

LESSON PLAN:

Symbols of Family

by Esmeralda Torres

Explore varied symbols of family through the arts of modern and Mesoamerican vessels and other artifacts. Experience the Zoque-Mayan indigenous ways of making ancestral chocolate as a symbol of family. Bring a dishware or pottery that holds a special meaning to you. Savor ancestral "Xocolatl" (chocolate) as you come together with symbols of family, centuries of culture, and tradition.

Objectives:

Student will...

Introductory Discussion

- Consider and share why the items they brought hold a special meaning. Discuss the (similarities & differences- compare & contrast) shared values, ideas, concepts, and topics across people from diverse communities (Possibilities: family connections, love, care, unity, ancestors, cultural continuance).
- Understand that families come in many forms and sizes, can be biological and chosen, and develop unique cultural symbols that influence an individual's identity and ways of life.
- Explore, identify, and connect with symbols of family embedded in modern and Mesoamerican objects, including art pieces exhibited in the UMFA Mesoamerican Collection.
- Gain a deeper understanding of Mesoamerican cosmovision and symbols of cultural, social, and political knowledge, beliefs, and earth-sustaining practices.
- Understand that diverse communities possess unique linguistic and cultural knowledge, traditions, ways of thriving, and linguistically and culturally sustaining practices through generations. Understand that diverse communities' ways of knowing may contribute to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our communities.

The Chocolate Process

- Discuss and explore food as a symbol of family. Observe and experience symbols of family fused in the linguistically and culturally sustaining practices of making ancestral chocolate as a way of thriving.
- Connect with Mayan symbols by creating a model made from chocolate dough to represent a symbol of family.

Reflection

- Reflect upon your classroom's diverse students and their families' languages, traditions, cultural backgrounds, and symbols of family.
- Determine the next steps to promote and sustain students' and their families' languages and cultures.
- Consider implementing family engagement practices to integrate students and their families' funds of knowledge.

Grade level:

3rd–12th

Duration:

1 hour

Materials:

Provided by teacher

- Cultural objects
- Pictures of pieces of ancient art from the UMFA Mesoamerican Collection
- Paper and pencils
- Indigenous tools to process foods
- Cacao beans in various stages
- Recycled plates and utensils

Provided by student

- Personal drinking cup, bowl, or container.

Ask these questions to help select a drinking cup, bowl, or plate with a special meaning. Does this item remind you of a person, a place, a special memory, or an event? Was it a gift from someone? How does it make you feel when you use it? How does it influence your identity and your way of life?

Examples: Cups or dishware made from different materials

Vocabulary/Key Terms:

- **Mayan:** Mesoamerican civilization occupied a nearly continuous territory in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and northern Belize.
- **Zoque-Mixe- Zoquean:** living in northeastern Oaxaca; the Zoque, primarily inhabiting north-western Chiapas; and the Popoluca (not to be confused with the Popo- loca), who live in eastern Veracruz and Oaxaca, about midway between the Mixe and Zoque.
- **Cacao:** the seeds of a tropical tree, from which chocolate and cocoa are made.
- **Metate:** The metate is a rectangular stone carved from volcanic rock that can be aphid, legless or have three tenamatzin or stone supports, which is complemented with a metlapil or metate hand. The size of the metates increased over time, parallel to the increase in the size of the corn cob.
- **Molcajete:** Made of volcanic stone carved into a concave shape with three tenamatzin or short supports, it was used to crush and grind grains and other ingredients in small quantities. The word molcajete is derived from the voices of the Nahuatl molli salsa and caxitl cajete, mollicaxtli; You can also see a texolot, a stone that was used with the molcajete to crush food.
- **Jicara-Jícara:** Hemispherical gourd with a concave base and straight edge containing cochineal grain.
- **Pinol-Pinole:** a traditional food that began to be made in pre-Hispanic times. It is made from corn flour and sweetened with piloncillo or sugar and mixed with cinnamon. Its name comes from the Nahuatl pinolli, which means ground and roasted corn, in ancient Mexico it was used as an energy drink, especially during long journeys on foot.
- **Pozol:** The history of pozol begins in pre-Hispanic times, where the Maya-Chontales, who lived in the state of Tabasco, prepared a drink based on corn and cocoa which they called pochotl; Indigenous travelers widely consumed this as it is nutritious, moisturizing and helps alleviate hunger. With the passage of time, the drink spread throughout southeastern Mexico and with the arrival of the Spaniards to Mexican territory, the name pochotl was deformed to pozol.
- **Tazcalate- Tascalate:** sometimes known as Taxcalate, is a typical Chiapas drink made with roasted corn, cocoa beans, annatto, sugar and cinnamon. All these ingredients are ground thus creating a powder that when mixed with water or cold milk results in a refreshing drink.

Activity

Prep (week leading up to the activity)

- Teacher: Prepare the first part of the process of making chocolate, including sorting, cleaning, roasting the raw cacao beans, and cleaning the roasted cacao. Gather the materials, tools, and utensils needed for the lesson.
- Students: Select a drinking cup that holds a special meaning.

Prep (on activity day)

- Teacher: Place supplies for the first activity at the tables and set the chocolate process's materials, tools, and utensils. Arrange floor space to develop the chocolate process.

Step 1 | Inform and Connect (10 minutes)

- Ask students why the items they brought hold a special meaning and share their thoughts and feelings. Then, connect students' observations and reflections to the concepts of diverse family structures and family symbols embedded in the art pieces from the UMFA Mesoamerican collection.
- Discuss Mesoamerican symbols as a way to sustain language and culture.
- Through indigenous family stories, promote a deeper understanding of diverse families, family symbols, and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices.

Step 2 | Develop and Observe (25 minutes)

- Provide opportunities to view and immerse in the chocolate process to understand diverse families' funds of knowledge and indigenous ways to process foods, thrive, and sustain languages and cultures.
- Chocolate Process:
 1. Toast the raw dried cacao beans in a pan for 15-20 minutes or until dark brown, carefully stirring them with a long, wooden serving spoon to toast them evenly. Make sure not to burn the cacao beans in the process.
 2. Let the roasted cacao cool off for five to ten minutes.
 3. Peel the roasted cacao beans.
 4. Grind the roasted cacao beans on a metate or a hand grinder, homogenizing the ground cacao beans into a soft, greasy paste or dough.
 5. Work the dough into long rectangular shapes, cutting each shape into small chocolate bars and letting them air dry on parchment or shipping paper.
 6. Let the pieces of chocolate air dry and store them in a cool room.
 7. Boil two or three chocolate bars at a low temperature in a pot.
 8. Make sure that the chocolate bars melt entirely and the hot chocolate begins to bubble.

Step 2 | Develop and Observe (25 minutes) cont.

9. Use the pinolillo to make the chocolate a thick homogeneous drink.
10. Sweeten to taste.

Step 3 | Create (10 minutes)

- Students think about how the item they brought represents a symbol of their family. Support students in constructing an idea of a family symbol, shaping it into a model made from chocolate.

Step 4 | Reflect (5 minutes)

- Provide opportunities to reflect and share what students learned through the lesson and the chocolate process and how this helps them understand students and families' diverse linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Methods for Assessment

- Did students achieve a greater understanding of diverse family structures?
- Did students understand that families possess diverse linguistic and cultural assets that may contribute to greater knowledge and understanding of diverse communities?
- Did students gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their communities?

Additional Resources

- [Peace Corps](#) | [World Wise Schools](#) | [Teaching About Culture](#) | [Culture Matters Workbook](#)
- Recinos, A. (Ed.). (1950). Popol Vuh P. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Dillinger, T. L., Barriga, P., Escárcega, S., Jimenez, M., Lowe, D. S., & Grivetti, L. E. (2000). Food of the gods: cure for humanity? A cultural history of the medicinal and ritual use of chocolate. *The Journal of nutrition*, 130(8), 2057S-2072S.
- Inomata, T., Triadan, D., & Aoyama, K. (2017). After 40 years: revisiting Ceibal to investigate the origins of lowland Maya civilization. *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 28(1), 187-201.
- <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2014/02/06/the-secret-to-cacao-farming-in-mexico-tell-the-trees-you-love-them>

Additional Resources cont.

- Steve Bartz, & Jaime Kibben (Producers), & Kibben, J. (Director). (1994). In good hands: Culture and agriculture in the lacandon rainforest. [Video/DVD] The Video Project. Retrieved from <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/in-good-hands-culture-and-agriculture-in-the-lacandon-rainforest>
- Téllez, L. (2019). Eat Mexico: Recipes from Mexico City's Streets, Markets, and Fondas. Kyle Books.
- [Grinding chocolate on the metate, the traditional Mexican way \(themijachronicles.com\)](http://themijachronicles.com)
- Pettersson, R. (1998). Circles, triangles and squares: Sacred symbols in the Mayan culture. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 18(2), 137-148.
- de la Garza, M. (1978). Quetzalcóatl-Dios entre los mayas. *Estudios de Cultura Maya*, 11.
- [Qué es el pinole y cómo se hace \(eluniversal.com.mx\)](http://eluniversal.com.mx)
- Barrera-Bassols, N., & Toledo, V. M. (2005). Ethnoecology of the Yucatec Maya: symbolism, knowledge and management of natural resources. *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 9-41.
- Castañeda, Q. (1996). In the museum of Maya culture. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- [Mediateca INAH](http://mediateca.inah.gob.mx)
- [Tascalate de Chiapas: La bebida refrescante \(agro-cultura.mx\)](http://agro-cultura.mx)



Artwork Spotlight:

Unidentified Artist, Guatemala, Peten region, *Maya Culture Vase* with checkerboard pattern and Jaguar Pelt, 600-900 Earthenware and Pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1984.003

- This vessel decorated with a jaguar pelt design, a symbol of power, was for an elite member of Maya society. Can you find where the jaguar pelt is painted on?
- The orange glyphs around the cup say it is a “drinking vessel for tree fresh kakaw/cacao.” Cacao beans were a valued currency. Lesser lords would often give bundles of beans as tax payments to their overlords.
- Since the Olmec era (around 1200 BCE), cacao was an important drink. Mixed with chili powder and other spices, it was served at feasts celebrating special events. The Maya enjoyed different varieties including “tree-fresh,” “bitter,” and “frothy.” How do you like to drink chocolate?
- Today, the descendants of the ancient Maya culture live all over the world, but the majority live in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras. Cacao is still used by contemporary Maya peoples today in each stage of life, especially during births, baptisms, marriages, and funerals. Although the ancient glyphs are not used today, Maya people speak many dialects of the Mayan language.



Left | *Standing Man Holding a Rectangular Box*, Mexico, Island of Jaina, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from the M. Belle Rice Foundation and Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1988.021.001

Right | *Seated Man*, Mexico, Island of Jaina, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1984.144



Top left | *Standing Woman*, Mexico, Veracruz region, Remojadas culture, 150–600, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1978.025

Top right | *Standing Woman*, Mexico, Nayarit region, Nayarit culture, 300 BCE–300 CE, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum and the Herbert I. and Elsa B. Michael Foundation, UMFA1977.092

Below | *Chontal-Style Stone Mask*, Western Mexico, Guerrero region, Mezcala culture, 1000–100 BCE, white stone. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1978.024



Clockwise from top left | *Vase Depicting Lord Making an Offering*, Mexico, Campeche region, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1985.005

Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif, Guatemala, possibly northern Petén region, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1979.269

Bowl with Glyphs, Guatemala, Petén region, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1985.006

Polychrome Vase with Straight Walls, Guatemala, possibly northern Petén region, Maya culture, 600–900, earthenware, cream-colored slip, and pigment. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1979.179





Above | *Burial or Cache Urn Base*, Guatemala, Petén region, Maya culture, 500–800, earthenware and pigment. Purchased with funds from the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation for the Marriner S. Eccles Collection of Masterworks, UMFA1987.057.001

Left | *Seated Male Figure*, Mexico, Colima region, Colima culture, 300 BCE–300 CE, earthenware. Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum, UMFA1985.004

Contributer Bio:

Esmeralda Torres is a wonderful and valued collaborator with the Utah Museum of Fine Arts! From participating in our Community Work Group that is reenvisioning UMFA's collection of art from México and Central America to providing enriching hands-on workshops in our classroom. In this session and lesson plan she shares her family's Zoque-Maya traditions from Chiapas, Mexico around chocolate making. She is not only an educator but an indigenous chocolatier with incredible talent that she's willing to share.

This Lesson Plan was created for the October 25, 2023 UMFA Evening For Educators: Symbols of Family. The evening was inspired by the special exhibition *Tatau: Marks of Polynesia*, on view from August 12, 2023 to December 30, 2023.

Heading image | Oceania, Samoa, (1st half of the 20th century), detail of *Siapo (tapa cloth)*, dye, paper mulberry bark, resin. Gift of Richard E. Brown in memory of Ellis O. and Sarah N. Brown, UMFA2006.3.4



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