



I-40 AND THE PANAMA CANAL: TIES THAT BIND TOO TIGHT

Level: high school
Course: Spanish, social studies, career development

Rationale

The Navajo Nation, believing in the sovereignty and desiring to perpetuate its isolation, must recognize the presence and power of the Latin American nations because of their size, proximity, and population. If a commonality is discovered and explored, interaction, communication and mutual understanding may take place. This in time will allow future exchange educationally, economically and at a personal level. At this time there is little knowledge of, or recognition of, any need for interaction with any Latin American nation by the Navajo Nation.

Panama and the Navajo Nation share the same situation of bring the site of a huge bisecting, transcountry, invading transportation system that affects the host site, but is separate form and administered by the U.S. government.

The Panama Canal and I-40 both:

- * dissect and create new boundaries
- * connect previously disconnected areas
- * save huge amounts of time for their users, whether countries or individuals
- * measurably affected their host lands
- * destroyed ancient cultures
- * brought invasive businesses, ways, cultures and peoples
- * have been perpetuated by the US Government

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- * have opened up new lands through exposure
- * created a basic society dependent on tourism rather than the traditional dependency on the land

This unit was designed for Navajo students, but other sites and populations that share the same characteristics will find it appropriate, such as those affected by dams, nuclear installations, and energy megasystems such as the T.V.A..

Goals and Objectives

1. Navajo students will understand how these facts (the installation of a huge transportation system in their midst by the US Government) affected similarly both nations. This goal is also appropriate for students living near other US Government installations, such as the Hoover Dam or the Aswan Dam.
2. Students will explore both the negative (new monetary system, employment drop off, US dominance) and positive affects of the transportation installation.
3. Navajo and other students will learn how Panama is facing the future after or in spite of the canal. They will examine the society's emergence into a market economy.
4. Students will become familiar with Panama, it's "current" population, indigenous people, and Latin America's relationship to the US. They will look at geography, proximity to the Navajo Nation, location and how to get there.
5. Students will become familiar with the Canal—its building, impact, size, future—and compare these issues to those associated with Interstate 40, which runs through the Navajo Nation. These include:
 - * Building: a road, canal, freeway was constructed across a host country to serve distant populations with no provisions as to it's affect on the host country. Workers were "imported" with profits going elsewhere.
 - * Impact: the countries were both dissected leaving native or indigenous peoples staring at an affluent world passed through leaving nothing behind. The boundaries created were unnatural as were new sections and alignments. Panama's disassociation with Columbia should help Navajo students realize that they are not alone in realignment disputes between the Hopi and the US Government. Student exchange may explore current boundary disputes. Problems arising from getting from one side of one's country to the other are also comparable as to cost, convenience and accessibility. For example, the goal for the Panama Canal was easy access from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, not from the cities of Panama to the forested southern areas or on to Columbia. Likewise, the goal for Interstate 40 was a limited access "speedway" from California to Chicago, not from St. Johns, Showlow or Flagstaff to Window Rock, Tuba City or Kayenta.
 - * Size: At the turn of the century, the enormity of the canal, which mechanically moves huge ocean-going vessels through non-industrialized, fishing and agrarian towns, was probably traumatic for those living along side it. Interstate 40, intersecting dirt roads and single-laned highway, stunned the Navajo Nation, which, for the most part, did not desire the presence of the 20th century.

* Future: The canal has been modernized and is being given to Panama by the US Government. However, the number of jobs have been down-sized and will continue to dwindle. The economy, which was boosted by the presence of US workers and based on US wages and standard of living, will also be affected. How will that affect the Panamanian people? Also, if another canal is constructed elsewhere that will divert revenue derived from this transportation system. In the same respect, the US freeway system was out-dated before it was even finished. Will monorails or other technology replace the highway system as we know it? And if so, how will this impact the Navajo Nation? The Navajo Nation wants to stand alone and re-emphasize ways of the past. More eyes peering in will be traumatic and painful.

6. Navajo students will explore how the host land can profit from these transportation systems imposed on them. Examples include:

- * With training, local residents can be employed in maintenance aspects
- * Tourism has flourished and can be further developed
- * Exposure of the host country to an outside world
- * Land values increase
- * New inhabitants

Methods and Resources

1. Maps and mileage charts
2. Basic reference volumes
3. Oral history conducted with I-40 workers and those affected by the road
4. World Wide Web and E-mail contact with Panamanians about:
 - * the affect of the Canal and the US Government's role compared to the role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Navajo Nation
 - * basic information from the CIA WWW site
 - * indigenous peoples
5. the Latin America Data Base (<http://ladb.unm.edu>)—research about Panama entering the world market
6. Film: crossing the Canal, make a comparative video driving across I-40, exchange video of Native American dancing. Discussion questions raising points of comparison between the Navajo Nation and Panama should be included with each of these film experiences.
7. Art: construct a model of a "lock," create a diorama of the Navajo Nation showing I-40 (Note: a new gas station opened at Navajo, AZ during 1995—it is the first Navajo-owned freeway-related business since the freeway opened 20 years ago.), make paper molas and paper Navajo rugs (or design on a computer) and have students compare the designs, colors and meanings.
8. Reading: Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck, books by Tony Hillerman, books dealing with the Panama Canal.
9. Write: stories (views of the life before and after these transportation systems were constructed), articles, culminating essays regarding the question of similarity between the cultures and situations.

Culminating Exercises

1. Share as much work with Panamanian students as possible.
2. Presentation of work in an exhibition format in the school library (this would include: molas, writings, maps, dioramas, oral history videotapes, Panamanian materials sent to us).

Career Exploration (relating to I-40)

1. tourism positions: hotel, cooking, PR, manufacturing of tourist items as a cottage industry
2. mechanic, diesel, auto
3. truck driving
4. retail worker, marketing
5. road maintenance
6. administrative jobs (few opportunities)
7. professional careers: civil engineering, surveying, geologist

Use the Internet to compare career opportunities related to these transportation systems on the Navajo Nation with those in Panama.

Conclusion

Answer the question:

If these areas do not grow and continue to experience change, will the Navajo Nation remain a non-participating host to this transportation system and be subject to the invasive eyes of passerbys?

Or, is the Navajo Nation NOT affected by Interstate 40, nor Panama by the Canal?