Although many mistake Cinco de Mayo (May 5) for Mexican Independence Day, it is in fact the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, where a poorly armed Mexican militia defeated the French army. The capital of the state of Puebla, Puebla is located 65 miles southeast of Mexico City.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain on September 16, 1810. However, the years that followed included much turmoil, including the Mexican-American War and the Mexican civil war of 1858. Mexico suffered economically and borrowed money from other countries. After Benito Juárez was reelected president of the United States of Mexico in 1861, he called for a two-year moratorium on all foreign debts with a promise to resume payments thereafter. Spain, England, and France decided to intervene to get their payments. France was particularly interested because it planned to invade Mexico and establish French rule over Mexico under Archduke Maximilian of Austria.

On December 8, 1861, the European powers landed at Veracruz, Mexico. England and Spain withdrew their support when they discovered France's plan. Led by Napoleon Bonaparte’s nephew, Leon Bonaparte, the French army advanced toward Mexico City in early April 1862. President Juárez ordered General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin to hold back the French army at the city of Puebla. On May 5, 1862, the outnumbered Mexican militia and Zacapoaxtla Indians hoped to stall the well-equipped French army to give Mexico City more time to fortify itself. Instead, they managed to win the battle.

A year later, Napoleon sent 30,000 troops to invade Mexico and installed Maximilian as its ruler. However, the victory of Puebla inspired the Mexicans to continue fighting. If they beat the French once, they could do it again. Sure enough, Maximilian was overthrown in 1867. In the meantime, Cinco de Mayo has come to symbolize Mexican nationalism.

Cinco de Mayo is a national holiday in Mexico, but it is celebrated more elaborately in the state of Puebla and the city of Puebla, where the battle took place. The battlefield is now a park with a statue of General Zaragoza Seguin. The city of Puebla celebrates Cinco de Mayo with a large patriotic parade.

Ironically, celebrations of Cinco de Mayo are more widespread and elaborate in the United States. Mexican American communities in states such as Texas, California, and Arizona celebrate with parades, fairs, mariachis, folkloric dancers, and authentic Mexican food. During the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Cinco de Mayo grew in importance as a time for Mexican Americans to celebrate their patriotism, heritage, and culture. As the festivities have grown, they have come to include all Latinos living in the United States, giving all Latinos a sense of unity and ethnic pride.
Chile peppers are a heavily used ingredient in Mexican cooking. They add flavor to traditional dishes and can be made into powder or eaten alone. Chile peppers are often hung on strings to dry. When cooking, one can just take some from the bunch hanging in the kitchen. Sometimes replicas are made out of plastic or ceramics for decoration. Try making your own out of paper.

**Supplies**
- white construction or index paper
- invisible or transparent tape
- cotton twine (12”/string)
- crayons
- safety scissors

**Instructions**
1. Copy the chile pepper pattern onto white construction or index paper.
2. Color the chile peppers.
3. Cut out each individual chile pepper.
4. Tape each chile pepper on the cotton twine lengthwise so that each hangs on the string. Tape the ends of the string to the wall as a decoration.

**Recommended Books**
*Note: The bibliography at the end of the book provides complete information for each title.*

- Alarcón, Francisco X. “Chile.” In *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risueños y Otros Poemas de Primavera*.
- Behrens, June. ¡Fiesta! Cinco de Mayo.
- Reiser, Lynn. *Tortillas and Lullabies/Tortillas y Cancioncitas*.
- Tabor, Nancy Maria Grande. *El Gusto del Mercado Mexicano/A Taste of the Mexican Market*.

**AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM**
**Chile Pepper Magnet**
As previously mentioned, chile peppers are used in many Mexican dishes. Chile peppers and the dishes in which they are cooked are not always spicy. In Mexico, it is customary to buy fruit on a stick topped with lime juice and sprinkled with dried, powdered chile. Chile candies are also very popular! These colorful magnets are fun to make and can serve as a reminder of the craft program when used.
Supplies

migajón (dough) (see the appendix for the recipe—1 batch/3 magnets)
green food coloring
fork
magnet strip

Instructions

1. Make migajón (dough).
2. Use food coloring to make it green.
3. Take a small amount of the dough and roll it so that one end is thicker than the other.
4. Curve the thin end to give the chile its shape.
5. Take a small ball of green dough to make the chile stem.
6. Place it on top of the chile and spread it out with the tip of a fork.
7. Flatten the back of the chile (to place the magnet on it), and let it dry overnight.
8. When dry, glue a magnet strip to the back of the chile.

Recommended Books

Alarcón, Francisco X. “Chile.” In Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/fitomates Risueños y Otros Poemas de Primavera.
Alarcón, Francisco X. “Family Recipe.” In Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems/Los Ángeles Andan en Bicicleta y Otros Poemas de Otoño.
Behrens, June. ¡Fiesta! Cinco de Mayo.
Lomas Garza, Carmen. “Picking Nopal Cactus/ Piscando Nopalitos.” In In My Family/En Mi Familia.
Mathew, Sally Schofer. The Sad Night.
Riehecky, Janet. Cinco de Mayo.
Soto, Gary. Big Bushy Mustache.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM
Tin Art

In ancient Mexico, the Mixtecs of Oaxaca (a Mexican state in the southern part of the country) were known as master craftsmen for their creations in gold and silver. The Aztecs too had gold and silver art and jewelry throughout their empire. After the Spanish conquest, the Spaniards stole their treasures and melted them down. Few items survived. The Spaniards forced the Indians to mine Mexico for all its precious metals and showed the Indians how to prepare the nonprecious metals previously unknown to them. Because it was then illegal for them to use precious metals, the Indians began using tin in their art. Today, tin is used in a variety of art forms. Mirrors, boxes, trays, jewelry, toys, Christmas ornaments, and much more are made out of tin and often painted with bright colors or left in its natural state.

In this adapted craft, you trace the following patterns onto small square tin sheets and display them as you wish. For instance, they can be framed with a traditional frame or with frame corners. Place a magnetic strip on the back and put them on the family refrigerator or school locker. Use a hole punch to punch a hole in them and use some decorative yarn or string to hang them. Use red, white, and green yarn for the Benito Juárez Silhouette and Mexican Flag Emblem as these are also the colors of the Mexican flag.

Benito Juárez Silhouette

Benito Juárez was born in the village of San Pablo Guelatao in 1806. When everyone in his family had died, he went to the city of Oaxaca at the age of twelve. He became a lawyer and later a judge. He was honest and stood up for the Indians. He became governor of Oaxaca in 1847 and president of Mexico in 1861. As president, he fought to give more power to the Indians and mestizos. He declared a moratorium on Mexico’s debts that resulted in France attacking Mexico. When Mexico defeated the French in the Battle of Puebla, President Juárez declared Cinco de Mayo a national holiday.

Mexican Flag Emblem

According to Aztec legend, Quetzalcoatl was a god-hero who was changed into a bird and looked like a serpent. Defeated by an evil god, he would someday return to defeat his enemies. Legend promised the Aztecs a land where they would find an eagle sitting on a cactus, holding a snake in its beak. When the Aztecs found the eagle on a rock in the middle of Lake Texcoco, they settled there, which is where Mexico City is today. That is the significance behind the emblem on Mexico’s national flag.
Mixtec Calendar Patterns

The Mixtecs lived in Oaxaca during the ninth century and spread over an extensive territory. They were an advanced culture that produced art, jewelry, and writing and studied astronomy. They created several códices, books made out of animal skin, that survived the Spanish conquest and destruction of Mesoamerican books. These books documented genealogies, daily life activities, and history. Their ideographs were so good that other peoples had the Mixtecs document their own códices. The origin of their writing is not known, and it is possible that Aztec writing is based on the Mixtec system. The Mixtecs had an exact calendar, and the designs reproduced here for making tin art are from that calendar.

Instructions

1. Make copies of the patterns.
2. Padding is needed to trace the design onto tin. Make sure there are several layers of newspaper under the tin before you trace the design so that the image shows nicely.
3. Trace the patterns on the foil with the pencil or pen.

Recommended Books

Gollub, Matthew. The Twenty-Five Mixtec Cats.
Palacios, Argentina. ¡Viva México! A Story of Benito Juárez and Cinco de Mayo.
Salinas, Bobbi. The Three Little Pigs/Los Tres Cerdos.

Supplies

precut decorator foil squares (approximately 5” × 5”) (The square sheets can be ordered in packets of one dozen squares from St. Louis Crafts, Inc.: phone, 1-314-638-0038; website, <http://www.stlouiscrafts.com>.)
pencils or medium-point pens
newspaper
Bird

Mexican Flag Emblem

Buzzard

Dog
Catrina (Posada)

Frog

Calavera

Pancho (Posada)
FAMILY PROGRAM
Oaxacan Sun

The Sun and the Moon are frequently seen throughout Mexican folk art. Perhaps this can be attributed to the Aztecs, who lived in Mexico before the Spaniards. The ancient Aztec city of Teotihuacán, about 28 miles from Mexico City, was much larger than any European city during that time, and two pyramids were dedicated to the Sun and the Moon. The Aztecs kept a very accurate calendar and had many beliefs concerning the life cycle. They watched the Sun's activity carefully and offered it human sacrifices because they believed this would keep it shining. A giant carved stone disk known as the Sun Stone hung at the Temple of Huitzilopochtli in Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec empire, where Mexico City now stands. It is believed that the face at its center represents the sun god. Found by those making a new subway system in Mexico City after having been buried when the Spaniards came, the Sun Stone is a source of cultural pride among Mexicans. Children will enjoy making and decorating suns of their own.

Supplies
migajón (dough) (see the appendix for the recipe—1 batch/sun)
pencil
yellow food coloring (if desired)
yarn (for hanging the suns)

Instructions
1. Make the migajón (dough).
2. Add yellow food coloring if desired.
3. Divide 1 batch of dough in half.
4. Use your hands to spread the dough into a circle 2” in diameter with one-half of the dough.
5. Use the other half of the dough to make slanted triangles that will form the sun’s rays.
6. Attach the triangles to the sun by wetting the wide edge of the triangle and joining the pieces with your fingers.
7. Pinch the clay to form the eyes, the nose, and the mouth.
8. Use a pencil to make a hole at the top for hanging purposes.

Optional two-day program: If you have room, provide small pieces of cardboard or ask participants to bring their own. Have the children put their names on the piece of cardboard where their sun is drying. The children can return to paint their suns on the second day of this craft program when the suns are dry.

Display ideas: Because this craft lends itself to hanging, take advantage if you have hanging space and display these suns in the library. Have a party with snacks. After the children put yarn through their completed suns, decide where to display them—and don’t forget to tell the crafters to invite their friends and family!

Recommended Books
Ehlert, Lois. *Moon Rope/Un Lazo a la Luna.*
Gollub, Matthew. *The Moon Was at a Fiesta.*
Mora, Pat. *The Night the Moon Fell.*
Rohmer, Harriet, ed. “Elly Simmons.” In *Just Like Me.*

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18 Fifth of May/Cinco de Mayo
FAMILY PROGRAM
Making Gorditas

The indigenous people of Mexico believed corn to be sacred and had special ceremonies for their corn gods. Corn is used in a variety of ways and is a main ingredient in tortillas. Tortillas are made from ground corn and look similar to pancakes. They can be fried to make crispy tacos; baked to make enchiladas; filled or covered with meat, cheese, beans, or lettuce; or buttered and eaten with a meal, as one might eat buttered bread with a meal.

Preparing a dish in the library requires a bit of extra work, both before and after. But the rewards are many—even the toughest outreach groups are often tempted by the delicious smells and the fun of creating food. Here is a recipe for making gorditas—thick tortillas filled with all sorts of ingredients.

### Supplies

- 4 cups of masa harina (masa flour, found in Latino markets and delis) to make 20 gorditas
- 3 to 4 cups of water
- 1 cup of cooked refried beans
- ½ cup of grated cheese
- ¼ head of lettuce sliced into thin pieces
- 3 medium-sized tomatoes cut into small pieces
- salsa (see chapter 7, “Everyday Crafts,” for the recipe)
- electric grill for cooking the gorditas

### Instructions

1. Prepare masa harina by following the instructions on the package or buy prepared masa (dough) from a Mexican store. The masa will be used to make the gorditas.
2. Prepare the ingredients that will be used to fill the gorditas in advance—cooked refried beans, grated cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and salsa.
3. Make sure the participating family members wash their hands.
4. Give each participant a small portion (approximately golf-ball size) of the masa.
5. Demonstrate how to place the masa ball between your hands and flatten it out by moving the ball from hand to hand until it is approximately ½" thick.
6. Place the gordita on the grill to cook until you can lift it cleanly off the grill. Turn the gordita over and repeat.
7. The gordita is ready when it is light and airy. The middle will swell.
8. Let the gordita cool off.
9. Cut an opening on the side of the gordita wide enough to stuff the gordita with its ingredients.
10. You might want to serve a traditional drink with the gorditas (see chapter 6 for a recipe for Christmas punch and chapter 7 for a recipe for Agua de Jamaica). You can make them as part of the program, in advance, or purchase them at a restaurant or Mexican store.

### Recommended Books

- Alarcón, Francisco X. “Tortilla.” In Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risueños y Otros Poemas de Primavera.
- Chavarría-Cháirez, Becky. Magda’s Tortillas/Las Tortillas de Magda.
- Johnston, Tony. “Corn.” In My Mexico/México Mío.
- Kimmel, Eric A. The Runaway Tortilla.
- Paulsen, Gary. The Tortilla Factory.

### Activities

#### Songs

“To Honor the 5th of May”
(Tune: “If You’re Happy and You Know It”)
by Ana-Elba Pavon

To honor the 5th of May, clap your hands.
To honor the 5th of May, clap your hands.
To honor the 5th of May, when Puebla said, “Go away”
To honor the 5th of May, clap your hands.

Fifth of May/Cinco de Mayo 19
To honor the 5th of May, stomp your feet,
To honor the 5th of May, stomp your feet,
To honor the 5th of May, when Puebla said,
“Go away”
To honor the 5th of May, stomp your feet.

To honor the 5th of May, shout, “¡Viva, México!”
To honor the 5th of May, shout, “¡Viva, México!”
To honor the 5th of May, when Puebla said,
“Go away”
To honor the 5th of May, shout, “¡Viva, México!”


Poems


Alarcón, Francisco X. “Cinco de Mayo.” In Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risueños y Otros Poemas de Primavera.

Alarcón, Francisco X. “From the Bellybutton of the Moon.” In From the Bellybutton of the Moon and Other Summer Poems/Del Ombligo de la Luna y Otros Poemas de Verano.
