Title of the curricular unit: Textiles of the Maya in Chiapas, Mexico
Name: Virginia Hilyard
Subject Area: Spanish 1, 11
Grade Level(s): 9-11
Number of Lessons in the Unit: 4
Time Frame to Allow for Unit: 2 weeks or ten 43 minute class periods

Brief Narrative Describing the Unit:

In the textiles of Chiapas, Mexico, Maya women tell a story in their weavings and textile embroidery about their understanding of time, space and the mythological forces of nature and the cosmos. The weavings of these Highland Maya women tell their individual stories and so assert their independence in creating an art form with designs and symbols derived historically from their ancient ancestors to which they have added their own modern interpretation of earlier designs.

In the state of Chiapas, located in southwestern Mexico, 200,000 Maya women or more weave their own intricate designs often using backstrap looms like their ancestors or more modern shuttle looms and sewing machines or needle and thread. They adapt these ancient designs into intricate forms of clothing for men and women in the Highlands of rural Chiapas north and surrounding the colonial city named San Cristobal de Las Casas. The textiles often include brocade technique and are interwoven with many designs considered sacred. It is their sacred duty to execute and perfect these designs and to often add their own personal interpretation of these ancient designs woven with respect for the Virgin Mary and Catholic Saints, as well as designs associated with their surroundings in rural Mexico.
Unit Teaching Objectives (what will student be able to do upon completion of the unit?)

Objective 1: Students will be able to locate the State of Chiapas, Mexico on the map and also pinpoint surrounding countries and the colonial city of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

Objective 2: Students will be able to sketch and identify the designs of the textiles of Chiapas and understand their symbolism.

Objective 3: Students will be able to understand the vocabulary of textile design as it pertains to the different regions of Chiapas.

Objective 4: Students will be able to look at a picture of a design and identify the region that it likely comes from, and compare the designs to clothing designs today and fashion today.

Unit Essential Questions (what are the most important concepts students should learn from this unit?)

What designs do you observe and how do they compare to those of earlier decades and generations?

What is expressed in these designs that relates to the past and also to the present?

How do these designs compare to those we see in Chiapas today and is there any similarity to what we see in designs and fashion in the United States?

List of Key People and Vocabulary

Maya Women
Lesson#1 Blank Map of Mexico to outline Chiapas
Handout #1 Map of Mexico
Lesson#2 Vocabulary
Lesson#2 Designs and Symbols of the Maya
Lesson#2 Activity#1 Imitation of Mayan Designs
Lesson#3 Comparison of Maya fashion and fashion today
Activity#1 Venn Diagram
Images of the Maya
Sources and Bibliography
Addendum: personal photos from Chiapas, July 2012
Lesson #1

Objective: Where is Chiapas and where are the areas surrounding the colonial city of San Cristobal de Las Casas such as Zinacantan and Chamula, as well as Santa Marta Magdalenas to the North where textiles are created and worn as ornament?

Resources: [www.google map+Chiapas+Mexico](http://www.google map+Chiapas+Mexico)

Handout #1 – blank map of Mexico to outline Chiapas, neighboring countries and locate San Cristobal de Las Casas
Overhead transparency to help students outline the area of Chiapas and surrounding countries, as well as the living Maya people of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chamula, and Magdalenas Aldama.

Lesson #2

Objective: students will learn the history of the symbols and the designs used in the textiles and the Spanish words for these textile motifs

The women weavers of the Maya Highlands use natural cotton and wool brocade embroidery technique with thread imported from China in recent times.

Primary source: Morris 2011.
Vocabulary: Handout #2
Activity#1

Word bank to match with the following words:

English to Spanish

1. language spoken in the Highlands of Chiapas
2. everyday dress
3. formal wool tunics
4. toads
5. made of wool
6. blouse
7. woven offerings
8. Classic Maya Period
9. cultural identity

Spanish to English: Match the numbers with the Spanish definitions:

1. _____ Tzotzil
2. _____ huipil( or Maya word for blusa)
3. ______ el periodo Maya Clasico ( A.D. 200-900)
4.______ el traje cotidiano
5.______ de lana
6._____ tunicas formales de lana
7._______ ofrendas tejidas
8._____ los sapos
9._____ identidad cultural
Vocabulary Handout #3

Define the following words in English:

1. disenos sagrados=
2. el santo=
3. camisas con mangas coloradas=
4. la comunidad=
5. la creatividad=
6. los tejadores=
7. una tradicion=
8. las flores=
9. los animales=
10. el arbol de la vida=
11. el bordado=
12. el estilo
13. el brocado=
14. la espalda=
15. el cuello=
16. el pecho=
17. la moda=
18. adornar=
19. el cinturón (fajas)=
20. las rayas=
21. huipiles de rayas rojas o azules=
22. una pechera rectangular=
23. hacer bordados=
24. preservar=
25. la moda=
Curricular Lessons

Lesson #3

Title: The symbols present in the textiles of the Maya in Chiapas

Objectives: Students will learn the history of the symbols and the Spanish words associated with the textiles and the Spanish words for the specific textile designs and compare the designs and colors used in different regions of Chiapas, such as the change from red to blue in recent years from San Lorenzo Ziancantan and the wool skirts found in San Juan Chamula.

Note: The women weavers of the Maya Highlands use natural cotton and wool and metallic thread as well as acrylic fabric imported in recent times.

Lesson Specific Essential Questions: What designs do you see in the textiles and what might these designs symbolize? How do modern designs reflect those of Classic period Maya?

Discussion of the designs:

Note the “diseno del ‘universo’ alrededor del cuello”. Morris, Walter F. 19, 29, 22, 26, 29, 70.

See the “Hileras del perro que pata que alternan con el deseno universal”. In translation: “rows of dog’s paw that alternate within the design.” Different variations of this dog's paw and often the toad design as well are the designer's personal signature and identify the village or community that they come from.

image #1 Morris 71.
image #2 Morris 29&22.

"En el diseno del ‘universo’, el camino del sol a traves del cielo se muestra con una delgada linea amarilla que conecta los pequenos rombos del oriente y poniente a un rombo central mas grande. Este rombo interior tiene rizos a cada lado que representan alas; llamadas pepen, ‘mariposa’, son es el simbolo del sol entre las tejadores. La mariposa es una metafora para el sol porque como el sol, habita el inframundo cuando el dia se torna en noche."

In translation: Morris 29. Santa Marta

In the 'Universe' design the path of the sun across the sky is shown by a thin yellow line connecting the small diamonds of the east and west to a larger central diamond. The inner diamond has curls on each side that represent wings; called pepen, ‘butterfly,’ it is the weaver's symbol for the sun because like the sun, it inhabits the Underworld when day turns to night Butterflies as well as fruit bats dwell in caves--portals to the Underworld-and they feed on the same flowers. In the waning
light of dusk you may see a butterfly fluttering among the bushes at the edge of the cornfields, and then suddenly see a bat flying from the same spot." Morris 29.

Sapos or “Toads” are in folklore said to represent the wife of the “Senor de la Terra” or the wife of the Earth God. They are said to guard the Earth Lord's house and in Zinacantec myth, they are musicians who sing at the entrances to the caves. They are said to have glands that secrete a substance like a hallucinogen stronger than cocaine. In recreating these designs Maya women are performing a sacred duty and showing respect for their ancestors. As Protestants replace some Catholics these beliefs are beginning to disappear.

Image # 3 Morris 26-27.

The “huipiles” or blouses have the color blue in modern times in San Lorenzo Zinacantan, whereas red predominated in earlier decades. Red has turned to maroon and brown in some areas. The ponchos among the men, however, have varied little and The huipil is characterized by a “pechera” azul or “bodice” that is embroidered around the “col” or neckline and belts with giant tassels complete the outfit. Often the bodice has a line of individually designed diamond motifs that vary among designers.

Image #4 Morris 38.

In 2010 a tourist introduced “el bordado en punto de cruz” or cross-stitch embroidery which has become popular. Many Maya women today imitate earlier woven design with their own style of “punto de cruz.” Others use black embroidery or “huipiles de rayas rojas o azules con bordado negro sobrepuesto,” or black embroidered over a bodice of red or white stripes. Morris 65. In the Highlands as well around Chamula and Zinacantan where the altitude is 7,000 feet above sea level, skirts are woven out of black wool to resemble the fur of the howler monkeys. These skirts shed water in heavy rain and are cool in the summer rainy season. Men also wear huipiles made of natural brown wool, which was one color of few choices, brown, grey, white or black. For ceremonial dress they wear sleeveless tunics of black wool on the outside of a woven tunic, which is very expensive and difficult to make. Morris 122-123.

Image # 5 Morris 125.
Lesson #3 Activity #1

Students in Lesson # 3 will be given a piece of graph paper and pictures to observe on the overhead projector of Maya women in their individually designed huipiles or blouses. It is noted that most women’s community of origin is known by the designs and previously entire communities were identifiable by their clothing designs. Students will attempt to match their designs with the different geographical areas around San Cristobal de Las Casas in Chiapas using the map from Walter “Chip” Morris’ book.

Lesson #3 Activity #2

Students will identify the different designs such as the toad, the universe, the butterfly, the tree from a photograph  Morris 19-29. Optional Activity: Students may locate online a photograph of a backstrap loom and a modern shuttle loom and label the parts and uses comparing the techniques involved.
Lesson #4

Essential question #1: How are the fashions of Maya women different today from those of their ancestors?

Essential question #2: How does the dress of the Maya differ from our dress in the United States? What is similar and what is distinctly different?

Optional Activity #1: the teacher may hand out a Venn diagram for students to compare and contrast the dress of the Maya with that of the United States.

Optional Activity #2: the teacher may select a particular student to answer the questions posed by other students in front of the class. Students are given a set of previously prepared questions to study. Some of these questions may be general or more complex in nature that the teacher makes up from questions that he or she may raise throughout the two week unit.

Optional Activity #3: the teacher will hand out pictures of Maya Women or men in traditional or modern dress. Students will use the verb "llevar" to describe what they are wearing in two sentences in Spanish. They may include colors and design, as well as size and personal impression of the garment using "me gusta...or no me gusta..."
Methods of Assessment (formative and summative)

Lesson #1 includes the assessment rubric (#1-#4) on the map; #4 being an A or the highest
Rubric to include:
  #1 accuracy of detail
  #2 correct placement of borders and surrounding countries
  #3 correct spelling
  #4 completed on time

Lesson #2 to include a quiz on the vocabulary and students correct peers work and mark the
number correct at the top of the paper.

Lesson #3 to include assessment of the accuracy of the designs or symbols with correct labels in
Spanish and English translation.

Lesson #4 to include discussion of the Venn Diagram and discussion amongst the class in small
groups of selected diagrams for discussion. Are modern tattoos comparable expressions of identity
today?

Summative Assessment:
A test on matching Spanish words with their English definitions as well as a general essay question
(in English) about what they have learned from the Unit that they didn't know before and how
might they use this information in the future?

Conclusion:

For the Maya today and during the time of their ancestors, textile art is a form of sacred duty
ordained by the gods and expressed by them in their individual way. Some remnants have been
imbedded in ancient pottery that reflect ancestral history of sacred observances. The differences
between ancient designs and modern interpretations are becoming more pronounced in rural
Chiapas. The marketplace, however, is still a place where Maya women and families gather to
share and sell wares that often take a year to make. Each vendor expresses pride in the artwork and
embroidery that captivates visitors to the area today. The Mexican government is treating those in
Chiapas more as a community, which has helped to preserve cultural identity. Greenfield, Patricia
Marks. Weaving generations together: evolving creativity among the Mayas of Chiapas. 23.
Entrepreneurship and innovation have also been modern products of tourism and yet the
Zinacantecs in particular have a "wariness about the presence and activities of strangers that helps
preserve their cultural integrity." Greenfield 23. Nevertheless, printed patterns in many
communities have replaced their ancestor's designs and as women become more independent their
weaving and textile designs reflect their individuality. In San Cristobal de Las Casas women run
their own weaving cooperative, San Jolobil, open to the general public.
Resources


Additional Resources (other useful sources that pertain to the curricular unit)


Weavers in the codices:

Prehispanic Traces in the symbolism of Maya Weavings from Guatemala

Dying and weaving

http://www.galenfrysinger.com/fying_and_weaving.htm
What new technology will you use in this unit as a result of attending the Yale Summer Institute? I will use new websites as well as the overhead projector and primary sources such as books and photographs.

For creating the unit? I will use both books, websites and personal photographs of the textiles of Chiapas.

For student use? I will use my personal photographs, as well as textiles purchased in Chiapas for discussion.

For presentation?
I will use the prepared Curriculum Unit and the textiles for discussion, as well as have the actual books available in the classroom for examination.

How are you going to incorporate museum artifacts, museum visits, virtual collections or primary sources in this curricular unit?

I plan to use the textiles and photographs of them in the additional resource materials online to enhance discussion. I also intend to permit student use of the classroom computer for individual research on topics of the student's choice.

*****

The 2012 Summer Institute is sponsored by Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER) at the MacMillan Center, Council on Latin American and Iberian Studies (CLAIS), and Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History.

The 2012 Summer Institute is made possible by generous support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and the U.S. Department of Education under HEA Title VI for international, area, and foreign language studies.