



Name: _____ Class: _____

Celebrating Cinco de Mayo

By Sanjana Chetia
2019

Cinco de Mayo, a well-known Mexican holiday, has become an important cultural celebration for Mexican Americans across the United States. As you read, take notes on why Cinco de Mayo is an important day for Mexican Americans.

- [1] Cinco de Mayo is one of the most well-known Mexican holidays in America, but not many Americans know what the day is about. Some people even confuse it with Mexico's Independence Day.

Cinco de Mayo is only a minor holiday in most of the country. It is celebrated mainly in the Mexican state of Puebla. But for many Mexican Americans, Cinco de Mayo has become an important celebration of cultural pride.



"twirling cinco de mayo dress" by Gail Williams is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0

Remembering History: What Happened on May 5th?

In the late 1800s, Mexico was in big trouble. The treasury¹ was nearly bankrupt after fifteen years of civil war and two years fighting the United States. The country owed money to many

European countries. The new President of Mexico — a Zapotec² man named Benito Juárez — had to halt the debt payments because there was no money to complete them.

Angry with Juárez's decision, Britain, Spain, and France sent troops to Veracruz, Mexico. They demanded the money owed to them. Luckily, President Juárez was able to reach an agreement with Britain and Spain. But Emperor Napoleon III of France refused to talk and settle the debts. He saw this as an opportunity to grow his empire. He soon sent troops to claim Mexican land for France. This forced President Juárez into a war that Mexico was not prepared for: the Franco-Mexican War.

- [5] President Juárez quickly rounded up a ragtag army of 2,000 men. They were led by Texas-born General Ignacio Zaragoza. The army moved to the small town of Puebla de Los Angeles in the Mexican state of Puebla. The soldiers secured the town and waited for the French to arrive.

1. the money a government has to spend and the people in charge of looking after it
2. people who lived in the southern part of Mexico

From dawn until dusk on May 5, 1862, the battle raged. After three unsuccessful attacks, the French were surrounded by Mexican soldiers. They attacked after the French ran out of ammunition, or bullets. The Mexican army won, and the French retreated from the battlefield with almost 500 of their soldiers killed. On the other side, fewer than 100 of the Mexican soldiers had been lost.

The Battle of Puebla was seen as a great success. It boosted the spirits of the Mexican resistance movement. Despite the challenges they faced, the Mexican troops had achieved a small but inspiring victory against a strong European power. The Franco-Mexican War finally ended in 1867 when President Juárez's forces drove the French out of Mexico.

What Does Cinco de Mayo Represent?

The Battle of Puebla is still remembered today with Cinco de Mayo. For many Mexicans, May 5th is like any other day in the year. But in the state of Puebla, Cinco de Mayo is celebrated with military parades, speeches, battle reenactments, and festivals. In the United States, Cinco de Mayo acts as a more general celebration of Mexican heritage³ and culture.

Cinco de Mayo became a major Mexican American holiday because of Chicano activists in the 1960s. They saw Cinco de Mayo as a way to encourage Mexican Americans to celebrate their heritage. They were inspired by how the Mexican soldiers overcame great odds in the Battle of Puebla. To show their pride, Chicano activists began holding small Cinco de Mayo celebrations. Over time, they grew into the large festivals held today.

How is Cinco de Mayo Celebrated Today?

- [10] Many Mexican American communities throw parties, parades, and festivals to celebrate Cinco de Mayo. Mariachi and other Mexican folk bands play music, and baile folklórico⁴ dancers often perform. These events highlight parts of Mexican culture that come from Puebla, like the colorful skirt-and-blouse style of clothing called China poblana or the spice-and-chocolate dish called mole poblano. Some of the largest Cinco de Mayo festivals are held in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston.

Over the past fifty years, Cinco de Mayo has spread from Mexican American communities across the United States. The holiday has introduced Mexican culture to a wider audience. Many students learn about the holiday in school and through public festivals. People with and without Mexican heritage look forward to Cinco de Mayo as a day to celebrate Mexican food, music, clothing, and other traditions.

The meaning of Cinco de Mayo has truly evolved over time. It started as a battle in Puebla and later became a holiday about Mexican culture. It has traveled from Puebla to the United States and beyond! No matter where you live, Cinco de Mayo stands as an important day for Mexican people around the world to connect with their communities and celebrate their heritage.



3. **Heritage (noun):** the background from which one comes
4. traditional Mexican dances that emphasize local culture

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the central idea of the text?
 - A. The Battle of Puebla successfully ended the Franco-Mexican War.
 - B. Mexico's debt during the 1800s had a negative impact on the country and its culture.
 - C. President Juárez created Cinco de Mayo and is responsible for the holiday's traditions.
 - D. Cinco de Mayo has changed over time but continues to be an important celebration of Mexican culture.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "The treasury was nearly bankrupt after fifteen years of civil war and two years fighting the United States." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Cinco de Mayo stands as an important day for Mexican people around the world." (Paragraph 8)
 - C. "Cinco de Mayo became a major Mexican American holiday because of Chicano activists in the 1960s." (Paragraph 9)
 - D. "Many students learn about the holiday in school and through public festivals." (Paragraph 10)

3. Which quotation best describes the relationship between the Battle of Puebla and modern-day celebration of Cinco de Mayo?
 - A. "The Battle of Puebla is still remembered today with Cinco de Mayo." (Paragraph 8)
 - B. "They were inspired by how the Mexican soldiers overcame great odds in the Battle of Puebla." (Paragraph 9)
 - C. "These events highlight parts of Mexican culture that come from Puebla." (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "It started as a battle in Puebla and later became a holiday about Mexican culture." (Paragraph 12)

4. How does the author support the idea that Cinco de Mayo is growing in popularity across the United States?
 - A. The author explains that Cinco de Mayo is now celebrated by people who are not from Mexican descent.
 - B. The author provides examples of how Mexican Americans currently celebrate the holiday.
 - C. The author shares a personal experience from a recent Cinco de Mayo celebration.
 - D. The author describes cultural traditions that are rooted in Puebla history.

5. What is the meaning of the word "ragtag" in paragraph 5?
- A. troubled
 - B. prepared
 - C. disorganized
 - D. independent
6. What is the author's purpose in paragraph 10?
- A. to persuade readers to celebrate cultural holidays
 - B. to highlight the different ways Cinco De Mayo is celebrated
 - C. to provide readers with an understanding of Cinco de Mayo
 - D. to argue the importance of remembering the Battle of Puebla
7. How has the popularity of Cinco de Mayo impacted the celebration of the holiday?

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. How do cultural celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo make America unique? What other cultural celebrations take place in America, and how do these celebrations teach us about other cultures and communities?
2. To celebrate Cinco de Mayo, many Mexican American communities participate in parties, parades, and festivals. How does a holiday like Cinco de Mayo impact a community? How are community celebrations like Cinco de Mayo important?
3. Have you participated in celebrations in your own community? Compare and contrast these celebrations with Cinco de Mayo celebrations.