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**Emerald**  
**About 3 hours**

#### **World's Fair Assignment #4 – Brief on *Baile Folklorico* in Mexico**

Baile Folklorico plays an important role in Mexican culture by providing an opportunity for people of Mexican heritage to convey their emotions and to get to know their cultural identity better. For hundreds of years the traditional dances played an important role in the everyday lives of Mexican people, and continue to do so today. As one of few art forms that keep Indian traditions alive, today Baile Folklorico plays an equally important role in Mexican society that it did throughout Mexico's history. It molded to the influences of globalization over the years, but still maintains many of the Indian roots.

Before the conquest of the 1500's, the acrobatic dances of the native Mexican people included all classes, from the peasants to the King himself. Dances expressed religion and daily life, and dancers often imitated the movements of animals. Men more commonly danced, but when women participated the two genders never made physical contact. In school, children learned how to both sing and dance. The Spanish conquest destroyed much of the native Mexican people's arts and culture, and brought in European religion and dance. The Spanish replaced many of the Aztec traditions with their own by teaching the native people European music notation, and showing them how to build and play European instruments. They allowed the native Mexican people to continue to practice some of their dance forms, but adapted the traditions to incorporate Christianity, and eliminated blood sacrifice. The native people at first mimicked the dances they saw the Spaniards perform, and through doing so enjoyed the steps, and wove them into their own dances. Over time, the Spanish heavily influenced most dances of the native Mexican people. The very few almost purely native Mexican dances remain alive today because geographical isolation allowed the tribes to develop their culture without influence from the Spaniards. Because of the Spanish conquest and marriage of European and Native Mexican people, nearly all Mexican dance we know today combines early Mexican and Spanish cultures. The culture of the slaves brought to eastern Mexico also affected Mexican dance, and in those parts, particularly Veracruz, dance and music resemble afro-Cuban traditions. During 1848, on their way to search for gold in California, many travelers from South America stopped in Guerrero for fresh food and water. The scenery and fertile soil impressed some travelers so much that they settled in Guerrero. Many Chileans did so, and thus the dance forms from their country influenced the traditional Mexican folkloric dance in Guerrero. The influx of German settlers that came to Chihuahua made the dances of Chihuahua resemble the polkas of Europe, but with a Mexican flavor. Costumes vary by region, and the cultural diversity in each area plays an important role in determining the dress. Baile Folklorico allows people from all over the world to enjoy the richness of Mexico's culture through a sensory experience that they connect to. In 1952, Amalia Hernandez founded Mexico's national dance company,

Ballet Folklórico de México, after studying dance and teaching at the Mexican Academy of Dance. Amalia's company, with only eight dancers in the beginning, played an important role in popularizing the art form in Mexico in the 50's, and then in the U.S. in the 60's and 70's. Amalia searched in villages across Mexico for traditional dances to incorporate in her choreographies for the company. The company has toured internationally over 100 times, and over 22 million people have seen them since the company started. The company also founded a school where students study traditional dance. The style of dance in Jalisco displays the iconic colorful and vibrant dances of Mexico as well as the well-known mariachis. In Chiapas, marimba music usually accompanies dancers. Some dances depict religious or historical events, and others tell the stories of legends that surround celebrations and holidays. After Mexico's independence, the country had a stronger desire to preserve the culture of the native Mexican people. The Ballet Folklórico Company's dance, "Tenochtitlan", depicts the foundation of the Aztec culture. As people from all walks of life create "folk dance", they express their own life, culture, and beliefs, and pass their stories down from generation to generation. The international popularization of Mexican dance in the 60's and 70's promoted cultural pride among Mexican-Americans, partly because of Amalia's company. In recent decades, modern western dance replaced many of Mexico's traditional dances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some younger youth see the traditional dances as "old fashioned", and sadly, because of this, younger Mexican people began to value the art form less than the previous generation. Because the country's department of education sees the folk dance at risk, they try to promote teaching in schools, and teach the dance to people who live in urban settings. Because people in Mexico continue to work hard to preserve the art form, the dance has begun to gain in popularity.

Baile Folklórico not only provides a window for people from around the world to better understand Mexico, but also allows dancers to better connect to their cultural identity, and share their beliefs and experiences with others. Mexican dance played an important role in society for decades, and continues to matter to people around the world today. Learning and watching the dance form allows people to connect to their culture and better understand their roots, as well as connect to their emotions and heritage.