

GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER

PASSPORT TO UNDERSTANDING MEXICO: A LAND OF RICH AND COLORFUL TRADITIONS

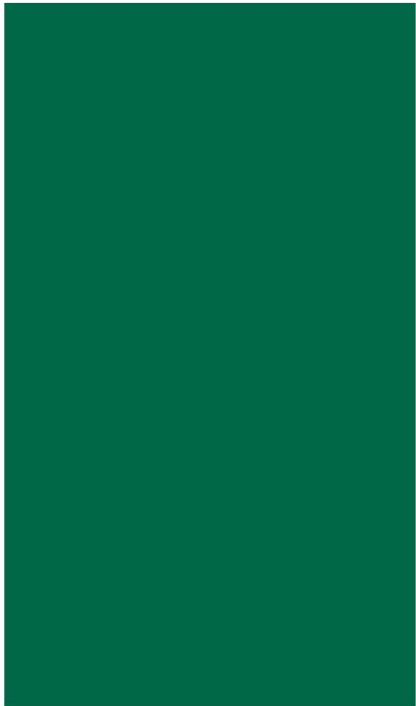


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MEXICO - A land of rich and colorful traditions

Mexico is a country in southern North America, the third largest country in Latin America, and is the most populous Spanish-speaking nation with a population of 130,760,000 people. It is comprised of 31 different states with a diversity of cultural traditions, including different music, dance, dress, and culinary traditions based on the ethnic diversity and history of each region. The geography of Mexico includes mountains, deserts, and rainforests, all sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The capital is Mexico City, which was the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. It is a beautiful nation with colorful flowers, birds, butterflies and wildlife, including the mystical jaguar and the elusive quetzal bird. Mexico is our neighbor, and many of our neighbors in our own community have family there.



The People of Mexico - A Land of Three Roots

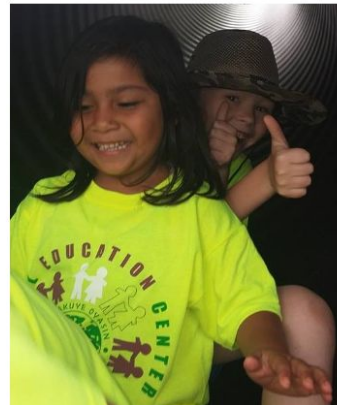
The first root is comprised of the indigenous people of ancient Mexico, including the Aztecs, Mayans, Omecs, Toltecs, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs. Their early lands included Mexico, but also much of the western United States (before the Mexican-American War), Florida and parts of the Caribbean. These groups thrived prior to the arrival of the Spanish, who conquered and colonized the area. There are estimated to be 78 indigenous groups in Mexico today, almost 22% of the population.

The second root is comprised of the Spaniards who colonized the region and over time mixed with the indigenous culture, creating what is defined as a "mixed race" commonly called mestizos. This group is widely recognized as the "dominant culture" of Mexico, especially in business and government.

The third root of Mexico is comprised of Black Mexicans who were brought from Africa during the slave trade in the 14th and 15th centuries. While the existence of this third root went largely ignored by the Mexican government until recent years, they have been notably influential in the art, music, dance, culinary arts and culture of Mexico.

With a large percentage of people in Mexico being a blend of these three roots, many people are beginning to research and appreciate their African ancestry. For information on The Third Root, check out the Global Education Center's curriculum guide that was the culmination of an entire year of exploration of Mexico's Third Root via music, dance, literary arts, visual arts, and film. (The photos on the far left and far right are by Sal Rojas; the others are students & teachers of Global).

https://www.globaleducationcenter.org/uploads/5/4/4/6/54461425/the_third_root_curriculum_guide.pdf



El Dia de Los Muertos (the Day of the Dead)

In early November, following our American holiday of Halloween, the people of Mexico gather in their local cemeteries to honor dearly departed loved ones and celebrate the continuity of life. While traditions associated with Dia de Los Muertos vary regionally, in many homes people construct temporary alters called ofrendas decorated with flowers, fruit, bread, candy and other specialties along with photographs of dearly departed relatives and friends. Calacas, which are handmade skeleton figures, are popular and depict an active and joyful afterlife that they expect their departed loved ones are enjoying. Sugar skulls (calaveras) are also popular decorations, mostly made from real sugar but sometimes created from decoratively painted ceramic.

Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>

Additional info @ <https://dayofthedead.holiday/sugar-skull/the-meaning-and-importance-of-sugar-skulls>

Sugar skull supplies from: <https://mexicansugarskull.com/>

Info on origins of Calaveras:

<https://xyuandbeyond.com/calaveras/>

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Calaveras



Cartonería (papier-mâché)

Paper crafting is a Mexican folk art that dates back to the early 17th Century, often tied to religious customs of indigenous populations. During Spanish colonization, paper-crafting was an inexpensive way of creating inexpensive religious objects used in ceremonies in the Catholic church. In cities throughout Mexico, cartoneria artists continue to produce items important for cultural and religious representations. Supplies are readily available (scraps of paper, discarded cardboard, newspapers), and artisans create three-dimensional figures by dipping the paper materials in a combination of water and flour (typically 2 parts water to 1 part flour, whisked to the consistency of pancake batter) and wrapping them around wire or, in the case of masks, pressing paper strips into greased ceramic molds. Paper products are layered until they are of appropriate thickness, allowing 24 hours of drying time between layers. Once dried, the paper is removed from the mold or left on the wire and painted with a white primer, followed by colorful acrylic paints, then a coat of a clear finish, such as varnish. Popular items made in the cartoneria tradition include masks, piñatas, judas and diablitos (devil figures), alebrijes (mythical creatures), catrinas (iconic female figures representing death), calaveras (skulls), and the giant mojigangas (papier-mâché figures created over hollow wicker frames and worn by dancers).

**Info from <https://www.vivaoaxacafolkart.com/paper-mache-art/>
and <https://www.revistalatinanc.com/2019/11/28/cartoneria-mexicana/>
and <https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com>**



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Oaxacan Wood Carvings

From humble beginnings 35 years ago, to international recognition today, the wood carvers of Oaxaca continue to delight crowds with their whimsical designs and festive colors. Each figure is carved by hand from the wood of the copal tree, often with nothing more than simple household knives and a machete. Afterwards, the figures are painted in stunning detail with a steady hand and brilliant acrylic colors. The end result is a one-of-a-kind work of art, often worthy of standing alongside the artwork of our most talented contemporary artists. This talent is now being passed down to the third generation of Oaxacan carvers, many of whom still believe their figures will bring good luck to the potential owner.

After the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the 1940s, tourists began coming to Oaxaca, which enabled the opening of folk art stores in which the wooden carvings could be sold. Several different styles emerged as more families took up the art of carving the copal wood, and with the growth of outlets for selling their figurines, the economic status of many families in the area improved.

Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>.

More info @ <https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/2999-jacobo-angeles-a-rich-wood-carving-tradition-in-oaxaca-dating-to-pre-hispanic-times>



Mexican Tin Art

Colorful hand punched and painted tin ornaments are a popular folk art from Jalisco, Mexico. The same methods are used on both the small mirrors added to tin frames as well as the many tin ornaments created for the holiday season. Natural and lacquered tin art is also found in Oaxaca, and oxidized tin art is popular in San Miguel de Allende.



Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>.

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Huichol Bead Art

Approximately 10,000 to 14,000 Huichol Indians live in the rugged mountains and remote villages of the Sierra de Nayarit region north of Guadalajara. The Huichol were among the last indigenous people to fall under Spanish rule, and they have been able to maintain their spiritual beliefs. Their religion is essentially pagan and revolves around four important agricultural deities. The most sacred of these is the deer, whose blood is considered to be a symbol of fertility.

Corn is considered to be the source of life, honoring Nacahue, mother of all gods, who gave corn to the first man to plant, from which was born the first Huichol woman. Peyote is considered to be an important means of communicating with the gods, and consuming peyote by the Huichol people is a deeply religious experience. These three elements — deer, corn, and peyote — unify to represent the absolute core of Huichol beliefs.

The Huichols express these three elements through their art, which gives profound expression to deep spiritual beliefs. Traditional Huichol art, which includes meticulous beadwork, yarn paintings, wooden masks, and embroidered and woven personal adornments, is beautiful both for its aesthetics as well as its deep psychological and spiritual meaning.

These beaded prayer bowls, rukuri, are created by spreading a thin layer of beeswax over a hollowed gourd bottom then pushing tiny glass beads into the wax to create complex patterns and symbols. These symbols tell the story of each individual piece.



Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>

More info: <https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1074-huichol-art>

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Huichol Yarn Paintings

The rugged mountains and remote villages of the Sierra de Nayarit north of Guadalajara are the homeland of roughly ten to fourteen thousand Huichol Indians. These were among the last tribes to come under Spanish rule, and their religion still is essentially pagan, revolving around several important agricultural deities. Deer is the most sacred of all animals, its blood a symbol of fertility. Corn is the source of all life, for it was Nacahue, mother of all gods, who gave corn to the first man for planting, and from it was born the first Huichol woman. Peyote is a means of communication with the gods, and the consumption of peyote by the Huichol people is a deeply religious experience. The unity of these three elements — deer, corn, and peyote — is the absolute core of Huichol beliefs.

The Huichols express these feelings through their art, which is made not from the standpoint of decoration, but to give profound expression to deep spiritual beliefs. This makes traditional Huichol art, whether it be meticulous beadwork, yarn paintings, wooden masks, or striking embroidered and woven personal adornments, beautiful not only from its aesthetic standpoint but from the psychological as well. While the yarn paintings are a newer art form and not considered sacred, they still have the religious views of the Huichol embedded throughout.

Information taken verbatim from www.lafuente.com.

Another good resources about the Huichol people:

<https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/187-huichol-indians-their-art-and-symbols>
and

<https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1074-huichol-art>

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Ojo de Dios (God's Eye)

One sacred use of yarn by the Huichol is in the "tsikuri" or eye of God. This wooden cross has strands of yarn wound about it in a diamond pattern. Sources say it is a symbol of power to help one understand the unknowable and the unseen. It is often created as an offering to the guardian god of a child. Each year the child's father adds a section to the object, which is left in a place deemed to be sacred.

This popular folk art has gained commercial popularity and is often found in the market place. It has also evolved into a fun and popular art activity in schools and camps throughout many countries, both as an educational tool for understanding indigenous art traditions and an artistic bridge between cultures but also as a great STEAM activity.

For information on the meaning of Ojo de Dios, read
<https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1074-huichol-art>

For more info on the Huichol, read
<https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1074-huichol-art>



Tenangos or Otomi Textiles

Otomi textiles originate from indigenous people in the states of Puebla and Hidalgo in eastern Mexico. It is an ancient handcraft using embroidery techniques. Most tenangos are very colorful and contain images of plants, animals and people, often sharing mystical images similar to the Otomi cosmovision recorded in cliff drawings. Designs are created from an artist's cultural heritage and ancestral memory with each element and color of the design having significance.

It is a disappearing art that is practiced today by just a few people in northern Puebla in the villages of San Pablito and Pahuatlán in the remote Sierra Norte region. It takes many weeks to complete a single tenango, and it is highly valued as a folk art form.

Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>.

Additional info @ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/otomi-textiles-history.html>

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Papel Amate (Bark Paintings)

Bark paper, or papel amate, is handcrafted by Otomi Indians in the state of Puebla, Mexico. They use the bark from the mulberry tree, which creates an off-white paper, and the fig tree, which creates a darker brown paper. The bark is washed, boiled, and placed on a wooden board, then beaten with a stone until the fibers are fused together.

The Nahua Indians of Guerrero - skilled painters of intricate village and nature designs on pottery - have emerged as skilled painters of similar scenes on bark paper. They have been creating wildlife and village scenes on papel amate for several generations and are highly regarded for their colorful artwork.

Recently, artists have included classic Mayan designs on papel amate that depict important Mayan deities and cultural symbols.

Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>.

Additional info @ <https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/1081-amate-art-of-mexico-where-the-secular-meets-the-sacred>



Mascaras de Coco (Coconut Masks)

Handmade coconut masks are created by Nahua Indians in Xaxlitla, Guerrero. They have been creating these folk art masks for several generations. They split a coconut in half and hollow out the center. They then create appendages made from plant material, such as seedpods, corn cobs, etc, creating interesting depictions of animals, insects and other creatures of nature. They then paint the masks with brightly colored acrylic paints, giving them an enameled quality. They are part of the emergence of masks made for commercial purposes, sometimes representing more traditional masks created and worn by indigenous populations for specific dances and rituals.

Information from <http://www.lafuente.com>. For info on more traditional masks, see <https://www.mexican-folk-art-guide.com/Mexican-masks.html#.Xwlj7RJ7nIU>

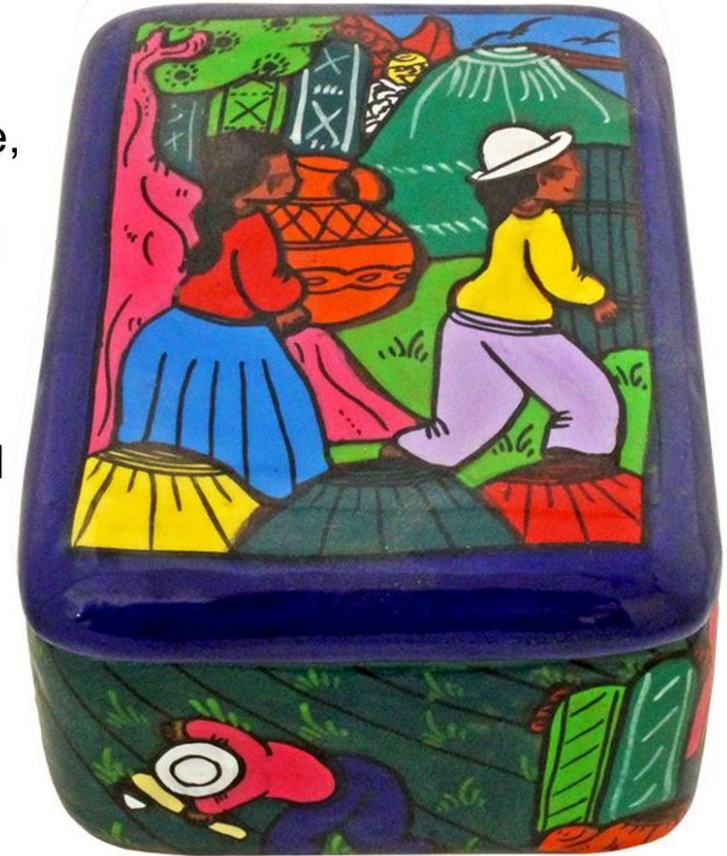


Barro Amate - Hand-painted Clay Boxes

These colorful hand-painted clay boxes have been created by Nahua artists in central and southern Mexico for many years. Most of the boxes feature one-of-a-kind Nahua villages scenes, and are typically painted in bright, shiny colors.

The Nahua are a people in Mexico who have lived in the area for over 5,000 years and have close association with the ancient Aztec. Their culture, language, religion, and ancient society have influenced many groups of people who came after them and are evident in their folk art traditions, including visual, literary and performing arts.

For detailed information on the Nahua, check out
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/nahua-peoples-culture-religion-language.html>
and
<https://www.everyculture.com/Middle-America-Caribbean/Nahua-Peoples.html>



Information from www.lafuente.com.

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Molinillo (Wooden Whisk)

The molinillo is a wooden whisk or stirrer used to froth traditional Mexican hot chocolate and other beverages, such as Atole and Champurrado. Sources say it dates back to the Aztecs, who created chocolate from roasted beans, ground on a metate and flavored with seeds and other flavorings. The chocolate was thick and gritty with a tendency to separate easily, so the Aztecs would pour the mixture from one pot to another to keep it smooth, sometimes stirring with cut and dried tepihilote palm. When the Spanish began colonizing Mexico, they found that the Aztec methods were too time-consuming so they invented the Molinillo that could stir the chocolate in a whipping fashion, thus preventing it from separating so easily. They became so enamored with this chocolate drink that they carried it back to Spain where it became the King's official drink. Around the late 1700's/early 1800's, Europeans began adding milk and sugar to create the hot chocolate that we know today. In Mexico and many other Latin American countries, folks add cinnamon and other flavorings.

A popular children's song to accompany the whipping action is

Bate, bate, chocolate!

Uno, dos, tres, CHO!

Uno, dos, tres, CO!

Uno, dos, tres, LA!

Uno, dos, tres, TE!

Chocolate, chocolate!

Bate, bate, chocolate!



Information from
<https://sacredchocolate.com/mexican-molinillo/>

www.globaleducationcenter.org

Metate y Mano (Mortar and Ground Stone)

The metate is a traditional grinding stone first used by the Aztec and made from volcanic rock, basalt, or andesite. The original stone had three legs and was slanted so that the ingredients being ground, such as corn, would fall into a container placed at the end of the stone. The mano is a cylindrical stone that is used to pound, roll and grind the grain in the metate. The original style of metate y mano was extremely efficient and is still used today.

The modern version of this kitchen necessity is the Mortar and Pestle, often made from granite, marble, soapstone, or ceramic and used widely around the world.

Information is from many sources, but a good reference book for information about the cultural importance of the Metate y Mano is **The Life-Giving Stone: Ethnoarchaeology of Maya Metates** by Michael T. Searcy. While it focuses on the Maya, it is still a great resource for understanding the importance of this life-giving tool.

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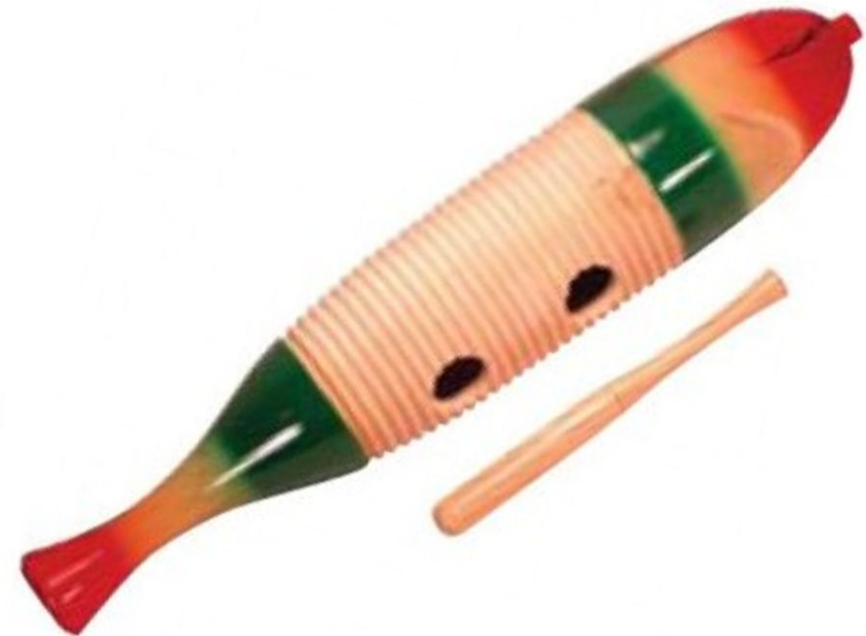


Traditional Percussion Instruments of Mexico

Maracas are percussion instruments used in many forms of music from The Americas. They are traditionally made from the fruit of the higuera tree, but can also be made from gourds. The higuera fruit is small and round. It is dried, then two holes are typically drilled in the fruit so that small pebbles can be inserted. A handle is attached, then the instrument might be painted or covered with tiny seed beads or decorated in some other traditional ways.



Guiro is a percussion instrument used in many forms of Latin American music and can be made from a gourd or wood (both traditional), or metal (modern). It is hollow with parallel ridges along one side and played by scraping a stick or metal tines across the ridges to create a ratchet sound. A typical one often representing Mexico is the shape of a fish and painted with the colors of the Mexican flag.



There are many styles of music throughout Mexico offering a blend of music from indigenous, African, and European traditions. There is also a diversity of instruments played throughout Mexico, including accordions, marimbas, stringed instruments like the guitar, violin and the vihuela, wind instruments like the trumpet and flutes, and many types of drums and small percussion instruments. The maraca and guiro are shared here because they are the ones in the Passport to Understanding cultural box