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# I ntroduction

## Who? What? Where? When? Why? Reporting on Consumer Products from Latin America

### Lesson 1

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Learn about the rapid growth of the banana export business at the turn of the 20th century. Students create an advertising campaign for bananas and compare their efforts with the strategies early American fruit companies used to create American demand for bananas.

## Lesson

# 1

# Who? What? Where? When? Why? Reporting on Consumer Products from Latin America



## INTRODUCTION

The lesson begins with a pre-test that emphasizes personal purchasing decision criteria. Three agricultural products are the focus of the unit: flowers, coffee and bananas. Students will “become” consumer reporters as they formulate lists of research questions generated within work groups.

## OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain how traded goods link Latin America and the United States.
- Identify criteria that might be considered in making consumer decisions.
- Develop questions about products that a reporter might want to answer before writing an article about the product.

## STANDARDS

### Economics

- **Standard 1:** Scarcity
- **Standard 2:** Marginal Cost/Benefit
- **Standard 5:** Gain from Trade

### Geography

- **Standard 11:** The Patterns and Networks of Economic Interdependence on Earth’s Surface

### Language Arts

- **Standard 3:** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- **Standard 7:** Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems.

## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- A bouquet of mixed flowers
- A bag of coffee beans, or a cup of coffee
- Bananas
- “Consumer Survey” (pre-test)
- “Trade Links” handout
- “Investigative Reporting” handout



## PROCEDURE

### 1. Pre-test

Open the lesson by administering the pre-test (“Consumer Survey”). This is designed to gather information about things that students feel are important to them in their role as consumers or buyers. Collect the pre-tests and save them for reference later in the unit.

### 2. Map the Trade Links Between the United States and Latin America

Display the flowers, coffee beans, and bananas. Ask students some basic questions about these products:

- Does anyone in your household buy these products?
- When someone buys bananas, how do they decide which bananas to buy? Which flowers? Which coffee?
- From where do you think these products come?

Distribute the “Trade Links” handout and read the information with students.

**Ask Students:** What does this handout tell us about where the three products come from? Are you surprised at any of the information? Why?

Complete the mapping activity and discuss the follow-up questions under the chart on page 7. <sup>1</sup>

### 3. Brainstorm Factors that are Important to Consumers

Explain to students that they are going to be acting as investigative reporters writing articles that will help people who buy flowers, coffee, and bananas in the United States make good decisions. Students will be learning a lot about where and how these goods are produced, but their articles will also need to cover other factors people consider in making consumer decisions.

Brainstorm a list of factors that may be important to consumers (you may wish to refer to factors listed on the “Pre-test”). Post the list where it can be seen throughout the reporting assignment.

### 4. Introduce the Reporting Assignment and Generate Questions

Organize the students into three groups:

- **Group 1:** Flowers
- **Group 2:** Coffee
- **Group 3:** Bananas

Distribute the “Investigative Reporting” handout and allow time for students to develop their list of questions. Have groups compare their lists in order to improve the quality of every group’s questions.

<sup>1</sup> You may want to point out to students that flowers are the only one of the three products that are grown in the United States in any quantity, but price has favored the Latin American posies. As a result, U.S. producers have focused on special, unusual flower crops.

Inform students that you will be teaching some lessons about flowers, coffee and bananas. These lessons will focus on the people who produce these items and the resources used in and affected by their production. These are two topics that students should examine in their consumer articles. Thus, as they take part in the lessons, students should look for information that they can use in their articles. Tell the students that they will periodically have opportunities to work in their groups to gather information.

### **EXTENSION**

As an extension, encourage students to find examples of consumer-related reporting. They may check the local newspaper or local television newscasts, as well as national consumer publications, such as *Consumer Reports* or *Zillions*, a version of *Consumer Reports* for kids (<http://www.consumerreports.org> or [www.zillions.org](http://www.zillions.org)), or government-produced consumer information (<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>).

**Ask Students:** What makes a good article about consumer concerns? What did you learn from these articles that will be useful in your own work?



# Consumer Survey (pre-test)

This survey is designed to gather information about the things you feel are important when you make a purchasing decision. Please answer honestly.

Imagine that you are going to the store to buy an item. It can be any type of item, such as a chocolate bar or a car. There are many different types of this item for sale. Which of the following do you consider in deciding which one to buy? Check all that you consider.

- Price
- Quality
- Healthfulness/Safety <sup>2</sup>
- Brand name
- Certification from a government or other agency
- Where the product was produced
- Who produced the product
- How the product was produced <sup>3</sup>

When you decide which item to buy, who might be affected by your decision?  
List as many groups as you can.

<sup>2</sup> Does the product contain any harmful substances? Does using the product put you at risk for being hurt?

<sup>3</sup> Was the product made in an environmentally friendly manner?

# Trade Links

A huge percentage of the flowers, bananas, and coffee sold in the United States is grown in Latin America. How much? Consider the following:

- People in the United States spend about \$400 million per year on cut flowers; about 60 percent of those flowers are imported. Colombia is the main supplier of cut flowers to the United States: two of every three roses sold for Mother’s Day in the United States come from Colombia. To encourage countries to grow flowers instead of drugs, the United States charges no tariffs (import taxes) on flowers from several countries in the Andes. This makes flowers from these countries very affordable.
- Coffee is one of the most valuable products traded in the world today. The amount of money involved in the coffee trade is second only to oil. The United States is the largest importer of coffee. More than half of all adults in the United States drink coffee daily. Latin America produces about 60 percent of the world’s coffee. The top coffee-producing country is Brazil. Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala are also in the top 10 coffee-producing countries (three of the other top ten are in Asia and three in Africa).
- Americans eat more bananas than any other fruit—an average of 27.5 pounds (nine pounds more than any other fruit)! Latin America produces more bananas for export than any other region—more than 10 million metric tons per year. Ecuador is the number one producer of bananas, followed by Costa Rica, the Philippines, Colombia, and Guatemala.

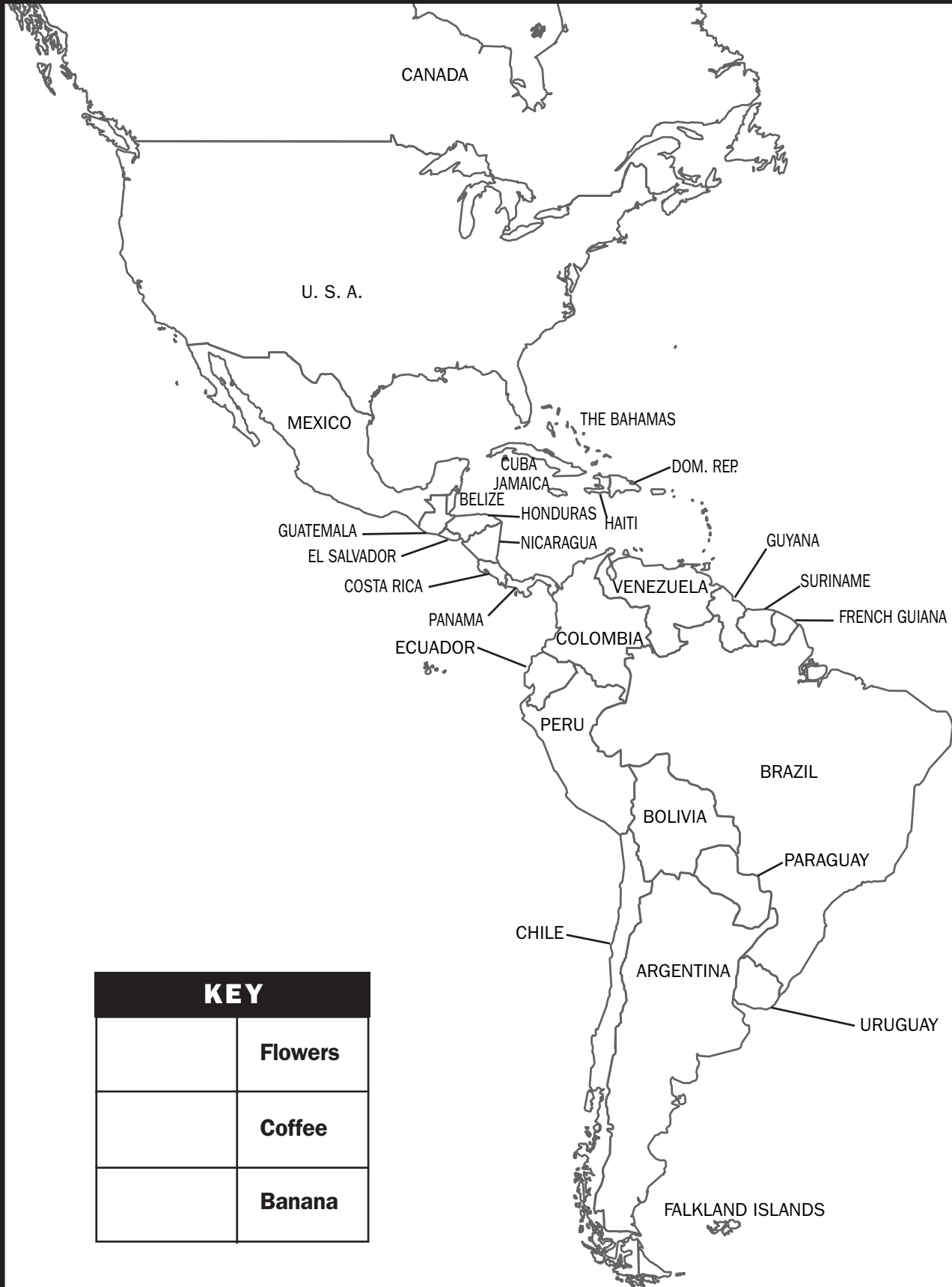
## Mapping the Goods

Create symbols for flowers, bananas, and coffee. On the map on the next page, draw the symbols in the key. Then draw the appropriate symbol in the top exporting countries for that product. Some countries may have more than one symbol if it is a top exporter of several of these products.

TOP BANANA-EXPORTING COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA	TOP COFFEE-EXPORTING COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA	TOP CUT FLOWER-EXPORTING COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA
Ecuador	Brazil	Colombia
Costa Rica	Colombia	Ecuador
Colombia	Guatemala	Guatemala
Guatemala	Mexico	Mexico
Panama	Honduras	Costa Rica
Mexico	Costa Rica	Peru
Honduras	Peru	
Venezuela	El Salvador	
Brazil	Nicaragua	
Nicaragua	Ecuador	
	Dominican Republic	

Examine your completed map. How would you describe the location of the countries growing bananas, coffee, and flowers? What is the significance of this location?

# Mapping the Goods



# Investigative Reporting

A journalist can write about many subjects. One role a journalist can play is that of a consumer reporter. A consumer reporter writes about goods and services that people can buy. They research the product (or service) and provide information and analysis to people trying to decide which good (or service) to buy.

Your group will write about \_\_\_\_\_

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As a group, write a list of questions that would reveal information that a consumer might want to know about this product. Apply these basic journalistic questions to your assigned product:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **Where?**
- **When?**
- **Why?**
- **How?**

Post your list of questions where other groups can see it. Look at questions on the other groups' lists for ideas you might want to add to your own list.

As you learn more about the product, feel free to add more inquiry questions to your list.