

## Who celebrates Cinco de Mayo and why?

Cinco de Mayo is Spanish for "Fifth of May." This regional holiday commemorates the Mexican's army victory over the French during the *Battle of Puebla*, which took place on May 5, 1862.



The *Battle of Puebla* was a very important battle for several reasons. For one, the French outnumbered the Mexicans. There were approximately 4,500 Mexican militia, while there were more than 6,000 French soldiers. The French soldiers were also better equipped than the Mexican army, and had not lost a battle for almost fifty years.

In the year 1862, Mexico was experiencing a fairly tumultuous period in time. Mexico had only gained independence from Spain in the year 1821, and there were a number of different wars that contributed to a failing economy, including the Mexican Civil War of 1858 and the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

During this time, Mexico had accumulated a lot of debt. One of the countries that Mexico owed money to was France. France was unhappy that Mexico had not paid back their money, and they invaded the Mexican country. It was at this time that the Mexicans defeated the French army, stopping the invasion of the country.

However, for the Mexicans, the victory did not last long. The French returned a year later with 30,000 troops and took over Mexico City. Their rule was short (from 1864 until 1867), and with help from the

US, the French were eventually expelled. The US had just put an end to their own civil war, which allowed them to now help Mexico.

Cinco de Mayo is a holiday that celebrates the bravery that the Mexicans showed during the Battle of Puebla. It also marks a point in history when the Mexican people became very proud of their nation. So, for many people, this special day is a celebration of national pride.

Today, Cinco de Mayo is not only a regional holiday in Mexico, but also a popular celebration in the US and in other countries. People of Mexican heritage celebrate Cinco de Mayo as a day to celebrate Mexican culture, food, customs, and music. There are often parades to commemorate this day.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. What does *Cinco de Mayo* mean in Spanish?
  - a. May 5
  - b. May Circus
  - c. May 15<sup>th</sup>
  - d. Celebration of Children
  
2. The *Battle of Puebla* took place in the year
  - a. 1822
  - b. 1682
  - c. 1882
  - d. 1862
  
3. About how many French soldiers were involved in the *Battle of Puebla*?
  - a. 800
  - b. 8000
  - c. 80,000
  - d. 800,000
  
4. In the year 1821, Mexico gained independence from:
  - a. France
  - b. The United States
  - c. Spain
  - d. Portugal
  
5. When the French returned with 30,000 troops, they took over:
  - a. Mexico City
  - b. The Mexican shoreline
  - c. Cancun
  - d. Puebla
  
6. Which country helped Mexico eventually expel the French?
  - a. Canada
  - b. Spain
  - c. The United States
  - d. South Africa

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Short Answer Questions

1. Explain, in your own words, why Cinco de Mayo is a holiday.
2. Why did the French invade Mexico?
3. Why did the US wait to help Mexico?
4. Even though the French eventually succeeded in taking over Mexico for a short period of time, why do the people of Mexico still celebrate on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May?
5. Speak to someone who celebrates Cinco de Mayo. How does he or she celebrate? If you don't know someone who celebrates this holiday, research the holiday online and list some ways a typical Mexican-American family may celebrate.
6. Why is it considered amazing that the Mexicans won the battle over the French on that fateful day in May? Give two reasons.
7. Aside from winning the battle, what else does Cinco de Mayo represent for many Mexicans?

ANSWER KEY:

Multiple Choice:

1. A
2. D
3. B
4. C
5. A
6. C

Short Answer:

1. Individual Response. Example: It is a holiday because it commemorates the bravery that the Mexicans showed during the Battle of Puebla on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862.
2. Mexico owed France money, and so France invaded them because they had not paid it back.
3. The US waited to help Mexico, because they were fighting their own civil war.
4. The Mexican people still celebrate on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May because they are celebrating the bravery of their people.
5. Individual Response.
6. The Mexican army was a lot smaller than the French army; and they did not have as good equipment.
7. National Pride.