

Faces™

VIBRANT CENTRAL AMERICA

Explore the fascinating geography, history, and culture of Central America to learn more about what makes it unique.

CONVERSATION QUESTION

What factors make Central America a unique place?

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Central America.
- Students will explain how cultural and environmental characteristics make places similar.
- Students will analyze the effects of catastrophic environmental events on human settlements.
- Students will identify the environmental, political, and geographic characteristics of a region.
- Students will give a presentation.
- Students will conduct research.
- Students will create a map.



In addition to supplemental materials focused on core Social Studies skills, this flexible teaching tool offers vocabulary-building activities, questions for discussion, and cross-curricular activities.

SELECTIONS

- **This is Central America!**
Expository Nonfiction, ~1100L
- **Me, Oh-Maya!**
Expository Nonfiction, ~900L
- **3 Countries, 1 Biosphere**
Expository Nonfiction, ~1100L

Faces® Teacher Guide: January 2021

This is Central America!

pp. 8–11, Expository Nonfiction

Discover the similarities of the seven countries that make up Central America, a region located between North and South America.



RESOURCES

- Explaining Similarities

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Central America.
- Students will explain how cultural and environmental characteristics make places similar.
- Students will give a presentation.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **geographical features** (p. 9) the natural landforms and ecosystems of a region
- **descent** (p. 11) the origin or background of a person in terms of family or nationality
- **urban** (p. 10) in, or relating to an area where a large amount of people living close together

ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What factors make Central America a unique place?

Ask students what countries make up the region known as Central America. Have them hypothesize what makes these countries similar to one another? Ask them to record their predictions and then check their ideas as they read the article.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Write the following sentences on the board. Then, ask students to decide which words from the vocabulary list should be used to complete the sentence.

- In addition to having many people with a common _____, many people in Central America live in _____ areas.
- Certain _____ are common to many of Central America's countries.
- Some _____ areas in Central America are positioned along the coastline, one of the regions' most common _____.

READ & DISCUSS

Read the article with a partner, and then use these prompts for discussion:

- In what way do Central American countries have a similar cultural heritage?
- Which Central American countries face the greatest risk of experiencing natural disasters?
- What geographic features are common across Central America?

CONCEPT/SKILL FOCUS: Explain Similarities

INSTRUCT: Explain to students that the article describes aspects of the culture, history, and geography of each of the seven countries that make up Central America. Point out that similarities do not necessarily require two countries share the same exact attributes. For example, volcanos and mountains are similar because they are both elevated landforms.

ASSESS: Have students work in pairs to complete the *Explaining Similarities* graphic organizer. Ask pairs to share the similarities they noticed among the three countries they selected. Last, have the entire class summarize some of the characteristics common to the entire region.

EXTEND

Math Have student groups choose one Central American country they want to learn more about. Ask them to use print and digital sources to research the country's culture, history, or geography. Have them select one of those focuses. Then, have them share their findings with the class by giving a short, one-minute oral presentation.

Explaining Similarities

As you read the article, select three countries. Record any cultural/historical and geographic characteristics for those countries. Last, identify any similarities between the characteristics you identified for each country and any of the other countries you selected.

Country	Cultural/Historical Characteristics	Geographic Characteristics	Similarities (identify similarity and other country)

Faces® Teacher Guide: January 2021

Me, Oh-Maya!

pp. 12–15, Expository Nonfiction

Discover why the Maya civilization, once dominating areas of Central America, suddenly and mysteriously went into a rapid state of decline.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Central America.
- Students will analyze the effects of catastrophic environmental events on human settlements.
- Students will conduct research.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **decline** (p. 15) a gradual and continue loss of strength, numbers, quality, or value
- **famine** (p. 15) an extreme scarcity of food
- **slash and burn** (p. 15) relating to a method of agriculture in which existing vegetation is cut down and burned prior to planting new seeds

ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What factors make Central America a unique place?

Ask students to think about the types of human activities that might affect the environment. Guide them to identify a few examples of human-environment interaction (including modifying landscapes) that could endanger the environment. Then, tell them that sometimes, these interactions can have unintended consequences. Ask them to hypothesize what type of interactions could cause large civilizations to enter a state of decline.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Together, review the vocabulary words and read them aloud. Then, ask students to make predictions about the topic of the text using the vocabulary words. If necessary, help students guess the topic by revealing the title of the article.

READ & DISCUSS

Read the article with a partner, and then use these prompts for discussion:

- In which regions of Central America did the Maya live during the peak of their civilization (600-900 C.E)?
- How might human-induced environmental factors have endangered the Maya?
- What were the likely effects of widespread famine on the Maya?

CONCEPT/SKILL FOCUS: Analyze Effects

INSTRUCT: Explain to students that the article presents theories that suggest there were catastrophic environmental events which impacted the Maya civilization. Tell students that they'll be identifying that event and then analyzing how it might have affected Maya settlement patterns.

ASSESS: Ask students to work in pairs to identify the environmental events described in the article that can be considered catastrophic. Then, have pairs identify the sequence of events that caused the catastrophic events, and the sequence of events that were caused by them. Last, have them analyze this theory of Maya decline to determine if there is enough evidence to support it.

EXTEND

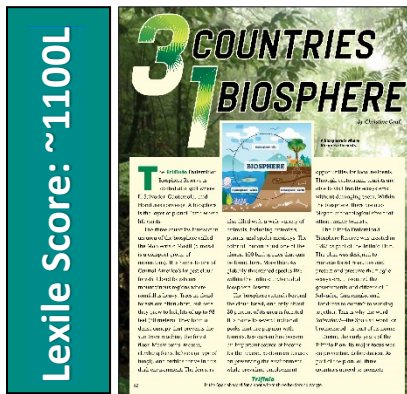
Science Invite students to use print and digital sources to research the decline of the Maya. Task them with collecting at least three pieces of evidence (e.g., information presented by an authoritative source) on the subject. Then, hold a class discussion where students share their findings with the rest of the class and determine the most likely reason why the Maya civilization went into a state of decline starting around 900 C.E.

Faces® Teacher Guide: January 2021

3 Countries, 1 Biosphere

pp. 32–33, Expository Nonfiction

Explore one of the world's most unique biospheres, located at the intersection of three Central American countries.



ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What factors make Central America a unique place?

Ask students to explain what is meant by the word *region*. Invite them to give examples. Guide them to understanding that regions are areas of the Earth that share characteristics. Inform them this is why there are many different types of regions - political regions, cultural regions, and geographic/environmental regions – which sometimes overlap. Last, inform students that they'll be learning about a region of Central America that is known around the world for its unique geography and animal and plant life.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Define each word with students. Then, arrange students in small groups and have them practice using all three words in a single sentence. Finally, tell students to look for these words as they read the story.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about Central America.
- Students will identify the environmental, political, and geographic characteristics of a region.
- Students will create a map.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **ecosystems (p. 32)** biological communities of living organisms and their physical environments
- **deforestation (p. 32)** the action of clearing a wide area of trees
- **sustainability (p. 33)** avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain ecological balance

READ & DISCUSS

Read the article with a partner, and then use these prompts for discussion:

- Where is the Trafino Fraternidad Biosphere Reserve?
- What type of geographical characteristics are present in the reserve?
- What efforts do Central Americans take to protect and nurture the reserve? Why?

CONCEPT/SKILL FOCUS: Identify Regions

INSTRUCT: Inform students that regions are areas of the Earth that share characteristics. Sometimes, these characteristics are social, while other times they are political or environmental. Explain that they'll be identifying the characteristics of the Trafino Fraternidad Biosphere Reserve, a region within Central America. Then, tell them they'll be using this information to create a map.

ASSESS: Arrange students into pairs and ask each pair to re-read the article to identify the physical boundaries, landforms, and animal and plant life that characterize the reserve. Check in with each group to ensure to ensure comprehension.

EXTEND

Science Tell students that within the article are enough details for them to draw a basic map of the Trafino Fraternidad Biosphere Reserve. Provide them with an outline map of Central America to work from. Instruct them to work with a partner to find the details relating to political and geographic features that will help them draw the reserve. Then, ask them to annotate the map with explanations of different features (e.g., landforms, animals, plants). Last, have students do a gallery walk to see other groups' maps.