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Querétaro, Mexico  
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**Reflection**

*Out of all the photos you take during the four weeks in Mexico, compile a small series/collection of photos and incorporate a reflection. and provide the potential readers of the essay with some insight/background information on each photo. Where was it taken? Who or what was involved? Why did you decide to capture that particular moment? How did that moment impact you in some way? After reflecting on each individual photo, think about the collection as a whole and how it demonstrates the knowledge you've gained from your experience in Mexico.*



Some mornings, we went to the frutería, or local market, to pick up some fruit. Fruterías are different than grocery stores. They are usually small stores in each town that sell fresh fruit and vegetables. I went with my host mom to pick out some fruits and vegetables for the dinner we were making. Everything was so vibrant and fresh. Aside from the people working at the register, there was a woman skinning nopal, a type of cactus. She used a sharp knife to shave off each spine on the piece of cactus. She made it look easy, although I could tell it was no easy job. I really like the idea of fresh markets and I wish we had more in my community. When food is cooked using fresh ingredients, like in Mexico, the taste is very different. Even though it was just another trip to the frutería for my family, I enjoyed looking around at the choices of fruits and vegetables and experiencing this part of their lifestyle.



This picture was taken in the center of Querétaro at Mercado de la Cruz. Dorrilene Wilke, Amber's host mom, took us to see the city. We walked around in the plazas and learned more about the city. The streets in El centro are lined with quaint stores and bars. There are neverías, or ice cream, shops everywhere. Music is audible from each restaurant and hotel. I really enjoyed the atmosphere of El centro and came back several more times throughout the trip.



One weekend we were lucky enough to go to a beach about five hours away. The Wilke family took Amber and I to Playa Majahua in Guerrero. Although I did not take this picture, I think it really captures an important scene from the trip. The photo is of Dorrilene, and her son, Teun, walking along the shore. Their family firmly believes in always showing their feelings for each other. They are all so supportive of one another. This picture speaks for the mother-son relationship and the bond they share. By looking at this photo, I am reminded of the importance spending time with everyone we love and appreciating the people in our lives.



This picture was taken at JFK earlier on in the trip. I was with my first cooperating teacher, Camille, who teaches seventh grade geography. She was the best teacher I observed at the school, and she taught me many skills that I know I will be able to apply to my future classroom. This picture allows me to reflect on the people I have met and relationships I have formed. I know these are people I will keep in touch with for a long time, and hopefully come back and visit once in awhile.



One of my favorite activities I observed in Camille's class was the dice game. The game was based off an article about overpopulation read by students. Depending on the number rolled, they formulated a question, using the different levels of questions from Bloom's Taxonomy. This game forced them to process and comprehend the information they read in each section. Usually students tend to skim and rush through readings, however, her students were very engaged throughout the whole activity. Through this picture, I hoped to capture their attentiveness as well as the creativity of the game.





This picture was taken on the world's third largest rock, Peña de Bernal. My host family took Amber and I to climb the rock and see the nearby area. Even though it was a cloudy and cool morning, the climb was still tiring. We climbed up as far as we could and stepped out a little farther on a ledge. We attempted to do some yoga poses on the rock. I had to remove my shoes because of the uneven footing. I chose to start with tree pose and I became worried about the lack of balance. There was nothing to hold onto in case I needed to steady myself. Typically when I practice yoga, I take my gaze to a spot on the ground, or wall in front of me. This point is called a drishti. Usually, it is easy to focus my attention on one specific area, however, it was very difficult to find a drishti because of the openness out in front of me. I finally completed the pose and held it for as long as I could. It took a lot of effort to concentrate and focus on letting go. This moment symbolizes remaining grounded despite the rocky path encountered along the way. Learning to be a more grounded and less reactive individual are just a few of the important skills yoga has taught me that can be applied to daily life, and are skills I was also able to apply in Mexico.



This is one of my favorite pictures from the trip. My family spent a weekend in San Miguel de Allende, a city in a neighboring state. We stayed at a friend's second home, which was in a very nice, private neighborhood. Each night, I went outside to watch the sunset. A little before 8:00 p.m. I walked down by the pool area, where there was nothing blocking the skyline. Sunsets to me represent peace and finding beauty in impermanence. To me, this photo represents comfort and appreciating nature. Whenever I travel, I naturally seek to find beautiful places in nature, something I can say I did numerous times in Mexico.



Towards the end of my time at JFK, I was able to teach bell work, or the opening grammar exercise, to Laura's eighth grade literature classes in Spanish. This is where the picture was taken. Laura gave me a couple options of lessons that I could prepare, and I decided to create a worksheet about accents and classifying different types of words—agudas, graves, and

esdrújulas. I was nervous at first when Laura asked me about this topic because I had never heard of these classifications before. However, it turns out that in the process of preparing the lesson, I was learning the material we would be covering in class. Each class period I was able to improve upon my teaching style and change my techniques depending on how the students reacted and participated. This was the first time I had ever taught a class independently. At the end of the day, I felt very accomplished and satisfied with how I managed the classroom and conducted the lesson.



We spent our last weekend of the trip in Mexico City. There, we were able to visit the National Museum of Anthropology and the Frida Kahlo museum. We also went to Xochimilco and took a boat ride down the river through the Floating Gardens. I really enjoyed seeing the Frida Kahlo Museum. There was so much history within the walls of the artist's home. For years I have studied about her in school, but to actually visit her house and learn more about her was so interesting. I loved being able to see her artwork and tour her home. There was so much to see in Mexico City, but I felt we accomplished a lot within the couple days we had been there.



The last photo I chose is a picture of my family. It was taken towards the end of my trip. We were at a birthday brunch for family friends, and enjoyed a delicious meal outside. It took us about fifteen tries to get a decent photo with everyone smiling and looking in the right direction, but we finally were able to capture everyone smiling. From the first day I arrived, this family made me feel welcome and like I was a part of their family. I learned something new from them each day. They also went out of their way to accommodate me and help me make the most of my stay. This picture represents the special bond I share with my family. I know I have a place I can call home in Mexico, thanks to the people I have met.

### **Responsiveness**

***Describe 1-2 issues of social justice that you experienced or witnessed while in Mexico. How were these issues approached in Mexico? What would you have done (differently) in this situation? How would this issue of social justice be approached in the United States?***

While in Mexico I experienced and witnessed several issues of social justice. Some were more intense and thought-provoking than others. Nonetheless, I was able to reflect on each issue and compare it to what I experience living in the United States.

As I lived with my host family for several weeks, I grew accustomed to their routines and other tendencies as individuals. However, there were some aspects of their lifestyle that I still had not grown accustomed to entirely. For example, my host family has two young girls, about seventeen or eighteen years old that work for them. The girls, or “muchachas,” live upstairs above the garage. Their work around the house seemed endless. I found them in the kitchen preparing breakfast as early as six o’clock in the morning and finishing up with cleaning for the day around nine or ten o’clock at night. While we were gone at school during the day, my host mom assigned them a long list of chores. Because there was so much to cover and get done, the girls often made mistakes or simply forgot to complete a task. When a task was not completed correctly, my host mom was quick to catch their mistake and yell at the girls. This was frustrating for me because it seemed like more often than not, the girls were being scolded, rather than being shown any sign of appreciation or gratitude.

My host family’s different lifestyle was a bit uncomfortable for me at times. I was raised to take initiative and always help out around the house, so it was challenging for me to not have to lift a finger. For example, during our main meal after school, the girls made sure everyone had what they needed. Oftentimes, something as simple as a knife would be missing from the table. Immediately, my host mom would ask them to hand her the utensil. When her phone rang, the girls instantly handed it right to her. Sometimes I thought to myself that it would just be more



efficient if my host mom did these things on her own, rather than waiting for the girls to do everything. Also, after preparing and serving each meal, they cleared away all the plates from the table. Every morning, they made sure the kids' bags—and my bag—were packed for school. Their roles extended much beyond just cleaning and food preparation, sometimes taking on the role of the mother.

Over time, I learned more about their backgrounds from my host family. Apparently, they both come from the same far-away village, and they come from very poor families. They have limited access to simple resources that we take for granted, such as food, doctors, education, etc. On the other hand, the children in this community, Juriquilla, have it all. They have access to modern and spacious homes with the newest technology, fancy cars, and the latest in brand name fashion. As for education, they attend one of the top schools in the state, if not the entire country. It is clear the families care a lot about their reputation and what others think of them.

I have realized that this is what it is like for a typical family living in the area. To me, the treatment of the muchachas was frustrating. But to a family there, that is all the know. Personally, I think it should only be acceptable to have a cleaning lady or babysitter to work at a family's home, like we have in the United States, because mixing the two roles can be a risky combination.

Although my family might not have always acknowledged all the hard work done by the girls, I did my best to say thank you and let them know I appreciated what they did. I believe it is important to always have good manners and show our gratitude for all that people do, despite our socioeconomic class.

### **Resourcefulness**

*Share a method or lesson that you observed in Mexico that you would like to bring back and use as a teaching tool. Describe how this technique or lesson is culturally relevant. How can what you learned in Mexico be implemented in the classroom to make students feel more understood or comfortable for those who are of varying cultures?*

For most of my time at the JFK American School, I observed a seventh grade geography class. The teacher, Camille, is one of the best at the school. She consistently incorporates new and creative teaching methods into the curriculum. One of the activities I observed and helped with was a dice game. The game was based off of an article about overpopulation read by students. They worked in pairs and began by choosing six checkpoints in the article. This is where they paused in their reading to better understand each section. From there, they rolled the dice. Depending on the number rolled, they formulated a question using the different levels of questions from Bloom's Taxonomy. Each side of the dice represented a different level question. According to Camille, the students do not typically enjoy reading articles, but for some reason, this activity gets them excited about learning. It also forces the students to process and comprehend the information they read in each section. This technique is culturally relevant because it can be used in any class, in any language, for a variety of ages. Regardless, the game guides students through their readings, forcing them to pay attention to what they read.

I can definitely see myself implementing this activity into my future classroom curriculum. This could be applied to a high school Spanish class when reading articles or short stories. I also think this activity could be useful when teaching students about different verbal tenses, or other grammar topics, such as ser vs. estar, or por vs. para. For example, I could give them a worksheet with a short reading, and have them identify and highlight places where they see each different grammar clause or verb tense. The activity appeals to multiple learning styles, so it is guaranteed to compliment a variety of students. This is just one of the many skills I learned while I observed and taught at JFK.