**LESSON 6: LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE**

**DAILY LIFE**

*Latin America thrives on its culture. Its art, literature, dance, and music are unique to the region and known around the world. Even some of its religions are found only in Latin America.*

Religion has long played an important role in Latin American cultures. During colonial times, most Latin Americans became Christians, and Christianity still has the most followers. Roman Catholics form the largest Christian group, but in recent years, Protestant missionaries have converted, or changed, many people to their forms of Christianity.

Other faiths include traditional Native American and African religions. These often mix with Christianity and other faiths. Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, brought by Asian immigrants, are practiced in the Caribbean and along the coasts of South America. Judaism has followers in the largest Latin American cities.

**Music and Dance**

Latin Americans have a love of music and dance. Latin American music is a blend of European and African rhythms. Caribbean music, such as salsa and merengue, are styles of music based on African rhythms. In Argentina, the tango has its roots in European rhythms and dance. In Brazil, samba, American jazz, and classical music combine to form the bossa nova music.

**Family**

For most people in Latin America, family is the most important part of their lives. Often several generations live together, and adults are expected to care for their parents. Adult brothers and sisters often live near each other, and their children—who are cousins—can be very close.

**RECREATION AND CELEBRATIONS**

Sports fans in Latin America enjoy a variety of ball games. Soccer is popular throughout the region, and Brazil and Argentina have produced outstanding players and world championship teams. Cuba was the world’s second country—after the United States—to play baseball.

Baseball has taken hold throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America. Several countries have their own baseball leagues, and many players have left to play for teams in the United States. The British sport of cricket is a favorite sport in Caribbean areas once ruled by the British.

**Holidays**

Some holidays are celebrated throughout the Americas, such as Christopher Columbus Day. In English-speaking countries, the day is celebrated as Columbus Day or Native American Day. In Spanish-speaking countries, the day is known as Día de la Raza, the Day of the Race. It is celebrated on October 12 in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Many countries hold a large festival each spring called **carnival**. It takes place on the last day before the Christian holy period called Lent. The celebration is marked by huge parades. The carnival held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is the largest and is known around the world for its color and excitement.

In many Latin American countries, people celebrate the Day of the Dead. It is a day to honor family members who have died. Latin Americans believe that death is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new stage of life.

**Citizenship**

**Be A Leader**

Some holidays in Latin America celebrate leaders such as Ecuador’s Simón Bolívar Day on July 24th. Leaders are able to identify problems and find solutions. Consider being a leader in your community or school. Find others to help solve a problem and make sure everyone has a chance to contribute.

**THE ARTS**

It is easy to see how Latin American art has been affected by rich history and a mix of many ethnic groups. During the 1930s, Mexican artist Diego Rivera painted **mural**s, or large paintings that are painted on walls. They recalled the artistic traditions of the ancient Maya and Aztec.

Many works of Rivera and other Latin American artists focused on the region’s history and political issues. In Latin America, many writers, such as Pablo Neruda, have used their work to address social divisions and political conflicts in their countries.

**International Influences**

Latin American artists have inspired artists in other parts of the world. The music of Cuba and Brazil has strongly influenced American jazz. Writers around the world have used a Latin American style of writing called magic realism that combines fantastic events with the ordinary.

**Primary Sources**

My ambition as a writer, if there is an ambition, is to write about all the things that I see, that I touch, that I know, that I love, or that I hate.

**An interview with Pablo Neruda by Radio Canada, 1971**