

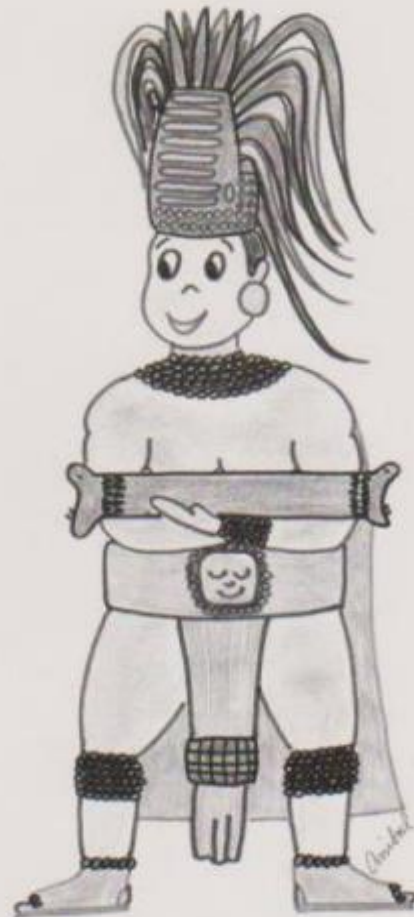


The Popular Tradition

Guatemala Tales

No. 196

Anibal Chajón Flores



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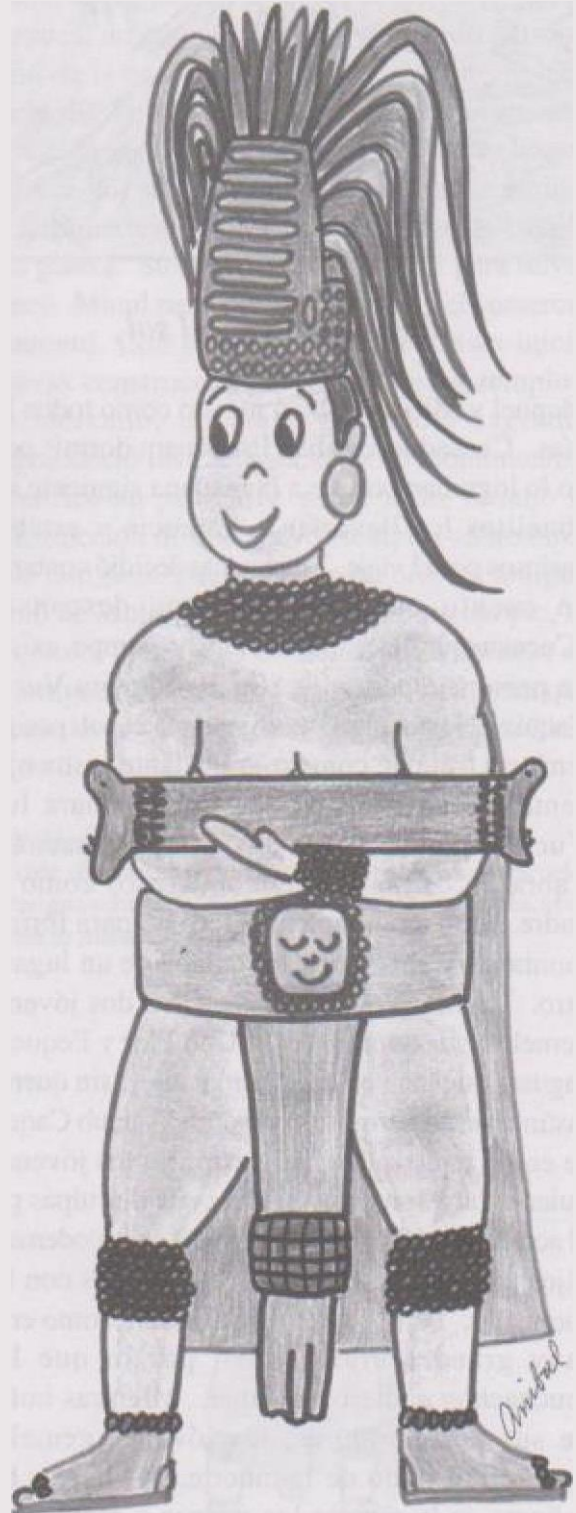
University of San Carlos of Guatemala

Guatemala Tales

Anibal Chajón Flores

Presentation

This Guatemalan Popular Tradition Bulletin provides educators with a series of stories about Guatemala's history and traditional culture, aimed at children between six and eight years old. It contains information related to various stages of the country's historical development, from the pre-Hispanic period to the period of independence. At the end of each story, a brief activity is provided that readers can engage in. The main objective is to narratively present to children concrete facts about aspects that have shaped Guatemalan identity: the country's geography inspired by the literary accounts of the Popol Vuh; the Maya origin of certain monuments, dances, crafts, and clothing that still exist in many communities, especially worn by women; the slavery brought about by the Spanish Conquest and the subsequent liberation, the African presence, and some architectural monuments that characterize the urban landscape in *Esquipulas* and *La Antigua Guatemala*, all aimed at promoting the appreciation of Guatemala's traditional culture and the preservation of the country's cultural heritage.





Volcanoes and the sun

Manuel and Miriam had played like every day. Tired, they were ready to sleep, but they couldn't because the next morning their grandparents would take them to *Palencia*, and they were eager for the trip. Their grandmother decided to tell them a story so they could rest: "they say that, a long, long time ago, there existed a powerful character. His name was Vucub Caquix. He wasn't the sun, but he believed he was the sun because he wore a bright red costume, and his eyes sparkled as if they emitted light. Vucub Caquix had two sons, Zipacná and Cabracán. They were almost as powerful as their father. One piled up the land to create mountains, and the other moved them from one place to another. One day, Vucub Caquix saw two young twins, their names were Uno Flor and Pequeño Jaguar. They were playing with a blowgun and accidentally hurt his beautiful teeth. Vucub Caquix got so angry that he wanted to destroy the young twins, who fled before apologizing for the accident. Vucub Caquix sent his powerful sons to crush the twins with the mountains. But Zipacná and Cabracán, being very large, were slow, so the young boys were able to escape. While fleeing from their pursuers, the young twins arrived in the realm of death. Upon arrival, the lords of death challenged them to play a ballgame.

The lords of death hoped to defeat the twins through deception. Before the game, they asked the twins to light tobacco cigars but not let them burn out. The twins sought help from fireflies to simulate the fire. Then, they were asked for flowers, but they were locked away, so ants carried them off. Finally, they asked a rabbit to make the ball for the game and it ran so far away that the lords of death couldn't catch it. With all of this, they managed to emerge victorious. For defeating death, Uno Flor became the true sun, and Pequeño Jaguar became the planet Venus, which appears in the sky. They no longer had to flee from Vucub Caquix, who was astonished to see the brilliance of the real sun. The young boys, before ascending to the sky, offered their apologies for the accident and thanked him because, if it hadn't been for his pursuit, they would never have become the sun and Venus. Vucub Caquix felt ashamed of his actions. So, he wanted to pay tribute to the sun and Venus. He called his sons and said, 'We will create 40 volcanoes that will spew fire.' They began the work and piled up the land. Gradually, they raised and transported the volcanoes. They would later be known as Tajumulco, Tacaná, Tolimán... However, the sun had to illuminate the earth and couldn't wait any longer. When the first day dawned, Zipacná and Cabracán had only finished 36 volcanoes. They lined them up from east to west so the sun could continue its course every day. As a tribute, three volcanoes spewed fire as the sun passed by. The sun was pleased and rewarded Vucub Caquix by turning him into a macaw, a bird that had to complete the four volcanoes that were missing." When the grandmother finished her story, the children were fast asleep.

Exercise

Find out how volcanoes are formed and write it in your notebook.

The Builder King

Many years ago, more than 1300 years ago, a young king inherited the kingdom of an ancient city. The name of this king was Hasawa Chan K'awil, and his kingdom was known as Mutul. One of his ancestors had turned their city into the most powerful kingdom in the entire region, but now it was in trouble because Hasawa's father had been defeated in a war. Hasawa was determined to regain the prestige of his kingdom and the commercial importance it had in the past. The ancient city was situated along the main trade routes where jade, shells, obsidian, precious feathers and skins, cotton, and other treasures were carried from distant places to the city. Hasawa saw the danger that, due to the defeat, visitors might stop coming to the city. Although he was young, Hasawa had many advisers who made him realize that it was necessary to take decisive action. The war in which his father had been defeated was provoked by an enemy city, the kingdom of Kan. Hasawa understood that, even though their neighbors aimed to diminish their power and prestige, the true threat came from Kan, which envied Mutul's power and commercial wealth. The sovereign made numerous consultations with his ancestors, fasted, prayed, and waited for his ancestors to reveal something to him. One early morning, while praying inside the temple mound located in front of his palace, after days of fasting, he observed a snake that seemed to emerge from the wall. It was a bright snake whose flashes resembled the feathers of macaws and quetzals. He was astonished. The priests had spoken to him about the Feathered Serpent, a manifestation of the heavens, but he had never seen it before. He didn't know what to say and remained silent. The magnificent serpent opened its jaws, and a face seemed to emerge. As it appeared, he realized it was his father, speaking to him with the voice of thunder: 'My son, your destiny is to triumph in war and restore my name. Go against King Kan, and victory will be yours.

The smoke from the incense turned into a whirlwind that filled the entire room, and the serpent disappeared, along with Hasawa's father. The next morning, Hasawa ordered preparations for war. Messengers were sent to Kan to respond to the challenge. A few weeks later, a massive army under the command of the king marched out of the city through the northern causeway. In just a few days, they confronted the king of Kan, who expected to defeat young Hasawa in a matter of hours. Perhaps due to his arrogance or the lack of skill of his warriors, the king of Kan lost the battle and the war. His army had to flee to save the king. Mutul regained its prestige, and trade flourished. With his newfound prosperity, Hasawa initiated new constructions. He created new temples, a market, a sacred ball court, expanded the causeways, erected monuments, modified his palace, and, above all, ordered the construction of two new temples over older ones. It was the golden age of the ancient kingdom of Mutul, now known as Tikal, so that you may remember the great king of the city: Hasawa Chan K'awil.

Exercise

Is there any ruin or mound near your home or school? Find out about it, note its name, and try to discover who ordered its construction.





A woman of strong will

Wac Chanil was born in a grand palace located in the center of the city of Dos Pilas. On the day of her birth, the king was joyful because he had requested a daughter from his ancestors. He already had an heir who would become king like him, but he wanted a daughter to marry her to the son of an allied king. From the day of her birth, preparations were made for the marriage. The ambassadors traveled with gifts to Naranjo, the allied kingdom, to inform them that the wedding would take place in 17 years. Her mother was a princess from Cancuén, and, like Wac Chanil, she had been raised to marry a king. When she was eight years old, she had visited the city and the palace of her maternal grandparents, with over a hundred rooms, many storehouses, and a bustling port. The image of the powerful kingdom had been engraved in her mind, especially when her mother had told her, "Your kingdom must be more powerful than that of your parents and grandparents." But things accelerated, and when she was barely twelve years old, she was sent to her new kingdom. She was very nervous but didn't show it. She departed in an immense caravan, accompanied by an army of guards to protect her. She traveled in a litter, shielded by curtains, with her ladies-in-waiting, and one of her cousins led the caravan. As they passed through each city, they left the residents in awe.

After several weeks of travel, they arrived in Naranjo. The city was adorned to welcome her, flower and feather arches adorned the main avenue, and a carpet of flowers and leaves perfumed the caravan's path as the inhabitants greeted their future queen. When they reached the palace, her future father-in-law welcomed her with an affectionate greeting while seated on his throne and introduced her to her fiancé, a young boy of twelve. Wac Chanil was taken to her residence, where she would live until her marriage in five years. She continued her studies in literature, history, astronomy, medicine, music, art, mathematics, and other disciplines. The day of her wedding arrived, and although nervous, she behaved like a queen, as her father-in-law had passed away by then. Troubles began shortly after. The kingdom of Caracol had feared the union and had tried to prevent it. Then, Caracol attacked the city. Her young husband led the army and managed to stop the enemies, but not for long. In another battle, he was captured and died. Wac Chanil was left very sad. She was a widow with a small baby, while the enemy army prepared to invade her kingdom. The courtiers advised her to flee and seek refuge with her father to protect her child so that, when he grew up, he could regain the freedom of Naranjo. But Wac Chanil remembered her mother's words, her kingdom had to be greater than that of her parents and grandparents. She fortified the palace, gave orders to the high military chiefs, and, to everyone's surprise, donned her husband's war attire. The enemies attacked not far from the city, hoping to enter quickly and seize it. The battle was long and violent. The surprised enemies were defeated and fled. From then on, Wac Chanil ruled independently and prepared her son to fight for his kingdom to the end, just as she had achieved.

Exercise

For a long time, women did not have the same rights as men. Write in your notebook how you will help both men and women have the same rights and responsibility.

Foreign liberator

On King Charles I's table, letters of protest from important figures piled up. Bishop Francisco Marroquín proposed to the king various ways to prevent the conquistadors from harming the native inhabitants of the province of Guatemala even more each day, and the same was done by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. Pope Paul III himself had drafted a document expressing his astonishment at the damage caused by the conquest and demanding that indigenous people be treated as human beings and not as animals. The king had a lot of work to do. He had spoken with several conquistadors, such as Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, who had brought him many gifts. One of his favorite artists, the German Albrecht Dürer, exclaimed in amazement that he never imagined such marvels could be created with gold. Now he understood it well; these were gifts to disguise the harm caused to the rightful owners of so much gold and so many marvels. Friar Antonio de Montesinos had written a sermon: "What harm were the indigenous people doing to the Spaniards for them to attack, kill, and steal their possessions? They didn't even know the king of Castile." Then, in the city of Barcelona, the king issued some Ordinances. These were laws that prohibited the enslavement of Native Americans and ordered the return of their lands. To achieve this, he also ordered the establishment of a court of justice on the borders between Honduras and Nicaragua. Several judges were sent to ensure the king's will was carried out. However, time passed, and justice was not served. Six years after the laws were proclaimed, the king sent another judge. He was a vigorous man accustomed to ensuring that justice was carried out. When he arrived in Gracias a Dios, he discovered that it was a small town with limited access to the rest of the province. But there was another city with better roads, the city of Guatemala. He decided that to achieve the freedom of the indigenous people, he should relocate to that city and send his judges to accomplish what seemed impossible.

The opposition was formidable; the conquistadors brandished swords and prepared their firearms, but Don Alonso had no fear. He knew he was upholding justice and headed to the city to liberate the indigenous people. The escort that accompanied him led him to a two-story house. Bishop Marroquín had given it to him; it was his residence. Don Alonso thanked him for the gift and from there, he issued the necessary orders to free the indigenous people. The conquistadors shouted, but the judge didn't yield an inch. Justice had arrived. Little by little, the indigenous people were liberated. Don Alonso allocated towns and lands for the former slaves. Many historians may have forgotten his name because they were Spanish, but for the indigenous people, he remained a distant memory of the day when the freedom of entire communities was achieved.

Exercise

Write a message for the boys and girls who don't know the importance of what Don Alonso did.





Cotuja', the liberated slave

Cotuja' was a child like any other. His dark eyes would widen when he discovered something new, like the sparkling dust in the streams that fed into a larger river. At the age of five, he hardly strayed from his mother, who had to wash clothes and cook for Pedro de Alvarado's slaves. She too was a slave, and her fear grew as she knew that, at the age of six, her son would be sent to the streams to "pan for gold". This involved gathering sand from the riverbed using tools resembling griddles, in order to collect the sparkling dust that captivated Cotuja's gaze. The work wasn't complicated, but being in the water all day led to illness and death. The young boy's mother tried to conceal her fear by telling her son stories every night. She would tell him that their hometown was Q'umar Ka'aj, with its white buildings and imposing defenses. She recited the names of their ancestors to him, so he would always remember them. She spoke incessantly of Kikab and Cavizimaj, two powerful kings who had expanded the kingdom beyond the horizon. But the wars of the past were not like the ones that had turned Cotuja's parents into slaves. The Spaniards, like Pedro de Alvarado, had brought firearms and, in a bloody battle, defeated the K'iche'es, Cotuja's people. When the Spaniards reached the city, they captured the kings, killed them, set fire to the houses, and took his parents as slaves.

His father had fought, but he was wounded, and when he recovered, they forced him to pan for gold, threatening him and his family with firearms. He worked like this until he died, when Cotuja' was only three years old. Cotuja's mother worried about her son's future deeply. Some Castilians, dressed in robes that reached their ankles and whom they called friars, claimed that everything would be resolved. They said that one of them had written to a man named the Pope and to the King of the Castilians, and that freedom would soon come. But the mother didn't believe it. However, one day, they heard a commotion. Other Castilians, dressed in black, had arrived with some papers. They claimed to come in the name of Alonso López de Cerrato, a judge who had ordered compliance with the laws of the Castilian king. Finally, they were free, and they could live in peace. The mother couldn't believe it, but it was real. The only difficulty they found was that they couldn't return to their city, as it no longer existed. They stayed in a village created by the orders of the same Lord Cerrato. They were going to provide them with land to cultivate, and soon, they saw other friars arrive with the mission of teaching them a new religion. Cotuja' didn't quite understand what had happened, but he saw his mother cry, this time with happiness because she said that her little boy could have a better future.

Exercise

To be free is to be responsible for one's actions. Write a message for all boys and girls to promote freedom and responsibility.

The eventful life of Bumbu

The year 1667 began in the city of Santiago de Guatemala. Preparations were underway for the arrival of the new president of the Audiencia and governor of the realm, Don Sebastián Álvarez Alfonso Rosica de Caldas. In the Royal Palace, all the employees hurried from one place to another to finalize the details for the reception. One of the maids was hanging curtains in the future president's room. Her dark skin and curly hair made her African ancestry evident. Her grandmother had been a slave, as was her mother, but they had been freed by their owner, so she was free. She lived in the San Francisco neighborhood, where she had the chance to meet a holy man, Brother Pedro. Then, the president entered the city in an elegant carriage. Inside the Audiencia, officials handed the governor the staff symbolizing his power, followed by a mass at the Cathedral and a banquet at the Palace. Even though Bumbu only washed the clothes in the Palace, they didn't allow her to go home because it was necessary for her to unpack the president's family's clothes. So, by chance, the president saw her in his room. "What's your name, slave?" the governor said arrogantly. "My name is Bumbu, but I am not a slave," the young woman replied. "How dare you answer me that way? Don't you know I can dismiss you immediately?" Don Sebastián said, infuriated. "I apologize, I didn't mean to offend you," Bumbu said, who was supporting her two children and had just found out she was pregnant with her third child, so she couldn't afford to lose her job. But Don Sebastián was unyielding and grew hateful towards her. He asked the butler who the girl was. That's how he learned that Bumbu hadn't married because her young partner didn't have enough money for the wedding and had died in an accident a few weeks ago. So, he wanted to set an example for all those who served him and ordered that the girl be sent to the Castillo de San Felipe, a prison on the Río Dulce. The girl cried and begged, but Don Sebastián was unrelenting.

Bumbu was taken in chains to the Castillo de San Felipe, her two young children cried with her, but they had received Brother Pedro's blessing along with a small crucifix. The journey was filled with anxiety. On the same day she arrived at San Felipe, her chains were removed, and an enemy ship had been spotted in the Gulf of Honduras, indicating a possible attack. The entire population of the area prepared to face the threat. Militiamen from Chiquimula picked up their weapons and readied the cannons. Bumbu, her two little ones, and other people prayed that nothing bad would happen. Bumbu's little ones took out the small crucifix from a bag and held it up, announcing to everyone that it was a gift from Brother Pedro. The approaching ship drew nearer, its cannons ready, when suddenly, a gust of wind pushed the sails in the opposite direction. The sailors tried to steer the ship toward the castle, but the wind prevented them, and they quickly moved away. The danger passed, and the militiamen fired three cannons as a warning not to return. Everyone applauded in relief and attributed it to a miracle from Brother Pedro. Bumbu knew that everything had happened to save a small village from a pirate attack.

Exercise

Research the living conditions of slaves in the past.





In the name of the king

It was the year 1700 in La Gomera, Escuintla. The population was discontented with one of the Spaniards who owned an estate near the town. In 1619, a governor of the Kingdom of Guatemala, Don Antonio Peraza Ayala Castilla y Rojas, Count of La Gomera, had founded the town so that the Afro-descendant population could live peacefully in the area. According to the kingdom's ordinances, the town had its own farmland for cultivation and had access to the estuary, known as the Chiquimulilla Canal, for irrigation purposes. However, the Spaniard had taken control of a bank of the estuary and used it for a large part of his cattle to drink from. The cows, left free by the Spanish workers, invaded the farmlands and damaged them, harming the corn cobs. The mayor of the town, a person of mixed race named Diego in honor of the town's patron saint, was determined to resolve the situation. He had seen how indigenous mayors from neighboring towns obtained justice by submitting a petition to the Audiencia in the city of Guatemala. But no one in the town knew how to write. It occurred to him to send a messenger to the town of Escuintla to have them write the complaint, but he found out that the Spaniard had many friends in Escuintla. So, he thought of a more distant place and sent his nephew Juan to San Miguel Petapa, where indigenous mayors had secretaries.

When Juan arrived in Petapa, he spoke with the mayors, and when he explained the problem, they assisted him. In the capital, he headed to the Audiencia. The judges received the petitions from the towns in the portico of the Royal Palace, only in the morning. Juan had to wait his turn, and finally, he handed over the document. It was received without much ceremony, as he was alone. In contrast, delegates from other towns, like Chichicastenango, who came with large entourages, were received with more formalities. But he didn't mind; he hoped to find a solution to the problem. Then, he noticed that the judges hurriedly got up; an extraordinary official was arriving, the kingdom's visitor, Don Francisco Gómez de la Madriz, who also acted as the governor. At that moment, Don Francisco requested all the documents and quickly reviewed them. He handed them to his secretaries and issued orders for everything to be resolved immediately. He looked at Juan's petition and said aloud, "Order the Spaniard to remove the cattle, and let the town of La Gomera have exclusive use of the bank indefinitely." One of the secretaries hastily wrote the document, making a copy that was archived. Don Francisco signed it and proceeded with other cases. The judges handed their documents to Juan, who returned to La Gomera very pleased, never imagining that a solution would come so quickly. However, the Spaniard refused to obey the order from the *Audiencia* and instructed his workers to shoot at any resident of *La Gomera* who approached the bank. The residents, without weapons, had to withdraw. Diego hurriedly sent Juan back to the capital. Juan had to leave at night to avoid being shot by the Spanish workers. Juan arrived in Guatemala, spoke with one of the secretaries, who informed the visitor. Don Francisco then sent a group of militiamen to La Gomera. The Spaniard had to obey the authority of the visitor and his orders. Since then, the estuary has belonged to the town, and justice was administered in the name of the king.

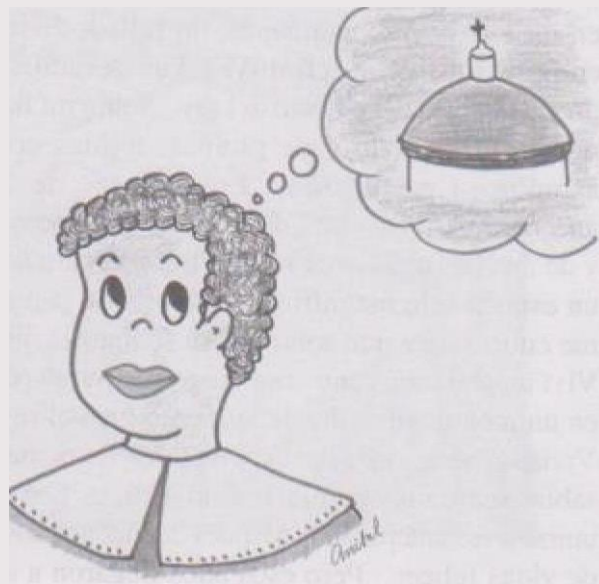
An extraordinary family

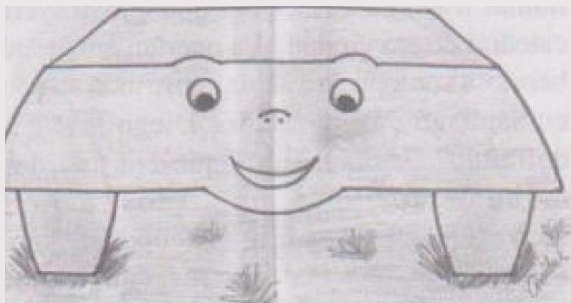
Manuel arrived in the town of Chiquimula de la Sierra. He had been summoned to build the new church for the town. It had been over 30 years since the town had been destroyed by an earthquake and a flood. The ruins of the old settlement could still be seen, where the remains of the "old church" lay. Resources were scarce because the authorities were determined to move the capital from the Panchoy Valley to the Ermita Valley. Manuel had to use only the money he could raise in Chiquimula. He felt a deep sense of responsibility; everyone expected him to create marvelous work because he came from an extraordinary family. His great-grandfather had been the first chief architect of the kingdom, José de Porres. According to what his father had told him, José had started as a mason, working under the command of a formidable architect named Juan Pascual. Juan studied architecture books that had arrived in the city, which meant he had to learn Spanish, as Juan was of Mayan origin. On the other hand, José's grandparents had African origins. So, José didn't have the right to study in schools for Spanish and noble indigenous people. That's why Juan educated José. Once he had learned enough, he was entrusted with the greatest project of his time: the construction of the Cathedral of Santiago. José, who had already studied and worked extensively, accepted the challenge and built the most important and largest church in the city. Due to his talent, he was also assigned the Bishop's Palace and other churches, such as Santa Teresa, the Company of Jesus, and Belén. José was also a good teacher, as he passed on everything, he knew to his son Diego. Furthermore, he left all his architecture books to Diego. Diego became the second chief architect of the kingdom. Due to his own skills and the fame of his father, Diego undertook other projects, such as the church in *Ciudad Vieja*, the School of Christ, *Capuchinas*, *Santa Clara*, the City Hall, and the *Las Sirenas* Fountain. In turn, Diego knew he had to teach his children. Two of them followed in his footsteps, Felipe and Diego José. As everyone in the kingdom knew of the talent in the Porres family, they sent for Diego José all the way from León, Nicaragua, to build the cathedral in that city.

They wanted it as grand and beautiful as the one his grandfather had built in Santiago de Guatemala. Diego José didn't disappoint them. Manuel knew it was one of the most cherished monuments for the Nicaraguans. Meanwhile, Felipe was called to Esquipulas to build a sanctuary for the Black Christ. It turned out to be a monumental work, with four towers, a dome, and a shrine for the sculpture. In fact, they wanted him to build a large convent, but the resources ran out, and it couldn't be constructed. In that town, Felipe taught his son, Manuel, everything necessary for him to become another architect in the family. Manuel learned, but he felt fearful in the face of the works and the fame of his relatives. When he arrived in Chiquimula, he carried the blueprints of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He took many ideas, decided to use the decoration his grandfather had used, and began the work. The workers had affection for him because he was considerate and kind. Gradually, the walls grew in height, the dome was placed, and the temple was completed. Manuel showed that he still belonged to an extraordinary family.

Exercise

Search in your community for an old building constructed during the Spanish colonial period. Draw it and write down its name in your notebook.





The story of a throne

My life has been wonderful. Over 2,000 years ago, a skilled artisan, whose name has been lost to the pages of time, found the rock in which I was carved in a quarry in the mountains. Upon seeing the rock, he envisioned me. Twenty men transported me from the quarry to the workshop. There, they shaped me, though not perfectly. Another twenty men moved me, and gradually, they brought me to a marvelous city known as Tak'alik' Ab'aj. I had only known my mountains, but now, I could see a dazzling landscape before me. A plain stretched out into the sea. Hundreds of people came and went from the city. Some were traders, others farmers, hunters, artists, and scholars. Men and women greeted each other with respect and gazed at me in wonder. Alongside me, other rocks were transported, and shortly thereafter, I learned they would be turned into monuments. I was destined to be the throne of the king. When they brought me to the workshop, the master drew lines on my body, and slowly, I was carved into my final form. I was carried in a procession to the king's palace. They placed a cover of feathers on me, woven with astonishing precision. The colors of the macaw, *quetzal*, hummingbird, *chocoyo*, and many other birds intertwined to create a magnificent spectacle. A jaguar skin covered me so that the king could sit upon me. I lived many years in honor and was depicted in a monument, where I appear beneath the king. Several generations of wise kings made laws concerning me and administered justice. I witnessed them joining their ancestors after many years of happy life. But those years came to an abrupt end, and that's when my sadness began.

One day, a group of foreign warriors, speaking an unknown language to me, with rustic customs, invaded the city. To demonstrate their newfound power, they attacked me. They split me in two. I suffered greatly, was humiliated, and left abandoned. No one could protect me; they set fire to the palace and parts of the city. Fortunately, friends from the city helped the residents expel the violent foreigners. But I had been mutilated. They only found one part of me. Since I wasn't complete, they sent me to a temple and placed me as an altar. Now, instead of bearing kings on jaguar skins, I raised prayers alongside the smoke and the scent of flowers. I didn't complain, but I missed my other half, which suffered beneath the rubble, lost. Times changed again; Tak'alik' Ab'aj entered a slow economic crisis, and gradually, it was abandoned by its population, who moved elsewhere. The temple where I served as an altar was emptied. The roof collapsed. Slowly, I could see how vegetation grew closer, first a few quetzal feathers, then some shrubs, and finally, large trees. The earth piled up over me, and I stopped seeing the sun. Years turned into centuries until one day, some strange men found me. I thought they would attack me again, and I got scared. But I was wrong; they had found my other half. You can't imagine my joy; I was whole again! They called themselves archaeologists, a man and a woman. Now they are my friends, Miguel and Christa. They placed me in a new location. The city is not like before, but now I have new visitors; they come with cameras and speak of me. I am happy because I am complete, and I am serving my city once again. I love it as much as my mountains because here I have seen the good deeds of humans and that we can always have a better future. I hope to see you someday at Tak'alik' Ab'aj.

Exercise

Look near your home or school for an ancient monument and draw it in your notebook.

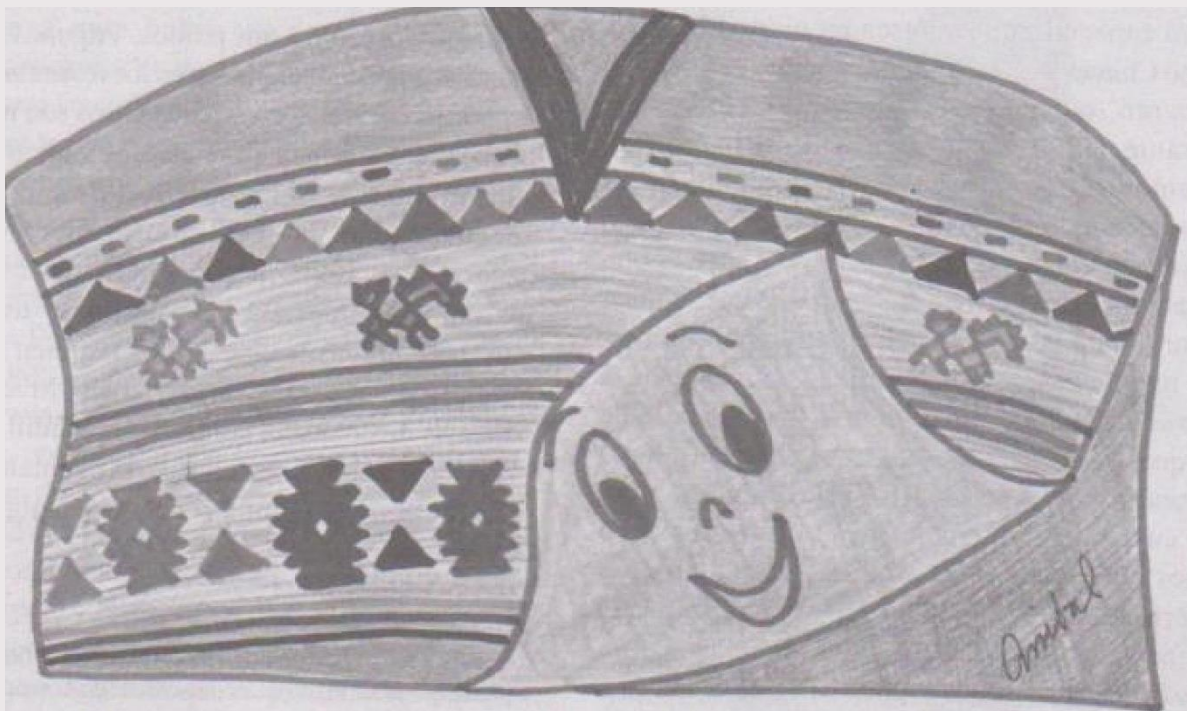
My name is Po't

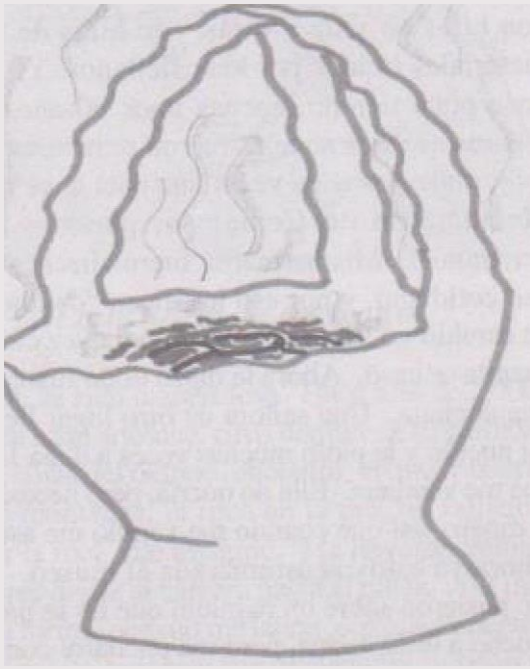
I have to confess something to you, I'm somewhat worried because I've been taken on a journey. They placed me inside a suitcase, covered in paper, where I was kept for several days. Then, they took me to a museum, where people looked at me and admired me. I can't deny that I feel flattered, but the truth is I wasn't made for a museum. The skillful hands of an artisan brought me to life, although I considered my true mother and grandmother to be much older. The artisan, Doña Juana, embroidered me thread by thread and imprinted beautiful details on my body, geometric patterns with deep significance. You probably know me by my Mexican name, Huipil, but my K'iche' name is Po't. My earliest ancestors were born thousands of years ago. Over time, skilled artisans made them more and more elegant, incorporating colorful threads for increasingly intricate decorations. When they were created for queens, my ancestors' designs were very elaborate, featuring feathers from birds like the quetzal, hummingbird, and macaw, as well as jade and obsidian jewelry.

But my mother, for example, was woven with different materials. She and my aunts were made with silk threads, while others were made with wool threads, materials brought by the Spaniards. I was born relatively recently, just about 60 years ago. If you consider that my ancestors were depicted around 1,500 years ago, you'll see that I'm quite young. I was made in Comalapa for a ceremonial dress. My sisters were made for everyday use, and that's why they are called "daily wear," but I was first used when Juanita got married. Now they call her Doña Juana, and she's an elderly woman. A lady from another place came to my town and asked Doña Juana many times to sell me. She didn't want to, but she needed the money, so when she sold me, I was scared. Now I'm used to the museum. They placed me on a mannequin that doesn't resemble Doña Juana much, but I reunited with my old friends, *uj* and *pas*, whom they call *corte* and *faja*. Someday, they will tell you their stories.

Exercise

A few years ago, someone thought that the traditional clothing worn by people of Maya origin was a uniform that made them look like slaves. That person was mistaken. Help the boys and girls who wear their traditional clothing feel proud with a message.





I am made of clay

Did you know that there is special clay for making ceramics? Ceramics are a Guatemalan craft that includes pots, griddles, plates, and other everyday items. You might have seen griddles for making tortillas or bowls for *chirmoles* and other foods. Well, all of that is made with a special clay found in certain places like Chinautla and Rabinal. My name is "b'utz'nib" in Ch'orti', which in Spanish means "incense burner." For many centuries, I have been used in very important religious ceremonies in communities because I contain a bit of burning charcoal onto which pom, copal, and incense are placed to spread fragrance in any place where a religious ceremony takes place. I've been taken to the highest mountain peaks, the deepest ravines, inside forests and jungles, to caves, lakes, and lagoons, alongside ancient towering trees. They take great care of me to ensure I don't break. You know that ceramics are fragile, and if you drop them on the ground or any other object, they can shatter. That's why when I'm not in use, they keep me in a safe place in the house, along with other religious objects like candles. When they bring me out for a ceremony, they almost always accompany me with flowers, and sometimes with fruits.

My lifelong companions are the candles. Typically, when I am used, my candle friends are also present. We serve to send a message to the sky. As the smoke rises to the heavens, it is believed that the prayers travel with the smoke we produce. Most of the time, the prayers last as long as the fire does because that's the right moment to offer them.

I have many ancestors. You can see some of my grandparents in museums. They have very special and artistic shapes. Some look like important figures, others have expressive faces, but they all have a space inside for placing fire and incense. My grandparents were only used by royalty. Nowadays, they are used by the elderly and the wise. I have some cousins that were made solely for decoration. I've seen them in markets, and they have been taken abroad. Others decorate the interiors of houses and have even been placed in restaurants and stores. They miss their place of origin, but they were made for tourism, so many of them have never held fire inside or carried the prayers of the people to the sky. When you visit the markets, look out for my cousins. Some are large, with broad faces, and in restaurants, they put candles in them. Others are very small, used as souvenirs and decorations, they are tiny. Some are the right size for ceremonies, but they are purely decorative. Among our relatives are the griddles, which are hardly used nowadays. Our friends, the bowls, are also well-known for holding *chirmoles*. Many people say that *chirmol* in a bowl tastes better. Perhaps it's true. Ask the adults in your family if they know any of us.

Exercise

Interview an older family member and ask them to tell you a story. Write it down in your notebook and add a drawing.

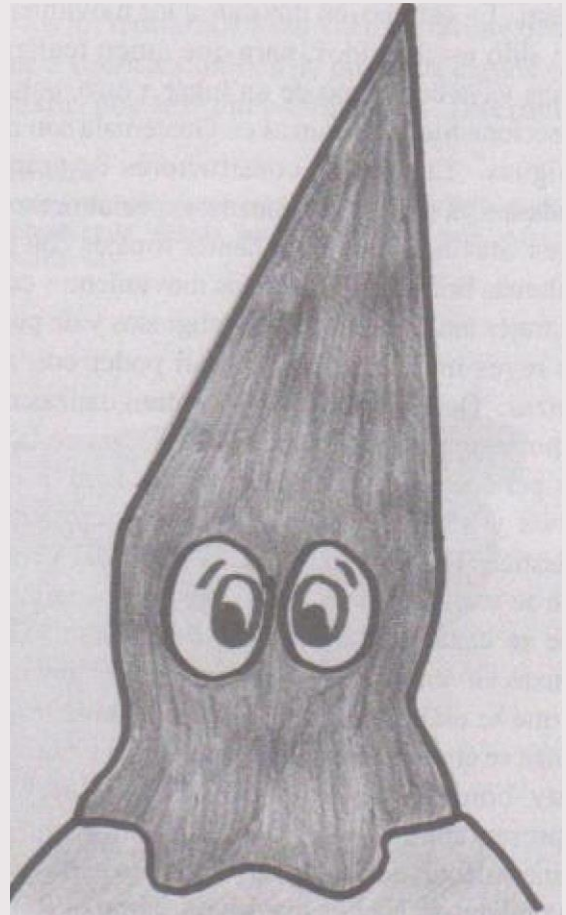
I am made of clay

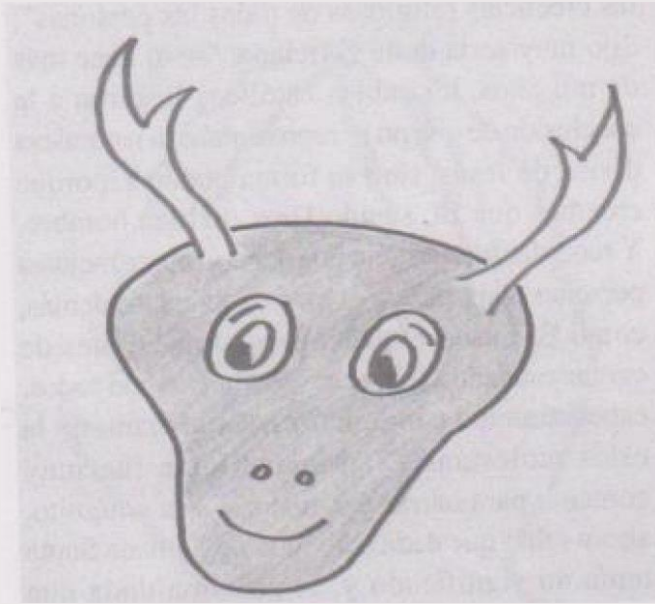
Manuelito eagerly awaited Holy Week in the city of Guatemala. He loved watching the processions, and this year, he could finally put on the *cucurucho* outfit and carry a float. One of his friends, who wasn't Catholic, asked him why he wore that outfit and what it meant. Manuelito didn't know the answer, so he went to his grandmother, Doña Feliciana, who told him the story: "More than 700 years ago, in a distant place in the heart of Europe, a tragedy occurred. It was a terrible disease that caused the death of thousands of people. They called it the plague. Some gentlemen believed it was a divine punishment and decided to whip their own backs with whips and walk through the streets and fields like that to seek forgiveness for their sins. Since they were penitents, they covered their faces with cloth cones and went bare-chested. The disease was transmitted through flea bites, and because they didn't wear much clothing, they didn't get sick and believed it was the right way to ask for forgiveness for their sins. The tradition reached Spain and was practiced during the 40 days leading up to Holy Week. When the Spaniards arrived in Maya territory, they brought this practice with them. Because of the cones they wore on their heads to cover their faces, they were called "*cucuruchos*." They no longer harmed themselves and only went out into the streets with the *cucurucho* on their heads as a form of penance. They accompanied the images that were carried in procession to commemorate the death and Resurrection of Jesus." Then Manuelito interrupted, "But nobody wears cones on their heads like that, grandma." So, Doña Feliciana continued, "That happened because, in 1908, the then-president of the country, Manuel Estrada Cabrera, prohibited them from covering their faces, fearing they might pose a threat to him because he was a tyrant." "And why do we carry images?" Manuelito added. To which Doña Feliciana replied, "It's a way to show love and respect to Jesus, his sacrifice, and with the hope that we will rise again as He promised". "My friend Edgar says that making images of Jesus and the Virgin is a sin," added Manuelito. "We

respect everyone's religious beliefs," Doña Feliciana said very seriously, "but over a thousand years ago, wise Catholics reached the conclusion that they were not representing the divine nature of Jesus but his human form because we believe that He, being God, became a man. And remembering His sacrifice should make us better people, seeking the well-being of everyone else, just as He sought ours. So, before you carry this year, you must be very kind to everyone, especially to your little sister, Miriam, don't bother her," advised Doña Feliciana. Manuelito left feeling very happy, ready to share the story with his friend. He now knew that each activity during Holy Week had a meaning, and the next time he had a question, he would ask his grandmother.

Exercise

Create a list of three activities that take place in your community during Holy Week and find their meaning.





I am a deer!

Do you know what a *traditional dance* is? Do you think it's the same as a *normal dance*? Well, I'll tell you it's not. A normal dance is the movement of the body to the beat of the music, but it's free, the person does it as they please. In contrast, in a traditional dance, the movements have been established so that the person performing the dance moves rhythmically from one place to another, but they are already chosen. Traditional dances in Guatemala are very ancient. The Maya, builders of great cities, already performed dances, especially the kings, adorned in impressive garments with jade and bright feathers. Both the movements and the costumes had religious and power-related meanings, as the kings showcased their immense power through these dances. From that era, there are very significant dances, such as the Dance of the Flying Pole, in which the performers ascend to the sky to give thanks for rain and food, and descend with a celestial message. Another dance is the Deer Dance, which was performed to express gratitude for the animals that were hunted for sustenance. Other dances serve as expressions of gratitude for maize, which is used to make *tortillas*, *atoles*, and *tamales*. This dance is known as "*La Paach*." There is a beautiful dance called "*La Culebra*," which represents rain and lightning, appearing like serpents made of light. Additionally, there were dances that narrated historical events, such as the "*Rabinal Achí*," which recounts a war between the K'iche' people from Cunén and the Achí people from Rabinal, an event that occurred almost 600 years ago.

When the Spaniards arrived, they incorporated new dances to perform in front of Catholic churches. These dances symbolized the victory of Christianity over other religions because Catholics in Spain had to contend with people of different beliefs who had come from Morocco, which is why they were called Moors. These dances are known as "Moorish and Christian dances." They are very beautiful and include dialogues that the performers must recite, always exalting Jesus and his mother, Mary. The Moorish and Christian dances indeed have many variations, each with its own name, such as the "*Danza de la Conquista*," where the enemies of the Christians were the K'iche' people, and the "*Danza de los Jicaques*," in which the Christians triumphed over a group that inhabited Honduras. These dances were used to teach Christianity through music. As you can see, they are religious dances and not for entertainment. It's clear that you dedicated a lot of effort to participate in these dances. Your commitment to prayers and fasting for over 40 days is impressive. Being selected among more than a hundred children and having the honor of participating in the "*Danza del Venado*" is indeed a significant achievement. I am very excited, and I will finally dance in front of my village's church. Nobody knows who I am because I wear a mask and a special costume. I was told that the design of this costume is over a hundred years old. Our ancestors were inspired by the gala uniforms of 19th-century soldiers, which is why they have golden fringes. But embroidered fabrics made by the ladies of our community are used for the cape and other parts of the costume. When I perform the dance, I must have completed additional prayers. My family is very proud of me because it's a very important and special act. Perhaps someday you, too, can perform a dance, but you must prepare very well.

Exercise

Search for photos of the Deer Dance and paste them into your notebook.

Brought from distant lands.

No, I am not a "trayda," as they called the brides that the Spaniards brought to marry them. No, although it is true that they brought me from very, very distant places. When the Spaniards conquered these lands, they took advantage of the people and turned them into slaves. However, King Carlos, I ordered them to be set free. So, the Spaniards decided to bring slaves from Africa because that was allowed. Well, some African people, captured to be slaves but who knew about musical instruments in their places of origin, were brought to these lands. They suffered a lot because they were treated very poorly. But they decided to brighten their days with music. Their ancestors knew how to produce music with slats joined by a string. They had learned from the islands of Indonesia. However, when they arrived in the Mayan lands, the Africans and the Maya people tried placing gourds at the bottom of the slats, which greatly improved the sound. Gradually, the Maya people learned to make these instruments, which they called marimbas. I am a marimba. For greater convenience, they made us with a leather strap to be carried on the shoulders so that the person playing the marimba could move from one place to another.

We were used to accompany dances, allowing them to perform the dance from one place to another in front of the Catholic churches, in the squares known as *atrios*. For many generations, we brought joy to the lives of everyone who heard us. Over 100 years ago, two gentlemen named Sebastián Hurtado and Julián Paniagua decided to try something different and created the double-keyboard marimba, capable of producing all musical sounds. Since then, we have been part of concerts in Guatemala and around the world. However, we can't move like we used to because we are quite large and require several performers at once. When the double-keyboard marimba appeared, our little sibling, called Tenor, also emerged. Tenor is the smaller marimba that you can see alongside one of us. Sometimes, we are accompanied by a double bass (which is like a giant violin) and even a drum set. However, we continue as we were originally, bringing joy to people in all moments of their lives. It would be very nice if you could listen to marimba music sometime. You can even find it on the Internet...

Exercise

Create a map to represent the arrival of the marimba in Guatemala, indicating the islands of Indonesia, Africa, and Guatemala.



The cousins of Fernando.

Fernando is a fair-skinned boy with black hair. His father, Mr. Fernando, is from Jutiapa, and his mother, Mrs. Agapita, is from Retalhuleu. Fernando's cousins who live in Jutiapa are blond, they ride horses, and they enjoy rodeos. On the other hand, the cousins who live in Retalhuleu are darker-skinned, they ride bicycles, and they like fairs, but they don't go to rodeos. One day, Fernando asked his grandmother, Mrs. Francisca, why the people from the east are different from the people in the west. "It's a very simple story," Mrs. Francisca replied. "The first inhabitants of Guatemala were the Mayans." "Yes," Fernando interrupted, "the ones who built Tikal and Takalik Abaj, but they no longer exist." "You are correct in saying that the Mayans built those cities," continued Mrs. Francisca, "but even though they no longer exist, we are their descendants. A Mayan person is someone who speaks a Mayan language. The builders of those cities spoke *Cholano*, while we speak *Mam*, and there are many other Mayan languages. Almost 500 years ago, the Spanish arrived and entered our territory through warfare. They had more destructive weapons than the Mayans and conquered our ancestors. Nearby, in Zapotitlán, they won the first battles. After several years of war, they managed to make our grandparents accept their rule as they enslaved them." A Spanish king named Carlos I restored freedom, honors, and properties to our grandparents, and life continued with the introduction of different customs, such as the Catholic religion, the use of sugar, and the raising of cows, horses, pigs, and sheep, which did not exist in our land. Most Spaniards chose to stay and live in the city now called *La Antigua Guatemala*, and they became very wealthy by selling the cocoa produced in Retalhuleu and Suchitepéquez. Years passed, and there was fierce competition for cocoa, causing prices to drop. Suddenly, the children of wealthy Spaniards were becoming poor. So, they asked for help from the new Spanish king, Felipe II. He granted them lands in the eastern part of Guatemala, like in Jutiapa, because there was a sparse population there.

The Spaniards who received land in those areas dedicated themselves to raising cows and horses. They developed a taste for rodeos, ribbon races, leather crafts, and other livestock-related activities, such as making cheese, cream, and milk sweets. These people married among their relatives, which is why they retained their blonde appearance. That's why we are dark-skinned, and they are fair-skinned, and we enjoy the customs of our Maya ancestors, like prayers, regional clothing, and, especially, our languages," explained Mrs. Francisca. "Ah," said Fernando, "and what does '*canchito*' mean?" "It's a Mayan word that means 'yellow tree,'" Mrs. Francisca pointed out, "probably because the Spaniards who arrived were blond, and to the Maya people, they looked like the trees when they shed their leaves." Now, Fernando understands why his cousins are different and even found out what '*canchito*' means.

Exercise

Tell this story to two of your friends from the neighborhood or community and find out where their relatives came from to the place where they currently live.





CENTER FOR FOLK



Studies

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