

A Cultural Journey: Exploring Cuban & Mexican Heritage with Arturo

Overall Materials Needed (September - December)

- Construction paper (various colors, especially red, white, green, blue, orange, black)
- Child-safe scissors and glue sticks
- Crayons, markers, and paint
- Tissue paper (bright colors, especially orange, pink, yellow, purple)
- String or yarn
- Picture books about Mexico and Cuba (library suggestions included)
- Access to a music streaming service or online videos for songs and dances
- Simple cooking ingredients (e.g., avocados, tortillas, sugar, flour, masa harina)
- Air-dry clay or salt dough ingredients (flour, salt, water)
- A small shoebox or cardboard box (for the ofrenda)
- Recycled materials like paper towel tubes, small jars
- Battery-operated tea lights
- A blank scrapbook or journal to serve as a "Cultural Passport"

Monthly Lesson Plan

September: ¡Viva México! - Heritage and Independence

Focus: Introduction to Hispanic Heritage Month, focusing on Mexican Independence Day (September 16th) and national symbols.

Learning Objectives:

- Arturo will identify the three colors of the Mexican flag (red, white, green).
- Arturo will participate in creating a craft inspired by Mexican culture.
- Arturo will learn the word "amigo" (friend) and "familia" (family).

Activities:

1. Week 1: What is Hispanic Heritage?

- **Activity: Create a Cultural Passport.** Decorate the cover of a scrapbook. On the first page, write "Mexico." Find Mexico on a world map or globe. Explain that this month we celebrate people whose families came from countries like Mexico and Cuba.
- **Book Suggestion:** *"Off We Go to Mexico"* by Laurie Krebs or *"Dreamers"* by Yuyi Morales.

2. Week 2: The Mexican Flag.

- **Activity: Torn Paper Flag.** Draw the outline of the Mexican flag. Have Arturo tear red, white, and green construction paper into small pieces and glue them into the correct sections. Talk about what flags are for (to represent a country, like a team jersey). You can simplify the center eagle and snake into a brown circle or shape.
- **Music:** Listen to festive mariachi music while you work. Dance around the room!

3. Week 3: The Sound of Mexico.

- **Activity: Make Your Own Maracas.** Fill two empty plastic bottles or paper towel tubes (with ends sealed) with a little rice or dried beans. Decorate the outside with paint and markers. Shake them while listening to more mariachi music.

4. Week 4: The Taste of Mexico.

- **Activity: Simple Guacamole.** With help, Arturo can mash a ripe avocado with a fork in a bowl. Add a squeeze of lime juice and a pinch of salt. Talk about how avocados grow in Mexico. Enjoy with tortilla chips.

October: ¡Hola Cuba! - Island Life and Day of the Dead Prep

Focus: Introduction to Cuba, its symbols, and beginning to explore the traditions of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).

Learning Objectives:

- Arturo will identify the Cuban flag and name one color in it.
- Arturo will create a craft inspired by the national bird of Cuba.
- Arturo will be introduced to the concept of remembering loved ones through the symbols of Day of the Dead.

Activities:

1. Week 1: The Island of Cuba.

- **Activity: Passport and Flag.** Add a "Cuba" page to the Cultural Passport. Find Cuba on the map and notice it's an island. Create a Cuban flag using blue and white paper strips and a red triangle with a white star.
- **Book Suggestion:** *"Martí's Song for Freedom"* by Emma Otheguy.

2. Week 2: The Toco-ro-ro Bird.

- **Activity: Handprint Bird.** The national bird of Cuba, the Toco-ro-ro, has the colors of the flag (red, white, and blue). Trace Arturo's hand on white paper. Let him paint or color the thumb blue, two fingers red, and leave two fingers white. Add a beak and an eye.
- **Music:** Listen to upbeat Cuban salsa music, like Celia Cruz. Try some simple salsa dance steps.

3. Week 3: Introduction to Día de los Muertos.

- **Storytelling:** Explain that in Mexico, there is a special holiday not to be sad, but to happily remember family and friends who are no longer with us. It's like a big party for their memory.
- **Activity: Decorate Clay Calaveras.** Use air-dry clay or salt dough to shape a flattened skull shape (calavera). Let it dry. Once dry, use bright paints to decorate it with happy designs like flowers, hearts, and swirls. Emphasize that these are not scary skulls; they are happy and colorful to celebrate life.

4. Week 4: Marigolds and Papel Picado.

- **Activity: Tissue Paper Marigolds.** The cempasúchil (marigold) is the flower of this holiday. Show Arturo how to stack a few pieces of orange or yellow tissue paper, fold them like a fan, tie the middle with yarn, and gently pull the layers apart to create a fluffy flower.
- **Activity: Simple Papel Picado.** Fold a piece of colorful tissue paper in half. Help Arturo cut simple shapes (triangles, semi-circles) along the folded edge. Unfold it to reveal a beautiful, symmetrical design.

November: Remembrance and Gratitude

Focus: Assembling a Day of the Dead ofrenda (altar) and connecting the theme of remembering family to the concept of Thanksgiving and gratitude.

Learning Objectives:

- Arturo will participate in creating a simple ofrenda.
- Arturo will be able to name one thing he is thankful for.
- Arturo will understand that both holidays are about celebrating family.

Activities:**1. Week 1 (Nov 1-2): Building Our Ofrenda.**

- **Activity: Create a Memory Box.** Use a shoebox as your ofrenda. Drape it with a colorful cloth or paper. Arrange the items made in October: the clay calavera and tissue paper marigolds. Add a battery-operated candle for a safe "light." Explain that families put photos and favorite foods of their loved ones on their ofrendas. You can add a photo of a great-grandparent, a beloved family pet that has passed, or even a favorite character from a book.
- **Book Suggestion:** *"The Day of the Dead / El Día de los Muertos"* by Bob Barner.

2. Week 2: What Are We Thankful For?

- **Activity: Gratitude Tree.** Find a small branch from outside and place it in a jar. Cut out paper leaves. Each day, ask Arturo what he is thankful for (his toys, a sunny day, his family, a good snack) and write it on a leaf. Punch a hole and hang it on the branch.

3. Week 3: Connecting Traditions.

- **Discussion:** Talk about how Day of the Dead is about being thankful for the family we remember, and Thanksgiving is about being thankful for the family we have with us now. Both are about love and familia.
- **Activity: Make Pan de Muerto.** Find a simple, kid-friendly recipe for this "bread of the dead." The fun is in kneading the dough and shaping the "bone" shapes on top.

December: Navidad, Nochebuena, and New Traditions

Focus: Exploring Christmas traditions in Latin America (Nochebuena) and learning the specific history of Christmas in Cuba.

Learning Objectives:

- Arturo will participate in a Nochebuena-inspired craft.
- Arturo will retell the simple story of why Christmas wasn't celebrated in Cuba for a time.
- Arturo will connect the joy of celebrating holidays with family.

Activities:**1. Week 1: Nochebuena (Christmas Eve).**

- **Storytelling:** Explain that in many Latin American countries, the biggest celebration is on Christmas Eve, called Nochebuena ("the Good Night"). It's a big party with family, special food, and music.
- **Activity: Make Farolitos (Little Lanterns).** Decorate small glass jars or paper bags with festive designs. Place a battery-operated tea light inside to make a beautiful, safe lantern to light up your home for Nochebuena.

2. Week 2: A Cuban Christmas Story.

- **Storytelling:** Tell this story in a simple, age-appropriate way: "In Cuba, there is a plant called sugarcane that people harvest to make sugar. For a long, long time, the leaders said everyone had to work very hard during December to cut all the sugarcane. They were so busy there was no time to celebrate Christmas. People were sad they couldn't have their parties. But then, things changed! Now, families in Cuba are very happy because they can celebrate Nochebuena together again."

- **Sensory Activity:** Explore sugar! Feel raw sugar, brown sugar, and taste a little bit. Talk about where it comes from.

3. **Week 3: Music and Celebration.**

- **Music:** Listen to Spanish Christmas carols, known as *villancicos*. "Feliz Navidad" is a perfect one to learn and sing together.
- **Activity: New Year's Tradition.** A fun Cuban and Spanish tradition is to eat 12 grapes at midnight on New Year's Eve for good luck. You can practice by counting out 12 grapes for a snack.

Assessment and Portfolio

Assessment for this age is observational and informal. Keep Arturo's "Cultural Passport" as a portfolio of his work. Throughout the months, notice:

- **Participation:** Is he engaged and excited to do the activities?
- **Comprehension:** Can he retell parts of a story in his own words? Can he point to Mexico and Cuba on a map with help?
- **Creativity:** Observe the choices he makes in his artwork and crafts. Ask him to tell you about what he made.
- **Vocabulary:** Does he remember and use any of the Spanish words like "amigo," "familia," or "gracias"?

Differentiation and Extension

- **For Simplification:** If an activity is too complex, focus on the sensory aspect. For example, instead of making a perfect flag, just let him enjoy painting or gluing with the flag's colors. Pre-cut shapes for him if fine motor skills are a challenge.
- **For Extension:** If Arturo shows deep interest in a topic, expand on it! Check out more library books, watch a documentary or travel show about the region, try a more complex recipe together, or learn more Spanish words related to the theme (colors, numbers, animals). You could even do a virtual museum tour online.