



## Latin American Geography

**Social Studies Standard** - Geography

*Key Ideas and Performance Indicators* 3.1.2, 3.1.3

### Skills:

Drawing inferences and making conclusions

Getting, using, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting information

Interpreting and analyzing different kinds of maps

### Concepts:

Diversity-Unity

Environment

Places and Regions

Physical Systems

Human Systems

Urbanization

### Historical Context:

Many associate the term “American” with a person from the United States, but such persons are not the only Americans. All the regions from the arctic tundra of northern Canada to the Tierra del Fuego of Argentina and Chile together form the American continents. To Latin Americans, people from the United States are known as *norteamericanos*. Latin Americans inhabit the landmass south of the continental United States as well as the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Language, ethnic backgrounds, and customs are some of the characteristics that differentiate *norteamericanos* from *latinoamericanos*.

Certain aspects of this region such as political issues, standards of living, and even weather conditions can have an effect on other areas of the world. For example, sheer proximity and concerns over national security have prompted the United States to involve itself in national affairs in Latin America. (e.g. as the United States’ relationship to Nicaragua in the 1980s and the United States invasion of Panama). Proximity to Latin America affects the United States economically. In recent years, the Mexican economy has deteriorated, partially due to the devaluation of the peso and the accumulation of a large foreign debt. This has compelled some Mexicans to migrate, legally or illegally, to the United States. Even the weather conditions in Latin America can have an indirect effect upon us. Hurricanes are a powerful natural phenomenon in the Caribbean. A powerful and destructive hurricane sweeping through the

Caribbean and up the coasts of Central American and Mexico could damage agricultural crops that the United States imports such as sugar, bananas, and coffee, consequently raising their prices on the United States and world markets.

In order to understand Latin Americans and their diverse cultures, it is important to have a working knowledge of the physical surroundings that have influenced those cultures. For the purpose of this activity, Latin America is divided into the following five sub-regions: 1. Middle America, which includes Mexico and Central America; 2. Caribbean (West Indies); 3. Andean nations, which include Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Columbia; 4. Southern Cone, which includes Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay; and 5. Brazil, Venezuela, and Guiana (Guyana, French Guiana, and Surinam).

### **Activities:**

Divide the class into six groups and assign one of the handouts to each group.

[Handout 1](#): Climate Regions

[Handout 2](#): Physical Geography

[Handout 3](#): Natural disaster Zones

[Handout 4](#): Populations and Cities

[Handout 5](#): Major Cities

[Handout 6](#): Latin America

Ask each group to do the following:

- Make a list of any statistical facts that are given in its handout.
- Research related facts from additional resources.
- Select three facts from its research to share with the class.
- Present its facts with charts, pictures, or other illustrations.

Discuss with the class how physical geography might affect the following:

- Relations among countries (economic, diplomatic, political)
- Services from cities to rural areas
- Territorial boundaries
- Living conditions

Discuss the immediate and long-term effects of natural disasters, which can damage and sometimes destroy an area.