

Name: _____

Period: _____

Writing Across the Social Studies and Language Arts Curriculum
PSSA Performance Task – Five Paragraph Essay

Performance Task: Read the three articles entitled “Father Miguel Hidalgo,” “José Morelos,” and “Agustín de Iturbide.” Choose the individual you think did the most to help Mexico gain its independence from Spain. Construct an essay persuading others that the person you selected was the most important person in Mexico’s quest for independence. *You may use only the information provided in the articles or your class notes from social studies to write your essay.*

FATHER MIGUEL HIDALGO

Father Miguel Hidalgo was born in the colony of New Spain in 1753. His father was an hacienda administrator, thus placing Hidalgo into the social caste of criollo (a person of Spanish blood, but born in the Spanish colonies). Father Hidalgo was extremely well educated as a youth and by the age of fourteen was attending the best university in the colony, Real y Pontifica Universidad de México, where he studied arts and theology.

In adulthood, Father Hidalgo was a bit of a trouble maker and often found himself in trouble with the church elites who did not like his unique teaching style. He was even investigated by the infamous Inquisition for criticizing the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown. It did not help that Father Hidalgo also liked to gamble and even had three children with two different women. And yet even with all of his misgivings, Father Hidalgo became a charismatic leader of Mexico's push for independence from the Spanish Crown.

In the early hours of September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo rang the church bells of his parish in the town of Dolores to summon the people to mass. It was certainly an unusual hour for mass to be held as even the sun was still slumbering. Father Hidalgo had been conspiring against the Spanish Crown, and he had been informed that the Crown was out for his arrest.

As the mestizos and Indians sat there half asleep wondering why they were in church at such an hour, Hidalgo awakened them as he erupted with patriotic words. Although the text of his speech did not survive, historians attribute the following words to this patriot:

My children: a new dispensation comes to us today. Will you receive it? Will you free yourselves? Will you recover the lands stolen three hundred years ago from your forefathers by the hated Spaniards? We must act at once....Will you not defend your religion and your rights as true patriots? Long live our Lady of Guadalupe! Death to bad government! Death to the Peninsulares!

This famous speech became known as the *grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores) and was the spark that ignited Mexico's push for independence. Even till this very day, Mexican school children are taught these patriotic words.

Soon mestizos and Indians were flocking to Father Hidalgo's cause and he found himself in charge of a popular army. Hidalgo himself was named Captain General of America. He realized he needed something to unite Indians, mestizos, and criollos. Father Hidalgo began flying a banner with the Virgin of Guadalupe on it, which not only brought people of different social classes together, but also helped his rebellion gain even more support.

Although Hidalgo was a true patriot that could certainly rally the people, he was not a military man. He had lost control of his army at Guanajuato, and his Indian and mestizo army burned many criollos to death. Thus, as Father Hidalgo's army was on the outskirts of Mexico City, he had second thoughts about unleashing his army on the capital. Ultimately, his army deserted and Father Hidalgo was captured.

On July 30, 1811, Father Hidalgo was marched in front of a firing squad as he had been found guilty of treason against the Spanish Crown. As he walked to his execution, he gave candy to each of his executioners. The order was given, and the firing squad unleashed a volley of lead into Father Hidalgo. The father of the Mexican independence movement was dead. The Spaniards were not finished with Hidalgo. They severed his head from his body and placed it on display as a warning to those who wished to fight for independence.

José Morelos

José Morelos was born in the colony of New Spain on September 30, 1765. He was a mestizo, which meant that he had the mixed blood of both Spaniard and Indian. Like Father Miguel Hidalgo, he too was educated as he attended school at Colegio de San Nicolás. And just like Father Hidalgo, Morelos also chose to enter the priesthood.

Morelos was drawn to the independence movement as he had heard the stories of Father Hidalgo's triumphs. Upon meeting Morelos, Father Hidalgo asked him to join the army. Morelos agreed and was made a colonel in the army as he served under Hidalgo. He did not disappoint as a military strategist for he won 22 victories in only his first nine months of fighting. Thus, it made perfect sense that when Hidalgo was executed Morelos would fill the role of the leader of the independence movement.

Though he had supported Hidalgo, Morelos immediately changed the way the revolutionaries under his command fought and thought. Morelos realized that his army was the poor majority—the Indians and the mestizos. He thus made the decision that he would no longer stand and fight in the traditional sense, but instead used guerrilla tactics. This turned out to be a brilliant move because he won many major victories. Morelos captured the port city of Acapulco and won several key victories at the towns of Cuautla, Cútlala, Tehuacán, Orizaba, and Oaxaca. He was even able to surround Mexico City.

It was Morelos who was able to convene a congress in the year 1813 that finally announced the formal independence of Mexico. This congress also adopted Mexico's first national constitution.

Morelos wanted a government that would provide equality for all, equal taxation for all, and provide protection for private property. To the Congress he made the following statement:
That [Mexico] is free and independent of Spain and any other Nation, Government, or Monarchy, and its sovereignty proceeds directly from the people....That the legislative, executive, and judicial branches shall be divided into compatible bodies for the execution of their powers....Because good laws are above every man....

And yet even for all the good and popular support Morelos was able to achieve, he, in the end, would suffer the same fate as Father Hidalgo.

The Mexican upper class (Peninsulares and criollos) decided they did not like the direction the rebellion was going under Morelos leadership as he gave power and rights to the lower classes. Morelos was on the run from royal forces and was eventually captured. He was tried and found guilty of treason. On December 22, 1815, Morelos was executed in front of a firing squad. His severed head was placed alongside Father Hidalgo's. The brilliant leader and military strategist was dead.

Morelos continues to be an influential force in Mexico today. His portrait currently appears on the 50 peso. And even some of the greatest people in history recognized his military brilliance. It was rumored that the great French General Napoleon Bonaparte, the man who nearly conquered the entire European continent, once stated, "...with three such men as José Morelos, I could conquer the world."

Agustín de Iturbide

Agustín de Iturbide was born in the Spanish colony of Mexico on September 27, 1783. Born into a criollo family, he became a wealthy land owner after he received a formal education. While at school, he discovered that he was a gifted horseman and entered the military as a teenager. It did not take him long to rise in the ranks, and by 1806, he became a full lieutenant.

When the war for Mexican independence broke out, Father Miguel Hidalgo attempted to recruit Iturbide to his rebel army. Iturbide refused and instead fought against both Father Hidalgo and José Morelos, defeating Morelos once in a brilliant cavalry charge. For his efforts, he was promoted to colonel.

As colonel, Iturbide was once again in pursuit of Morelos, and in 1815 he was able to help in apprehending the leader of the rebellion. Since Morelos was executed, a new leader emerged to lead the rebels by the name of Vicente Guerrero.

After chasing the guerrilla fighter Guerrero for some time, Iturbide came to the conclusion that he might never defeat his enemy. Thus, Iturbide made a fateful decision that not only impacted his own life, but also impacted the fate of the Mexican nation. Iturbide switched sides and became allies with Guerrero. Together the two men drafted the Plan of Iguala.

The Plan of Iguala called for equal treatment under the law of both Peninsulares and criollos. It also made Catholicism the official state religion of Mexico. Finally, it established that Mexico would be governed by a limited monarchy. The plan was brilliant as it brought together a diverse group of people and gave them a common objective for which to fight—the separation of Mexico from Spain.

On September 27, 1821, the same day as his birthday, Iturbide marched into Mexico City with his army. The population of the city celebrated Iturbide's arrival and even decorated their homes with the colors of his army—red, white, and green. These colors are still associated with Mexico today through its flag. The green stands for independence, the white for the Catholic faith, and the red for the unity of Mexico. The next day Mexico declared itself an independent nation.

Following independence, Iturbide made himself Generalísimo de Tierra y Mar (highest general of the earth and sea). However, Iturbide did not hold this title for very long because shortly thereafter he became emperor of Mexico.

Iturbide's reign as emperor lasted less than a year. Mexico had too many internal problems and Iturbide was a rather egotistical ruler to the point where he made his family's birthdays national holidays.

In the end, he too found himself in front of a firing squad. Before he died, he uttered this final message:

"Mexicans! Even in this act of my death I recommend to you love of our fatherland and observance of our holy religion....I die having come to assist you, and I die happy because I die among you. I die with honor, not as a traitor."

One can still visit the site of Iturbide's burial today. He is buried in a cathedral in Mexico City. Upon viewing the site a passerby will notice an inscription that reads:

"Agustín de Iturbide, author of the Independence of Mexico. Compatriot, cry for him; passerby, admire him. This monument guards the ashes of a hero. May his soul rest in the bosom of God."