

The Tropical North

Lesson 3: Life in the Tropical North

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What makes a culture unique?

Terms to Know

Creole a group of languages developed by enslaved people that is a mixture of French, Spanish, and African

tariff tax on imported goods

What Do You Know?

In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After this lesson, complete the last column.

Now...		Later...
	What ethnic groups live in the Tropical North?	
	Where do most of the people of the Tropical North live?	
	What is the Tropical North's culture like?	
	What are some of the challenges that the countries of the Tropical North face?	



Defining

1. What is the definition of *mestizo*?

People and Places

Guiding Question *What ethnic groups populate the Tropical North, and where do they live?*

Ecuador has the largest indigenous population of any country in the Tropical North. One quarter of the population is Native American. Mestizos are a mixture of white and Native American. Counting mestizos, 90 percent of Ecuadorans have some Native American ancestry.

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In Venezuela and Colombia, 20 percent of the populations are white. Only 1 to 2 percent are Native American. Two-thirds of Colombians and Venezuelans are mestizos. The African populations of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia are small. However, 15 percent of Columbians have mixed African and European ancestry.

Descendants of laborers from India are Suriname’s largest group. They make up nearly 40 percent of the population. An equal number of people are of African and mixed-African descent. There is a large Indonesian population. Whites and Native Americans total less than 5 percent of the population.

Native Americans make up almost 10 percent of Guyana’s population. A third of the population is African. East Indians account for more than 40 percent. There is no significant white population. About one out of six Guyanese is of mixed ancestry.

People of mixed race make up most of French Guiana’s population. There are small groups of French, Native Americans, Chinese, East Indians, Laotians, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Haitians, and Africans.

Most people in the Tropical North live in cities. Bogotá, Colombia, is home to almost 5 million people. About 20 percent of Colombia’s people live in the Caribbean lowlands. The Pacific coast is sparsely settled.

Most of Ecuador’s Native Americans live in or around Quito. Most other Ecuadorans live along the coast. Venezuelans began moving to cities in the mid-1900s. More than 90 percent of the country’s people live in Caracas and other cities along the coast.

Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana are sparsely populated. Nearly everyone lives along the coast. Suriname’s capital is home to more than half of the country’s population. Most Guyanese live in small farm towns on the coast.

People and Cultures

Guiding Question *What is the Tropical North’s culture like?*

Languages in Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana reflect their colonial heritage and ethnic populations. **Creole** is widely spoken. It is a group of languages that enslaved Africans developed to help them communicate. Most people in Guyana speak English. In Suriname, the official language is Dutch. However, it is spoken only as a second language. Native American languages, Hindi, and other South Asian languages are heard in both countries.



Analyzing

2. Why is the Tropical North home to so many ethnic groups?



Marking the Text

3. Read the text on the left. Highlight the names of major cities in the Tropical North.



Reading Progress Check

4. Where do the greatest number of people in the Tropical North live?



Marking the Text

5. Read the text on the left. Highlight the definition of the word *Creole*.

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Marking the Text

6. In the text, highlight the names of languages that are spoken in the countries of the Tropical North.



Describing

7. How do Native American cultures continue to influence the Tropical North?



Reading Progress Check

8. What language and religion are most common in the Tropical North?



Defining

9. How would ending *tariffs* between UNASUR's member nations help their economies?

Spanish is the official language of Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. Native American languages have created regional differences in Ecuadoran Spanish. Colombians, however, have preserved the purity of the Spanish language.

The religions of the Tropical North are equally diverse. Native Americans practice indigenous religions in all countries. However, most people practice religions reflecting the ethnic variety and colonial heritage of the region.

Ecuador	90% Roman Catholic
Venezuela	90% Roman Catholic
Colombia	90% Roman Catholic
Suriname	equal numbers Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Muslim
Guyana	Protestant, Hindu, with Catholic and Muslim minorities

Each country's foods, music, and other cultural elements reflect its ethnic and religious makeup. Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador celebrate Carnival. However, the festivities are not as colorful as those of Brazil. Many Andes communities celebrate regional religious festivals.

Culture often differs by geographic area. Native Americans in mountain regions weave baskets and cloth. They play Andean music using traditional instruments. A dance called the *cumbia* blends Spanish and African heritage. It is popular along the coast of Colombia and Venezuela. Other Venezuelan coastal music shows Caribbean island influences. Maracas and guitars make the music of the Llano.

Ongoing Issues

Guiding Question *What challenges do the countries of the Tropical North face?*

Many people in the Tropical North are poor. The region's natural resources have mostly benefited a wealthy few. This has led to tensions within and between countries.

Many South American leaders believe that trade will strengthen their countries' economies. In 2008 the countries of South America joined to form the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). UNASUR has several goals, including ending **tariffs**, or taxes on imported goods, between member nations. It also would like to see the region adopt a single currency similar to the euro.

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Another challenge is improving the region’s relationship with the United States. The relationship has been rocky in the past. The United States and the Colombian government are working together to stop the flow of illegal drugs.

In 1998 Venezuelans elected Hugo Chávez as president. He has often criticized the United States. He has become friendly with anti-U.S. governments in Cuba and Iran. He promised to use Venezuela’s oil income to improve conditions for the country’s poor. In 2009 he seized control of U.S. oil companies operating in Venezuela. His rule has split Venezuela into opposing groups. Working class Venezuelans support his policies. But middle-class and wealthy Venezuelans oppose him.

The government of Colombia has had a long and bitter struggle with FARC. That is short for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. FARC wants to decrease foreign influence in Colombia. It also wants to help the nation’s poor farmers.

In Ecuador, indigenous people protested for rights. When the president did not help them, they organized to win rights. They want access to land, basic services, and political representation.



Marking the Text

- 10.** Underline text that describes how the United States is working with a nation of the Tropical North.



Reading Progress Check

- 11.** How has Hugo Chávez raised tensions between Venezuela and the United States?

Writing

Check for Understanding

- 1. Informative/Explanatory** Why are there Hindu and Muslim populations living in northern South America?

- 2. Informative/Explanatory** How and why is UNASUR likely to affect the economies and people of the Tropical North’s countries?
