

Mr. Dowling's study sheet on Mexico and Central America

1. Most Geographers consider Central America to be part of the North America continent.
2. Most Geographers do not consider Mexico a part of Central America.
3. The Yucatan Peninsula separates the Gulf of Mexico from the Caribbean Sea.
4. Mexico and Central America are very mountainous.
5. Most Central Americans speak Spanish. More than ninety percent of Mexicans are Roman Catholic.
6. The Rio Grande River forms most of the border between the United States and Mexico.
7. Mexico's population is growing very fast.
8. Mexico City is the world's most populated city.
9. More than half of Mexico's industrial output is produced in Mexico City.
10. Mexico City's population is growing very fast.
11. Mexico's most significant industry is oil production.
12. Only one political party has controlled Mexico since 1929.
13. The Mexican monetary unit is called a peso.
14. Guatemala has been ruled by a series of military dictatorships.
15. Guatemala is the most populated Central American nation, but Mexico has far more people.
16. Honduras is a mountainous, isolated nation.
17. Bananas is a major export in Honduras and other Central American nations.
18. The people of Nicaragua were in a bloody civil war between the communist Sandinistas and the Contras. The war ended when Violeta Chamorro was elected President.
19. Belize is the only English-speaking nation in Central America.
20. Costa Rica is a small nation that has had a democratic government for many years.
21. An isthmus is a narrow strip of land that connects two larger bodies of land.
22. Panama is an isthmus because it connects South America with Central America.
23. The United States built a canal through Panama.
24. A mestizo is a person of mixed racial ancestry. Most of the people of Mexico and Central America are mestizos.
25. A conquistador was a leader in the Spain's conquest of Mexico, Central America and Peru in the sixteenth century.
26. A caudillo is a military dictator. Many caudillos have ruled in Mexico and Central America.



The Aztecs were an advanced native population in Mexico.

- The Aztecs were also known as the Mexica. They were initially nomadic people who settled on an island in central Mexico.
- The Aztecs were skilled engineers who built aqueducts to carry fresh water to their island and dikes to separate the salty water from the fresh water.
- Bloodthirsty gods governed the lives of the Aztecs. They believed that the god of the sun and war, Huitzilopochtli (pronounced hweets y loh PAWCH tlee) could only remain strong through human sacrifice.
- The Aztecs were fierce warriors who conquered as many as 15 million people.
- Montezuma was the last of the Aztec emperors. He allowed the Spanish conquistadors into his city because he believed they were gods. The conquistadors, led by Hernán Cortés, were able to defeat Montezuma and murdered him.

The Panama Canal

The Panama Canal is an artificial water route that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The canal was considered the greatest engineering feat of the modern age when it opened in 1914, but alternative methods of transportation have lessened its importance in recent years.

The site of the Panama Canal was chosen because it is one of the narrowest passages of the isthmus connecting the North and South America. The canal actually runs north and south despite the fact that ships are traveling from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west.

The forty miles journey across the canal takes between seven and eight hours. Ships are transported through a series of locks that raise and lower water levels that allow the ships to travel. A ship enters a lock and waits as water is pumped in to allow it to rise high enough to enter the next section where the land is higher. After reaching the highest point, ships pass through locks that bring them back down to sea level.

Explorers like Columbus took to the seas hoping to find a water route to Asia, but were stopped by the American landmass. A European ship would have to circumnavigate South America to pass from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, a journey that was both time consuming and dangerous.

A French company tried to build the canal in 1881, when Panama was a part of Columbia, but was stopped by malaria and yellow fever. The company went bankrupt and work ceased in 1887. Five years later, the Colombian government refused to allow the United States to attempt to build a canal. The United States responded by supporting a rebellion in Panama. When the rebels succeeded in forming an independent Panama, America recognized the new government and signed an agreement with the Panamanian rebels that allowed America to lease the land for 99 years.

Mexico City

- Mexico City is part of the world's largest metropolitan area. The metropolitan area includes the areas surrounding Mexico City. Experts believe that more than twenty million people are crowded in the city and surrounding area.
- More than half of Mexico's industrial output is produced in Mexico City. Manufacturers include textiles, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, steel, and transportation equipment. Mexico City is the center of an emerging manufacturing belt stretching from Guadalajara to Veracruz.
- Mexico City is an educational and cultural center. More than two dozen colleges are located in the vicinity including the University of Mexico. The area's numerous museums include the National Museum of Anthropology, with unparalleled exhibits of pre-Columbian artifacts as well as the Museum of Modern Art.
- Mexico City is growing at an alarming rate. The population has more than quadrupled since 1950. The government is unable to provide adequate police, fire and sanitation service that keeps pace with the expanding population.
- About two thousand new residents enter the city every day, mostly from poor rural (or country) areas. About half of Mexico City's inhabitants live as "squatters" or illegal residents in "shantytowns" or other illegal houses.
- Air pollution is a serious problem in Mexico City. Mountains surround the city, so the polluted air is trapped. The pollution sometimes gets so bad that the government closes schools, limits driving and closes some factories until the air clears.