

¿How Much Do You Know about Cinco de Mayo?

Quiz, text and illustrations by Bryce Hedstrom

1. What is celebrated on Cinco de Mayo?

- a. The Independence of México
- b. The anniversary of the first *Star Wars* movie
- c. The battle of Puebla
- d. The first Corona beer factory

2. When is Independence Day in Mexico?

- a. July 4th
- b. September 16th
- c. May 5th
- d. November 2nd

3. Who did the Mexicans beat on May 5th in 1862?

- a. The French
- b. The invading troops of the United States
- c. Russia
- d. The English, Germans and the Spanish

4. Why did the French invade Mexico in 1862?

- a. Because of the healthy climate of Mexico
- b. Because of Mexican debts
- c. Because they considered tamales and enchiladas an insult to French cuisine
- d. Because Benito Juárez adored emperor Napoleon III of France

5. Who did the French want to install as emperor of Mexico?

- a. Fat Boy Slim
- b. Pancho Villa
- c. Benito Juárez
- d. Maximilian of Austria

6. Which Mexican president directed the fight against the French?

- a. Benito Juárez
- b. Enrique Peña Nieto
- c. Carlos Salinas de Gortari
- d. Bill Clinton

7. What happened after the Battle of Puebla?

- a. The French left Mexico forever.
- b. The French went to the beaches of the Yucatan... where they remain to this day.
- c. The French troops regrouped and conquered Mexico again in the year 1864.
- d. They no longer permit French food in Mexico.



What are three reasons that there are big celebrations of Cinco de Mayo in the United States?

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

The Story of **CINCO DE MAYO**

A short explanation in **novice level English** of why **El Cinco de Mayo** is celebrated in the USA.
Translated from the book **Conexiones**, by Bryce Hedstrom, available on brycehedstrom.com

In general, the celebration of Cinco de Mayo is bigger in the United States than it is in Mexico. How weird! Right? Why would that be? Why would there be a Mexican celebration in the U.S.A.? And why would it be so popular?

A Celebration of Independence?

Many people believe that the celebration of Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of the independence of Mexico, but it isn't. Mexican Independence Day is September sixteenth. On the fifth of May, people celebrate the Battle of Puebla. In the Battle of Puebla, Mexico won against the French. The date of this famous battle was the fifth of May of eighteen sixty-two (1862).

The Story of Cinco de Mayo:

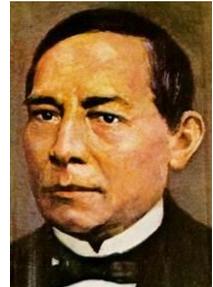
Between the years eighteen forty-eight (1848) and eighteen forty-nine (1849), there was a war between the United States and Mexico. That war was called the Mexican-American War. Wars can cost a lot. A country needs a lot of money in order to have a war, especially a new country. And Mexico was a very young country. Mexico was only twenty-seven years old, because it had won its Independence from Spain in eighteen twenty-one (1821).

Since it was so young, Mexico did not have much money. And after the war against the United States, Mexico also had many debts. Mexico owed money to the United States, Spain, England, Germany and France. But Mexico didn't have enough money, and it couldn't pay its debts. Mexico repaid the money to the United States, but it couldn't repay the European countries yet.

*The president of Mexico was called **Benito Juárez**. Juárez was an indigenous Zapotec, and was the first president of Mexico. Benito Juárez wanted Mexico to pay all of its debts, but he couldn't pay them very quickly. Mexico needed more time to pay, so Juárez decided to wait.*



*Juárez decided that Mexico was going to pay when his country had more money. He told his plan to the leaders of Europe. But they didn't like his plan, especially the emperor of France. The emperor of France was called **Napoleon III**. He was not the famous **Napoleon Bonaparte**. He was his nephew. Napoleon III didn't like Juárez's plan. He wanted his money, and he wanted it right away.*



So, Napoleon III sent his army to Mexico to get the money. In reality, Napoleon III wanted to get more than his money, he wanted to gain control of the entire country, and he wanted to install his friend, Maximilian of Austria, as emperor of Mexico. Napoleon III knew that the United States couldn't help Mexico due to the Civil War in the United States. The United States was Mexico's friend, but they didn't have the money or the troops to send to Mexico.

The French went to the country of Mexico and were marching toward Mexico City. They passed by the city of Puebla, which was only some eighty miles south of the capital. But the French could not imagine what was going to happen. The French Army was very good. It was one of the best armies in the world at that time. The French soldiers were very good. They had a lot of experience, and they also had the best weapons in the world.

The Mexican soldiers were very different. They had old weapons and they didn't have much experience. In fact, the Mexican army was using old weapons that it had bought from Napoleon Bonaparte, the uncle of Napoleon III. The Mexicans beat the French using the old weapons of the French emperor's uncle! How ironic!

How ironic! The Mexicans won against the French using old weapons they had bought from the French emperor's uncle: Napoleon Bonaparte.



Legend has it that one positive result of the short French occupation of Mexico was the rapid development of Mariachi music. While the French ruled, groups of musicians would roam the plazas looking for work. The word Mariachi comes from the French word "mariage" which the performers would shout out looking to play at weddings. The French left, but the urban musical style combining European waltzes and polkas, stayed.

On May fifth, in the year eighteen sixty-two (1862), the Mexicans fought against the French near the city of Puebla. The Mexican soldiers fought valiantly for their new country. The rain helped them, and also a stampede of five thousand cattle helped them, but in reality, the Mexicans won because they fought hard. They loved their country. Yes! The Mexicans won! Nobody believed that Mexico was going to do this. Nobody believed that a Latin American army could win against a European army. But Mexico did it!

But the victory in Puebla was not a total victory. The French regrouped and reconquered Mexico two years later, in the year eighteen sixty-four. But France could not maintain control of the country for very long. Within a few years, the Mexicans had reconquered their country again. The victory at the Battle of Puebla encouraged them to continue the fight.

The Celebration of Cinco de Mayo today in Mexico

It may seem strange, but Cinco de Mayo is not celebrated in many parts of Mexico. There is a big celebration in just one part of the country. In the city of Puebla, where the battle took place, there are many celebrations, but in the rest of the country there are not. To celebrate the Cinco de Mayo nowadays, the people go to the **zócalo**, the main town square. The **mariachis** play guitars and sing **ranchera** songs about the battle. Everyone eats tacos, drinks soft drinks, dances and sings. Some people have their faces painted. It's similar to celebrations in the USA, isn't it?

Some families stay in their houses. The grandmothers cook **mole** (a spicy sauce for chicken), **tostadas**, **tortillas** and **tamales**. Almost all of the people put the Mexican flag in front of their houses.

Normally there is a military parade. The soldiers march, the tanks pass by, the airplanes fly, the bands play and all the people watch and applaud. Sometimes there is a recreation of the battle. At night, there are fireworks in the plazas. The people watch them and have a lot of fun. Everyone yells, "**¡Viva México!**" (Long live Mexico!)

Why Are There Cinco de Mayo Celebrations in the United States?

Celebrating Cinco de Mayo is popular in the United States. But why? Here are four reasons:

1) The Result of the Civil War Could Have Been Different

Mexico helped the United States by winning the Battle of Puebla. It possibly changed the results of Civil War. If Mexico had not caused problems for the French, France probably would have helped the Southern States. With Mexico as a base, France would have had routes to the south of the United States. The extra help from France could have changed the results of the Civil War.



2) There is a Long History of Celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

After the Civil War, many people in the USA recognized the help of Mexico and its connection with winning the war between the states. Between the years eighteen seventy (1870) and (1900) nineteen hundred (1900) there were many celebrations for Cinco de Mayo in the western states of the US (like Texas, New Mexico and California) with people wearing uniforms of Union soldiers. There are historical connections between the United States and Mexico, and the celebration of Cinco de Mayo is a representation of this.

3) There Are Many that Want to Remember and Celebrate Mexico.

Today there are many people that have forgotten this history. The majority think the Cinco de Mayo is simply a celebration to honor Mexico. And it is. It is obvious that there are many Mexicans in the USA. They want to remember Mexico, and that's why they make a great celebration of it. But in the celebration of Cinco de Mayo, many people that are not Mexicans celebrate too. It is similar to Saint Patrick's Day when many that are not from Ireland celebrate the day with the Irish.

4) It Is a Reason to Celebrate the Underdogs

Another reason to celebrate the Battle of Puebla is because the underdogs won. It is possible that this idea may give encouragement to the poor that normally cannot win. It gives them encouragement because sometimes the underdogs can indeed win, like the Mexicans won in the Battle of Puebla on May fifth, so many years ago.

The end.

Selected Sources:

<http://www.theespresso.com/2012/05/cinco-de-mayo-the-greatest-us-civil-war-victory-in-mexican-history/> "The French also had a long-term plan to demolish US power by siding with the Confederacy when the time was right — after the French got a strong foothold in Mexico."
<http://www.texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org/wortham/4345.htm> "It was feared by the Federal government that France might join forces with the Confederacy and thus complicate the war."
<http://www.civilwarhome.com/europeandcivilwar.html> "Napoleon III would probably have given the Confederacy, from that base, more active support."