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# Arturo's Heritage Journey: Exploring Cuba & Mexico

A Four-Month Homeschool Lesson Plan for a 5-Year-Old

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## Overall Materials Needed (September - December)

- World map or globe
  - Construction paper (various colors, especially red, white, blue, green)
  - Child-safe scissors and glue sticks
  - Crayons, markers, and paint
  - Play-Doh or air-dry clay
  - Simple baking ingredients (flour, sugar, eggs, vanilla) and cookie cutters (skull shape optional)
  - A small shoebox or cardboard box (for the *ofrenda*)
  - Tissue paper (bright colors, especially orange) and pipe cleaners
  - Speakers or a device for playing music
  - Access to a library or online book resources
  - Small paper bags or cardstock for lanterns (*farolitos*)
  - Battery-operated tea lights
  - Grapes (for New Year's activity)
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## September: ¡Hola, Heritage! Flags and Family

**Focus:** Introduction to Hispanic Heritage Month, geography, and national symbols.

### Key Concepts for Arturo:

- Our heritage is part of our family's story.
- Mexico and Cuba are two special countries with their own flags and culture.
- A flag is a symbol that represents a country and its people.

### Activities:

1. **Map Detectives:** Using a globe or world map, find Mexico and the island of Cuba. Talk about how they are neighbors. Trace the journey from where you live to each country with your finger. Discuss: Is it far away? Would you need a plane or a boat?
  2. **Flag Creation Station:**
    - **Cuban Flag:** Use red, white, and blue construction paper to create the Cuban flag. Talk about the shapes: three blue stripes for the sea, two white stripes for purity, a red triangle for strength, and a single star for independence.
    - **Mexican Flag:** Use green, white, and red paper or paint. Talk about the colors: green for hope, white for unity, and red for the blood of heroes. For the eagle in the center, Arturo can draw his own version of a powerful animal or use a pre-printed eagle to glue in the middle. This is about creative interpretation, not perfect replication.
  3. **Heritage Handprints:** Trace Arturo's hand on a piece of paper. Inside the handprint, he can draw pictures of things that represent his family and things he's learned about his heritage (maybe a tiny flag, a favorite family food, or a picture of a family member).
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## Story & Music Time:

- **Book:** *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal.
- **Music:** Listen to the song "Guantanamera" (a famous Cuban folk song) and "Cielito Lindo" (a famous Mexican folk song). Dance around the room!

## Checking for Understanding:

At the end of the month, ask Arturo if he can point to Cuba and Mexico on the map and show you the flags he made for each country.

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## October: Cuba's Story & The Power of Sugar

**Focus:** A simple introduction to Cuban independence and the importance of sugar cane.

### Key Concepts for Arturo:

- Sometimes people have to be brave and say they want to run their own country.
- Cuba is a warm island where a very tall, sweet plant called sugar cane grows.
- Sugar comes from this plant and is used to make many yummy treats.

### Activities:

1. **The Cry for Freedom (Grito de Yara):** Explain simply: "A long, long time ago in Cuba, people wanted to be in charge of their own home. So on a special day, they shouted together, '¡Viva Cuba Libre!' which means 'Hooray for a Free Cuba!'" Have Arturo practice shouting "¡Viva Cuba Libre!" with a happy, strong voice.
2. **Sugar Cane Sensory Science:** Since real sugar cane might be hard to find, use a stalk of celery or a long pretzel rod as a model. Explain that sugar cane is a tall grass. Then, do a sugar taste test. Put a tiny bit of salt, flour, and sugar in three separate bowls. Have Arturo taste each and describe the difference. Mix sugar with water and watch it "disappear" (dissolve).
3. **Make Merenguitos (Little Meringue Kisses):** This is a simple, sweet Cuban treat. Beat egg whites with sugar until they form stiff peaks. Let Arturo scoop little "kisses" onto a baking sheet and bake at a low temperature. It's a fun way to see how sugar creates something new.

## Story & Music Time:

- **Book:** *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle (a story about a Chinese-African-Cuban girl who breaks tradition to become a drummer).
- **Music:** Listen to music from the Buena Vista Social Club. The rhythm is perfect for playing with maracas or homemade shakers (rice in a plastic bottle).

## Checking for Understanding:

Ask Arturo, "What sweet plant grows in Cuba?" and "What treat did we make with sugar?"

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## November: Remembering with Love & Giving Thanks

**Focus:** Celebrating life with Día de los Muertos and expressing gratitude.

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## Key Concepts for Arturo:

- Día de los Muertos is a happy holiday from Mexico for remembering family members who are no longer with us.
- We celebrate their life by remembering things we loved about them.
- Being thankful is important in all cultures.

## Activities:

1. **Build a Mini-Ofrenda (Offering Altar):** Use a shoebox to create a small, personal altar. This is not about sadness, but happy memories. Arturo can place a photo of a great-grandparent or a beloved family pet who has passed away. He can then decorate it with things they would like: a drawing of a favorite food, a small toy, etc.
2. **Creative Crafting for the Celebration:**
  - **Paper Marigolds (Cempasúchil):** Teach Arturo how to make fluffy marigolds by layering yellow and orange tissue paper, folding it like a fan, and tying it in the middle with a pipe cleaner.
  - **Decorate Sugar Skull Cookies:** Bake simple sugar cookies using a skull-shaped cutter (or a round one). Use colorful icing to decorate them with happy designs like flowers, hearts, and swirls. Explain that the skulls are smiling to show that we remember our loved ones with joy, not fear.
3. **A Heritage Gratitude Tree:** Connect the American Thanksgiving tradition to universal gratitude. Draw a large, bare tree on a poster board. Cut out leaves from construction paper. On each leaf, help Arturo write or draw one thing he is thankful for. Include things he's learned about his heritage: "I'm thankful for Cuban music," or "I'm thankful for my family's story."

## Story & Music Time:

- **Book:** *The Day of the Dead / El Día de los Muertos* by Bob Barner.
- **Music:** Listen to the soundtrack from the movie *Coco*.

## Checking for Understanding:

Ask Arturo to tell you one happy memory about the person or pet he chose for his *ofrenda*. Ask him to share one thing from his gratitude tree.

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## December: Navidad, Nochebuena, and a Story of Resilience

**Focus:** Christmas traditions in Latin culture and a specific historical story from Cuba.

## Key Concepts for Arturo:

- In many Cuban and Mexican families, the biggest Christmas party is on Christmas Eve (*Nochebuena*).
- For a long time, people in Cuba were not allowed to celebrate Christmas.
- Even when they couldn't have a big party, they kept the spirit of Christmas in their hearts.

## Activities:

1. **The Story of Christmas in Cuba:** Tell the story in a simple, age-appropriate way. "Remember the sugar cane we learned about? The government in Cuba decided that harvesting sugar was more important than Christmas. They told everyone they had to work instead of celebrate. It was sad for many people. But they never forgot about Christmas! And now, families in Cuba can celebrate *Nochebuena* again." This teaches resilience.

2. **Light Up the Night with *Farolitos*:** Make simple paper lanterns (*farolitos*) that are popular during Christmas. Decorate a small paper bag or folded cardstock with cutouts of stars and moons. Place a battery-operated tea light inside to make it glow. Talk about how light is a symbol of hope, even during difficult times.
3. **New Year's Good Luck Grapes:** Introduce the fun tradition of eating 12 grapes at midnight on New Year's Eve for 12 months of good luck. You can do a practice run at 8:00 PM on any night. Count out 12 grapes and eat one for each "gong" of a pretend clock, making a little wish for the "year" ahead (or just for tomorrow!).

### Story & Music Time:

- **Book:** *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto (a classic Mexican-American Christmas story).
- **Music:** Play festive Latin Christmas music like "Feliz Navidad" by José Feliciano and "Mi Burrito Sabanero."

### Checking for Understanding:

Ask Arturo, "Why couldn't people in Cuba celebrate Christmas for a while?" (Because of the sugar cane harvest). "What holiday happens on Christmas Eve?" (Nochebuena).

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