



MOCK ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) CONFERENCE

Grade: grades 6-12
*Course: social studies/history/
Latin America*

Rationale

This lesson plan is designed to be part of a larger unit on Latin America and the Caribbean. The unit covers geography, history, people, culture, economics and government. This mock conference would serve as the culmination of research done by students on specific nations of Latin America, with the following rationale:

- * to give meaning to their research and to give students responsibility for in-depth learning.
- * to help students develop an appreciation for the significance of multiple factors of history, geography, economics and culture on present day situations
- * to help students understand the "art of negotiating" and the limited powers of organizations like the OAS.
- * to develop an appreciation for how complex the issues are that the Americas face.
- * to give students a reason to become familiar with ways to access both current and historical information through the electronic technology of the Internet.

Lesson Overview

Students are asked to represent countries they have independently researched in a mock OAS conference. A preliminary introduction to the history, function and current status of the organization

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will be presented. As diplomats, they must come to the conference with a resolution to present to their fellow ambassadors that addresses a current issue/interest of his or her country. Resolutions are debated, committees are formed, amendments are made, and votes are taken to adopt or reject resolutions. (NOTE: Try to have someone agree to be Puerto Rico, and ultimately represent the U.S. in the OAS conference).

Time Needed

1 week of 40 minute class sessions, or, if possible, 2-3 2-hour blocks of time.

Materials and Preparation

Teacher preparation

Make copies or overhead transparency of gopher "veronica" search screen for a brief review lesson on how to select key words for a search. Prepare copies of handouts. (See step One, because it requires teacher to access a document describing the OAS.) Also, see Step Ten in order to inform students about how they will be evaluated on this project.

Student preparation

Each student should first have a familiarity, through country research, with their assigned country and with the major issues facing Latin America and the Caribbean. Just prior to the conference, students should be given assignment to make a country "desk plaque" to identify their country in the conference. Encourage use of flag, colors, 3-dimensions for stability, etc. Students could also make nametags using the title "ambassador" and their last name. Or students could be asked to learn the name of their country's actual representative to the OAS and make that their nametag.

Procedures

This is described in steps as opposed to days, since it is designed to be adaptable to different time periods.

Step One

Explain the assignment to students so that they can begin preparing their plaques and nametags, and find current news articles relating to their country's concerns. (See bibliography for possible sources of current news articles.) Prepare a handout for students that gives a description of the OAS and its role in Latin American affairs. Two good sources are: a. Duhart, J. R. "Organization of American States," *Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia*. Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc., 1993. or b) "Organization of American States", at OAS www site. The url is: <http://www.oas.org/homepage.htm>. It offers a picture symbolizing the OAS and gives a lengthy (16 page) description of the OAS that includes some of the issues the OAS has dealt with over the years, as well as an address for the headquarters. I have also included a more sophisticated description that can be edited for students to help them appreciate the types of issues the OAS has dealt with over time. A third good description of the OAS that the teacher could edit for use with students can be found at

the Internet gopher site: lanic.utexas.edu, in America Online. Have students read handout, then discuss, adding excerpts from full text for clarification. Allow some brainstorming of what issues they, as ambassadors, might bring to the OAS table.

Step Two

Handout # 2. "Writing your resolutions." (If possible, get a sample resolution from Internet. Access is <http://www.oas.org/homepage.htm>. See other citations under bibliography.)

Step Three

Students receive blank resolution forms. They are assigned to write rough drafts of their resolutions. Explain that they are to write a resolution to (a) describe the problem to be solved, (b) give a specific solution which addresses the problem, and (c) give reasons for why the solution proposed should be supported by the rest of the OAU.

Step Four

Allow students to get into small groups to read their resolutions. Allow them to critique each other, to modify their drafts. They then must prepare their final drafts. (Have extra resolution forms handy.)

Step Five

Students prepare "opening statement", which could be a paragraph that expresses their country's enthusiasm for this OAS conference. It may be sort of a flowery statement, a protest, a "welcome to esteemed colleagues". . . . Brainstorm some examples with students, asking them to come up with ideas as to how they would introduce themselves and make a political statement at the same time. (for example, Cuba may say, "Greetings, esteemed colleagues, from the sunny Republic of Cuba. Our respected president, Fidel Castro, extends his warmest regards, and his hopes that the members of this body will make this a memorable gathering that takes the economic and social interests of all American peoples to be their mandate.. .")

(NOTE: Here, students may be advised to work in collaboration with a student from one of the more advanced Spanish or French classes in order to give the opening statement in the official language!)

Step Six

Set desks or tables in a circle or square, conference style. Depending on the age of the students, you may want to assign or even have students vote for a president. Otherwise, the teacher is the president.. Students may dress the part, bring a flag or an interpreter (someone from the Spanish/French class to give their opening statement?).

Go over some ground rules before beginning. For example, everyone should address each other as "Ambassador _____". This lends dignity and seriousness to the simulation. Discuss the agenda for the conference (a synopsis of the following steps.) Give some "Robert's Rules" guidelines for parliamentary procedure, for example, point of information, point of clarification, . . .)

Formally open the (Date) meeting of the OAS. "Greetings, ambassadors. . ."

Step Six

Oral presentation of resolutions by delegates. Delegates go in order of where their country name falls in the alphabet. Each delegate introduces him/herself and makes opening statement (in native language would be great!) and then reads resolution. There is no debate allowed at this time; delegates are allowed to ask questions for information only. The President assigns each resolution a number and refers it to one of the committees identified in Handout #2.

Step Seven

Students break up into committees, organized by issue. Committee members discuss the resolution. they should remember to act as they believe their country's government would. They can suggest and vote on amendments, and mark in red pen either PASS, PASS AS AMENDED, or NO PASS. If amended, someone should be designated to rewrite or type the resolution (if the technology is available, word process it.)

Committees should also rank all their resolutions in order of importance. This is necessary, because it would take too long to debate and vote on every resolution. It also may inspire committees to combine some resolutions with creative amendments.

Step Eight

Debate and final vote by the whole body. After the committee work is done, it is time for the whole body to debate, amend and finally vote on the resolutions that received top priority from each committee.

Step Nine

Debrief. Ask students why parliamentary procedure is important to an international conference.

- * Ask what they learned about the importance of writing a well-stated resolution.
- * Ask why the issues Latin America faces are so complex. What does it take to find solutions to these problems?

Step Ten

It is important to have the students do some sort of thoughtful assessment of what they got out of the conference. This could also serve as a teacher assessment to be used for evaluation of students' performances. Possible ideas are:

1. Have students write a "newspaper" report on the conference. Include results of resolutions passed and interesting debates. You may also ask students to interview another "ambassador" and put interviews in sidebar (separate sidebox) format.

2. Evaluate students based on the following:

- * portrayal of country
- * effectiveness of written resolution
- * presentation of opening statement
- * presentation of resolution
- * participation in debate
- * participation in committee

Acknowledgements: Thomas Weber (Sandia Preparatory School), New Mexico Law Related Education Project (see bibliography).

OAS Conference Preparation: Writing Your Resolutions

Now that you are somewhat familiar with your Latin American or Caribbean country and with Latin America in general, we are almost ready to convene our Organization of American States Conference. The purpose of the conference is for ambassadors of all the Americas to meet and address issues that concern them in hopes that solutions can be cooperatively found. In order to achieve this purpose, you must write a resolution which you will read and defend at the conference.

What is a resolution? It is a written statement with two parts. The first part briefly describes the problem. The second part states one or more specific solutions to the problem. You will have to read your resolution to the other ambassadors and respond to their questions. The ambassadors will debate your resolution, and they may suggest changes and vote on it.

Resolutions should be written with one of the following topics in mind:

1. Political change.
2. The environment.
3. Population growth.
4. Economic development.
5. Cultural affairs.

Choose a topic that is of specific concern to your country as well as other American countries. You will be more likely to get your resolution passed this way.

Handout

Organization of American States Conference _____

A RESOLUTION

Sponsored by _____

WHEREAS: (state the problem, supporting each point with facts)

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE OAS: (state the solution you propose in detail)

Bibliography

Materials useful for teacher background and classroom unit on Latin America and the Caribbean:

Civics and Law: A Teacher's Resource Manual. Albuquerque: New Mexico Bar Foundation, Law Related Education Project, 1992.

This manual has good examples of how to use Robert's Rules of Order for parliamentary procedure, and for setting up debates in a classroom.

"CP/RES. 644 - The Meeting of Experts in the Area of Environmentally Sound Technologies, 1 February, 1995", at OAS world wide web site. The url is: <http://www.oas.org/>.

This site has a number of resolutions recently presented to the OAS. Find examples to show students while they are writing their resolutions.

Duhart, J.R. "Organization of American States," Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia. Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc. ,1993.

Kidron, Michael and Ronald Segal. The New State of the World Atlas. NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1991.

This is a wonderful collection of maps showing how countries compare in many areas, such as military spending, consumption of energy resources, per capita income, health, etc.

"OAS OKs New Haiti Sanctions", The Associated Press News Service. CD NewsBank, Comprehensive 1994.

NewsBank contains Online news reports. This is a good place to look and to send students for current news about their country.

"Organization of American States," OEA/Ser.G. At OAS WWW site. The url is: <http://www.oas.org/>

This site includes a description of the OAS, history of the organization, goals and core concerns, other entities, specialized organizations, and examples of issues and resolutions addressed over the years.

Barry, Tom. Roots of Rebellion. New York: South End Press, 1987.

The Interhemispheric Resource Center in Albuquerque also has a slide show with this title. Both the book and the slide show examine the underlying causes of conflict in Central America and explains how agroexport systems and agricultural reform programs leave farmers and farmworkers hungry for change. Good for grades 7-12.

Sanborn, Michelle, et. al. Teaching About World Cultures: Focus on Developing Regions, grades 7-12. Denver: Center for Teaching International Relations, 1986.

This is a smattering of lesson plans for different parts of the developing world, including Latin America.

"Special Program of OAS Cooperation with Haiti", OEA/Ser.J/II.39, 15 February, 1995. At world wide web site. The url is: <http://www.oas.org/>

Resolution approved at the fifth plenary session, held on February 15, 1995.

Additional Sources

University of Texas, Latin American Studies, URL <http://lanic.utexas.edu> will access information useful for teacher background and for student research.

Materials for students to access information about their country. This list includes reference material and sources for current news articles:

Barry, Tom and Deb Preusch. The Central America Fact Book. New York: Globe Press, 1986.

Excellent overview of historic trends and problems.

Barry, Tom and Marco Gandasegui. Inside Panama. Albuquerque: The Resource Center, 1995.

This is one book in the "Inside Series". The series takes a look at Central American countries, mid-1990's.

CIA Fact Book. URL: <http://www.research.att.com/cgi-wald/dbaccess/411>

Excellect source for demographic, geographic, economic, political information, with slight CIA bias.

Creelman, Matthew. "Foreign Aid Floods Into Haiti," *Chronicle*, 4/20/95. Use either country name or OAS in search - or both. URL: <http://ladb.unm.edu>

Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia. Grolier Electronic Media, Inc., 1994.

The World Almanac and Book of Facts: 1995. New Jersey: Funk & Wagnalls, 1994.

Students can also use www sites and gopher sites, using a search with the name of their country. One good site is accessed through url at: http://www.yahoo.com/regional_information/countries/.