

# ¡Hola, Maestro!

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## Letters to Elementary School Teachers in Mexico

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he Mexican Institute of Family and Population Research (*Instituto Mexicano de Investigación de Familia y Población*) published a series of booklets in September for elementary school students. The series, “Yo, Mi Familia y Mi Medio Ambiente” (“Me, My Family and My Environment”), aims to support the development of men and women able to respond successfully to society’s increasingly challenging demands. Each grade-level booklet includes an introductory letter for teachers, explaining what children in that grade feel they need. The letters were written by an adult on the basis of interviews with children in each age group and refined after children reacted to the first drafts.

### AGES FIVE TO SIX

Hi!

I am in kindergarten. I like to learn new things. I love learning to play, and I like to play tricks. I have lots of ways of doing things, and I need you to support me. Don’t force me to do things only the way you think they should be done. I have a lot of creativity and imagination and curiosity. If you help me express myself and investigate and understand things, I’m going to learn more than if you just make me obey you, make me color inside the lines, and in the color you

want, so that I’ll sit and be quiet and act good around adults. Let me make decisions and experiment. I want to see how things look in different colors and decide what games to play first.

I also need for you to treat me with respect and for you not to yell at me, because it scares me and I feel bad. I want to listen to you—and for you to hear my ideas, which are also very good. Make me feel good, tell me nice things, tell me my work is good. Don’t compare me to other people—it only makes me feel bad and makes me not want to do good work anymore. Remember that I am special and make me feel important. Notice when I learn something or do something well.

Please, relax and don’t be afraid when you need to explain or reassure me about things. Don’t get nervous when we talk about sexuality. Remember that you tell me things with words and with your expressions, too.

Help me learn to keep my things neat and make good use of my time. This way, I will be able to be on time and be organized when I am big.

You know what? It’s important to learn about hygiene and keeping my community clean and about healthy food. If I can get myself in the habit, starting now, it will be easier to do it when I grow up.

Susan Pick is president of the Mexican Institute of Family and Population Research.

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Oh! I don't want to forget to tell you that boys and girls can do the same things and can play the same games. You will help us a lot if you treat us equally. That way, we'll learn to do the same things and we will get along better with our friends. Boys and girls can play with toy cars, learn to cook, lift things, clean the living room, and decide what we like and what we don't.

Last of all, I want to tell you not to be afraid if I tell you how I feel and if I tell you I don't agree with something you say. If I learn to say what I need and to know when to obey and when not to, I'm going to be able to defend myself better when someone tries to hurt me.

### AGES NINE TO TEN

Hi!

We've finished half of elementary school already. Now, in fourth grade, I'm going to understand what other people think of me.

Don't ask me just to obey you—teach me discipline instead. This will help me to always be organized in my activities. I know this is a very hard to goal to meet, and the formula for doing it is for you to teach me affectionately and tell me clearly what the rules are. Oh—and please don't change the rules because you're tired or happy or annoyed.

I don't want to be obedient because that means doing everything adults tell me and being afraid that they will punish me or scold me if I don't. Remember that there are adults who sometimes don't mean well, so I want to learn to make decisions and say "no" and I want to learn to have initiative. To teach me discipline, you don't need to punish or threaten me—I'll be more responsible if you don't. This will help me more than if I just obey everything adults tell me to do.

You know what else? Don't make me ashamed when we talk about sex. It



Meo Puleo, *Bobbing for Apples, Tijuana, Mexico, 1984.*  
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seems very normal and I'm curious about it. I don't want a lot of details. Ask me what do I want to know, and just answer that. Don't worry about giving me more facts—I'm not going to understand. Just answer what I ask you.

I want to learn to say how I feel without making other people feel bad. I need my peers to understand me, and I need adults to understand me. Will you help me?

Thank you for listening to me.

— Your Student

### AGES TEN TO ELEVEN

Hi!

I have a lot of questions and I want to feel comfortable when I ask them, without

worrying what everyone else thinks about there being things I don't know. Sometimes I make mistakes, so help me see my mistakes without making me feel guilty. If I don't feel guilty, I'll feel more like trying again, but if I feel bad, I'll be sad and I'm not going to go back and fix my mistakes.

I am changing, and it's not totally clear to me what is happening. I am very sensitive to criticism and teasing. I need to feel like I'm loved and to be able to tell other people that I love them. . . .

It hurts to say this, but the other day I saw my neighbor hit his daughter. It scared me, and I didn't know what to do. And on TV, I saw a teacher yell really mean things at her students. What can I do when something like that happens? They say that children have rights—what are they?

Finally, I do not agree with a lot of the things that I'm told. Sometimes I argue (not very politely), and other times I don't say anything at all. Teach me to say what I think without offending anyone.

I get impatient when people tell me I can't do what I want.

Of course I understand that I can't always do what I want, but it's not right either if I always have to do what other people want. Instead of "give and get," it's "give and give." What kind of negotiation is that? I think you ought to be concerned about this.

Something else: it seems like everyone talks about credit and about wanting to be successful. They say you need to get credit to buy a house, that the interest they get is really low, that you shouldn't use credit cards carelessly, that they want a good job, or that they would like their wife or husband to tell them more how much they love them.

Thanks for listening to me.

— Your Student

## AGES ELEVEN TO TWELVE

Hi!

This is my last year in primary school. I have learned so many things, and I want to keep learning. I want to know about myself and where and how I fit in with other people. I want to know what qualities I have, which things I'm best at and which things I'm not so good at, because when I make a mistake, other kids stare at me and that's embarrassing.

Now that I'm going to be leaving primary school, everyone asks me what kind of secondary school I'm going to enroll in. They ask me what I can do and what I want to do when I'm older. Some people would like it if I studied the same thing as them, and others tell me that certain things only men or only women study. They tell me that what I want to do is not respected, but at the same time they tell me I ought to choose for myself.

I'm not sure what is important for me, because it is not always the same as what is important for other people. They say boys and girls are very different, but I notice that in many ways we seem a lot alike. How can I make it so that other people won't make fun of me when I want to do things that they say are "for the other sex"?

I also want to know what drugs and alcohol are about. Everyone in the world talks about them. Give me a way to analyze my options. Right now I have to make decisions more than I did before, and I have to be responsible for what happens when I decide to do something.

I have lots of plans. I need to learn to organize myself better so that I can be successful at them. Also, I ought to learn to say what I think in a way that others will understand me and pay attention to me.

I hope to have my own project to take care of nature. I believe that this will help my whole community.

I saw my book from first grade, and it made me realize how much I've changed.

Thank you for listening to me.

— Your Student ☉

## Thousands of Miles from Familiar Surroundings

the clouds are singing carnivals  
and the little fat barker man  
who wants to drive camels  
whacks his stick across my hands,

this is school, he says,  
women slap fish  
across their breasts and weigh  
barnacles, what kind of flesh

am I? A turtle who cannot speak  
plods up the sand to lay  
a few bottles on the beach,  
green glass with gray

corks from a tree in Boston,  
narrow-necked like my body.  
Don't worry, he says, all lost  
messages become rods

that beat the brain.  
In Texas there is a room  
where the children sing rain  
and nobody reads the dog-eared moon.

— Lois Marie Harrod