CULTURE GUIDE
GUATEMALA
SERIES 2
PRIMARY (K–6)
GUATEMALA CULTUREGUIDE

This unit is published by the Intercultural Outreach Program of the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University as part of an effort to foster open cultural exchange within the educational community and to promote increased global understanding by providing meaningful cultural education tools.

Curriculum Development

Brittany Martin graduated in psychology from Brigham Young University. Martin spent the summer of 2001 in Guatemala observing the lifestyle, traditions, and culture of the people in the western highlands.

Editorial Staff
Elisabeth Guyon, 
CultureGuide publications coordinator
Intercultural Outreach

Editorial Assistants
Linsi Barker
Jessica Best
Carrie Coplen
Dan Corrigan
Jackie Dunlop
Anvi Hoang
Sara Israelsen
Angela Olsen
Jena Peterson
Michael Strayer
Anna Swallow
Julie Volmar

Content Review Committee
Jeff Ringer, director
Cory Leonard, assistant director
David M. Kennedy Center

Victoria Blanchard, program coordinator
Intercultural Outreach

Allen Christenson, professor of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature
Brigham Young University

Special Thanks to:
Grant Olsen, photographer: Mayan Temple
Kristine Whipple, photographer: Guatemalan Highlands (three photographs) and Guatemalan Farmland

For more information on the Intercultural Outreach program at Brigham Young University, contact Intercultural Outreach, 273 Herald R. Clark Building, PO Box 24537, Provo, UT 84604-9951, (801) 422-3040, intercultural_outreach@byu.edu.

© 2007 Intercultural Outreach, David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602. Material contained in this packet may be reproduced for single teacher use in the classroom as needed to present the enclosed lessons; the packet is not to be reproduced and distributed to other teachers. Additional packets may be obtained by contacting Intercultural Outreach at (801) 422-3040.

Copyright Note: CultureGuide materials are the original creation of the curriculum developers and editorial staff, with the exception of country flags from Comstock.com, where noted. Included from the public domain is CIA World Factbook 2006 information found in the “Facts About” section and sometimes the country map or flag.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Study Cultures? .......................................................... 2

Geography & Climate
   Western Highlands ....................................................... 3

History
   Ancient Mayan Religion ................................................. 6

Politics & Economics
   Land Inheritance .......................................................... 9

Lifestyle
   Corn ........................................................................ 12

Reference Material
   Facts about Guatemala ................................................... 17
   History and Holidays ..................................................... 18
   Additional Resources ..................................................... 20
   Visuals ........................................................................ 22
**WHY STUDY CULTURES?**

For most of us, cultures are misunderstood; they are nebulous, vague, and hidden. Like the famous iceberg analogy, we know that most of what a culture is cannot be seen. But what does that mean? And why, then, should we study cultures if we do not know what we’re studying in the first place?

In the late twentieth century, Brigham Young University did not embrace a new discipline, but rather a new area of study—the study of cultures. Typically, anthropology is the social science that studies cultures. Why should they have all the fun? The study of cultures unites other academic disciplines (as needed), drawing upon literature, political science, sociology, and even the more applied areas of nursing, social work, law, and business. The study of cultures has grown into nothing short of a revolt against disciplines, “a mode of inquiry” that looks at things in new ways.¹

In 1982, the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies established Intercultural Outreach² as a formal program to help build bridges of intercultural understanding. Since then, more than 10,000 gratis cultural presentations have been given to local area public schools, taking students to new places using language, multimedia, and imagination. *CultureGuides* derive from the same expertise that has been honed in classrooms—with the exciting exception that these intercultural learning tools are not geographically bound. Thanks to the Internet, accessible multimedia technology, and our trusty eMACs, a limitless audience can learn about different cultures.

Globalization, the driving paradigm of the post-Cold War world, means that now, more than ever, culture matters. Culture is the invisible context that may keep us from understanding important people, places, and ideas; it exists whether or not we think about it. Intercultural education can help us, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also in very practical ways to combat racism, to expand business, and to communicate effectively.

*CultureGuides* share the same aim as Edward T. Hall, the eminent cultural scholar, to try to “make culture real.”³ Even though our “student guides” are not present in every classroom, we hope that *CultureGuides* will make classrooms of the mind and cultural laboratories wherever you may reside.

---


² The program was originally called International Outreach when it was established in 1982, but it was renamed Intercultural Outreach in 2006 to better reflect its aims.

GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

WESTERN HIGHLANDS

The weather in the western highlands of Guatemala affects the way the Guatemalan people live. Every night during the wet season, when nights are cold and rainy, families gather around the stove. Typically, the grandfather tells stories about the family’s history, while the grandmother makes food. These traditions emphasize the importance of family in the Guatemalan culture.

Starting Points

1. Imagine your favorite drink. What does it smell like? What does it taste like? What does it remind you of? When do you like to drink it? In Guatemala, many people like to drink atól [ah-toll], a hot drink made from finely ground corn kernels or cornstarch.

2. Think of your favorite stories. Where did you first hear these stories? Did your parents or grandparents tell them to you? Do you know any stories about members of your family? In Guatemala, family members like to tell stories to each other to help build family unity.

3. How does weather affect what you do? What do you and your family do when it rains? What do you do when it is sunny? In Guatemala, families often spend time with each other indoors during bad weather.

Information

Weather

When most people think of Central America, they imagine an area that is hot and humid. This is true of the northern and southern regions of Guatemala; they have low elevations and tropical climates. In fact, the northeast has a tropical rain forest, and the southeast has beaches, both sandy and rocky; however, the western highlands of Guatemala are mountainous, with elevations almost 10,000 feet above sea level, and the weather is much cooler than the tropical weather characteristic of Central America (see Geography & Climate Visual 1).

Guatemalans who live in the western highlands say there are two seasons—wet and dry. The wet season is from May to October, and the dry season is from November to April. People in the western highlands live differently than people in the northern rain forests or southern coasts do because of the constant rain during the wet season.

Around the Stove

Many Guatemalan families often live near or with each other in the western highlands in one- or two-bedroom houses made of cement. These homes are simple and do not have central heating or air conditioning. At night, before going to sleep, the family gathers in the kitchen, which is the only heated room in the house. A small wood-burning
A stove called a *plancha* [plahn-chah] is used to heat the kitchen as well as to prepare all of the family meals. Often, a family of fifteen to twenty people live in one house (see *Geography & Climate Visual 2*), and each night the entire family warms themselves by the stove (see *Geography & Climate Visual 3*).

**Story Time**

The grandfather is the storyteller during this nightly gathering time. Small grandchildren sit on his lap as he tells them stories about how their family came to the town. He also tells about their ancestors’ hard work to farm the land and to build homes. The grandchildren listen intently to his stories and ask him to repeat their favorites. In addition to stories from the family’s history, the grandfather tells about family traditions and beliefs as well as important moral values.

During this family gathering, the elders teach children about the tradition of drinking atól by drinking it while they tell stories.

**Atól**

Atól is a hot drink that was once made with finely ground, toasted corn kernels. Today, it is also available in small packets at Latino specialty stores.

**You will need:**

- 2 C cornstarch
- 4 C cold water
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 1 C sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- ground cinnamon

**Preparation**

1. Using a blender, liquefy cornstarch with 1 cup of water.
2. Add the remaining 3 cups of water, 1 cup of sugar, and cinnamon stick.
3. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Stir constantly to avoid sticking.
4. Add salt, and keep mixture at a boil for about 10 minutes.
5. Sprinkle with cinnamon, and serve hot.

Yield: 6 1-cup servings

Note: For more porridge-like consistency, substitute cornmeal for cornstarch.

**Activities**

1. Make a plancha out of construction paper and huddle around it as the teacher reads a favorite classroom story.
2. Using construction paper, markers, crayons, glue, and so forth, create a picture of your favorite rainy day activity, and share it with your class.
3. Make atól, and taste this traditional Guatemalan drink.
4. Tell a traditional Guatemalan story (see *Geography & Climate Visual 4*). Have the students act out the story as you tell it.
5. Find pictures of Guatemalans in traditional clothing (see *Additional Resources*). Cut out arm and neck holes in paper bags and use markers to decorate them like Guatemalan clothing.
Discussion Questions

1. Do your parents or grandparents tell you stories? If so, what are your favorite stories? Why? What makes these stories good?

2. How many people are in your family? How many of these people live in your house? What would it be like to live with or near your grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins? What would you learn from living with these family members?

3. What are your favorite foods? What traditional foods do you eat on special occasions? Why are these foods considered traditional?

4. How is your house heated? How does that compare with how homes were heated throughout American history? Do you think it would be useful to have a wood-burning stove today?

5. Has the power ever gone out in your home? If it were to happen in the winter, what would you do to stay warm? How would your family make food? What would you do to pass the time?

6. What are the seasons like where you live? How do those compare with Guatemala’s seasons?
HISTORY

ANCIENT MAYAN RELIGION

Thousands of years ago, a group of people called the Maya [my-ah] lived in the land now known as Guatemala. Ruins of their ancient cities and religious structures can still be found scattered throughout the country. Today there is a mixture of the Mayan religion and Catholicism.

Starting Points

1. Play the audio of a Guatemalan processional (see Music in Additional Resources). What sounds do you hear? What do you think the people are doing? For special events and holidays in Guatemala, the people often march in a procession, a religious parade-like ceremony.

2. Look at the picture of a Guatemalan processional (see History Visual 1). What are these people doing? Have you seen anything like this before? These processions can be seen during religious holidays.

3. Think of something ancient that you have seen in books, in museums, or elsewhere. What was it? What was it used for? In Guatemala, traditions and artifacts are very important to the people and their culture.

Information

Ancient Maya

Guatemala was first inhabited by a group of people called the Maya. This civilization began almost four thousand years ago in 1800 B.C.E. The Maya are still famous today for their advancements in architecture and science. They built many large temples out of stone without using any type of mortar to hold the stones together (see History Visual 2). These temples reached heights of over two hundred feet—nearly the length of a football field. The Maya were also advanced in their study of astronomy. Their highly accurate solar and lunar calendars were historically some of the first calendars and, in some ways, they were superior to those of Asia and Europe.

Not only were the Maya skilled architects and astronomers, they were also devoted historians. The Maya recorded their history by carving pictures called hieroglyphics into the sides of their temples. These pictures tell of war, peace, trade, and ancient religious ceremonies.

Religious Ceremonies

The ancient Mayan rituals and ceremonies have rich symbolism. The Maya used directions according to astronomy to determine when specific rituals should be performed. They also used colors to represent specific directions: white meant north, yellow meant south, red meant east, and black meant west. An ancient priest, called an itz’at [eet-saht] (sage) or k’uhun [koon] (keeper of holy books), conducted the ceremonies on behalf of the common people.
Fire also played an important role in religious ceremonies. The presence of fire symbolized humility and strength; the Maya would show humility by sacrificing animals as burnt offerings to please their gods.

**Contemporary Religious Traditions**

Today, there is a hybrid version of the Mayan religion and Catholicism. Catholicism came to Guatemala when Guatemala was conquered by Spain.

The ancient use of color and fire continues to influence modern-day Mayan practices and remains an important aspect of Guatemalan life. Houses and clothing are brightly colored to represent the life and energy of the Guatemalan people. Elements of fire have now been added to the traditional Catholic mass, and patrons worship by burning candles and incense on the front steps of cathedrals. Some Mayan priests hold private prayer meetings where burnt sacrifices are offered as gifts to the gods.

Worship through music is very important in the Guatemalan culture. Early in the morning, priests retreat to the mountaintops to sing and play music on behalf of the people in the village.

Processionals also add to people’s worship. Once a year, Catholics parade through the streets to worship God. The processional begins with mass at a church, after which the priest leads the congregation out into the streets. The congregation walks the streets of the town singing, chanting prayers, and stopping at every corner to worship the Catholic and ancient Mayan saints. Processionals can last for many hours. The Easter procession of Christ’s coffin, which travels a single block, lasts from three o’clock in the afternoon until the next morning.

**Activities**

1. Play the hieroglyphics translation game *(see History Visual 3).*

2. Color a picture of a Guatemalan house using bright colors *(see History Visual 4).* Discuss the meaning of colors in the picture and in Mayan culture.

3. Listen to the audio of the Guatemalan priests singing *(see Music in Additional Resources).* Write about what it sounds like and what music means to Guatemalans.

4. Give a TV news report to your class on the ancient religion of the Maya and how it affects Guatemalan culture today.

5. Complete the word search “Ancient Mayan Religion” *(see History Visual 5).*

6. Using salt dough *(see Lifestyle Visual 4)*, clay, or blocks, build your own Mayan temple.
Discussion Questions

1. Do you or your parents keep a journal? What do you record? Why? How are Mayan records that are written in hieroglyphics comparable to someone’s journal?

2. What is your favorite type of music? Where do you go to sing or play music? Why do you listen to music? Compare your favorite type of music with the music the ancient Mayans used to listen to.

3. What is your favorite color? If you could paint your bedroom a bright color, which one would you choose? Why would you choose that color?

4. What are some traditions that you and your family do every year (for Christmas, Halloween, Easter, or other holidays)? Why do you do them? Are they mostly for fun or for religious reasons?

5. What do you think fire symbolizes for the Guatemalans? What do you think of when you think of fire?

6. What would it be like to depend on the sun and the moon to tell time? What do you think it would be like to follow solar and lunar calendars like the Mayans created? (We follow the Julian calendar.) How would it affect your perception of time?
LAND INHERITANCE

Many people in Guatemala are farmers, but because land is scarce, many other Guatemalans are forced to find different sources of income. Some men turn to weaving and trade. Others move to the United States to look for work because they can earn more money there. When these men return to Guatemala, they live off what they have earned and bring back new ideas about how to live. These new ideas have caused major changes in today’s Guatemalan lifestyle.

Starting Points

1. Show the class something you have inherited from a family member. Who gave it to you? Why did they give it to you? Discuss what it means to inherit something. Most of the land in Guatemala has to be inherited through families because it is expensive and not easily attainable.

2. Look at the picture of Guatemalan youth (see Politics & Economics Visual 1). What do you notice about the way they are dressed? Is anyone dressed like you? Guatemalan teenagers do not dress much differently than teenagers in the United States dress.

3. Listen to the audio of a man weaving tela [teh-lah] (cloth) (see Music in Additional Resources). Have you ever heard anything like this before? What does it remind you of? Guatemalan people like to sing when they work.

Information

Land Inheritance Traditions

When the father of a family dies, his land is divided among his children to support their families. These families can be very large, and the divided plot of land is often too small to meet their needs (see Politics & Economics Visual 2). Although they make the best of their small plot of land, they will someday have children and will have to divide their land between those children. Thus, each generation has to live off of a smaller portion of land than their parents did.

Additional Income

Because plots of land are too small to support even a small family, men must find other ways to earn money. Some men have taken up the skill of weaving tela, a material used to make women’s skirts. They weave with different colors using traditional designs, which enables people to recognize a person’s village based on the patterns of the tela.

Once the men have woven a certain length of tela, they bundle it into a large bolt and take it to the nearest city. There they sell the tela to merchants, who then resell the cloth to foreign and domestic manufacturers. Depending on the man’s skill and
the quality of the finished cloth, some men can earn enough money to support their
family through weaving alone.

Another way of earning money is through trade. Highland tradesmen travel with
bolts of their woven tela to the coasts of Guatemala and sell it to the coastal people
who farm more than they weave. Using a small amount of the profit from their
sales, the men buy large quantities of fruits that do not grow in the highlands. The
men then return to the highlands and sell the fruit at a higher price. This way they
make a profit on both ends of the market.

Another possible job market is working in the United States. Men risk injury, illness,
and even death to travel to the United States. Once there, they work hard to get a job.
On average, they stay in the United States for two to three years, continually sending
money back to their families. By the end of their stay, most men have sent enough
money to build a nice house (see Politics & Economics Visual 3) and begin a small
business in Guatemala. Even though Guatemalan families that have men living in the
United States are able to live a more prosperous lifestyle, the absence of husbands and
fathers often has negative effects on the family.

United States Influence in Guatemala

The number of Guatemalan people going to work in the United States is rising. In fact,
having family members in the United States has become somewhat of a status symbol.
Even teenagers who do not have family in the United States may dress in American
clothing as opposed to traditional clothing. Generally, the men and women of indige-
nous communities wear traditional clothing, but an American influence is felt through
the use of American flags draped across the dashboards of cars, hung in the windows of
many homes, and worn as clothing (see Politics & Economics Visual 4). The presence
of North American culture is a recent change in Guatemala, and some people argue that
this change will destroy the native culture; however, others hope the influence of the
United States will benefit Guatemala.

Activities

1. Play the Inheritance Game (see Politics & Economics Visual 5).
2. Pretend you have a family member living in Guatemala. Write a letter to him
telling him what the current clothing styles are in the United States. Make sure to
tell him what you have learned about Guatemalan clothing. Include a drawing of
yourself dressed in typical American clothes and a drawing of what you think the
styles are in Guatemala.
3. Play charades and act out what your mom or dad does to earn money for your
family. Have your classmates guess the occupation. Now act out what you do to
earn money. Finally, act out what many Guatemalans do to earn money.
4. Write a paragraph about how the people in Guatemala earn money. Include what
you think it would be like to have one of these jobs.
5. Research some traditional tela patterns. Use a sheet of colored construction paper
and cut it into one-inch strips, but keep it uncut on one end so it serves as a base.
To make your own tela pattern, cut the other sheets of paper into strips and
weave them into the first paper.
**Discussion Questions**

1. Why do Guatemalans divide their land between all of their children? Do people in the United States do this? Why or why not?

2. What do you want to be when you grow up? What jobs do you want to have? What are some of the different types of jobs in Guatemala? If you were to live in Guatemala, what type of job would you want to have?

3. How would you feel if one of your parents had to work in another country? Why would you choose to work in another country?

4. Pretend you are a Guatemalan man that needs to earn money to feed his family. Would you rather weave, trade, or come to the United States? Explain why.

5. What are the benefits of the increasing influence of the United States in Guatemala? What are the disadvantages?

6. Why do you think many Guatemalans choose to wear American clothing instead of traditional Guatemalan clothing? Can you think of other cultures that have become more Americanized in their clothing?
LIFESTYLE

CORN

Corn is one of Guatemala’s most important crops because it is a staple of many native diets. However, preparing corn is a time-consuming process, so both men and women spend the majority of their day working to produce this important food.

Starting Points

1. Tell the story of the Little Red Hen who needed help making bread (see Additional Resources). Point out how hard the Little Red Hen worked. Guatemalans have to work hard to care for corn, one of their most important crops.

2. Look at the picture of the cornstalks (see Lifestyle Visual 1). These cornstalks are more than eight feet tall. Mark a height of eight feet on the wall with masking tape. As a class, walk by in a line and compare your height with that of an eight-foot cornstalk. Guatemalan cornstalks are taller than people.

3. Name all the foods you can think of that are made from corn. (Some examples are cornflakes, corn bread, corn tortillas, corn chips, and corn muffins.) Which of those foods do you like? Dislike? Which of those corn items do you think people eat in Guatemala? Corn is the most valuable crop in Guatemala.

Information

Importance of Corn

From the valleys to the tops of the mountains, cornfields cover much of the Guatemalan countryside. Because there is so much corn, every meal includes at least one corn dish. The prevalence of corn shows how important it is to the Guatemalan people. In Guatemala, corn is not eaten only for dietary reasons, but for religious and social reasons as well. Growing corn is a long-held tradition, and people grow and eat it because that is what their parents did; however, now many fields are being replaced by more profitable export crops such as coffee.

An ancient Mayan myth says that people were first created out of masa [mah-sah], or corn dough. For this reason, many Guatemalans today believe it is important to continue to eat corn to stay healthy. A good crop is seen as a gift from God, and an abundance of corn is seen as a sign of prosperity. If a family has enough corn for all of them to eat, they are considered wealthy.

Corn is also an important social tool for men, women, and children. Men spend many hours in their milpas [meel-pahs], or cornfields, socializing with other men by helping them plant, fertilize, and harvest their crops. Women talk with other women at the molina [mole-een-ah], or mill, while grinding kernels to make masa. Children gather hojas [oh-hahs], the cornstalk leaves used to prepare tamales [tah-mah-lehs] (see Lifestyle Visual 2), and play hiding games in the cornfields.
**Men’s Role in Corn Production**

Men are responsible for growing the corn. During the growing season, they spend the majority of the day taking care of their fields. They clear, plow, and plant their fields in early April. Until the rains begin, men must irrigate their fields by hand, using a bucket-like shovel to carry the water. Once the crop begins to grow, men can concentrate on other tasks, such as weeding, fertilizing, weaving tela, and gathering leña [lain-yah] (firewood).

In October, the crop is ready to harvest. Neighboring men go from field to field harvesting until each man’s field is done. Once the corn is harvested, men place the corn in a cellar to dry during the six-month dry season. After the men have planted, harvested, and dried the corn, the women turn it into masa for food.

**Women’s Role in Corn Production**

Women are responsible for converting the dry corn into masa. To do this, women place dried corncobs in a burlap sack, and then they beat the sack with a heavy stick to remove the dried kernels from the cob. Once the kernels are removed from the cob, the dried kernels are boiled in a large pot with lime for at least five hours. Boiling softens the kernels so they can be ground up easily. Once the kernels are boiled and drained, women take them to the molina where they grind them into masa (see Lifestyle Visual 3). Masa is used to make both tortillas and tamales.

**Corn Tortillas**

Tortillas are round, thin disks of unleavened bread that are very popular in many Central American countries.

**You will need:**

2 C instant corn flour (masa harina)  
1½ C warm water

**Preparation**

1. Add water to instant corn flour until it forms masa (dough). Masa will be slightly sticky and should keep its form when molded.  
2. Scoop a palm-sized amount of masa into your hand.  
3. Using both hands, roll the masa into a ball.  
4. Lightly flatten the masa ball by clapping the ball between your palms, rotating the masa as you clap.  
5. As the edges of ball begin to separate, push the edges of masa together and begin clapping motion again.  
6. Continue clapping motion until ball becomes a circular, flat tortilla. The tortilla will now be larger than your palm.  
7. Carefully place the tortilla on a griddle and cook until one side is golden. Flip, and brown other side.

**Serving Suggestions**

Tortillas can be eaten with anything, but favorite Guatemalan dishes combine them with eggs, black beans, rice, guacamole, or soup.
Guatemalan Tamales

Tamales are a Guatemalan family favorite, and there are many regional variations among tamale recipes. Unlike those eaten in Mexico, which are steamed in corn husks, Guatemalan tamales are steamed in cornstalk leaves. Although making tamales is a very labor-intensive process, they are worth it because they taste great.

**You will need:**

For the filling:
- 4 14.5 oz cans of diced tomatoes
- 3 large red bell peppers, sliced lengthwise into slivers
- 1 C water
- 2 ½ tsp kosher salt
- 2 oz squash seeds
- 1 quajillo chile, dried, stem removed, seeded, and broken into pieces

For the masa batter:
- 8 C fresh coarsely ground corn masa for tamales
- 12 C water
- 1 C shortening
- 4 tsp salt or to taste
- 36 8” x 12” aluminum foil pieces

**Preparation**

1. Cover meat with cold water. Bring to a boil, and cook on low heat for about 2 hours, or until tender.
2. In a large pot, combine tomatoes, half of the bell peppers, 1 cup of water, and salt. Bring to a boil. Simmer and cover for 15 to 30 minutes or until tomatoes and peppers are soft.
3. While tomatoes simmer, toast chiles and squash seeds and cinnamon stick in a nonstick pan over medium heat for approximately 5 minutes or until chiles and seeds release their aroma. Stir frequently. Be careful not to burn the seeds or chiles because they will make the sauce bitter. When fragrant, add sesame seeds and toast for another 5 minutes.
4. Add chile and seed mixture to the tomatoes, and cook for 15 minutes over low heat. In batches, purée mixture in a blender or food processor, adding water if necessary to blend into a smooth purée. Strain the mixture back into pot through a medium-mesh strainer. Bring to a simmer and add shortening. Taste, and add salt if necessary.
5. Cut meat into bite-sized pieces.
6. Prepare the masa in another pot, melting shortening in 12 cups water, and gradually add the masa flour. Add salt. Bring mixture to a boil. Taste for saltiness and add more if necessary. The mixture should have the consistency of cake batter but should not be runny.
7. Assemble the tamales. On one piece of aluminum foil, spread about \( \frac{1}{3} \) cup of the masa dough into an 8” x 4” rectangle.

8. Spoon 3 tablespoons of the sauce onto the masa. Place some pieces of pork, 2 capers, 2 olives, and several strands of bell pepper into a decorative pattern on the left half of the masa. Fold over the right edge of the tinfoil, enclosing the filling in the masa. Fold over the left edge, and then the top and bottom, creating a tight square package. Make sure that the tamales are wrapped well, so that the water will not get inside.

9. Once all the tamales are assembled, arrange them in layers in a large pot with about 4 to 6 inches of water at the bottom. Cover and bring to a boil and steam over medium heat for about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Watch carefully to make sure that all the water doesn’t boil away. Keep the steam steady by adding boiling water to the pot when necessary.

10. Tamales are done when the aluminum foil peels away from the masa easily. Remove from heat. Let the tamales stand for several minutes to firm up.

Yield: 36 tamales

Activities

1. Make tortillas and taste test them with eggs, black beans, rice, and guacamole. Vote on your favorite combination.

2. Make and eat Guatemalan tamales together as a class.

3. Make salt dough (see Lifestyle Visual 4). Using the salt dough instead of masa, make different corn products that people eat in Guatemala. Write about what it would be like to depend on corn products for your survival.

4. Act out the process of planting, harvesting, and grinding corn. Divide the different jobs of men and women among the students in your class.

5. Turn the classroom into a milpa by making cornstalks and ears of corn out of construction paper.

6. Make a mosaic using colorful dried corn kernels and gluing them to the paper.

Discussion Questions

1. Which states in the United States are well known for the foods they grow? How are these foods important to them? Why is corn so important in Guatemala?

2. What are the different chores at your house? What do the men do? What do the women do? How do they compare with the Guatemalan division of labor?

3. Why do you think Guatemalans put so much effort into preparing their favorite foods? How much effort do you put into making your favorite food?

4. Guatemalans eat tortillas or tamales at every meal (including breakfast). Would you like to eat the same thing at every meal? What food would you choose to eat every day?
5. Do you know anyone who owns a farm? What kinds of crops do farmers grow in the United States? Is corn as important a crop to the United States as it is to Guatemala?

6. Would you like to be a farmer? Why or why not? What crops would you like to raise?
**FACTS ABOUT GUATEMALA**

**Official Name:** Republic of Guatemala  
**Capital:** Guatemala City  
**Government Type:** constitutional democratic republic  
**Area:** 108,890 sq km  
**Land Boundaries:** Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico  
**Climate:** tropical; hot, humid in lowlands; cooler in highlands  
**Lowest Point:** Pacific Ocean 0 m  
**Highest Point:** Volcan Tajumulco 4,211 m  
**Natural Resources:** petroleum, nickel, rare woods, fish, chicle, hydropower  
**Natural Hazards:** numerous volcanoes in mountains, with occasional violent earthquakes; Caribbean coast subject to hurricanes and other tropical storms  
**Population:** 12,293,545 (July 2006 est.)  
**Ethnic Groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian-Spanish or assimilated Amerindian—in local Spanish called *Ladino*) and Spanish approximately 60%, Amerindian or predominantly Amerindian approximately 39%, other 1%.  
**Religions:** Roman Catholic, Protestant, indigenous Mayan beliefs  
**Languages:** Spanish 60%, Amerindian languages 40% (23 officially recognized Amerindian languages, including Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Mam, Garifuna, and Xinca)  
**GDP:** $56.86 billion (2005 est.)  
**GDP Per Capita:** $4,700 (2005 est.)  
**GDP Composition By Sector:** agriculture 22.8%, industry 19.1%, services 58.1% (2005 est.)  
**Labor Force:** 3.76 million (2005 est.)  
**Unemployment Rate:** 7.5% (2003 est.)  
**Industries:** sugar, textiles and clothing, furniture, chemicals, petroleum, metals, rubber, tourism  
**Agricultural Products:** sugarcane, corn, bananas, coffee, beans, cardamom; cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens  
**Exports:** $3.94 billion (f.o.b., 2005) coffee, sugar, bananas, fruits and vegetables, cardamom, apparel, petroleum  
**Imports:** $7.744 billion (f.o.b., 2005) fuels, machinery and transport equipment, construction materials, grain, fertilizers, electricity  
**Trade Partners:** U.S., Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, South Korea, China, Japan  
**Currency:** quetzal (GTQ), U.S. dollar (USD), others allowed  
**Exchange Rate:** 7.6339 quetzales = $1 U.S. (2005)
## HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS

### TIME LINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Earliest Mayan civilization begins in Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 B.C.E.–900 C.E.</td>
<td>Mayan civilization thrives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1523</td>
<td>Pedro de Alvarado, a Spaniard who helped conquer Mexico, invades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guatemala and establishes Spanish rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1570</td>
<td>Spain establishes the <em>audiencia</em> [ah-dee-ain-see-ah], a high court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of judges and administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>An earthquake destroys the city of Antigua; the audiencia moves to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guatemala City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Sep 1821</td>
<td>Guatemala declares independence from Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Guatemala becomes part of the Mexican Empire and breaks free from it a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>year later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>The United Provinces of Central America is formed with Guatemala,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica as its provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Guatemala leaves the United Provinces of Central America; Rafael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carrerea becomes dictator of Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Liberals take control of the Guatemalan government and forbid political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871–1944</td>
<td>Many liberal dictators rule Guatemala—they promote economic growth and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>encourage foreigners to immigrate to the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>United States company called the United Fruit Company develops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>banana plantations in Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Dictator Jorge Ubico resigns; revolution begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>New constitution adopted; Juan Jose Arevalo becomes president and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>encourages education and medical improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman becomes president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Guatemalan government takes over privately owned land and distributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it to the landless; government takes areas owned by the United Fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1954</td>
<td>United States supports a revolt against Arbenz to remove him from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>office, fearing he has communist tendencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>New constitution adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Guatemala’s military seizes control of the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Sixth new constitution is adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Guatemala opens several hydroelectric plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>A major earthquake strikes Guatemala, causing around 23,000 deaths and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$700 million in damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1970s</td>
<td>Widespread violence erupts in Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1982</td>
<td>General Angel Anibal Guevar wins the presidential election, but before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>he can take office, a group of military officers takes control of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>government; they suspend the constitution,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
abolish congress, ban political party activities, and form a three-member military junta [hoon-ta]

1983 Rios Montt, the leader of the junta, is overthrown after he declares himself the only ruler of Guatemala

1985 Civilian Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo is elected president; a new constitution is written, and congress reconvenes

1986 Civilian government takes office; military leaders try several times to take the government, but are unsuccessful

1991 Jorge Serrano Elias elected president

May 1993 Serrano dissolves congress and announces he will rule by presidential order

Jun 1993 Serrano is removed by military officials; Ramiro de Leon Carpio is elected president

1996 Anti-government groups sign a peace treaty with the government and president Alvaro Enrique Arzú Irigoyen, ending widespread violence and the thirty-six year civil war

2000 Alfonso Antonio Portillo Cabrera is elected president; archeologists find remains of large Mayan city El Pajaral

2001 Month-long drought ravages Central America and Guatemala loses 80 percent of its beans in its eastern provinces

10–11 Feb 2002 A 2,100-foot stretch of lava flows down from Volcano del Fuego near Antigua

15 Jun 2002 Despite accusations that he oversaw massacres in the 1980s and corruption scandals in the 1990s, former dictator Efrain Rios Montt wins another term as leader of the ruling party

29 Jul 2002 Pope John Paul II arrives in Guatemala; thousands of young people pack into a soccer stadium and spend the night waving candles and chanting “John Paul II, Guatemala loves you”

Jul 2004 $3.5 million paid to victims of Guatemala’s civil war

Mar 2005 Central American free trade deal with the United States is ratified

HOLIDAYS

1 Jan Año Nuevo (New Year’s Day)

Apr/May Easter (Sunday after Good Friday)

1 May Primero de Mayo (equivalent to U.S. Labor Day)

5 May Mother’s Day

Jun Corpus Christi

25 Jun Teachers’ Day

30 Jun Army Day

15 Sep Independence Day

15 Oct Revolution Day

1–2 Nov All Saints’ Day (families visit graves of loved ones; similar to U.S. Memorial Day) Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead—mixes pre-Columbian beliefs and modern Catholicism to honor their children and their dead)

24 Dec Nochebuena (Christmas Eve)

25 Dec Navidad (Christmas)

31 Dec New Year’s Eve (afternoon only)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

GUATEMALA EMBASSY TO THE UNITED STATES
2220 R Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20008
Phone: (202) 745-4952, Fax: (202) 745-1908
Web site: www.guatemala-embassy.org

GUATEMALA TOURIST COMMISSION (INGUAT)
7a Avenida 1-17, Zona 4 Centro Cívico
Guatemala City 01004, Guatemala
Phone: (800) 464-8281
Web site: www.visitguatemala.com

BOOKS

FILM
*Guatemala: Houses are Full of Smoke #1*, Mystic Fire Video, 1987.
*National Geographic: Lost Kingdom of the Maya*, National Geographic, 1993.
INTERNET SITES

Guatemala (in Spanish):
http://www.xelaenlinea.com

Guatemala—Heart of the Mayan World:
http://www.questconnect.org/guat_heart_mayan_world.htm

Guatemala on the Web:
http://www.guatemalanontheweb.com

Guatemala’s Future:

Letter from Highland Guatemala:
http://www.newfarm.org/international/guatemala/index.shtml

Little Red Hen Online Story:

Lonely Planet (Guatemala):
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/central_america/guatemala

Maya for Kids:
http://www.gigglepotz.com/maya.htm

Maya Legends:
http://www.kstrom.net/isk/maya/mayastor.html

Maya Religion:
http://philhar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/latam/maya.html

Mystery of the Maya—Writing and Hieroglyphics:
http://www.civilization.ca/civil/maya/mmc04eng.html

Travel for Kids—Western Highlands, Guatemala:
http://www.travelforkids.com/Funtodo/Guatemala/westernhighlands.htm

Visit Guatemala (in Spanish):
http://www.terra.com.gt/turismogt

Weaving in Guatemala: Threads of an Indigenous Way of Life:

World Fact Book:

MUSIC

Story of San Gregorio and the Kot

In the place known as San Gregorio, there were a lot of people. In this place was a hill named Siete Gradas. One day, at 7:00 PM, the hill glowed as if it were on fire; this frightened the people very much. They thought “Maybe it’s an angel,” but it wasn’t. At dawn they saw there was a great bird. It was the Kot, a royal eagle with two heads. The people of San Gregorio were scared because it was an immensely large bird with two heads!

This royal eagle came to San Gregorio and each time it came, it caught a person, took him or her to the great hill, and there it would eat the person. The people began to be frightened, and said, “What are we going to do so that the Kot does not eat us?” Together they decided, “It is better that when we leave the house that we always carry a large plank and the women carry something over their head like a basket or clay pot so that when the Kot comes he won’t take the person, he’ll take the basket or the plank.” And so it was.

The people had to do this for a long time. Almost all of the people grew tired from always carrying a large plank or basket. One day, a young boy left his house without carrying anything on his back. Consequently, the royal eagle came from the hill. He came flying with all his velocity and, with his large claws, grabbed the young boy by the collar and carried him in the direction of the hill. The eagle didn’t fly to the top of the hill but instead took the young boy halfway up the hill to his cave, where he had his nest and his children. The eagle left the young boy there with his children. But the children did not eat the young boy, because they were already full.

The royal eagle returned to San Gregorio to catch other people, but very few people stayed in the town. While the royal eagle was gone, the young boy grabbed a large rock and began to hit each one of the eagle’s children. The children of the eagle were all beautiful, but they were all ferocious. They had two heads, and they were so sly that he could not grab them.

Once each of the eagle’s children were dead, the young boy grabbed a vine and little by little began to climb down the tall mountain. It was difficult for him to climb down the mountain because of the many thorns on the vine. Once he was on the ground, the young boy hid himself among the trees and rocks, because he didn’t have a plank to carry over his shoulders to protect him from the Kot.

When the young boy arrived in San Gregorio, there were very few people left. Some had died of fear. The young boy called all the people together and told them what happened with the Kot and its children. He told them they no longer needed to worry. Little by little, the problem faded away, and the people say that today it is very tranquil in San Gregorio; however, the people still carry cargo on their backs or their heads to protect them from the Kot.

Story collected by Spencer Jardine, June to August 2001.
Translated and transcribed from K’iche’ to Spanish by Victoriano Antonio Guarchiac Carillo, June to August 2001.
Translated from Spanish to English by Brittany Martin, November 2002.
History Visual 1: Guatemalan Processional
The ancient Maya recorded their history by carving pictures called hieroglyphics on their stone temples. Each is a symbol representing a word, idea, or event. It has taken archaeologists (people who study ancient civilizations) many years to learn to read these hieroglyphics. This game lets you be the archaeologist and translate what these symbols say!

**Instructions:** Fill in each blank according to the key to see what the message says.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>♥</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>♉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>♊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>♋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>♌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>♏</td>
<td>♍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>♐</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>♎</td>
<td>♏</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ready? Here’s the message:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</th>
<th>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</th>
<th>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</th>
<th>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
<td>♈ ♉ ♊ ♋</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ancient Maya recorded their history by carving pictures called hieroglyphics on their stone temples. Each is a symbol representing a word, idea, or event. It has taken archaeologists (people who study ancient civilizations) many years to learn to read these hieroglyphics. This game lets you be the archaeologist and translate what these symbols say!

Instructions: Fill in each blank according to the key to see what the message says.

A ☊ H ☊ O ☊ V ☊
B ☊ I ☊ P ☊ W ☊
C ☊ J ☊ Q ☊ X ☊
D ☊ K ☊ R ☊ Y ☊
E ☊ L ☊ S ☊ Z ☊
F ☊ M ☊ T ☊
G ☊ N ☊ U ☊

Ready? Here’s the message:

Many many years ago the

Many people used

Hieroglyphics to record

Their history
Color the house below using bright colors—just like the Guatemalans do!

Name: ____________________________
History Visual 5: Word Search (1 of 2)

Name: __________________________________

Ancient Mayan Religion

ARTIFACTS
ASTRONOMY
BLACK
CALENDAR
COLOR
EAST
FIRE

HIEROGLYPHICS
HUMILITY
ITZ’AT
K’UHUN
MASS
MAYA
MUSIC

NORTH
PRAYER
PROCESSIONAL
RED
RUINS
SACRIFICE
SAINTS

SOUTH
STRENGTH
SYMBOLISM
TEMPLE
WEST
WHITE
YELLOW

Intercultural Outreach CultureGuides 31
Ancient Mayan Religion

Name: ________________________________

ARTIFACTS
ASTRONOMY
BLACK
CALENDAR
COLOR
EAST
FIRE

HIEROGLYPHICS
HUMILITY
ITZ’AT
K’UHUN
MASS
MAYA
MUSIC

NORTH
PRAYER
PROCESSIONAL
RED
RUINS
SACRIFICE
SAINTS

SOUTH
STRENGTH
SYMBOLISM
TEMPLE
WEST
WHITE
YELLOW

Intercultural Outreach CultureGuides
Politics & Economics Visual 1: Guatemalan Youth
The Inheritance Game

This game is designed to give a better idea of how land is inherited in Guatemala.

Needed for each group of ten: 1 grandfather name tag
3 children name tags
6 grandchildren name tags
6 jelly beans

**Instructions**
1. Divide into groups of ten.
2. Give each group member one name tag. Assign one member of the group to be the grandfather, three people to be the children, and everyone else to be the grandchildren. Distinguish everyone’s roles with the name tags.
3. Give the grandfather six jelly beans. The beans represent the amount of land that the grandfather has to divide between his children.
4. Have the grandfather divide the six jelly beans evenly between the three children.
5. Each child must now divide his or her beans so that each group member wearing a grandchild name tag has the same number of beans.

**Discussion Questions**
1. How many jelly beans did the grandfather start out with? If the beans represent land, do you think that the grandfather had enough land to feed his family?
2. How many jelly beans did each child get once the beans were divided evenly? Did they have enough beans to share with their family?
3. How many beans did the grandchildren end up with? Was it more or less than the jelly beans each child had? More or less than the grandfather had?
4. If you were a grandchild, how did you feel when you were only given one jelly bean?
5. How does this game compare to land inheritance in Guatemala?
Lifestyle Visual 2: Guatemalan Children Gathering Cornstalk Leaves
Lifestyle Visual 3: Grinding Corn Kernels at the Molina
Salt Dough Recipe

You will need:

4 C flour  
1 C salt  
2 T vegetable oil  
food coloring  
1–1½ C cold water

Preparation
1. Mix flour, salt, and oil.
2. Add food coloring and water.
4. Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.
Flag of Guatemala

The flag has three equal vertical bands of light blue (hoist side), white, and light blue, with the coat of arms centered in the white band; the coat of arms includes a green and red quetzal (the national bird) and a scroll bearing the inscription LIBERTAD 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 1821 (the original date of independence from Spain), all superimposed on a pair of crossed rifles and a pair of crossed swords and framed by a wreath.