

AROUND THE WORLD

Central
Africa

Venezuela

ENERGY AND BIG GOVERNMENT



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AROUND THE WORLD

Table of Contents

Africa 1

Venezuela 14





What is Energy?

Energy is the ability to power our daily lives. Some different types of energy include thermal, electrical, solar, and nuclear (just to name a few). It enables humanity to do many things, like heating homes, driving cars, manufacturing things, and even growing food!

Why is it important?

There are billions of humans living on the planet, and every single one of them needs energy to complete the daily tasks of life. Turning on the lights in your home requires electrical energy. Boiling water or using a heater is an example of creating thermal energy. How can everyone get enough energy to do these essential tasks? Well, not everyone can. In some places, it is too expensive for people to get access to energy, and environmental campaigns offer unreliable, inefficient solutions. Life can be very difficult with limited access to energy, so many people are working hard to solve this crisis. Countries that have limited energy tend to be the poorest, least educated, and most polluted in the world.

What is Big Government?

A big government is one that has a significant amount of control over the lives of its citizens.

Why is it important?

The role of a government is to protect its people and maintain a level of order – through laws, structure, and serving their interests. While there are many different types of governments around the world, it has often been a problem throughout history when any government has gotten too big. Big government often means more taxes, regulations, and generally more interference in the everyday lives of people. This means freedoms are taken away, and law and order are replaced by fear and control. It is important that people hold their governments accountable to maintain freedom in society.

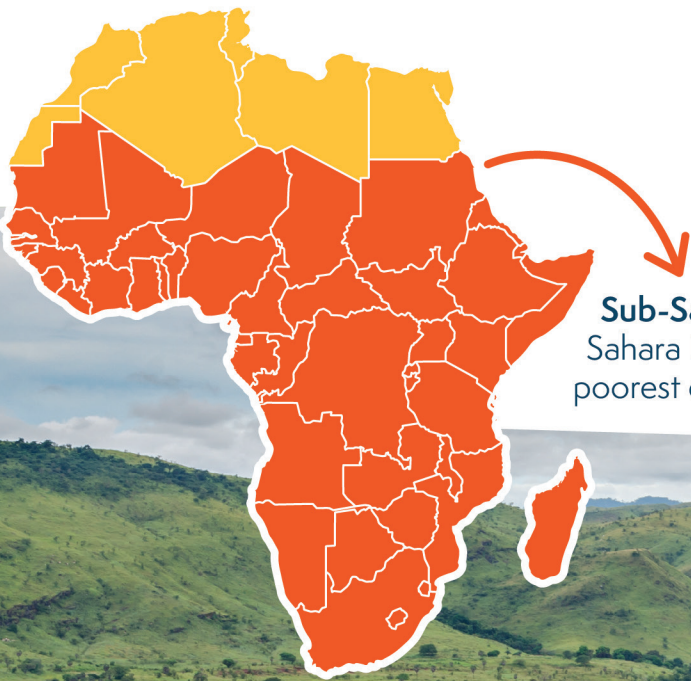
NIYAH NEEDS ENERGY

AFRICA



Meet Niyah

This is Niyah. She is eleven years old and lives in a small village in the Congo region of central Africa. She is very similar to kids who live in America. Niyah loves her mom and dad, and her two brothers. She loves to play soccer with her friends and loves to eat dessert. Her favorite is called mikate, a Congolese donut dipped in peanut butter and sprinkled with sugar. Unfortunately for Niyah, her mom only makes these delicious donuts on very special days. Niyah's mom would like to make mikate more often, but in the village where they live, cooking donuts is very difficult. Niyah is very similar to kids who live in America, but her life is very different. Like two-thirds of Africans who live in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, Niyah does not have access to electricity, and this makes her life very difficult.



Sub-Saharan Africa: All of Africa that is south of the Sahara Desert. This region is home to many of the world's poorest countries.





A Day in the Life

Each morning, Niyah wakes up at sunrise and walks thirty minutes in each direction to collect water. After returning with buckets filled with the family's daily supply of water, she often has a small breakfast of mango and fufu (sticky dough made from **cassava**). After eating, she goes with her brothers to the forest. They go there to collect wood that will be burned inside their home. There is little time for fun and games. The wood will be used to boil water, cook food, and provide heat on cool mountain nights. Millions of Africans cook on open fires inside their homes, because in a tropical, humid climate, it is very hard to start a fire outside. Once the kids deliver the wood to their mom, Niyah and her brothers enjoy a lunch of rice, beans, and peppers, and then spend their afternoons helping their dad on the family's small peanut farm.



Cassava: A root vegetable that is eaten widely in Africa and Asia. It is a main source of carbohydrates for millions of people. It is similar to potatoes.

Education

Education is very important to Niyah's parents. They would love for their children to go to school, but without access to electrical power, the family's survival depends on the work that the kids do. This is the same for all the families in the village, so there isn't a school. Thanks to evening lessons from her mom and dad, Niyah knows how to read. She loves reading about faraway places, and secretly dreams of one day wearing fancy work clothes and being a businesswoman in the capital city. However, because she doesn't have the ability to go to school, Niyah knows it will be very difficult for her dream to ever come true.



Close Your Eyes

Look at this map of Africa at night. Very few places have electricity. Now close your eyes and imagine what your life would be like without electricity.



Deforestation, Pollution, and Health

As of 2020, three billion people around the world do not have access to all the energy they need, and one billion do not have electricity at all. More than half of those with no electricity are like Niyah and live in Africa. Niyah's family is more fortunate than some because they live next to a forest where they can collect wood to burn. Africans without access to trees have to burn animal dung (the feces of an animal) for energy. Because there are so many people without electricity, the need for wood is very high, so trees are cut down (which is called **deforestation**) and now some of Africa's most important wildlife areas are in danger.



Deforestation: The action of cutting down all the trees in a wide area.

Deforestation, Pollution, and Health

Niyah lives near Virunga National Park. It is world famous for being one of the few places where Eastern Mountain Gorillas (the biggest **primates** in the world) live in the wild. Virunga Park is protected by the government. People are not supposed to go into the park and chop down trees. Niyah and her brothers are careful to not go into the forest to gather wood, but they often go right to the edge. Sometimes, during her morning hunts for wood, Niyah will see gorillas moving through the forest. She thinks the gorillas are beautiful and is proud to be their neighbor. It makes her sad that many of the villagers go inside the national park to get wood, but she understands why they do it. There are fewer and fewer trees outside the park, and people need to burn wood for energy. Without the energy that comes from the wood, they will not have fire to cook or heat their homes. Niyah worries that she and her brothers will someday have to break the park law. She also wishes there would be an easier and safer way to get energy.

For now there is enough wood for Niyah's family, and they are grateful for it, but burning wood is causing them harm that they are not aware of. According to the World Health Organization, cooking on an open fire inside the home is like burning 400 cigarettes an hour. It is estimated that 439,000 Africans die each year because they have to cook in their homes with wood.



Primate: Mammals in the zoological group that contain apes, monkeys, lemurs, and humans.



Meet Cousin Zuri



Once a year, Niyah travels to visit her cousin Zuri who lives a few hours away in a city. These visits are Niyah's favorite time of year, because not only does she love playing games with her cousin, but some years Zuri's house has electricity! Niyah loves to help her aunt cook. With electricity, they can cook dinner on the stove while cookies bake in the oven, and there's no coughing from smoke. Zuri likes to tease Niyah for getting so excited about electricity.

Some years, Zuri's family doesn't have electricity because it is too expensive. Sub-Saharan Africa has more **poverty** than anywhere on earth, and the area where Niyah and Zuri live is the poorest region in Africa. In the town where Zuri lives, the average worker makes \$600 a year. It costs that worker \$60 to power a refrigerator and \$300 to get connected to energy in the first place. The high costs for residential energy across central Africa make it very hard for people to pay for electricity.

When Zuri's family doesn't have enough money for electricity, they do what almost all of their neighbors do, and make their own energy using diesel-powered generators. In cities across Africa, because of the loud and constant roar from generators, it is impossible to hear birds chirping, and it's difficult to have conversations. These generators are very noisy, and the diesel fuel they burn causes dirty clouds of pollution that are almost as harmful as wood fires like the one Niyah's mom has to use.



Poverty: When people are very poor.

Meet Cousin Joseph

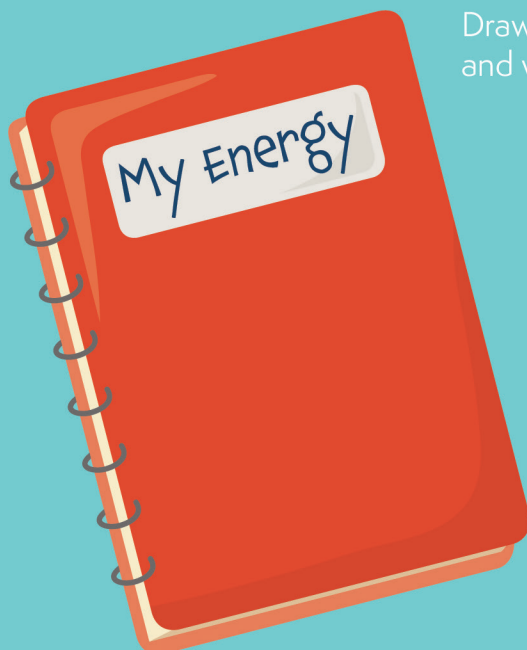
Niyah has another cousin named Joseph. He is Zuri's older brother, and he is a college student. He studies environmental engineering at a university. Joseph understands that without access to reliable energy, Africa's problems will continue, and the lives of its people will not improve. He knows that his little cousin Niyah is not free to follow her dreams because too much of her time has to be spent collecting wood for fires that cook her food but hurt her lungs.

Energy can be created in many ways. In Joseph's classes, he learns about different ways that are possible to power Africa. When he graduates, his goal is to work in a power plant that will bring energy to Niyah's village. Each power source has strengths and weaknesses. Review the different ways for creating energy on the following page, and predict which power source Joseph thinks is best for Sub-Saharan Africa.



Energy Scavenger Hunt

Grab a notebook and find items around your house that you can't live without – things that are powered by energy.



Draw or write about what you find, and why you couldn't live without it.

Find two energy-powered essentials in each of the following places:

1. Living room
2. Kitchen
3. Your bedroom
4. Bathroom
5. Outside your house

Power Sources

Power Source	Strengths	Weaknesses
Hydro Description: Electricity is created by moving water. Dams are built to control the flow of water, and the motion is used to turn machines called turbines. The spinning turbines generate electricity.	• Creates low level of pollution. • Can be generated 24 hours per day.	• Limited supply of available rivers (Hydroelectricity is already one of Africa's main power sources, and many of its major rivers, such as the Congo, have already been dammed). • Disrupts the natural environment – especially for fish and water plants.
Solar Description: Electricity is created using radiation from the sun. Solar panels capture sunlight and store energy in batteries.	• Creates low level of pollution.	• Only reliable on clear, sunny days, and can't be used at night. No sun means no power! • Panels and batteries contain hazardous materials. • Disrupts natural environment by using large amounts of land to lay out all the solar panels needed.
Wind Description: Electricity is created by wind. Gigantic windmills are made out of steel, iron, and plastic. Wind moves the blades, and their spinning creates electricity.	• Creates low level of pollution.	• Only reliable on windy days – most windmills spin under 30% of the time. • Makes a lot of noise and visual pollution. • Many birds get killed when flying by windmills. • Disrupts natural environment by using large amounts of land. • Hard to dispose of broken windmills.
Nuclear Description: Electricity is created from the splitting of uranium atoms – a process called fission. This generates heat to produce steam, which is used by a turbine generator to generate electricity.	• Creates low quantity of pollution. • Can be generated 24 hours per day. • Low amount of uranium needed. • Very safe.	• Very expensive to build and operate power plants. • Although people think nuclear power is dangerous, modern technology has made it very safe.

Power Source	Strengths	Weaknesses
Coal Description: Electricity is created by moving steam. Coal is mined from the earth, and then used to heat water that becomes steam. The steam rises and causes turbines to spin.	• Easy to find. • Low costs. • Can be generated 24 hours per day. • Easy to transport and store.	• Creates high levels of air pollution. • Disrupts natural environment by using large amounts of land for mining.
Clean Coal with “ scrubbing ” technologies Description: The same process for creating energy as coal, but with an added process for cleaning pollution.	• Easy to find. • Low costs. • Can be generated 24 hours per day. • Easy to transport and store. • Creates low level of pollution.	• Disrupts the natural environment by using large amounts of land for mining.
Natural Gas with “ fracking ” technologies Description: Electricity is created by moving steam. Natural gas is drilled out of the earth using high pressure and water. Then it is used to heat water that becomes steam. The steam rises and causes turbines to spin.	• High amounts recently discovered in Congo region. • Low costs. • Can be generated 24 hours per day. • Easy to transport and store.	• Found in areas close to protected forests. • Disrupts the natural environment during drilling.

Scrubbing: The process of removing sulfur dioxide from gas.

Fracking: Drilling and then injecting high pressure fluid deep in the earth to extract oil or gas.

Joseph has studied the different power sources and knows that there is no perfect solution to Africa’s energy problems. He knows that all power sources have different strengths and weaknesses. He sees countries like the United States safely burn **fossil fuels** like coal and natural gas, have nuclear and hydroelectric power plants, and use renewable energy sources like wind and solar, giving the Americans better access to energy at lower costs. Joseph believes that if this happens in Africa, kids like Niyah will also have access to energy and a better future.

Fossil Fuel: A natural fuel, such as coal or natural gas, that is found in the earth.

Make a battery

You will need:

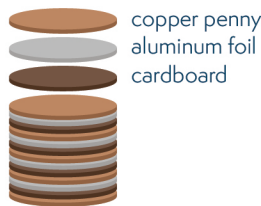
- 1 LED
- 1 sheet cardboard
- 6 copper pennies
- 1 sheet aluminum foil
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- small cup
- scissors



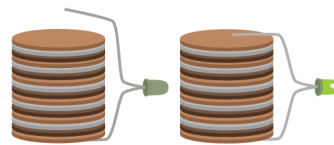
Directions:

1. Using one penny as a template, draw and cut out 5 circles of the cardboard and aluminum foil.
2. Pour water, salt, and vinegar in the small cup.
3. Soak the 5 cardboard circles in the liquid mixture.
4. Stack the pennies, aluminum foil, and cardboard as shown in graphic 1.1.
5. Now you have a battery! Test it out by taking the two wires of the LED and placing one wire on the bottom penny and the other on the top penny (see graphic 1.2). The LED should light up.

graphic 1.1



graphic 1.2



Write a Story!



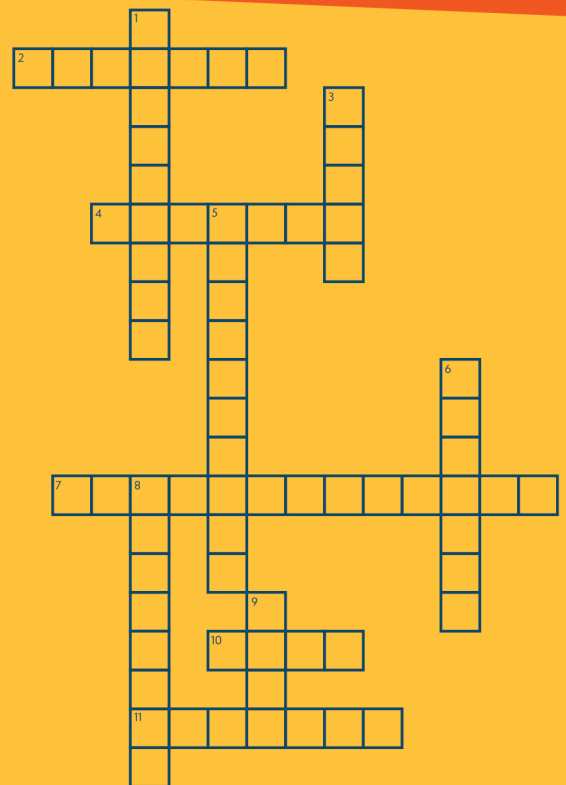
What would the world be like with no energy?

Now is your chance to find out!

Spend one day living without energy. Give up everything powered by energy (refrigerator, phone, lights, etc.) for 24 hours and then write a story about it.

Crossword

1. Diesel-powered machine families in the city use when they don't have money for electricity
2. The state of being very poor
3. Energy source powered by the sun
4. A root vegetable similar to potatoes
5. Area in Africa south of the Sahara Desert
6. Biggest primate in the world, found in the forest near Niyah's village
7. Cutting down of forests
8. Drilling and then injecting high pressure fluid deep in the earth to extract oil or gas
9. Combustible rock mined and used to heat water to create steam that spins turbines to create energy
10. What Niyah and her brothers collect for their mom to cook their food
11. Electricity created when uranium atoms split up and heat water, causing steam to spin turbines



Traditional Recipe for Mikate (Congolese Donut)

Ingredients

- 4 cups of self-rising flour
- 1 cup of granulated sugar
- 1 ½ cups of lukewarm water
- 1 Tbsp of vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Pour the flour into a mixing bowl and make a hole in the middle.
2. Pour the sugar into the hole.
3. Pour the vanilla over the sugar.
4. Gradually add the water while mixing with a large spoon. Mix fast to eliminate lumps.
5. Mix until you have air bubbles forming and popping. This can take up to 5 minutes, so you are going to get a workout.
6. Heat vegetable oil in a pot or pan to 375 degrees.
(Warning: oil will be hot and can severely burn you)
7. With clean hands, spoon, or ice cream scoop, make balls of dough that are about the size of a golf ball.
8. Carefully place dough into the hot oil. Do not overcrowd the oil or the temperature will drop and your mikate will be oily.
(Warning: oil will splash and burn you if not done carefully)
9. When the dough has turned golden brown, use a slotted spoon to turn your mikate over so that they are golden brown all over.
10. Carefully remove your mikate from the oil with a slotted spoon and place them on a paper towel-covered plate.
11. Eat warm or at room temperature. You might dip them in peanut butter and sprinkle them with sugar just like Niyah!





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Images: Getty Images

Vocabulary

Cassava: A root vegetable that is eaten widely in Africa and Asia. It is a main source of carbohydrates for millions of people. It is similar to potatoes.

Deforestation: The action of cutting down all the trees in a wide area.

Fossil Fuel: A natural fuel, such as coal or natural gas, that is found in the earth.

Fracking: Drilling and then injecting high pressure fluid deep in the earth to extract oil or gas.

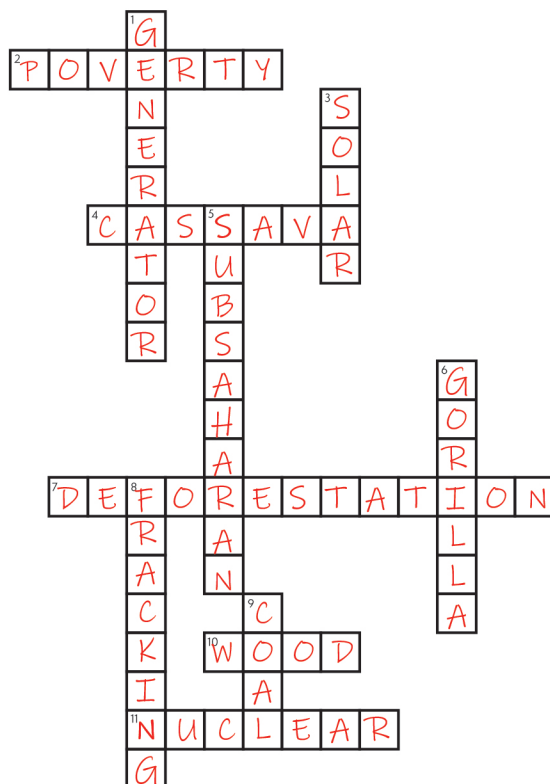
Poverty: When people are very poor.

Primate: Mammals in the zoological group that contain apes, monkeys, lemurs, and humans.

Scrubbing: The process of removing sulfur dioxide (a pollutant) from gas made from coal.

Sub-Saharan Africa: All of Africa that is south of the Sahara Desert. This region is home to many of the world's poorest countries.

Activity Answer Key



VIVI'S LIFE UNDER SOCIALISM

VENEZUELA



Welcome to Venezuela

Venezuela is a country in northern South America – a place blessed with both natural beauty and **natural resources**. Its landscape features stunning snow-capped mountains, waterfalls, sparkling beaches, lakes, valleys, jungles, and plains. In a letter written to the king and queen of Spain in 1498, Christopher Columbus called the land that later explorers would name Venezuela, “Heaven on Earth.”

For three centuries, Venezuela was a thriving Spanish colony. In 1811, Venezuela became an independent nation. In those days, most people lived off the land as farmers, fisherman, or ranchers. It was an agricultural country that received very little attention from the rest of the world. Things continued that way until April 15, 1914, when Venezuela drilled its first oil well. That’s when everything changed.



Natural Resource:

Something that is found in nature and can be used by people for economic gain.

Examples: water, plants, gold, etc.

Meet Vivi

This is Viviana, but no one calls her that. To her family and friends, she's Vivi, and she lives in Caracas with her mother and grandmother. Caracas is the capital and largest city in Venezuela. Her mom, Maria, works in a hotel restaurant, and her grandma, who she calls Lita (short for Abuelita) has health problems and needs to stay home most of the time. Vivi's dad, Cesar, lives in Miami, Florida in the United States.

Like many who live in Caribbean countries, Vivi is never far from music. When she's with friends, Vivi likes to listen to modern pop hits. However, it's with Lita when Vivi gets to listen to her favorite music. On nights when there is little to do, her grandmother brings out her old vinyl records and teaches Vivi dance steps while they listen to the **Salsa** and **Cumbia** hits from Lita's youth.

As much as Vivi loves music and dance, her favorite hobby is making jewelry. Using threads, wire, beads, and gems, Vivi has made jewelry for as long as she can remember. Her specialty is earrings, but she also makes necklaces and bracelets. Just a few years ago, she often sold jewelry to girls and ladies in her neighborhood, but no one has money for jewelry anymore.

Vivi, her mom, and grandmother were each born in Caracas, but their childhoods couldn't have been more different. Since the discovery of oil, Venezuela, and especially its capital city, has gone through many changes. Lita can remember the days of her youth in the 1960s and 70s when Venezuela was a peaceful place full of hope and opportunity. By the time Maria was growing up in the 1980s and 90s, it was an uneasy place, divided over a dramatic gap between rich and poor. Sadly, for Vivi, Caracas is now a place of desperation. Days without electricity and running water sometimes turn into weeks. Having enough to eat is a challenge, and fear of violence is always present.



Salsa:

A type of Latin American dance music that became famous during the 1960s and 70s, and remains popular around the Caribbean today.

Cumbia:

A type of Latin American dance music that originated in Colombia and became popular in countries like Peru, Mexico, and Venezuela.

A Blessing and Curse

Oil is one of the most desired resources on Earth. It not only powers machines, but is used in the making of thousands of materials from clothing to plastic. According to geological surveys, there is more oil underneath Venezuela than any country in the world. In fact, Venezuela has about 20% of Earth's known oil reserves. However, to use oil for energy, or sell it for profit, requires complex processes of drilling, pumping out, and cleaning up.

When oil was first discovered in Venezuela, no local people or businesses knew how to process it, so outside help was needed. The Venezuelan government allowed privately owned international oil companies like Shell and Chevron to control the land where oil was found. These companies brought in highly trained scientists, engineers, and businessmen and began processing and selling the oil underneath Venezuela. In return for control of the oil, the companies agreed to split the profits 50/50 with the Venezuelan government.





Lita's parents arrive in Venezuela

Lita's Venezuela

Lita is the daughter of European immigrants who came to Venezuela near the middle of the 20th century. Their homeland had been devastated by war and they wanted to raise a family in peace. Caracas attracted waves of European immigrants and in the first forty years after oil was discovered, its population more than tripled. Lita's mom and dad used their life savings to sail across the Atlantic Ocean and rent space in a neighborhood where oil company employees lived. They opened a coffee

shop and named it La Esquina Café (The Coffee Corner). Lita's mom and dad worked very hard and built a successful business. The shop was a favorite for many oil engineers and scientists, and a few years after it opened, Lita was born.

During Lita's childhood, the global price for oil was high, which meant a lot of profits for oil companies. The government was getting half of those profits, so there was a lot of money available to invest in the country and make it a better place. This investment happened in Caracas, which was transformed into a beautiful modern city with magnificent buildings and parks, but not in the rest of the country. Instead of using oil money to improve the countryside and small towns in the nation's interior, many



Lita's parents start La Esquina Café



Lita learning the family business

government leaders were **corrupt** and stole hundreds of millions of dollars for themselves and their friends.

Wealthy neighborhoods became common in Caracas, and Lita's family was part of a growing middle class. Her teenage years were carefree. Lita often took long walks through the clean and safe city streets, and she loved that her city was surrounded by beautiful tropical hillsides. Unfortunately, by the time Lita was running La Esquina Café, and had a daughter of her own, life in Caracas had changed, and most of the green hillsides were gone.

Corruption:

Dishonest behavior by those in power, typically involving bribery and theft.

Trouble Rises

It is very risky for a country to be overly reliant on one industry, like oil. Things can be great when prices are high, but can be very bad when prices drop. During Lita's childhood, the Venezuelan government could have used oil profits to develop other ways that the country could make money, but they did not. This led to a lack of opportunity for Venezuelans from small towns and the countryside, and many moved to Caracas looking for work. Over the last half of the 20th century, the population of the city tripled again, but there was no room for the newcomers. Soon, **shantytowns** surrounded the city, covering up the beautiful tropical hillsides. In the 1970s, the price of oil plummeted, which cut off the country's main source of income, leading to lots of problems for Venezuela.

The Venezuelan government was desperate to raise money, so in 1976 they decided to try **socialism** and **nationalize** their oil industry. This meant that the international private oil companies, with all their knowledge and expertise, were kicked out of the country, and the government would now receive 100% of the oil profits. Unfortunately, the government had no idea how to run the oil business, and the country became poorer.

Having the government control oil made life worse in Venezuela, and eventually the poor people of Caracas had enough.

Nationalize:

When things that are privately owned are taken over by the national government.

Socialism:

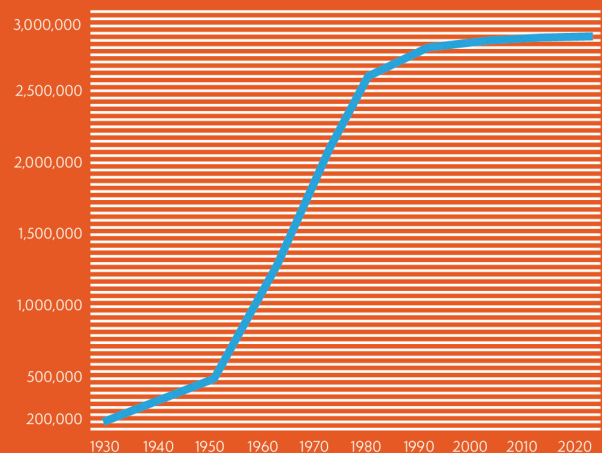
A system where you are not allowed to own anything individually and the government controls what everyone can buy and own.

Shantytown:

A settlement of improvised buildings typically made of materials such as metal, wood, and mud.



Population of Caracas



Maria's Venezuela

In 1989, when Maria was nine, poor people from shantytowns came down from the hills to riot and loot wealthy parts of Caracas. Lita and Maria were not harmed, but rioters did break the windows of La Esquina Café. The government sent in the military, and after nine days of violence and chaos, things finally settled down. The riots became known as El Caracazo. According to the government, nearly 300 people died during the unrest, but many claimed the number of deaths was over 2,000.



Maria meets Cesar

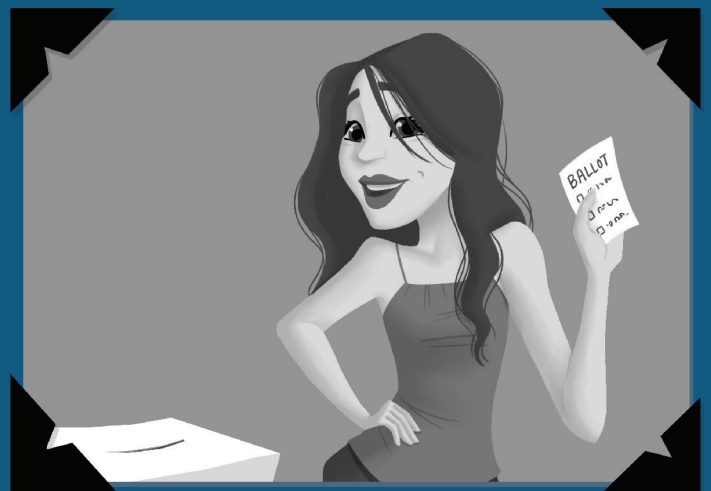
After El Caracazo, the Venezuelan government knew it had to make changes, so it allowed private oil companies back into the country. Oil profits immediately increased, which helped the economy and created more jobs, but the government remained corrupt, robbing the country of millions of dollars, and most Venezuelans remained poor.

Maria made the best of her teenage years, and made wonderful memories with family and friends, but she never forgot El Caracazo. She hated knowing that so many of the people living in the shantytowns suffered. Maria loved the family coffee shop, but wanted to do something where she could help people more directly. She decided to become a teacher and work in a poor neighborhood.

A few weeks after turning 18, Maria was excited to vote for the first time. A man was running for president who was promising to end poverty and give lots of money to schools in poor neighborhoods. It wasn't new to hear politicians make promises to fight poverty, but this man was different – he was very different.



El Caracazo



Maria votes for the first time



A New Voice

In 1998, Venezuela elected Hugo Chavez to be their new president. Presidents before him had all talked about making Venezuela a better place for poor people, but they had all come from wealthy upbringings. Chavez had grown up poor, in a small town far away from Caracas and its oil money, so his promises to make Venezuela a fairer and more equal place sounded different. He called his plan “21st Century Socialism” and promised that as president, he would end three things: corruption, poverty, and Venezuela’s dependence on oil.

Most of the poor people in Venezuela voted for Chavez, but many who were in the middle class did too – including Maria. Chavez promoted equality, and Maria believed that more equality in Venezuela would make it a better country. Lita, on the other hand, was suspicious. She had seen socialism fail in her country before. Lita was angry Maria hadn’t followed her advice to vote for a non-socialist candidate.

A Socialist Disaster

During his first two years as president, the price of oil more than doubled, providing Chavez with money to fund socialist programs he called his “Bolivarian Missions.” To the delight of many, he used the government’s oil profits to build free housing for people who were living in shantytowns. He also built hospitals and free health clinics, and his Missions provided free lunches and school supplies for the nation’s students. Poor people were given free food and free gasoline, and Chavez was very popular. Then, in November 2001, the price of oil crashed.

Low oil prices meant less money for Chavez to use on his socialist programs, but he refused to lower his spending. He believed his Missions brought “social justice” to Venezuela, and he didn’t care if paying for them had negative consequences. Chavez was desperate for money, so once again the private international oil companies were forced out so that all profits would go to the government. This strategy hadn’t worked in the past, and it didn’t work for Chavez. Just like before, putting the government in control of Venezuela’s oil led to corruption and disastrous mistakes. Anyone who questioned Chavez’s decisions was fired, and the result was

thousands of oil managers, scientists, and engineers began to leave the country.

During the summer of 2008 – the same year Vivi was born – the price of oil rebounded and reached a record high, but the country with the most oil in the world couldn’t benefit from it. Chavez had filled Venezuela’s oil industry not with qualified employees, but with his friends and loyalists who didn’t know what they were doing. The nation’s oil industry collapsed because of their failures. The government also ran out of money to pay for his socialist Mission programs. In a desperate move to grab any money that he could, Chavez imposed heavy taxes on businesses in all other industries, including Lita’s coffee shop – La Esquina Café.

Chavez remained president until he died from cancer in 2013. He left Venezuela in much worse shape than it was in when he arrived. It is true that his socialist government did improve the lives of many poor Venezuelans – at least temporarily – but he also robbed them of the chance to rise out of poverty. Those helped are still poor and now almost everyone else is, too.



Vivi's Venezuela

Vivi was six when Lita had to permanently close La Esquina Café. Her health was getting bad, and she could no longer pay the last employee she had left – her son-in-law and Vivi's dad, Cesar. The oil engineers and scientists had left the neighborhood (and country) years ago. Nobody had money for fancy coffee anymore. Vivi remembers her grandmother's tears that day. She cried, too. Vivi is now a teenager, and in the years since her family's shop closed, Venezuela's situation has become even more desperate.

When Hugo Chavez died, his friend, and Venezuela's vice president at the time, Nicolas Maduro, was elected to take over as president. Maduro still remains in power today. Instead of learning from the mistakes that Chavez made, Maduro has tightened government control, destroying the economy further.

The United States's currency is called the dollar. Venezuela's currency is called the bolivar. Because of decisions that Chavez and Maduro have made, one single U.S. dollar is equal to MILLIONS of bolivars. So, something that costs very little in most places of the world, like a pack of gum or candy, requires millions of bolivars.



Closing La Esquina Café

Venezuela's currency is basically worthless. Vivi used to have shoe boxes full of bolivars in her closet, but Maria recently told her to throw them out with the trash. They were useless and took up space. Now in Caracas, people pay for most things with U.S. dollars – when they can get them.

Thanks to Chavez's – and now Maduro's – socialist programs, Venezuelans can collect free food and supplies, but the amount that the government can give people is not enough to survive in Caracas. It got so bad in 2017 that the average adult in Venezuela lost 20 pounds! People are starving and desperate. Desperate people will commit crimes to stay alive – Caracas is now one of the most dangerous places on earth.





Cesar goes to Miami

Maria and Cesar knew that without U.S. dollars, they couldn't ensure Vivi or Lita's health and safety, so they started thinking creatively to find ways to survive. They downloaded a language app so they could learn English and made some major life changes. Maria quit her teaching job and began working at one of the last remaining nice hotels in Caracas. The hotel pays her in worthless bolivars, but when she interacts with wealthy customers, they give U.S. dollars as tips. Maria practices English as much as possible. She began making beds and now waits tables at the hotel restaurant.

Cesar was not able to find a job in Venezuela where he could make U.S. dollars, so he had to leave his family and move to America. For two years, he has been living in Miami with a cousin, and he works in a fancy coffee shop that looks a lot like La Esquina Café. When he first arrived, his English was very weak, so he couldn't interact much with customers. He could only work as a cleaner and dishwasher. Now, thanks to his language app and nightly practice while chatting with Maria, Cesar's English is strong. He's even taking orders from customers and running the cash register.

Every dollar Cesar makes that he doesn't need for his own survival gets sent home to help Maria cover the cost of food and to pay for their two-bedroom apartment, high in the Caracas sky.

Between the money that both of Vivi's parents are making, she and her grandmother are safe.

Luckily, Vivi's favorite food is **arepas**, and they are cheap to make. Usually Lita makes them domino style (stuffed with cheese and black beans), but when the family has a little extra money, she'll make reina pepiada style filled with chicken, cream, and avocado. Sometimes Vivi gets tired of arepas, but she never says anything. She knows that many Venezuelans have to dig through trash cans in search of food scraps, and that she is very fortunate.

Vivi and Lita rarely go outside since it is too dangerous. The risk of kidnapping and robbery is too high. These crimes happen all over the city each day. In the worst parts of town, up in the hills, people are killed regularly. Venezuela has one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many kids around the world have missed time in school, but Vivi hasn't gone to school in almost two years, even before the pandemic started. Her school has no electricity, and because there are not enough working toilets, most students don't get to use a bathroom. Some kids still attend school, usually because of the free government lunches, but Maria and Cesar decided it would be best if Vivi is homeschooled with Lita as her teacher.



Arepa:

Grilled dough made from maize stuffed with meats, cheeses, and other yummy ingredients.



It's not easy being a teenager in Caracas right now, but Vivi is grateful for what she and her family do have. She feels fortunate to live in a safe apartment high above the violence on the streets, and she loves living with and learning from Lita. She knows her parents love her and are working hard for her and her future. She misses her dad every day, but understands why he is in America, and that her health and safety depend on it.

Vivi is also very smart and understands why the problems in her world exist. Thanks to Lita's teachings, she knows that Hugo Chavez and his socialist government were not the beginning of Venezuela's problems – they were consequences of almost a century of corruption and mismanagement. However, she also understands that Chavez's, and now Maduro's, socialist government is the source of the fear and sadness she feels during her childhood. Thanks to socialism, Vivi has a computer tablet that she got for free from the government. She uses it to video call her dad through a video chat app – when she has internet and electricity, which isn't that often.

But it's also thanks to socialism that her dad has had to leave the country just to provide for her and their family.

Cesar is one of 5.4 million Venezuelans who has left the country during the last decade. Just like Cesar, most did not want to leave, but were forced to out of desperation. For centuries, Venezuela was a land of opportunity that attracted outsiders to come and make a good life. Now that opportunity is completely gone, as are the talents and abilities of millions of Venezuelans who have fled. Cesar would love to bring his family to America to be with him, but it isn't possible – he doesn't have enough money for them to join him and Lita's health is too poor to travel a long distance. It sickens him that he is not in Caracas to watch as his little girl grows into a young woman, but what can be done? When Cesar and Vivi have their video calls, they pray that life will get better.



Fun Facts



Venezuela has won the most titles in the biggest international beauty pageants – Miss Universe, Miss World, Miss International and Miss Earth.



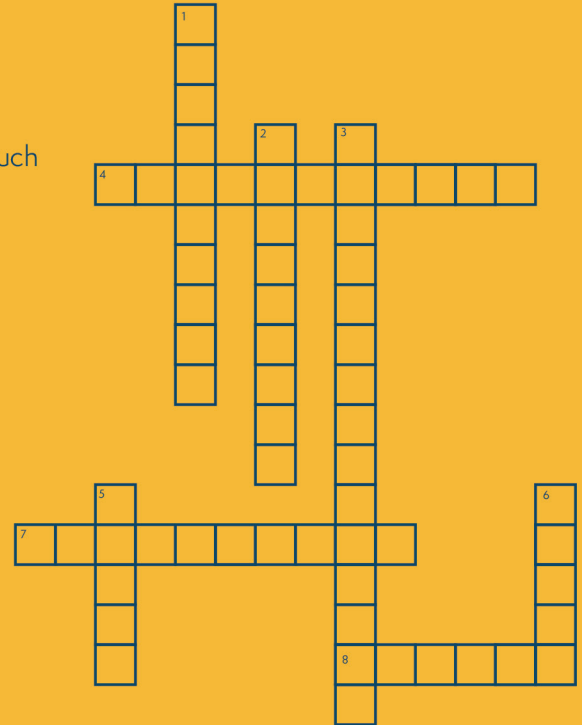
Miguel Cabrera, Major League Baseball first baseman for the Detroit Tigers, was born in Maracay, Venezuela.



Angel Falls is the tallest uninterrupted waterfall in the world.

Crossword

1. A settlement of improvised buildings typically made of materials such as metal, wood, and mud.
2. A system where you are not allowed to own anything individually and the government controls what everyone can buy and own.
3. Something that is found in nature and can be used by people for economic gain. Examples: water, plants, gold, etc.
4. When things that are privately owned are taken over by the national government.
5. Grilled dough made from maize stuffed with meats, cheeses, and other yummy ingredients.
6. A type of Latin American dance music that became famous during the 1960s and 70s, and remains popular around the Caribbean today.
7. Dishonest behavior by those in power, typically involving bribery and theft.
8. A type of Latin American dance music that originated in Colombia and became popular in countries like Peru, Mexico, and Venezuela.





Traditional Recipe for Arepas

Cook Time: 25-30 minutes

Servings: 6-8 arepas

Ingredients:

- 2 cups arepa flour
(i.e. Masarepa or Harina PAN)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups warm water
- oil for grilling

Instructions:

1. Combine arepa flour and salt. Slowly add warm water. Knead to form a dough ball. Rest for 3 minutes.

2. Divide the dough in 6-8 pieces and roll into a ball. Flatten dough to make a disk 1/2 inch thick.

3. Heat griddle or iron skillet on high heat with thin layer of oil. Place the dough disks on the griddle and cook for 3-5 minutes on each side. Then, lower the heat and cook for 5-10 minutes on each side to cook all the way through.

Using a knife, cut the arepas in half long ways - keeping the two sides together on the end. Fill with fillings of choice.

Filling ideas:

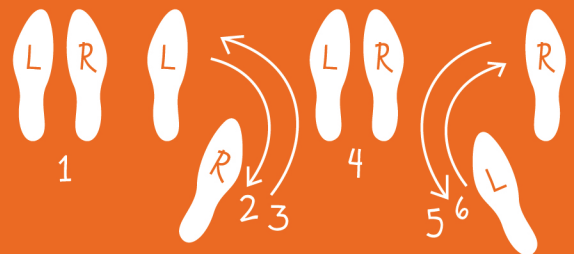
- Black beans
- Cheese
- Shredded beef
- Avocado
- Shredded chicken
- Tuna



Learn to Dance!

Cumbia:

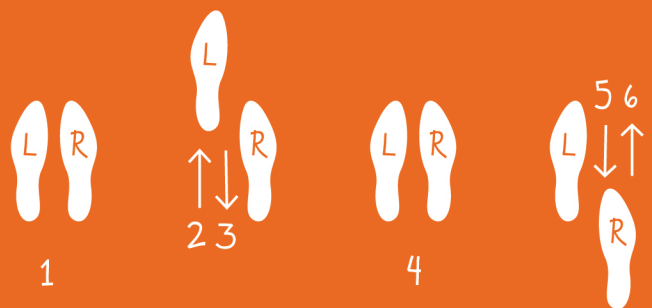
Follow the footprints below to learn the basic dance steps. Then, play some Cumbia music and start moving!



and repeat!

Salsa:

Follow the footprints below to learn the basic dance steps. Then, play some Salsa music and start moving!



and repeat!

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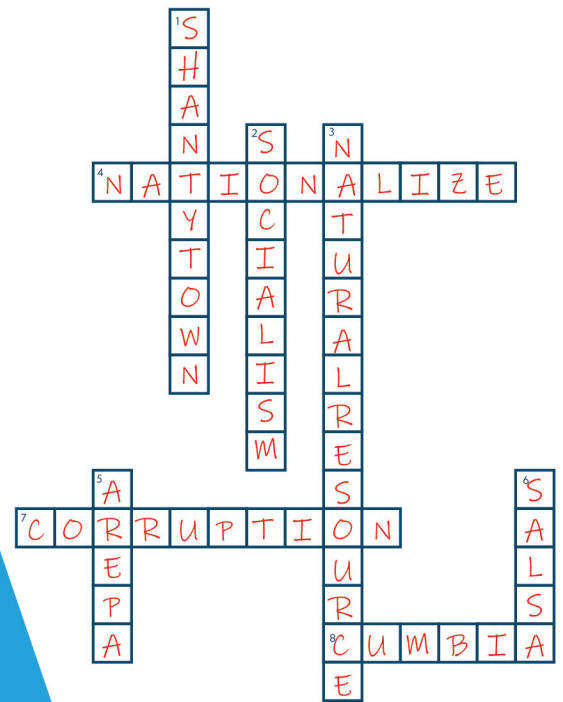
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Images: Getty Images, 123rf, Unsplash

Answer key:



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An illustration of five diverse cartoon characters standing in front of a stylized world map. From left to right: a boy in a grey military uniform with a peaked cap, a boy in a blue and white soccer jersey with the number 30, a girl with long brown hair in a blue top and yellow skirt, a girl with dark skin and braided hair in a yellow tank top and patterned skirt, and a boy in an orange t-shirt and grey shorts. The background is a solid blue color with white outlines of the world's continents.

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