

Fitting Latin American Geography into Your Classes

J. Timmons Roberts
Department of Sociology/Latin American Studies
Tulane University

I. Introduction

Why Geography?

Geography and Spanish, Social Studies, Science, or other secondary classes

II. Basic Descriptive Geography Exercises

A. *Map exercises*

Nations map, capitals/quiz

B. *Describe a trip from New Orleans (or current location) south*

Possible resources: wall maps, hand-outs of physical geography maps, tour books, World Almanac and Handbook of Facts.

Presents an opportunity for research projects for students on each country, or on one aspect of several countries.

C. *Physical geography briefing on Latin America*

Airline distance from northwest Mexico to Colombia is nearly 5,000 km (3000+ mi), and from there to Cape Horn, following the general curvature of the continent, is an additional 7,500 km (4,600 mi).

Diverse ecological zones: Volcanos, rainforests, glaciers, prairies, swamps, deserts, temperate forests, etc.

The Andes comprise the highest continuous mountain barrier on earth: 7,000 km long. There are over three dozen peaks higher than Mount Denali (McKinley), North America's highest. It's difficult to imagine the barrier these mountains presented to transportation and communication in the settling of Latin America. Led to greater dependence on oceanic shipping, overseas links, and perhaps contributed to preventing the emergence of a United States of Latin America.

The Amazon is the world's greatest river: containing one-fifth of all fresh water on the planet, pushing back the salt water over 100 miles at its mouth. 600 miles upstream it is still so wide as to be difficult to see across, and during the rainy season its size can triple.

Additional opportunities for independent or class research

III. U.S. Influence/intervention in Latin America: a Critical Current Issue

A. *How did it get started?*

Founding fathers on Latin America

Monroe Doctrine 1823

Mexican-American War 1846-48

Spanish-American Cuban War 1898 ("Remember the Maine")

The Panama Canal and the Marines in Nicaragua

B. Recent Historical Interventions and Ongoing Involvement

U.S. Interventions and military aid

Grenada, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, etc.

The Drug War

Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Mexico

IV The Destruction of the Amazon Rainforests

A. Briefing on the Amazon forest

Size

Characteristics

Countries with Amazon territories (9)

The importance of the Amazon: myths and realities

Forces for destruction in the Amazon

B. Possible solutions for the destruction of the Amazon

Overview

Letter writing to environmental groups for information

Understanding the problems of deforestation

Cooperative learning with fact cards

Information scavenger hunt with group presentations

Map activities locating problem spots

Research and independent study – choose a topic for deeper investigation

Group meeting on problems, solutions, and plans of action