



La Tradición Popular

Tales of Guatemala

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Presentation

This journal of *Tradición Popular Guatemalteca* provides teachers a series of tales about Guatemala's history and traditional culture aimed at six to eight-year-old children with information related to different stages of this country's historical development from the prehispanic period to the independence period. At the end of every tale, there is an activity that the readers can carry out. The main goal is to present to children through narrative specific information about aspects that have formed Guatemalan identity: the country's geography inspired by the literary stories of *Popol Vuh*; the Mayan origin of some monuments, dances, handicrafts, and the clothing that still remains in several communities, primarily worn by women; the slavery that the Conquer produced and the subsequent liberation, the African presence, and some architectural monuments that characterize the cityscape of *Esquipulas* and *La Antigua Guatemala*, in order to promote the appreciation of Guatemalan traditional culture and the conservation of the country's cultural heritage.





The volcanoes and the sun

Manuel and Miriam had played as every day. They were tired and ready to sleep, but they could not because the next day, their grandparents would take them to *Palencia*, and they were excited about the trip. Her grandmother decided to tell them a story for them to rest: "They say that a long, long time ago there was a powerful character. His name was Vucub Caquix. He was not the sun, but he thought he was because he had a bright red suit, and his eyes sparkled as if they emanated light. Vucub Caquix had two sons, Zipacná and Cabracán, and they were almost as powerful as their father. One of them would mound soil to form mountains and the other would move them from one place to another. One day, Vucub Caquix saw some twin brothers named Uno Flor and Pequeño Jaguar. They were playing with a blowgun, and accidentally, they hurt his beautiful dentition. Vucub Caquix got so angry that he wanted to destroy the boys, who run away before apologizing for the accident. Vucub Caquix sent his powerful sons to crush the twins with the mountains, but as Zipacná and Cabracán were big, they were slow and the boys would escape. While the young twins were running away from their chasers, they got to the death's kingdom. At their arrival, the gods of the death challenged them to play a ball game.

The gods of the death wanted to defeat the twins with trickery. Before the game, they asked the twins to light up cigars without them being consumed, and the twins asked lightning bugs for help to feign fire. Then, they were asked for flowers, but they were locked up and the ants took the flowers to them. Lastly, they asked a bunny to pretend to be the ball of the game, and it got so far away that the gods of the death did not reach it. All in all, the twins won the game. For defeating death, Uno Flor became the sun, and Pequeño Jaguar became the planet Venus that appears in the sky. They did not have to run away from Vucub Caquix anymore, who was surprised to see the brightness of the real sun. Before going up to the sky, the boys offered an apology for the accident and thanked him because if it were not for his chase, they would have never become the sun and Venus. Vucub Caquix felt embarrassed for his behavior, and he wanted to honor the sun and Venus with a tribute. He called his sons and told them, "We will make 40 volcanoes that throw fire." They started the work and mounded the soil. Little by little, they were creating and moving the volcanoes, which would later be called *Tajumulco*, *Tacaná*, *Tolimán*... However, the sun had to shine the light on the earth and could not wait anymore. When the first day got light, Zipacná and Cabracán had only finished 36 volcanoes, which had been placed in a line from the east to the west so that the sun followed its course every day. As a tribute, three volcanoes threw fire to the passage of the sun. The sun was pleased and rewarded Vucub Caquix turning him into a macaw, a bird with beautiful red feathering, while Zipacná stayed under the ground giving life to volcanoes, and Cabracán keeps moving the mountains and producing earthquakes as he still has to finish the fourth volcanoes that were missing." When grandmother finished her account, the kids were sound asleep.

Activity

Research how volcanoes are formed and write it down on your notebook.

The builder king

Many years ago, over 1300, a young king inherited an ancient city's kingdom. The king's name was Hasawa Chan K'awil and his kingdom was known as Mutul. One of his ancestors had turned the city into the most powerful kingdom in that region, but now he was in trouble as Hasawa's father had been defeated in a war. Hasawa was determined to recover his kingdom's prestige and the commercial importance it had had in the past. The main trading routes passed through the ancient city, and jade, seashells, obsidian, precious feathers and furs, cotton, and other treasures were carried from faraway places to the city. Hasawa saw the danger that due to the defeat, the visitors would stop frequenting the city. Although he was young, Hasawa had several advisers that made him realize that he had to take a definitive measure. The war in which his father had been defeated was caused by an enemy city, Kan's kingdom. Hasawa realized that although his neighbors wanted to decrease his power and prestige, the real threat came from Kan, who envied the power and commercial wealth of Mutul. The king consulted his ancestors several times, fasted, prayed, and waited for his ancestors to reveal. After some days without eating, one early morning while praying in the high temple located in front of his palace, he saw a snake that seemed to come out of the wall. It was a shiny snake whose glints looked like macaw and quetzal's feathers, and he was amazed. The priest had told him about the Feathered Serpent, a manifestation of heaven, but he had never seen it. He did not know what to say and kept quiet. The magnificent snake opened its maw and a face seemed to emerge. As it was sticking out, he realized that it was his father and was talking to him with the voice of a thunder, "My son, your destiny is to be victorious in the war to restore my name. Go against Kan's king and you will get the victory." The incense's smoke turned into a whirlwind that covered the entire place and the snake disappeared as did Hasawa's father.

The next morning, Hasawa ordered to do the preparations for the war. Some messengers were sent to Kan so they could answer to the challenge. A few weeks later, a large army under the command of the king left the city by the north road and after a few days, he fought the king of Kan who expected to beat the young man Hasawa in a few hours. Maybe due to his arrogance or the limited expertise of his warriors, the king of Kan lost the battle and the war. His army had to escape to save the king. Mutul recovered its prestige and its trading increased. With his prosperity, Hasawa started new constructions; he created new temples, a market, a sacred ball game, enlarged the roads, built monuments, rebuild his palace, and above all, he ordered the construction of two new temples on top of older ones. It was the golden age of the Mutul's kingdom. You can visit that temple, which is known as *El Gran Jaguar*, and it is located in the old Mutul, now called *Tikal*, to remember the great king of the city: Hasawa Chan K'awil.

Activity

Is there any ruin or mound near your house or school? Do some research about it, write its name, and try to discover who had it built.





A lady ready to fight

Wac Chanil had born in a large palace located in the city center of *Dos Pilas*. The day of her birth, the king was happy because he had asked his ancestors for a daughter. He already had an heir who would become a king like him, but he wanted a daughter to marry her to the son of an allied king. Since her birth day, wedding preparations were carried out. The ambassadors traveled with presents to Naranjo, the allied kingdom, in order to inform that the wedding would be carried out in 17 years. Her mother was a princess from *Cancuén*, and just like Wac Chanil, she had been reared to marry a king. When she was eight years old, she had visited her maternal grandparents' city and the palace, which had over one hundred rooms, many storehouses, and a very bustling port. The image of the powerful kingdom had remained in her mind, mostly when her mother had told her, "Your kingdom has to be more powerful than your parents' and grandparents'." But things were rushed and when she was barely twelve years old, she was sent to her new kingdom. She was very nervous but did not seem it. She left on a large caravan with an army of guards to protect her. She was on a float protected by curtains with her ladies in waiting, and one of her cousins was driving the caravan. The residents in every city they passed through

were amazed. After several weeks, they arrived to *Naranjo*. The city was adorned to receive her; flower arches and plumes decorated the main avenue and a flower and leaves carpet perfumed the passage of the caravan while the inhabitants waved at their future queen. When they arrived at the palace, sitting on his throne, his future father-in-law received her with an affectionate greeting and introduce her to her boyfriend, a twelve-year-old boy. Wac Chanil was taken to her residence where she would live until getting married five years later. She continued studying literature, history, astronomy, medicine, music, art, mathematics, and other disciplines. The wedding day arrived and although she was nervous, she behaved like a queen since her father-in-law had passed away by then. After a short while, problems started to arise. The kingdom of Caracol was afraid of the wedding and had tried to impede it, so it attacked the city. His young husband commanded the army and could stop the enemies, but not for a long time. In another battle, he was captured and died. Wac Chanil was very sad; she was a widow and had a baby, while the enemy army was getting ready to invade her kingdom. The courtiers advised her to escape and take refuge with her father to protect her baby so that when he grew up, he could regain *Naranjo's* freedom. But Wac Chanil recalled her mother's words, her kingdom had to be greater than her parents' and grandparents', so she reinforced the palace, gave orders to the senior military chiefs, and unexpectedly, she wore her husband's war suit. The enemies attacked at a short distance from the city; they expected to enter quickly and take over it. The battle was long and violent, but to their surprise, the enemies were defeated and ran away. From then on, Wac Chanil ruled with independence and prepared her son to fight for his kingdom to the end as she had done.

Activity

For a long time, women did not have the same rights as men. Write on your notebook how you would help both men and women have the same rights and responsibilities.

A foreign liberator

On King Charles I's table, protest letters of important persons piled up. Bishop Francisco Marroquín proposed the king some ways to prevent the conquistadors from harming every day more the native inhabitants of the province of Guatemala, and the same was done by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. Even Pope Paul III had written a document expressing his amazement for the damage caused by the Conquest, and he demanded native people to be treated as humans and not as animals. The king had a lot of work to do. He had talked to several conquistadors like Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, who had brought him many presents. The German Albrecht Dürer, one of his favorite artists exclaimed in amazement that he had never imagined that such wonders could be done from gold. The king realized that those were presents to disguise the damage caused to the owners of so much gold and so many wonders. Friar Antonio de Montesinos had written a sermon that said, "What damage did native people to the Spanish do for them to attack, kill, and steal their possessions? They did not even know the king of Castile." So, in the city of Barcelona, the king issued some ordinances, which were laws that prohibited the slavery of Native Americans, and it was also ordered their lands to be returned. In order to achieve it, he also ordered a court of law to be created in the boundaries between Honduras and Nicaragua. Several judges were sent for the king's orders to be fulfilled. However, time passed and justice was not done. Six years after the laws were promulgated, the king sent another judge. He was a strong man and used to enforce justice. When he arrived in *Gracias a Dios*, he discovered it was a small town with few accesses to the rest of the province. But there was another city with better roads, the city of Guatemala. In order to reach native people's freedom, he decided he had to move to that city and send his judges to get what seemed impossible. The group of opponents was

large, the conquistadors brandished their swords and prepared their guns, but Alonso had no fear. He knew he was enforcing justice and went to the city to free the native people. The guard that accompanied him took him to a two-story house that bishop Marroquín had given to him, which was his house. Alonso was grateful for the gift and from there, he gave the orders to free the native people. The conquistadors shouted, but the judge did not step back a bit. It was justice coming. Little by little, native people were freed. Alonso allocated towns and lands to the former slaves. Many chroniclers forgot his name because they were Spanish, but for native people, it remained as a distant memory of the day when the freedom of entire nations was reached.

Activity

Write a message for children who do not know how important Alonso's work was.





Cotuja', the liberated slave

Cotuja' was a common child. His dark eyes opened when he discovered something new like the sparkling powder in the streams that fed into a larger river. When he was five years old, he barely moved away from his mother, who had to wash clothes and cook for Pedro de Alvarado's slaves. She was also a slave and her fear grew as she knew that when her child was six years old, he would be sent to the streams to "pan for gold". This consisted of gathering sand from the riverbed with tools similar to griddles in order to collect the sparkling powder that drew Cotuja's attention. The work was not complicated, but staying all day in the water caused illness and death. The mother's child tried to hide her fear by telling stories every night to her son. She told him that her birth city was Q'umar Ka'aj, with white buildings and extraordinary fortresses. She told him the names of his ancestors for him to remember them always. She talked continuously about Kikab and Cavizimaj, two powerful kings who had spread the kingdom beyond the horizon. But the wars in the past were not like the ones that made Cotuja's parents slaves. The Spaniards like Pedro de Alvarado had brought firearms and in a bloody battle, they defeated the k'iche'es, Cotuja's people. When the Spanish arrived in the city, they captured the kings, killed them, and burned down the houses, taking his parents as slaves. His father had

fought, but he was wounded and when he recovered, he was forced to pan for gold, threatening him and his family with firearms. So, he worked until he died when Cotuja' was barely three years old. Cotuja's mother worried about her son's future so much. Some Spaniards dressed with robes that reached their ankles, and who were called friars, claimed that everything would be resolved. They said that one of them had written to a man called Papa and to the king of the Spanish, and that freedom would soon come. But his mother did not believe it; however, one day they heard a commotion. Other Spaniards, dressed in black, had arrived with some papers. They claimed to come in behalf of Alonso López de Cerrato, a judge who ordered to obey the Spanish king's law. They were finally free and could live peacefully. The child's mother could not believe it, but it was true. She only found a difficulty; she could not go back to her city because it did not exist anymore. She stayed in a town created by order of Mr. Cerrato. They were going to provide them with land to cultivate and soon, other friars arrived on a mission to teach them a new religion. Cotuja' did not understand well what happened, he only saw his mother cry with joy this time because she said that her son could have a better future.

Activity

Being free means to be responsible for one's actions. Write a message for all children to promote freedom and responsibility.

The eventful life of Bumbu

At the beginning of 1667 in the city of *Santiago de Guatemala*, preparations were underway for the arrival of the new president of the Audiencia and governor of the kingdom, Sebastián Álvarez Alfonso Rosica de Caldas. In the Royal Palace, all the employees hurried from one side to another to finish the details for the welcome. One of the maids was placing some curtains in the future president's bedroom. Her dark skin and curly hair made her African ancestry obvious. Just like her grandmother, her mother was a slave, but they were liberated by their owner, so she was free. She lived in San Francisco neighborhood where she could meet a saintly man, Brother Pedro. Then, the president entered the city in an elegant carriage. In the Audiencia, the authorities handed the governor the baton that symbolized his power. After that, there was a mass in the Cathedral and it continued with a feast in the Palace. Although Bumbu was only in charge of washing clothes in the Palace, she was not allowed 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 bedroom. 'What is your name, slave?', the governor asked her with arrogance. 'My name is Bumbu, but I am not a slave' was the young woman's answer. 'How dare you answer me that way? Don't you know that I can fire you right now?', Sebastián said enraged. 'I apologize, I did not want to offend you', Bumbu replied, who provided for her two children and just realized that she was pregnant with her third child, so she could not lose her job. But Sebastián was intransigent and it made him hate her. He asked the butler who was that young woman. That is how he found out that Bumbu had not married because her young partner did not have enough money to afford 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 the young woman to be sent to *Castillo de San Felipe*, a prison in *Río Dulce*. The young woman cried and pled, but Sebastián was rigid. Bumbu was taken in chains to *Castillo de San Felipe*, and her two

young children were crying with her, but they had received Brother Pedro's blessing with a small crucifix. The journey was so much anguish. The day she arrived to *San Felipe*, her chains were removed and an enemy ship had been sighted by the Lake *El Golfete*, and an attack was expected. All the population got ready for the fighting. The militiamen, coming from *Chiquimula*, took their weapons and prepared the cannons. Bumbu, her two children and other people were praying that nothing bad would happen. Bumbu's little children took the small crucifix out of a bag and held it up, announcing everyone that it was a present from Brother Pedro... The ship was drawing near when its cannons ready when, all of a sudden, a gale pushed the sails in the opposite direction. The sailors tried to steer the ship toward the castle, but the wind did not allow them and they quickly went away. The danger passed, and the militiamen fired three cannons to warn them not to return. All of them applauded in relief and attributed it to a miracle from Brother Pedro. Bumbu knew that everything had happened in order to save a small town from the pirate attack.

Activity

Research about the living conditions of slaves in the past.





In the name of the king

It was 1700 in *La Gomera, Escuintla*, and the population was annoyed with one of the Spanish who had a farm in the vicinity of the town. In 1619, a governor of the kingdom of Guatemala, Antonio Peraza Ayala Castilla y Rojas, Count of *La Gomera*, had founded the town so that the Afro-descendant population lived peacefully in that place. According to the kingdom's ordinance, the town had its own farmlands and had access to the estuary, known as *Canal de Chiquimulilla*, to use it in the irrigable lands. However, the Spaniard had taken over a riverbank of the estuary and used it for a large part of his cattle to drink. Left free by the Spaniard's workers, the cows stormed the croplands and ruined them, damaging the corncoobs. The town's mayor, a dark-skinned called Diego in honor of the town's patron saint, was willing to resolve the situation. He had seen how the indigenous mayors of the neighboring towns received justice by submitting a request to the Audiencia, in the city of Guatemala. But no none in the town knew how to write, so he decided to send a messenger to *Escuintla* for the request to be written. 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 the indigenous mayors had secretaries. When

Juan arrived in *Petapa*, he talked to the mayors and after telling them the issue, they helped him. In the capital, he went to the Audiencia. The judges received the requests of the towns in the portico of the Royal Palace only in the morning. Juan had to wait for his turn and finally, he handed over the document. He was received without ceremony as he was alone. By contrast, the delegates of other towns, like *Chichicastenango*, who came with a large entourage, were received with the corresponding ceremonial. But he did not mind, he just wanted to find a solution to the problem. Then, he saw the judges standing up in a hurry as an extraordinary authority was coming. It was the kingdom's visitor, Francisco Gómez de la Madriz, who acted as the governor. In that moment, Francisco asked for all the documents and quickly reviewed them. He handed them to his secretaries and gave orders for everything to be solved immediately. He observed Juan's request and said aloud, 'Order the Spaniard to remove his cattle and let people of *La Gomera* have exclusive use of the riverbank indefinitely.' One of the secretaries hurriedly wrote the document with a copy that was filed. Francisco signed it and continued with other requests. The judges handed Juan the documents, who returned to *La Gomera* very happy. He never imagined that the situation could have such a quickly solution. However, the Spaniard did not want to obey the order from the Audiencia and ordered his workers to shoot at any resident of *La Gomera* who approached the bank. Without weapons, the residents had to withdraw. Diego hurriedly sent Juan to the capital again. Juan had to leave at night for the Spaniard's workers not to shoot at him. Juan arrived in Guatemala and talked to one of the secretaries, who informed the visitor. So, Francisco sent a group of militiamen to *La Gomera*, and the Spaniard had to obey the authority of the visitor and his orders. From then on, the estuary has belonged to the people and justice was administered in the name of the king.

An extraordinary family

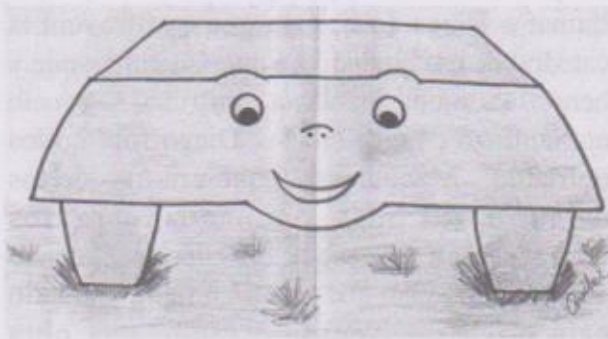
Manuel arrived to the town of *Chiquimula de la Sierra*. He had been called to build the town's church. It had been over 30 years since the town had been destroyed by an earthquake and a flood. The ruins of the old town could still be seen, where the remainders of the "old church" lay. The resources were limited since the authorities were obstinate in changing the capital from *Valle de Panchoy* to *Valle de la Ermita*. Manuel had to use only the money obtained in *Chiquimula*. He felt so committed and everyone expected him to do an amazing job since he came from an extraordinary family. His great-grandfather, José de Porres, had been the first head architect of the kingdom. According to what his father told him, José had started as a mason under the command of a terrific architect whose name was Juan Pascual. Juan studied in architecture books that arrived in the city, so he had to learn Spanish because he was of Mayan origin. In turn, José's grandparents were of African origin, so José did not have the right to study in schools for Spanish and noble indigenous people. For that reason, Juan instructed José, who had already studied and worked a lot. When he had already learned, he was entrusted with the greatest work of his time, the construction of the Cathedral of Santiago. José, who had already studied and worked a lot accepted the challenge and built the most important and largest church in the city. Because of his talent, he was entrusted the bishop's Palace and other churches like *Santa Teresa*, *La Compañía de Jesús*, and *Belén*. José was also a good teacher because he taught his son Diego everything he knew. In addition, he gave Diego all of his architecture books. Diego became the second head architect of the kingdom. Due to his own skills and his father's fame, Diego undertook other works like the church in *Ciudad Vieja*, *Escuela de Cristo*, *Capuchinas*, *Santa Clara*, the City Hall, and the *Fuente de las Sirenas*. In turn, Diego knew he had to taught his children. Two of them followed in his footsteps, Felipe and Diego José. As everyone in the kingdom knew about

the talent in the Porres family, they sent for Diego José from León, Nicaragua, to build the cathedral of that city. They wanted it to be as large and beautiful as the one his grandfather had built in *Santiago de Guatemala*, and Diego José did not disappoint them. Manuel knew that it was one of the most valued landmarks for the Nicaraguan people. Meanwhile, Felipe was called to *Esquipulas* to build a sanctuary for the Black Christ. It turned out to be an enormous work with four towers, copula, and a chapel for the sculpture. In fact, they wanted him to build a large convent, but the resources ran out and it could not be built. In that town, Felipe taught his son, Manuel, all the necessary to become another architect of the family. Manuel learned, but he felt fearful facing 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 started the construction. The workers grew fond of him because he was thoughtful and polite. Little by little, the walls reached height, the vault was placed, and the church completely built. Manuel showed that he still belonged to an extraordinary family.

Activity

In your community, look for an old building constructed during the Hispanic rule. Draw it and write its name on your notebook.





The story of a throne

My life has been wonderful. Over 2,000 years ago, a skillful craftsman, whose name has been lost in the pages of time, found in a quarry of the mountains the stone in which I was carved. When he saw the stone, he pictured me. I was taken by twenty men from the quarry to the workshop. There, they shaped me, but they did not cut me perfectly. Other twenty men carried me and little by little, I was taken to a beautiful city known as *Tak'alik' Ab'aj*. I had only known my mountains, but now I could see a stunning landscape. In front of me, there was prairie that joined the sea. Hundreds of people come in and out the city. Some of them were traders, other farmers, hunters, artists, wise men. Men and women greeted each other with respect and looked at me with amazement. Other stones were carried with me, and a bit later I found out they would be turned into monuments. I was destined to be the throne of the king. When I was taken to the workshop, the master drew some lines on my body and I was slowly carved until I reached my final shape. I was taken in procession to the king's palace. They placed on me a cover of feathers perfectly woven. The colors of the macaw, the quetzal, the hummingbird, the parrot, and many other birds interwove to give a magnificent sight. A jaguar fur covered me so the king could sit on me. I lived many years in honors and I was painted in a monument where I appear underneath the king. Many generations of kings enacted wise laws upon me and administered justice. I saw them join their ancestors after so many years of happy lives. But those years came to an end in a

sudden way, and that is when my grief began. One day, a group of foreign warriors, speaking an unknown language to me and of crude customs, invaded the city. In order to demonstrate their newfound power, they attacked me, and I was broken in half. I suffered deeply, and I was humiliated and abandoned. No one could protect me. They set fire to the palace and some areas of the city. Fortunately, some friends from the city helped the residents expel the violent foreigners. But I had been maimed and only a half of me was found. Since I was not complete, I was sent to a temple and placed as an altar. Now, instead of bearing kings on jaguar furs, I raised prayers along with the incense and the scent of flowers. I did not complain, but I missed my other half, which was lost and suffering under the rubble. Times changed again, and *Tak'alik' Ab'aj* came into a slow commercial crisis and gradually, it was abandoned by its population that moved to other places. The temple where I was placed as an altar was emptied, and the roof collapsed. Slowly, I could see how vegetation drew near; first some ferns, then some bushes, and finally, big trees. The soil gathered upon me, and stopped seeing the sun. Years became centuries until one day, some strange people found me. I thought I was going to be attacked again, and I was scared. But I was wrong, and they had found my other half. You cannot imagine my joy! I was complete again! They called themselves archeologists, a man and a woman. Now, they are my friends, Miguel and Christa. They placed me in a new place. The city is not as before, but now I have new visitors who come with cameras and talk about me. I am happy because I am complete and serving my city again. I love it and my mountains so much because here, I have realized the good acts of human and that one can always have a better future. I hope to see you one day in *Tak'alik' Ab'aj*.

Activity

Look for an old monument near your house or school and draw it on your notebook.

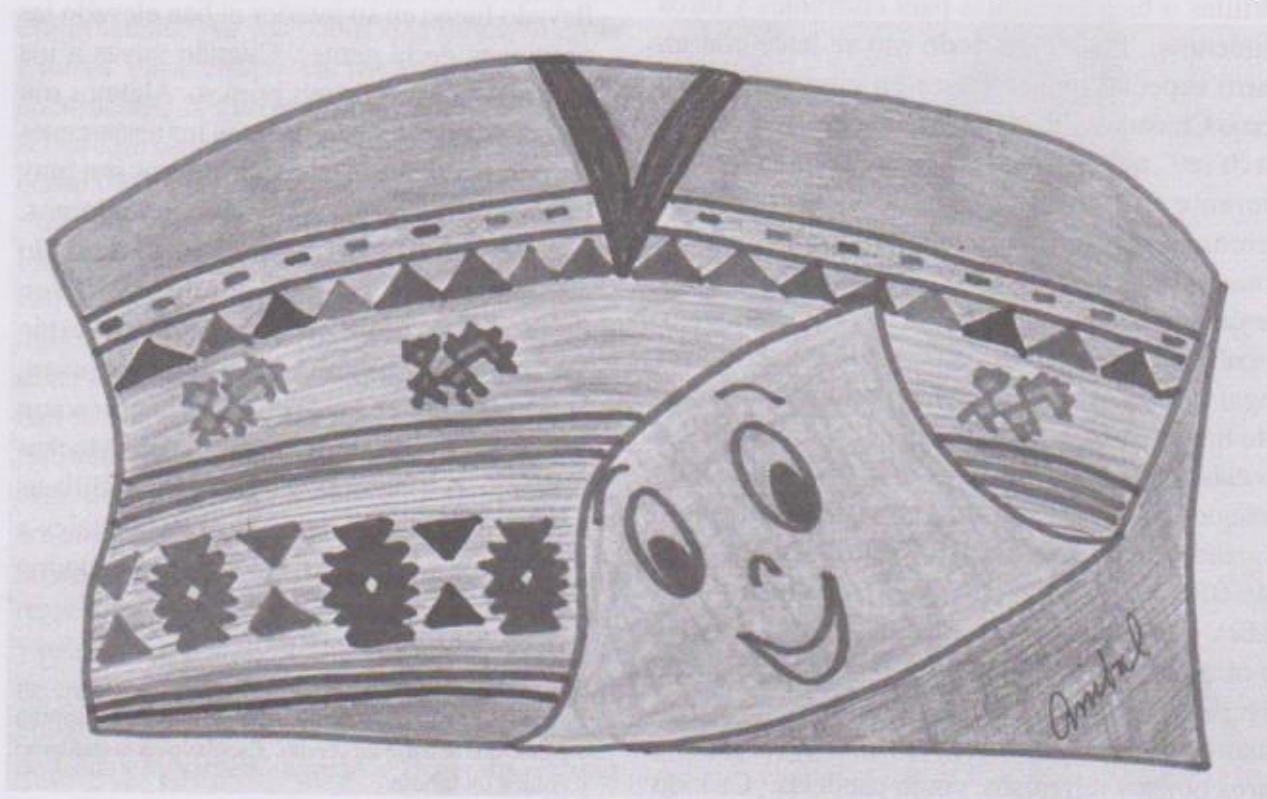
My name is Po't

I have to confess something to you, I am a bit worried because I was taken on a trip. I was put in a suitcase covered in paper where I remained for several days. Then, I was taken to a museum where people gaze at me and admire me. I cannot deny I feel flattered, but the truth is that I was not made to be in a museum. The skillful hands of an artisan created me, although I think my real mother and grandmother are older. The artisan, Juana, embroidered me thread by thread and imprinted beautiful details and geometric figures with deep meanings in my body. You probably know me by my Mexican name, Huipil, but my name in *Kaqchiquel* is *Po't*. My first ancestors were born thousands of years ago. With the passage of time, artisans made them more elegant, including colored threads to create increasingly intricate decorations. When they were made for queens, the designs of my ancestors were so elaborate, with bird feathers such as the quetzal, hummingbird, and macaw, as well as jade and obsidian jewelry.

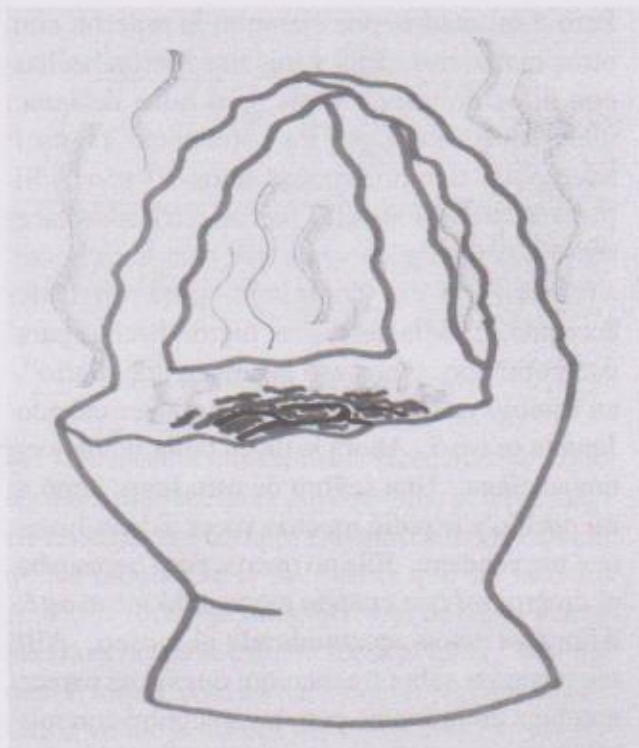
But my mother, for example, was woven with other materials. She and my aunts were made with silk thread and others with wool thread, which were materials brought by the Spanish. I was born recently, just about 60 years ago. If you consider that my ancestors were portrayed 1,500 years ago, you will realize I was born not long ago. I was made in *Comalapa* for a ceremonial costume. My sisters were made for casual use, and that is why they are called "daily wear", while I was worn for the first time when Juanita got married. Now they call her Doña Juana, and she is an old woman. A lady from another place came to my town and asked Doña Juana many times to sell me. She did not want to, but she needed the money, so I was scared when she sold me. Now I am used to the museum. They placed me on a mannequin that does not resembles Doña Juana very much, but I reunited with my old friends, *uq* and *pas*, which they call *corte*¹ and *faja*². One day, they will tell you their stories.

Activity

Some years ago, a person thought that the traditional costumes of Mayan-origin people were uniforms that turned them into slaves. That person was wrong. Help boys and girls who wear their traditional costume feel proud with a message.



1. Guatemalan traditional skirt.
2. Guatemalan traditional sash belt.



I am maid of clay

Did you know there is specific clay to make ceramic? Ceramics is a Guatemalan craftwork that includes pots, griddles, plates, and other objects for daily use. You have probably seen clay griddles to make tortillas or clay bowls for *chirmoles*¹ and other foods. Well, all that is made with special clay that is found in certain places like *Chinautla* and *Rabinal*. My name is b'utz'nib' in *Ch'orti'*, which means censer. For many centuries, I have been used in very important religious ceremonies in the communities because I contain a bit of burning charcoal onto which resin and incense is placed to spread fragrance in any place a religious ceremony is carried out. I have been taken to the tops of the mountains, to the deepest cliffs, into forests and jungles, caves, lakes, and lagoons next to large ancient trees. They take good care of me so I do not break. You know ceramic is fragile and if you hit it against the ground or any other object, it can shatter. That is why when I am not used, they keep me in a safe place in the house with other religious objects such as candles. When they

take me out to be used in a ceremony, most times I am accompanied by flowers and sometimes by fruits. My lifelong friends are candles. Typically, when I am used, my candles friends are also present. We help carry a message to heaven. As the smoke goes up, it is believed that prayers go with the smoke we raise. Most times, prayers last while the fire does because it is the right time to say them. I have many ancestors; you can see some of them in the museums. They have very special and artistic shapes. Some of them look like important figures, others have expressive faces, but all of them have a space inside to place fire and incense. My ancestors were exclusively used by royalty. Now, we are used by old people and wise men. I have some cousins that were made only for decoration; I have seen them in the markets and they are taken abroad. Others decorate the inside 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 people's prayers. When you go to the markets, look at my cousins. Some of them are large, with wide faces and in restaurants, they place candles in them; others are small and placed in souvenirs and decorations, and they are tiny. Some others are the right size for ceremonies, but they are purely decorative. Among our relatives, there are griddles, which are barely used nowadays. Our friends, the bowls, are also well-known for holding *chirmoles*. Many people say that *chirmol* in bowls tastes better, and it may be truth. Ask the adults in your family if they know any of us.

Activity

Interview an adult person in your family and ask him/her to tell you a story. Write it on your notebook and make a drawing

¹ Chili sauce made with grilled tomato, onion, and cilantro.

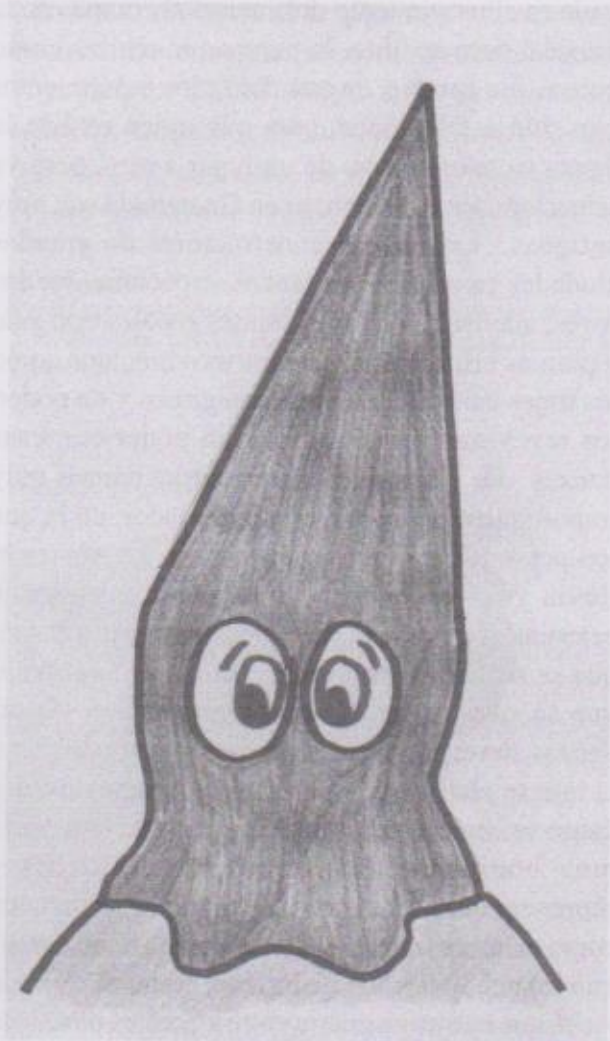
Manuelito, the cucurucho

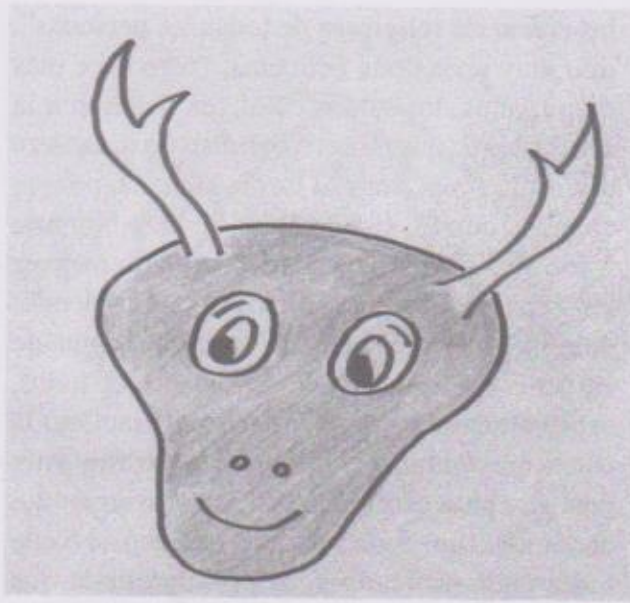
Manuelito was eagerly waiting for Holy Week in the city of Guatemala. He really liked watching processions, and that year he could wear his *cucurucho* costume and carry a float. One of his friends who was not Catholic asked him why he wear that costume and what was its meaning. Manuelito did know the answer and asked his grandmother, Feliciana, who told him a story: "Over 700 years ago, in a distant place in the center of Europe, a tragedy occurred. It was a horrible illness that was causing the death of thousands of people. It was called the plague. Some men thought it was a divine punishment and decided to flog their backs with whips and walk through the streets and fields like that for their sins to be forgiven. As they were penitents, they covered their faces with cloth cones and walked with their torso uncovered. The illness was transmitted by a flea bite, and since they did not wear much clothing, they did not get sick and thought that it was the right way to ask for forgiveness. The tradition reached Spain and was practiced during 40 days before Holy Week. When the Spanish arrived in the Mayan territory, they brought this tradition with them. Because of the cones they wore on their heads to cover their faces, they were called *cucuruchos*. They did not harm themselves anymore and just went out to the streets with the cone on their heads as a way of penance. They accompanied the statues that were carried in procession to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus." Then, Manuelito interrupted, "But no one wears cones like that, grandma." So, Feliciana continued, "That happened because in 1908, the president of the country in that time, Manuel Estrada Cabrera, prohibited them from covering their faces as he was afraid of being assaulted because he was a tyrant." "And why do we carry statues?", asked Manuelito, so Feliciana replied, "It is a way of expressing love and respect to Jesus, his sacrifice, and with the hope of resurrection as He promised." "Mi friend Edgar says that making statues of Jesus and the Virgin is a sin", he added.

"We have to respect everyone's religious beliefs", Feliciana said with a serious look, "but over a thousand years ago, wise Catholic concluded that we do not represent the divine nature of Jesus but his human form, because we believe that being God, He became a man. And remembering his sacrifice should make us be better people to seek everybody else's well-being, just like He sought ours. So, before carrying the load this year, you have to be kind to everyone, especially to your little sister, Miriam, do not bother her." Manuelito left happily to tell his friend the story. Now he knew that every activity in Holy Week had a meaning, and the next time he had a question, he would ask his grandmother.

Activity

Make a list of three activities that are carried out 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 is the same as a dance? Well, let me tell you that it is not so. A dance is the movement of the body to the rhythm of music, but it is free and one does it as their liking. On the other hand, in a traditional dance, the movements have been established so that the one performing the dance moves rhythmically from one place to another, but the movements are previously selected. Traditional dances in Guatemala are very ancient. The Mayan people, who built large cities, already performed traditional dances, especially kings, dress in impressive clothes with jade and bright feathers. Both the movements and the costumes had religious and power meanings; kings showed their great power through those traditional dances. From that time, there are very important traditional dances such as the *Palo Volador* (Dance of the Fliers), in which performers go up to the sky to thank for the rain, food, and come down with a heavenly message. The *Venado* Dance was also performed to thank for the animals hunt for sustenance. Other traditional dances are performed to express gratitude for the corn, with which tortillas, atoles, and tamales are made; that traditional dance is known as *La Paach*. There is a beautiful dance called *La Culebra*, and it represents the rain and lightning, which resemble snakes made of light. There were also dances that related

historic events, such as the *Rabinal Achí*; it relates a battle between K'iche' people from *Cunén* and Achí people from *Rabinal*, which took place almost 600 years ago. When the Spanish arrived, they incorporated new dances to be performed in front of Catholic churches. With those dances, the victory of Christianity over other religions is represented because Catholic people in Spain had to fight against people of other beliefs, who had arrived from Morocco, and that is why they were called Moors. Those dances are known as Dances of Moors and Christians, and they are very nice. They include dialogs that are said by the men performing the dance, they always exalt Jesus and His Mother, Mary. The Dances of Moors and Christians have many variations and each of them has a name, such as *La Conquista* dance, in which the Christians' enemies were the K'iche' people, and the *Jicaques* dance, in which the Christians defeat a group of people living in Honduras. This dance was used to teach Christianity through music. As you notice, they are religious dances and not for entertainment. I have practiced a lot and had to behave very well. I said prayers every day and stopped eating things I like for over 40 days. I was honored to be chosen among over a hundred children to participate in the *Venado* Dance. I am very excited, and I will finally perform a traditional dance in front of my town'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 formal uniforms of the soldiers in the 19th century, and that is why they have golden fringes. But embroidered clothes by ladies in our community are used for the cape and other parts of the costume. For the time I have performed the dance, I will have already had completed additional prayers. My family is very proud of me because it is a very important and special ceremony. Maybe one day you can also perform a traditional dance, but you have to prepare very well.

Activity

Search for pictures of the *Venado* Dance and stick them on your notebook.

Brought from distant lands

No, I am not a '*trayda*', as they used to call the girlfriends brought by the Spanish to marry them. No, although it is true that I was brought from very distant places. When the Spanish conquered these lands, they took advantage of people and turn them into slaves. But, King Carlos I ordered to liberate them. So, the Spanish decided to bring slaves from Africa because that was permitted. Well, some African people, captured to be slaves but who knew about musical instruments in their place of origin, were brought to these lands. They went through so much suffering because they were mistreated. But they decided to cheer up their days with music. Their ancestors knew how to make music with bars joined by a string; they had learned from the Islands of Indonesia. But when they arrived to Mayan lands, Mayans and Africans tried to place gourds under the bars, which greatly improved the sound. Little by little, Mayan people learned to make these instruments, which they called marimbas. I am a marimba. For greater comfort, they made us with a strap to be carried on shoulders so that the person playing the marimba could move from one place to another. We were played to

accompany traditional dances, so in that way they could perform the dance from one place to another in front of the Catholic churches, on the plazas known as atrium. For many generations, we brightened the life of many people who listened to us. Over 100 years ago, two men called Sebastián Hurtado y Julián Paniagua decided to make a change and created the double-keyboard marimba, which can produce all of the musical sounds. From then on, we have been part of concerts in Guatemala and around the world, but we cannot be moved as we did before because we are large and require several performers at once. When the double-keyboard marimba appeared, it also did our sibling called *Tenor*, which is the smaller marimba you can see next to us. Sometimes, a double pass accompanies us (which is like a giant violin) and even a drum set. However, we are still like in the beginning, we give people joy in every moment of their lives. It would be very nice for you to listen to marimba music some time. You can even search for it on the internet...

Activity

Draw a map to represent the arrival of the marimba to Guatemala. Mark the Islands of Indonesia, Africa, and Guatemala.



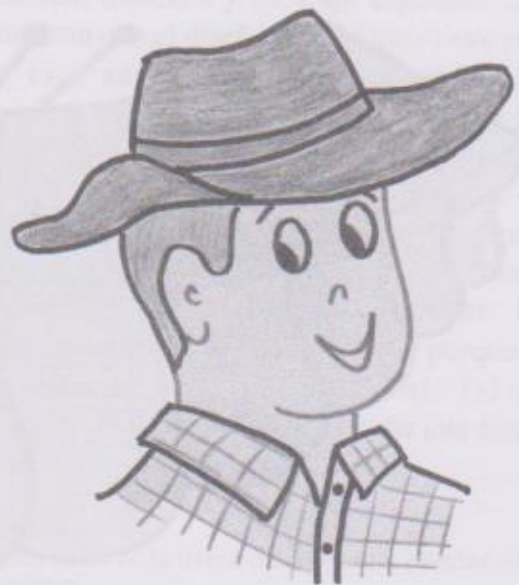
Fernando's cousins

Fernando is a fair-skinned boy with dark hair. His father, Fernando, is from *Jutiapa*, and his mother, Agapita, is from *Retalhuleu*. Fernando's cousins who live in *Jutiapa* are blond, ride horses, and like rodeos. However, his cousins who live in *Retalhuleu* are dark skinned, ride bicycles, and like fairs, but they do not attend rodeos. One day, Fernando asked his grandmother, Francisca, why people from the east and people from the west are different from each other. "It is a simple story", Francisca answered. "The first residents in Guatemala were the Mayans." "Yes, the ones who built *Tikal* and *Takalik Abaj*, but they no longer exist", Fernando interrupted. "You are right in saying that the Mayans built those cities", Francisca continued, "but even though they no longer exist, we are their descendants. A Mayan person is the one 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 came and entered our territory through war; they had more destructive weapons than the ones the Mayans used, and they defeated our ancestors. Nearby, in *Zapotitlán*, they won the first battles. After many years of war, they managed to make our ancestors accept their power as they enslaved them. A Spaniard king called Carlos I, made freedom, honors, and lands to be returned to our ancestors. So, life continued and different customs were introduced 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 of the Spanish stayed to live in the city that is now known as *La Antigua Guatemala*, and they became rich by selling the cocoa that was produced in *Retalhuleu* and *Suchitepéquez*. Years passed and since there was a lot of competition for cocoa, prices dropped. Suddenly, the children of rich Spaniards were becoming poor. So, they asked the new Spaniard king for help,

whose name was Felipe II. He provided them with lands in the east of Guatemala, like in *Jutiapa*, because there was not much population there. The Spaniards who received lands in those places decided to work raising cows and horses, so they developed a taste for rodeos, horse races, leather crafts, and other cattle-related activities such as making cheese, cream, and caramel. These people married their relatives, and that is why they keep their blond look. For that reason, we are dark-skinned and they are *canchitos*, and we like the customs of our Mayan ancestors such as prayers, traditional costumes, and mainly our languages." "Ah, and what does 'canchito' mean?", Fernando asked. "It is a Mayan word that means 'yellow tree'", Francisca replied, "probably because the Spanish who arrived were blond and to the Mayans, they looked like the trees when they are about to shed their leaves." Now, Fernando already knows why his cousins are different, and he even found out what *canchito* means.

Activity

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.





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