuadorian news in terms of the priorities and interests that each culture holds.

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Conclusion

In general, there are many opportunities to use Internet resources to study Latin America. Teachers hoping to locate supplemental teaching materials can take advantage of sites such as LANIC, RETANET, La Guia, and Zona Latina. Those wishing to infuse technology into lessons might choose to use one of the numerous WebQuests available on Latin America. Regardless of the degree to which educators incorporate the Internet, the growing collection of online resources and web-based lessons on Latin America can certainly enable teachers to find creative and effective ways of teaching about this important region. 🌐

Notes

1. For more information on the WebQuest approach, consult The WebQuest Page at edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html.
2. WebQuest Templates are available in both PC and Macintosh formats. They may be downloaded from edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/LessonTemplate.html.

Andrew J. Milson is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He teaches courses and conducts research in social studies education, middle school teaching, and character education.

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