

Spicing Up Spanish Class

Looking for a “habanero” (extremely hot) lesson to engage first-year Spanish language students in an in-depth study of Spanish-speaking countries? Read on to learn how we used 21st-century tools to get students excited about the not-so-new assignment of reporting on the people and culture of another country.

Chances are, we have all done some version of this assignment in our youth. Whether in social studies class or foreign language study, most students have gathered facts about a culture and put them together in a report accompanied by some supplemental photos or graphics.

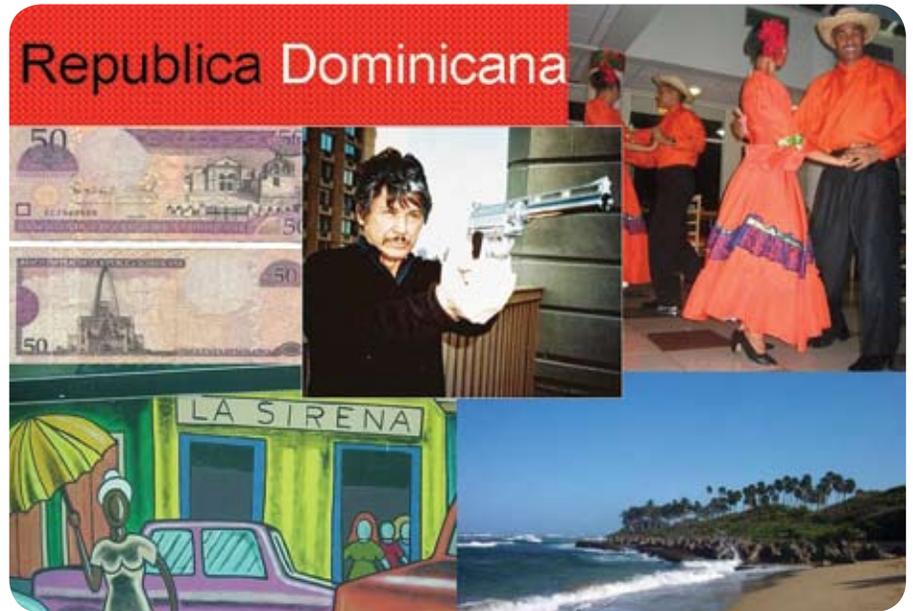
In this new take on a dusty old assignment, we used online databases, graphic organizers, e-mail, wikis, PowerPoint, and Photo Story to give a 21st-century sheen to a country report.

The Project

The project consisted of one week in the library media center gathering information and one week in the classroom synthesizing and presenting the information.

Students used books, reference sets, and encyclopedias, including a Spanish language set, to complete a graphic organizer with an overview of their country. Using the computer lab, students accessed the online databases, Culturegrams, and Grolier Online. The students developed their outlines as they found new information from each resource. We required them to cite their references using the Modern Language Association format.

We gave each student an e-mail address through the ePALs program, which offers safe and protected e-mail. The students wrote to each other in Spanish to provide two facts about



their country. Each student also found the e-mail addresses of their country’s embassy or consulate so they could request more information. The materials arrived promptly, and the students were able to use them in their presentations and to create displays in the classroom.

The students created their own wiki using the online tool PBwiki, and they integrated information from the print and online resources.

During the second week in the classroom, students had access to a mobile cart of wireless laptops checked out from the library media center. Students created one PowerPoint slide with at least five images that conveyed the subject areas from the outline form. The only writing on the slide was the name of the country. Students used these images to write scripts describing their countries in Spanish.

The students practiced their presentations with each other and the teacher. We converted each slide into a photo and imported it into Photo Story. The students described their

countries using the narration feature, so each photo was complete with an audio component.

Each student then gave a live presentation using a single PowerPoint slide and script. We taped the presentations so the students could review their performances. Then students shared their knowledge of their countries with each other through these presentations. As they practiced and presented their projects orally, their Spanish language skills improved dramatically.

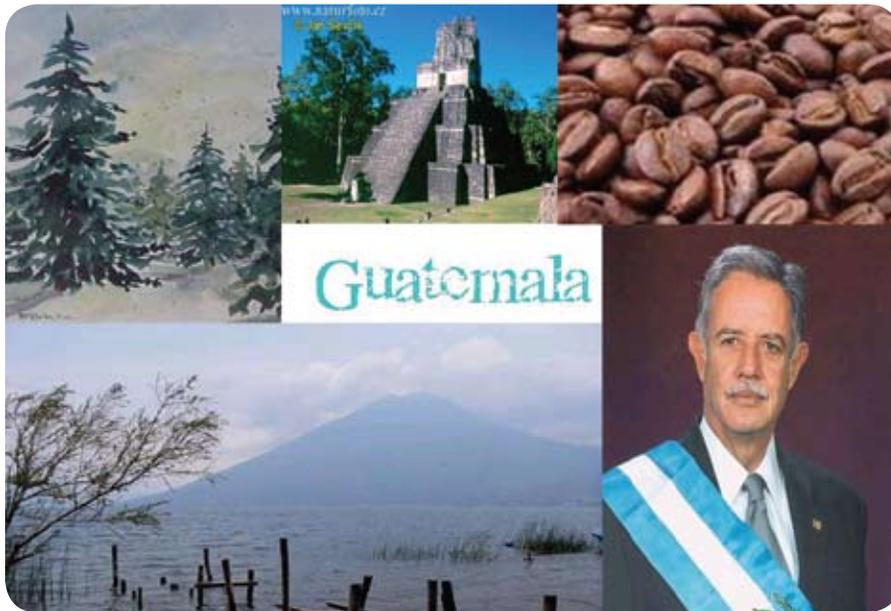
Students continued to update their wikis on a weekly basis to include current events for each country. As they developed their reading and writing skills, they began providing news in Spanish.

One homebound student was able to stay connected by using the student e-mail program, and we were able to send him examples of the other students’ presentations on DVD.

Assessment

As an evaluation of the two-week project, students devised a meter of

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Ryder McEntyre, a ninth grader at Sonoraville High School in Calhoun, Georgia, created this image (far left) about the Dominican Republic, and Meghan Twietmeyer, also a ninth grader, created the Guatemala image (left). The students used these images to write a script in Spanish to describe the countries' history, geography, economy, and art, as well as at least one notable person.

how engaged they were in each of the activities using the heat factor of peppers. They chose a range of sweet peppers to habaneros and so became familiar with an essential ingredient in Spanish and Latin American cooking. The students consistently rated their engagement as either jalapeño (very hot) or habanero (extremely hot).

We used a checklist to evaluate the presentations. We allowed students several chances to improve their final oral and visual presentations. Students used self-evaluation and peer evaluation in verbal and written form, so we had evidence of how well they understood the assignment.

We have the oral and visual presentations in a DVD format to use as examples for other classes. Photo Story allowed us to listen to and evaluate the students' oral Spanish language skills at our convenience. We also used the DVD of the final presentations to evaluate the students' oral skills as well as their knowledge of the cultures and people of their chosen countries.

We required the students to take notes while watching the final presentation. Each student selected two questions from their presentations, and the teacher combined these to create a knowledge assessment for the class.

Overall the evaluations were very positive, and we look forward to using the skills we learned with other classes.

Resources

Culturegrams: <http://online.culturegrams.com/world/index.php>
 ePals: www.epals.com
 Grolier Online: http://auth.grolier.com/login/go_login_page.html?bffs=N
 Modern Language Association: mla.org/style
 PBwiki: <http://pbwiki.com>

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2008 ISTE SIG Media Specialist Technology Innovation Award



Cawood Cornelius and Terri Vest are the high school winners of the 2008 SIGMS award. This annual ISTE award, sponsored by Linworth Publishing Inc. and Follett Software Company, is presented to two teams of a school librarian and collaborating teacher who have conducted an exemplary technology program extending beyond the library to meet the needs of classroom students and teachers. The purpose of this award is to identify, promote, and sustain excellence in collaborative and innovative technology-based projects driven by the school library media center in support of curricular and instructional needs in elementary, middle, and high schools.

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