

8 Ideas for Teaching National Hispanic Heritage Month

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	Varies for each idea	Reading: R1, R2, R4, R6, R7, R9 Writing: W1, W2, W4, W6, W7, W8 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5 Language: L3, L4, L5
MS	HS		

LESSON OVERVIEW

In commemoration of National Hispanic Heritage Month, we present this resource to help teachers engage students in thinking broadly and critically about the Hispanic American experience in all of its complexity. In highlighting the significant events as well as people that have made a substantial contribution to the Latino/Hispanic experience, instruction should incorporate history, literature, point of view, politics, first-person experience, the arts, and the struggle for equity. As you plan, keep in mind the following points:

- The history, accomplishments and culture of Latino people should be integrated throughout the school year.** Although National Hispanic Heritage Month takes place during a month-long period of time (September 15 through October 15), it is important to keep in mind and acknowledge that, like other groups that comprise U.S. society, the history of Latino people in the United States is part of American history. Therefore, it should be incorporated into multiple aspects of the curriculum throughout the school year to provide a multitude of culture, knowledge, and information to students.
- Consider the racial/ethnic composition of your classroom.** Even though there may or may not be students who are of Hispanic origin in your classroom, it is important to not make assumptions that your Latino students are interested in or knowledgeable about Hispanic history and heritage. Be mindful not to put Latino students in the position of being the “authority” or main possessor of knowledge about Hispanic history. Do not ask or expect them to speak for all Latino students. Your students will likely have a range of thoughts and feelings about Hispanic Heritage Month including pride, embarrassment, annoyance, excitement, boredom or they may not think much about it at all.
- Build empathy with students.** Use National Hispanic Heritage Month as an opportunity to build empathy in your classroom for the celebrations and struggles of all people. Make connections to other members of minority groups, people of color and oppressed people and find ways to incorporate their history, culture and struggle with the history and culture of the Latino experience.
- Provide a balanced perspective.** In teaching National Hispanic Heritage Month, balance the positive exploration of culture, art, history and accomplishments with the important but sometimes difficult learning about the struggles of Latino people in history. It is important not to send the message that Latino history is all about oppression and the fight for rights, which can feel like a “deficit-centered” approach. On the other hand, people’s struggles for rights and opportunities are important aspects of Latino history. Thus, it is important to have an equal balance of both the trials and triumphs that many have faced throughout Latino history.
- Terminology: Latino vs. Hispanic.** Throughout this document, the terms Hispanic/Hispanic-American and Latino/Latino-American are used interchangeably. While the differences between the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* can be both confusing for some and clarifying for others, the Census Bureau uses the terms interchangeably. Some people of Latino or Hispanic origin also use the terms interchangeably and some choose to use one or the other. This decision is based on a variety of factors including region of the country, political perspective, country

of origin, immigration status, family tradition and other factors. Sometimes people prefer to identify themselves in relation to their country of origin like Dominican/Dominican-American. In addition, the term Latina is often used to identify women of Hispanic/Latino descent but for the purposes of this document, we will use the term Latino only. “Latinx,” a term that has been gaining popularity, is a gender- neutral alternative to Latino and Latina. Used by scholars, [activists](#) and an increasing number of journalists, Latinx is becoming more commonly used among the general public.

1 Read and Discuss Latino Literature

1. Have students read and discuss Latino literature including short stories, fiction, non-fiction, plays, poems, graphic novels and speeches. Be sure to include contemporary work that incorporates Spanish, Latino, and Caribbean voices.
2. Read and discuss the literature as a whole class or create small group book clubs where each club reads a different book or collection together. Some general questions to guide literature discussions include:
 - What is the book/poem/story about?
 - What are the theme, meaning and message of the book/poem/story?
 - How are the characters developed?
 - What is the main conflict and how is it resolved?
 - What did you most like about the book? What did like least about it?
 - What does the book/poem/story reflect about the Latino/Latino-American experience?
3. Have small group book clubs discuss what they read and undertake a group project such as:
 - Write book reviews (and the class can create a blog of all the book reviews).
 - Act out a scene from a play they read.
 - Write their own poems, short stories, plays or beginnings of a novel based on the particular genre that they read.
 - Learn more about the author and compile and summarize book reviews.
 - Create a drawing or collage that illustrates their favorite or most important part or scene.
 - Conduct a mock “book talk” with the author and create a video of it.

Resources

Websites

[U.S. Latinx Voices in Poetry](#) (Poetry Foundation)
[You Gotta Know These Latin American Authors](#)
[Books about Latino’s Who Made a Difference](#) (PBS.org)

Children Books by Latino Authors

[Best Sellers in Children’s Hispanic & Latino Books](#) (Amazon)
[Latinx and Latin American Titles](#) (Social Justice Books)
[“23 Books by Latinos That Might Just Change Your Life”](#) (*The Huffington Post*, November 19, 2015)

[Books published by/for/about Latinos/Latinas/Latinx](#) (Goodreads)
[Children's Book Press](#)

ADL Books Matter Bibliography

[Books about Latino-Hispanic and Latino-American People](#)

[Books about Immigrants](#)

[Book of the Month](#)

2 Identify and Read Important People and Events in Latino History

1. Have students identify and study important people in Latino history. The process of identifying people will be a learning experience as will the actual research. Begin with categories such as:
 - Academics
 - Actors
 - Artists
 - Athletes
 - Business People
 - Celebrities/Entertainers
 - Elected Officials
 - Inventors
 - Musicians
 - Performing Artists
 - Political Activists
 - Public Service Workers
 - Scientists
 - Spiritual Leaders
 - Writers
2. Using these categories, have students brainstorm names of people with whom they are familiar. A good resource to use during this discovery period is HBO's *The Latino List: Volumes 1, 2 and 3*. Next, have students conduct library and internet research to find more names. After brainstorming, have students go home and interview their parents, family members and friends, asking them for additional names. They can also do some searching online for names. Instruct students to bring those names to school to add to the list.
3. After compiling a long and comprehensive list of names within each category, have students pick a person they want to learn more about. Try to discourage the majority of your students from choosing sports and entertainment figures, which young people are sometimes overly drawn to. Encourage students to choose people from history as well as contemporary people. Give students various options for presenting what they learned about the person they studied. Their learning should culminate in a project about the person such as:
 - Write and perform a short skit about the person.
 - Write diary entries from their person's point of view.
 - Create a portrait of the person.
 - Write a short biography.
 - Create a sculpture of the person, using clay, plaster of Paris or found objects.
 - Write an original speech that the person might give.
 - Create a timeline of their life.
 - Make a webpage about them, using photos and original written material.
4. Using a similar process as above, have students identify and learn about important events in Latino/Hispanic-American History which may include the following and other events: Mexican-American War, Cabeza De Vaca, Delano grape pickers strike, *Mendez v. Westminster* case about school desegregation in California, immigration history and trends (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Central American, etc.), Cuban Revolution, Immigration Reform legislation and legislation aimed at criminalizing undocumented immigrants.

Working alone or in small groups, have students study one of the time periods or events and engage in a project to express and share what they learned. After conducting research, students can undertake one or more of the following projects to demonstrate their learning:

- Create mini-timelines for the event.
- Provide biographical information about important people who participated in that event.
- Draw or paint pictures of the events and write placards that go along with the pictures.
- Create a mini-documentary about the event.
- Write and perform a skit demonstrating something about the time period or event.
- As a class, create a complete Latino-American History timeline, using all of the mini-timelines from each group.

Resources

Websites

[Latino Americans: Timeline of Important Dates](#) (PBS.org)

[Latino History](#) (National Museum of American History)

[Hispanic Heritage Month Activities, History, Timeline, Ideas, Events, Facts & Quizzes](#) (Factmonster.com)

[The Latino List](#) (2011, HBO Documentary)

[“18 Major Moments In Hispanic History That All Americans Need To Know”](#) (*The Huffington Post*, September 11, 2020)

[“How Mexican Immigration to the U.S. Has Evolved”](#) (*Time*, March 15, 2015)

[Hispanic Trends](#) (Pew Research Center)

[“Central American Immigrants in the United States”](#) (Migration Policy Institute, August 15, 2019)

[“Who is Hispanic?”](#) (Pew Research Center, September 15, 2020)

ADL Curriculum Resources

[“Huddled Mass or Second Class?: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.”](#)

[“Who Was César Chávez?”](#)

3 Explore Latino Art

Have students explore Latino art and artists by visiting online galleries as well as museums in your local area that focus on or contain a collection of Latino or Hispanic art. Have students think broadly about different types of art including photography, painting, sculpture, architecture, drawing, craft/folk art as well as “street art” including graffiti and murals. Some suggested activities are:

- As a class, visit a Hispanic or Latino art museum or a museum that may be featuring Latino art during National Hispanic Heritage Month. Give students some background information prior to the museum trip and provide activities and items to look for as they are walking around the museum.
- Have students go to the museum on their own or with their family and discuss what they saw as a class after everyone has visited the museum or exhibit.
- Have students select a time period and look at Latino art over that that time period, writing a critical analysis of the art and also creating some of their own art that reflects that time period.

- Have students delve deeper into one specific artist. Some artists include: Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Jean Michel-Basquiat, Wifredo Lam, Jose Clemente Orozco and Rufino Tamayo. Students can also conduct research to discover other artists. Have the students learn about the artists' life, their motivation, their style, their message, the time period in which they were artists and then have students create some their own art in the same style as their selected artist.

Websites about Art, Artists and Museums

[Smithsonian Latino Center](#)

[Museum of Latin American Art](#)

[National Museum of Mexican Art](#)

[Our American: The Latino Presence in American Art Exhibition](#) (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

[10 Of The Best Latino Artists In The U.S.](#) (*The Huffington Post*)

["15 Influential Hispanic Americans Who Made History"](#) (Biography, September 11, 2020)

4 Watch and Discuss Films about the Latino/Hispanic Experience

Throughout the years, there have been a variety of films made about the Latino experience, some directed by Latino directors and some not. There are films to consider showing in class or assigning students to watch. You can also engage students in a discussion about what films are missing, the extent to which the films as a whole portray the Latino experience in its complexity or what additional films are needed. For reviews and information about age level appropriateness, check [Common Sense Media](#).

1980s: *Zoot Suit* (1981), *El Norte* (1983), *La Bamba* (1987), *Stand and Deliver* (1988)

1990s: *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992), *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995), *Selena* (1997)

2000s: *Girlfight* (2000), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001), *Tortilla Soup* (2001), *Frida* (2002), *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), *21 Grams* (2003), *Raising Victor Vargas* (2003), *Mad Hot Ballroom* (2005), *Walkout* (2006), *A Class Apart* (2009)

2010s: *Sin Pais/Without Country* (2010), *A Better Life* (2011), *Gun Hill Road* (2011), *The Latino List* (2011), *Mosquita y Mari* (2012), *120 Days* (2013), *El Doctor* (2013), *Latino Americans* (2013), *Tio Papi* (2013), *Cesar Chavez* (2014), *Cesar's Last Fast* (2014), *Life on the Line: Coming of Age Between Nations* (2014), *Underwater Dreams* (2014), *Coco* (2017), *Dolores* (2017), *Roma* (2018), *The Sentence* (2018), *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018)

2020s: *The Infiltrators* (2020)

Students can explore, watch and learn about Latino films in the following ways:

- Organize a Latino film festival for the school. Create a program and a schedule and show films throughout National Hispanic Heritage Month and beyond.
- For each week from September 15th–October 15th, choose a different film for all the students to watch (either in class or independently) and discuss. In addition to discussion questions particular to each film, here are some general questions you can ask about any of the films:
 - What is the point of view of the film?
 - How did the director portray the Latino/Latino-American experience?

- Are the characters complex, stereotyped or a combination?
 - What did you learn about the Latino experience from the film?
 - For its time period when the film was made, was it ahead (or behind) of its time in terms of its portrayal of Latino people?
 - How did the director develop the characters?
 - What is the director trying to show about time and place?
 - Did you like the film? Why or why not?
- Have students choose one film to focus on to learn more about the context of the film and the director. Instruct them to (1) read reviews about the film, (2) gain background knowledge about the time period portrayed, (3) research more about the director and her or his point of view and (4) write an analysis of the film with their own review.

5 Listen to Latino Music and Learn about Dance

1. Have students learn about the historical significance of dance and music developed for and by Latinos over the years including Bachata, Cha Cha Cha, Mambo, Rumba, Samba, Merengue Jazz, Tango, Latin Pop, Latin Urban Music, Reggaeton, Latin Rock and Alternative, and hip hop.
2. As a class, watch videos of Latin dance and listen to the different genres of music and ask students questions such as:
 - How did it make you feel while listening and/or watching?
 - What instruments did you hear?
 - What dance moves did you notice?
 - What is the meaning of the lyrics?
 - What other music do you think was influenced by it?
 - What do you think this music tells you about the country from which the artists come?
3. Have students work individually or in small groups to learn more about one genre of Latin music or dance in history, originating from a particular country, how it was developed and famous artists in that genre. Small group projects can include:
 - Pick a decade in history and, in addition to the dance and music of that time period, research its significance to politics and culture, the social justice context of the music and/or dance and the genre's influence on clothing styles and other aspects of popular culture.
 - Create a short documentary about one of the genres of dance or music in Latino culture.
 - In small groups, assign students a Latin dance style prominent during a certain time period or in particular countries. They can watch videos of the dance and discuss the movements as well as the similarities and differences compared to other dance styles. Students can do additional research on their assigned dance style and then perform the dance for the class.

Websites about Music

[Essential Latin Music Genres](#) (About, Inc.)

[Latin Music](#) (Pandora)

[History of Bachata, The guitar music of the Dominican Republic](#) (iASO Records, Inc.)
[History of Salsa Music & Dance](#) (Salsa Gente)

6 Learn about Different Countries from which Latino People Originate

- As a class, look at a map and identify all the countries which Latino people and their ancestors have come from to the United States. Have students work individually or in small groups to learn more about one of the following countries:
 - Argentina
 - Bolivia
 - Brazil
 - Chile
 - Colombia
 - Costa Rica
 - Cuba
 - Dominican Republic
 - Ecuador
 - El Salvador
 - Guatemala
 - Honduras
 - Mexico
 - Nicaragua
 - Panama
 - Paraguay
 - Peru
 - Puerto Rico
 - Uruguay
 - Venezuela
- As a class, first brainstorm aspects of the country that are important to look at as well as questions student may have. In small groups, have students self-select or assign them to one of the countries for them to learn more about, creating a portfolio of information about their country. Students can then present their portfolio to the class. The portfolio can include the following information:
 - Geography
 - Music
 - Political System and Structure
 - Languages
 - Climate
 - Education
 - Population
 - Healthcare
 - History
 - Entertainers
 - Cultural Traditions
 - Leisure Activities
 - Economy
 - Immigration Patterns, History and Data
- The students' research and collection of information are to culminate in one of the following projects: research paper, photographic essay, video or PowerPoint or Prezi presentation about the country with each student or group presenting what they learned.

Websites

[Latin American Countries](#) (Operation World)
[South American Facts](#) (Kids World Travel Guide.com)

7 Talk about Discrimination and Injustice

- While we do not want to focus only on issues around discrimination and injustice during National Hispanic Heritage Month, these are important aspects of the Latino experience and it is critical to address. Talk with your students about the history of injustice towards Latino/Hispanic people in the United States including [current events](#). Issues may include: labor issues and organizing; the criminalization, prosecution and deportation of undocumented immigrants; citizenship rights; the "English only" or "Official English" movement; specific issues

that disproportionately impact Latino people such as the gender wage gap, voting rights and voter disenfranchisement, health care coverage, workplace discrimination and the educational achievement gap.

2. Engage students in interactive exercises to help them learn about and distinguish between individual, institutional and internalized forms of discrimination and injustice. Develop a common language and a [vocabulary](#) for talking with students about these issues.
3. Make the connection between discrimination against Latino people and other isms and forms of discrimination such as classism, sexism, religious discrimination, homophobia, ableism, immigration discrimination, language discrimination and provide the context of the [Pyramid of Hate](#).
4. Have students share their own experiences with discrimination and be sure to help them understand the societal institutions and systems which support and reinforce discrimination. Use art, literature, film and history to explore these issues in a deeper way. Always provide information about how people worked together to fight injustice and make fundamental change. Brainstorm ways that people have engaged in [activism](#)—both past and present—to make a difference in their world.
5. Learn more about ADL’s educational programs on [Anti-Bias Education](#) and our [Curriculum Resources](#) that focus on racism and racial diversity.

Resources

Website

Pew Research Center, www.pewhispanic.org

ADL Curriculum Resources

[What is The Dream Act and Who Are the Dreamers?](#)

[Exploring Solutions to Address Racial Disparity Concerns](#)

[Voting Rights Then and Now](#)

[What is the School-to-Prison Pipeline?](#)

[Who are the Children at our Border?](#)

8 Research the Origins of National Hispanic Heritage Month

1. Have students find out how and why National Hispanic Heritage Month was created, why it takes place September 15–October 15, what the annual theme is this year and in previous years and how many Hispanic people there are living in the United States.
2. Have students find different ways to share this information with other students in the school and the community at large by writing articles, making posters, using social media or creating a website or Instagram page about it.
3. In pairs or small groups, have students do the following projects:
 - Research different points of view about the pros and cons of National Hispanic Heritage Month and similarly—themed months. Read essays with multiple perspectives and have students share their own viewpoints in writing, citing evidence and including quotes from the texts they read.
 - Design and conduct a survey with teachers in the school asking them if they intend to teach about National Hispanic Heritage Month and if so, what they plan to do.

- Find out what events and activities in their town or neighborhood will be happening to commemorate National Hispanic Heritage Month. Share this information with the rest of the school community. Create a calendar to share.
- Learn more about how many Latino people live in the United States, either state-by-state or as a whole country and conduct [research](#) on how many Latino and non-Latino people in the United States speak Spanish. Share the information in a variety of interactive ways.
- As a culminating project for the month of study, create a [word cloud](#) using the words and concepts from all the student projects. Publish this on the school's website.

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
R9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Speaking and Listening

SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SL5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Language

L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.