

Unit cover page: *Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Program, Mexico 2010*

Unit Title: Fiesta Mexicana

Author: Tetyana Roger

School: Hoover Elementary School, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Subject Area: Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual Arts, Mathematics

Topic: research steps, communities, traditions reflected in art and architecture, nutrition

Grade Level: third or fourth

Time Frame: six 40-minute classes

Brief Summary and Goals:

The main idea of this unit is for students to gain a better understanding and appreciation of our diverse communities while exploring the rich Mexican heritage through research studies and art projects. Students will learn about different aspects of Mexican life while studying crafts and techniques that are essential in Mexico's daily life; explore textile/tapestry designs and their symbolic meaning; study terracotta technique and its application in tableware and architecture; make toy *trajineras* and masks; build a model of pyramid structures; and learn about "magical powers" of corn. The class will take on a challenge to prepare their own fiesta at the school by researching and making art and crafts that represent contemporary life in Mexico. At the end of the unit students will be able to describe the steps in the process of creating the craft, present it in the festive setting and explain the history and the role of the craft in contemporary life.

Established goals: The benchmarks addressed in this unit are taken from the Oklahoma PASS objectives for Language Arts, Visual Arts, Social Studies and Mathematics.

The students will:

- begin the research process by selecting a topic, formulating questions, and identifying key words.
- locate, organize, and synthesize information from a variety of print and nonprint and technological resources (e.g., dictionaries, reference books, atlases, magazines, informational texts, and technology/Internet).
- compile information into summaries of information.
- make brief narrative (story) presentations that provide a context for an event that is the subject of the presentation.
- express ideas and opinions in group or individual situations.
- use effective communication strategies in pairs and small group context.

- show respect and consideration for others in verbal and physical communication.
- use a variety of subjects, basic media, and techniques in making original art, including drawing, painting, weaving, paper folding, and printmaking.
- create a visual message that effectively communicates an idea.
- use information to understand and appreciate other cultures.
- develop and use strategies to estimate measurements while making original art.

Understanding: Students will understand:

- steps and reasoning of the research process;
- different aspects of modern Mexican life;
- stereotypes, history and traditions of indigenous communities;
- how history shapes current culture: Mayans and Aztecs;
- visual arts in relation to history and cultures;
- symbolism in communicating an idea.

Essential Questions:

- How is this craft used in everyday life in Mexico?
- What is the meaning of the symbols or colors used in the design?
- Why are crafts essential in Mexico's daily life?
- How does this craft change with modern life?
- How is this craft the same or different than in the U.S.?

Students will know and be able to:

- Use a variety of media to conduct research, follow steps and produce key components;
- Summarize their findings into an oral report;
- Communicate ideas in groups and practice for the presentation;
- Explain the history of the craft, its role in Mexico's daily life;
- Identify similarities and differences between similar crafts in Mexico and the U.S.;
- Create a sample of the craft.

Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks:

- Students will complete research on the craft they choose.
- Students will write a summary of their findings using a graphic organizer.
- Students will organize the information in the form of an oral report and present it to the class.

- Students will produce a sample of their craft.
- Students will explain steps in the process of creating their craft as a group.
- Students will support their presentation by explaining the authenticity of symbols they used to create their work of art.

Other Evidence:

- Videotape of the students' presentations will be used for self-reflection;
- Peer-evaluation rubric will be created;
- Ability to cooperate peacefully during the group discussions;
- Wise use of a graphic organizer;
- Ability to locate needed information;
- Ability to stay on task and follow steps of the research.

Learning Activities

Lesson One: What does it take to organize a fiesta?

1. Students will be posed with a problem: how to prepare for the festival to celebrate Hispanic heritage month at school.

Class will discuss fiestas as one of the forms of celebration in Mexico.

Fiesta Facts: The best known Mexican celebration is the fiesta. It is always fiesta time somewhere in Mexico. Each town and village has its own patron saint with an annual fiesta. People of that town decorate their streets and house entrance with flowers, cut paper and portraits of the saint and usually gather for the parade at the main street dressed in their colorful traditional costumes. There are also Mexican fiestas that are not religious, including national and civic holidays such as El Grito and Independence Day. Usually most common at the fiestas are parades, dances, food, music, songs, traditional costumes, masks, crafts, rodeos, bullfights and fireworks.

Possible discussion questions:

- What are the best known celebrations in Mexico?
 - How do people prepare for fiestas?
 - What do they do during fiestas?
 - How are they connected to the people's everyday life?
 - How are they the same as or different from the U.S. celebrations?
2. The teacher will preview with the whole group the "PhotoStory" presentation about the lifestyle, crafts and indigenous communities of Mexico and will brainstorm the possible fiesta events, focusing on arts/crafts aspects of it such as masks and traditional clothing designs, tableware and house decorations, foods and use of

natural dyes in art and tapestry, *trajineras* (small river boats) and stories behind indigenous groups and their celebration traditions.

3. Afterwards students will discuss in small groups of 3–4 the kind of arts and crafts they observed in a video and compare them to similar art objects in the U.S. Kids will complete a Venn diagram in their groups and also will identify different crafts and styles of art specific to Mexico.

Possible discussion questions:

- What kind of art or craft did you see in the video?
 - What is it made of? How is it used?
 - What is a similar craft to that in the U.S.?
 - How can you tell what part of Mexico the craft came from?
 - How is this craft used in everyday life in Mexico?
 - Why crafts are important in our daily life?
4. Students will focus on the following life aspects that are specific to Mexico: costumes and textiles, decorations in tableware and architecture, purpose and design of masks, pyramids and *trajineras*.

Materials:

PhotoStory (available for download from this Web site:
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/outreach/fulbright10/>)

Venn diagram (attached) or visit <http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

Lesson Two: What does it take to do research?

1. Open your lesson with the focus questions: What is research? When do you need to conduct research? How do you organize your studies?

Follow up with the chart on “the BIG 6” research model. Review with your students the steps of organizing new information.

2. Divide your class into learning teams of 3–4 students and let them choose the art/craft they would like to study (cut apart 6 cards from “Research topics and crafts” sheet and let group leaders pick one card). Next, students will brainstorm in groups what they already know about this craft and will record their findings in a KWL chart.
3. Review at the media center available resources for conducting research studies, and let students discuss in groups:

- What do we want to know about the craft?
 - What information can be gained from maps, atlases, encyclopedias, learning journals, magazines and the Internet?
 - What resources do we need to conduct studies of the chosen craft? Choose at least two print and two electronic sources.
 - What materials might we need to collect for making a sample of our craft?
4. Let students gather resources, explore Internet sites and read the fact sheets on each craft. Post the focus questions of the research:
- What **region** of Mexico does this craft originally come from?
 - How is this craft **used** in everyday life in Mexico?
 - What is the **meaning** of the **symbols** or colors used in the design?
 - What **materials** are used and what are the **steps** of making this art?
 - How does this craft **change** with modern life?
 - How is it **similar to or different than** the crafts we make here in the U.S.?

Materials:

Map of Mexico (attached) or visit <http://www.mexico-maps.com/>

“The BIG 6” research model chart (attached)

KWL chart (attached) per group

Research topics and crafts sheet (attached)

Fact Sheets (attached)

Library resources that have information on Mexico’s history, life and traditions (world encyclopedias, atlases, maps, travel books, art books and magazines, access to the Internet and the PhotoStory)

Lesson Three: How does it all fit together?

1. Students will be asked to work in their learning teams and conduct research studies on their chosen craft. The focus questions will be posted and reviewed. The research findings must be organized in a summary presentation format.
2. Students will use a graphic organizer with supporting details to record their findings first and then will write a brief summary report in 8–10 sentences describing their craft.
3. Extra task for students who finish their work first: discuss with your teammates how to evaluate your work. Create a self-assessment checklist as a result of your discussion. Possible questions for the checklist:
 - What were my topic and goals?
 - Did I follow “the BIG 6” steps research model?

- Did I answer the focus questions?
- Did I cooperate with my teammates?
- Did I use graphic organizers for collecting and summarizing the information?
- Did I write at least 8 sentences for my summary report?
- Did I edit my work and check for clarity?
- Did I use at least two print and two electronic sources?
- Did I document the sources I used?

Materials:

Graphic organizer—topic and supporting details (attached)

Library resources that have information on Mexico’s history, life and traditions (world encyclopedias, atlases, maps, travel books, art books and magazines, access to the Internet and the PhotoStory)

Lessons Four and Five: How to make the craft?

1. First the learning team will discuss steps in the process of creating a sample craft. Possible guiding questions:

- What will we do first, next, at the end?
- What will the final product look like?
- Who will be responsible for each step in our team?
- What materials will we use?
- Do we need to measure or estimate size/amount of the materials needed for the project?
- What symbols/colors will we use to decorate our craft?
- How do we make it attractive and presentable?

2. Next students will gather the materials and make a sample of a craft using appropriate media. Most of the lesson time will be spent in small groups making an art project.

3. Finally students will discuss ways to present their research and an art piece together. Possible discussion questions:

- What will our presentation look like? (Take turns presenting the interesting facts about the craft, demonstrating the steps in the process of making the art and its meaningful roles in Mexico.)
- Who will be in charge of each step of the presentation?
- How is this craft used in everyday life in Mexico?
- What is the meaning of the symbols or colors used in the design?
- How does this craft change with modern life?

- How is this craft the same as or different from in the U.S.?

Materials:

Different art media: construction paper of different colors, colored tissue paper, ten 6"x6" white construction paper squares, tempera paints, paper plates, brown paper bags, small wooden sticks, color markers, crayons, color pencils, paint brushes, sets of old sheets for sashes, scissors, glue

Lesson Six: The BIG Fiesta day

1. Students will be finalizing their projects and setting up their table for the presentations. Each group will be able to go through the final peer assessment checklist before the presentation.
2. Mariachi music and festive decorations will take place in the classroom, creating an authentic atmosphere for the celebration.
3. Students will take turns presenting their craft and teach the rest of the class the steps to make it. As time permits, students may choose to make some of the simple decorations of the craft.
4. Students will videotape their presentations for self-reflection.

Materials:

Peer assessment rubric (attached)

Mariachi music

Paper flowers

Art supplies

Camera and video camcorder

Ingredients to make tortillas (see Facts Sheets, attached)

Subject: _____

Subject: _____

A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping circles. Each circle contains five vertical lines for writing. The overlapping area also contains five vertical lines.

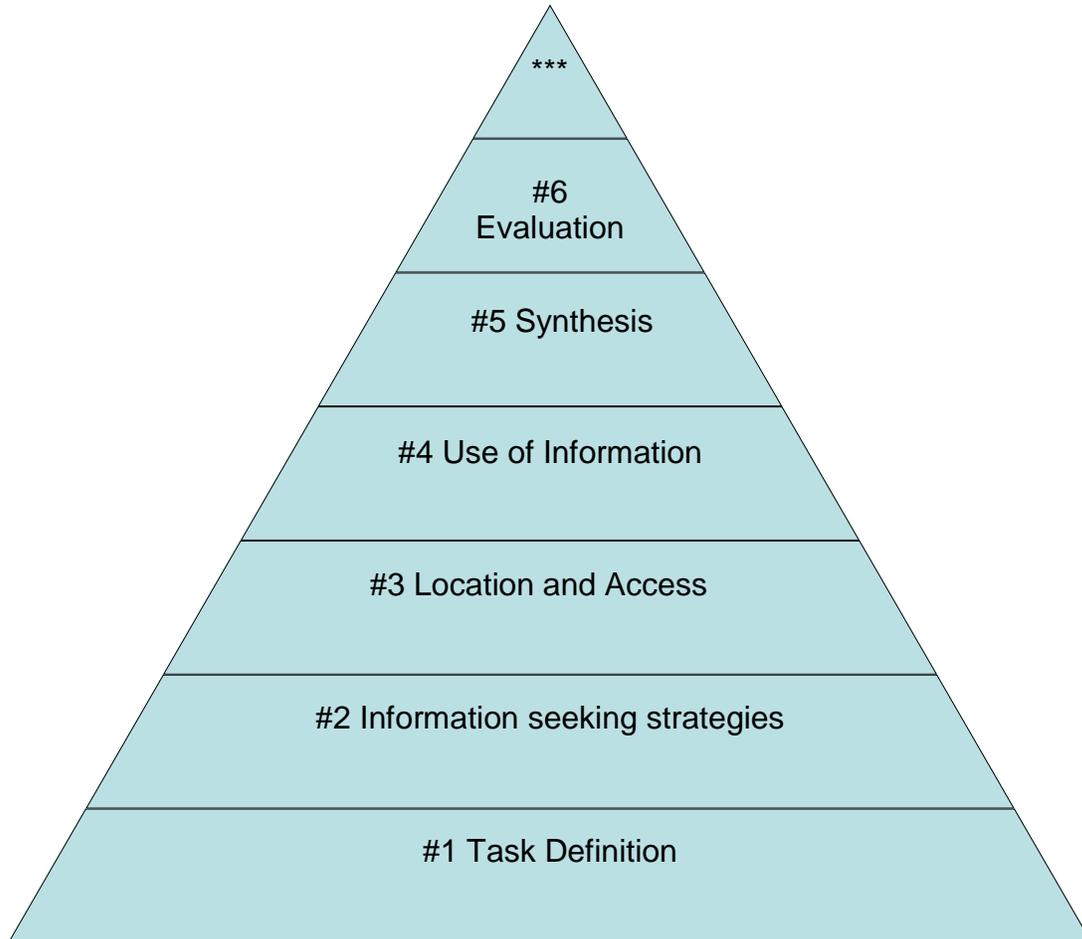
Map of Mexico



http://www.embassyworld.com/maps/Maps_Of_Mexico/

<http://www.mexico-maps.com/>

“The BIG 6” Research Model chart



1. Task definition: **What needs to be done?**
2. Information seeking strategies: **What resources can I use?**
3. Location and access: **Where can I find these resources?**
4. Use of information: **What can I use from these resources?**
5. Synthesis: **What can I make to finish the job?**
6. Evaluation: **How will I know I did my job well?**

KWL Chart

Before you begin your research, list details in the first two columns. Fill in the last column after completing your research.

Topic _____		
What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

Research topics and crafts

<p><u>Topic:</u> Traditional costumes, textile and tapestry design</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making waist sashes</p>	<p><u>Topic:</u> Purpose and design of masks</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making masks</p>	<p><u>Topic:</u> Decorations in tableware and architecture: terracotta</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making tile design</p>
<p><u>Topic:</u> Pyramids, Mayas and Aztecs</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making a pyramid</p>	<p><u>Topic:</u> <i>Trajineras</i> (Colorful river boats)</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making a small boat</p>	<p><u>Topic:</u> “Magical powers” of corn</p> <p><u>Craft:</u> making fiesta food (tortillas) and decorations (tissue paper flowers)</p>

Fact Sheets

1. Traditional costumes

Traditional costumes are worn at festivals throughout Mexico and reflect the different cultures of each region of the country. Some of the common items of clothing are following:

Rebozos are colorful shawls worn by girls and women over their heads and shoulders.

Serapes are small blankets worn over the shoulder by boys and men.

Ponchos are worn by children and adults as a jacket or wrap. They are blankets with the opening in the middle for the head.

Poblana are long, full skirts worn by women and girls on festive occasions. *Poblana* are considered the national folk dress and are always worn for the Hat Dance.

Charro Suits are worn on festive occasions by musicians. The *charro* includes a *bolero* (short jacket), trousers, white shirt and a red bow for a tie. Boots, a wide leather belt, *serape*, *sombrero* (wide brimmed hat) and *huaraches* (leather sandals) complete the outfit.

Waist sashes can be worn by girls and boys.

Yucatecan women often wear white dresses with brightly colored embroidery around the hem and neck. It is traditional Mayan dress.

Some of the designs can be found at <http://www.themexicandress.com>.





Textile and tapestry designs

The techniques of making fabric haven't change here since almost 3,000 years ago. Weavers still make clothes for their family on a belt loom of pre-Columbian origin. The pedal loom is widely used to weave woolen rugs. The most beautiful textiles come from Oaxaca, the Sierra de Puebla. Shawls worn by Indian women all over the country can be made of silk or cotton.

Some of the most unique and beautiful designs can be found in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. The tradition of weaving comes from the pre-Hispanic period, when Mayan civilization was flourishing. The act of weaving was closely associated with the myth of the Creation, the renewal of vegetation and the symbolism of childbirth. Today, it is still respected as a sacred activity that is important to the Mayans and their understanding of the Universe.

Some of the symbols that weavers use in their designs are plants, animals and geometric motifs. They represent different aspects of Mayan beliefs. A diamond shape, for example, symbolizes that the universe begins as a cube with three planes: the sky, the earth and the underworld. Monkeys symbolize disaster; zigzags are the symbol for the god of lightning, a very popular motif on the textiles of many villages. Very important to Mayans is corn, so many of the textiles include a design of the plant as a symbol of prosperity and a good luck. The design of the Mayan garment (*huipil*) can be read like a book where content varies according to the ethnic group, community, social status and the age of the person wearing it.

You can access for more information at <http://www.mayanaculture.com/clothing.html>.



universe



ancestors



flowery flag (festivals)



monkeys



Art project: students will use tempera paints and 4"x36" piece of fabric (per student) to design their own waist sash. They may compose their design on the white sheet of paper first and then copy it onto their fabric piece.

2. Traditional Masks: their purpose and design

Masks are used in many Mexican celebrations. The Cora Indians celebrate fiestas by wearing masks and painting their bodies. Masks are constructed of paper mache and made in the image of mythical, wild beasts with fierce expressions, bulging eyes, extended chins and enlarged noses.

Some masks are carved from soft wood and painted in bright colors representing not only mythical creatures but also animals, ancestors and historical figures. They are treated as living beings or as if they were saints.

Art project: making masks

Children can make their own masks from a great variety of materials including brown paper bags, paper plates and empty gallon plastic milk containers cut in a half. Refer to the PhotoStory to discuss different mask designs, colors and different media used for decorations. Additional materials: yarn, short wooden sticks, paper rolls, colored tissue paper, construction paper, glitter, tempera paints, buttons of different sizes and colors.

Some of the images shown here are wooden masks from Oaxaca, Mexico.



3. Decorations in tableware and architecture: the art of the “talavera”

The Spanish tradition of enameled tiling (*azulejos*) started in the colonial cities and towns in the 1500s, especially in Puebla. Mexican tiles are made of local natural resources: volcanic stone or dried, unfired bricks mixed with straw. Dyes are naturally drawn from the local resources as well. *Talavera* tiles are widely used to decorate front walls of the buildings. There are many uniquely decorated buildings in Puebla, Mexico. Here are some examples of decorative tiles from Puebla.



For more examples go to: <http://www.mexicantiles.com/>, <http://www.inside-mexico.com>.

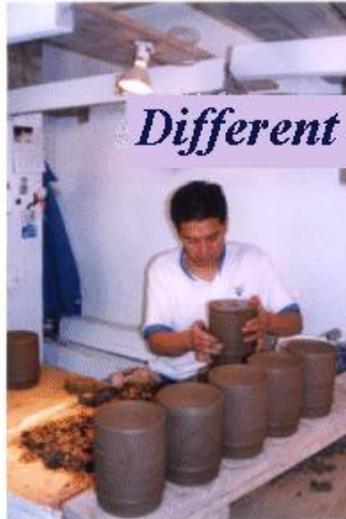
Talavera poblana is the oldest tin-glazed ceramic in America and it is still being manufactured with the same techniques as in the 16th century. It was originated in Talavera e la Reina, a major center in Spain. The design is widely used in tile decorations as well as tableware. Every piece is hand painted.



Art project: Students will design 10 “tiles” (6”x6” white sheets of construction paper), and will make them into a theme or a composition. They can have their choice of media: tempera paints, color pencils, crayons or markers.



Unfired Jar



Different Stages of the Process



Old Kiln



Colonial Talavera Sink



Marking Talavera

4. Pyramids, Mayas and Aztecs

Maya: Meso-American Indians living in southern Mexico. They practiced agriculture, built stone buildings and pyramid temples, worked gold and copper and used hieroglyphic writing. Early Mayan culture showed the influence of the earlier Olmec civilization. In 1500 BC the Maya had settled in villages and had developed an agriculture based on the cultivation of corn, beans and squash. They began to build ceremonial centers which developed into cities containing temples, pyramids, palaces, courts for playing ball and plazas. At its peak Mayan civilization consisted of more than 40 cities: the most important ones were Tikal, Uaxactun, Copan and Palenque. The peak Mayan population was around 2,000,000 people. After AD 900, the Mayan civilization suddenly declined, leaving the great cities overgrown with jungle vegetation. Chichen Itza, Uxmal, and Mayapan are the most famous Mayan sites in Mexico. Mayan pyramids were built with several terraces and with steps going up at least one of its sides. They used blocks of stone, which came from very distant places. They had architects who supervised the construction.

Aztecs: Used to occupy a northwestern region of Mexico. Aztecs were also known as Mexica. The name Mexica became modern Mexico. The Aztecs built the powerful city of Tenochtitlan around 1325. Their religion was centered on the cult of a young warrior and symbol of the sun who died every evening to be born anew the following day. War was a religious obligation in which captured enemies were sacrificed to the sun. Spanish expeditions led by Hernan Cortes marched against Tenochtitlan and the city was destroyed after a heroic Aztec defense.

The pyramids of Teotihuacan are located near Mexico City. It is the most impressive ceremonial center in all of Mexico. Its name means "The place where nobles of gods were made." The "Avenue of the Dead" runs down the middle of the whole complex connecting two main structures the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon.

Art project: making a pyramid

Materials: 2 bags of giant marshmallows, big piece of flat foam or cardboard (11"x14"), box of wooden toothpicks, white glue, and tempera paints.

Procedures:

Determine how many layers you want your pyramid to have.

Calculate how many marshmallows will be necessary in total and for each layer. This is easily done if you start from the top, with the highest layer having one marshmallow. Each subsequent layer will have edges that are two marshmallows longer than the last. Therefore, the second layer from the top will have three marshmallows on the sides and the third will have five marshmallows on the sides. Square the sides to figure out how many marshmallows belong in that particular layer.

Make a mark in the center of your flat cardboard base with a pen.

Put glue over that pen mark.

Stick a marshmallow to the glue.

Work outward, gluing marshmallows to the cardboard until you have created your bottom layer using the number of marshmallows that you calculated.

Start the next layer by connecting with a wooden toothpick a marshmallow to the top of the first marshmallow you glued down, the center marshmallow.

Work your way outward, as before.

Continue connecting on your marshmallows, layer by layer, until the pyramid is complete.

Decorate your pyramid with tempera paints.



5. *Trajineras* (small river boats)



Preview a video about history and traditions of “floating gardens” of Xochimilco (Discovery Atlas video): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJNygP28_0k

Xochimilco is better known for its extended series of canals—all that remain of the ancient Lake Xochimilco. Xochimilco has kept its ancient traditions: all inhabitants travel between *chinampas* (floating garden markets) in colorful *trajineras* (Xochimilco boats), decorated with paper flowers. One can see orchestra boats loaded with mariachis or marimba players, a photography boat, a canoe with a rose seller, a floating kitchen with fast food... This favorite place of many Mexican families at festival times also represents a return to their roots, when these waterways were mostly used by Aztecs to grow gardens.

Art project: Students will make a small boat similar to the trajineras. They will decorate their boat with color construction paper, tissue paper, tempera paints or markers.
Materials: Wooden sticks, construction paper, flat cardboard paper, glue, scissors, and different art media.

6. “Magical Powers” of corn

According to a Mayan legend, man was created from a grain of corn. Maize was the most important crop because it grew easily and in large quantities. It has been present in Mexico for over 7,000 years and played an important role in feeding all the pre-Hispanic peoples and still is among the most important ingredients in most traditional dishes. Corn pancakes (tortillas) are an essential part of any meal. In the countryside, women still make them by hand; in towns, they are sold in *tortillerias*.

Other crops of indigenous communities include beans, squash, sweet potatoes, papaya, avocado, bananas, chilies and watermelon. The Spanish brought to Mexico rice, wheat, onion, garlic, pork, spices and oils.

One of the most famous snacks in Mexico is the taco. Tacos are made from any available food, wrapped in a soft tortilla. To make tortillas, corn is first well-soaked in jars of limewater. Then the women grind the wet, softened kernels on a flat stone called a *metate*. They add a little water from time to time to keep the corn wet. The corn is ground until it is a smooth, doughy mass. Bits of this *masa* are then patted into round, thin cakes and toasted.

Project: making tortillas

How to make tortillas: (Students would need your assistance during the mixing and cooking process, let them do all the measurements on their own.) An electric skillet is recommended for this activity.

Ingredients: 4 cups of corn flour, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water, add more if needed, 1 tsp. salt, 1 cup shortening.

Mix flour, salt, and shortening in a gallon-size ziploc bag. Add warm water a little at a time. Mix until firm and let stand. Take heaping tablespoon size quantities to make rounds by rolling with a rolling pin. Cook on hot electric skillet, serve as bread with a meal or spread with butter and sprinkle with sugar.

Art project: Making flower decorations with tissue paper

Materials: Colored tissue paper, scissors, pipe cleaners, tape

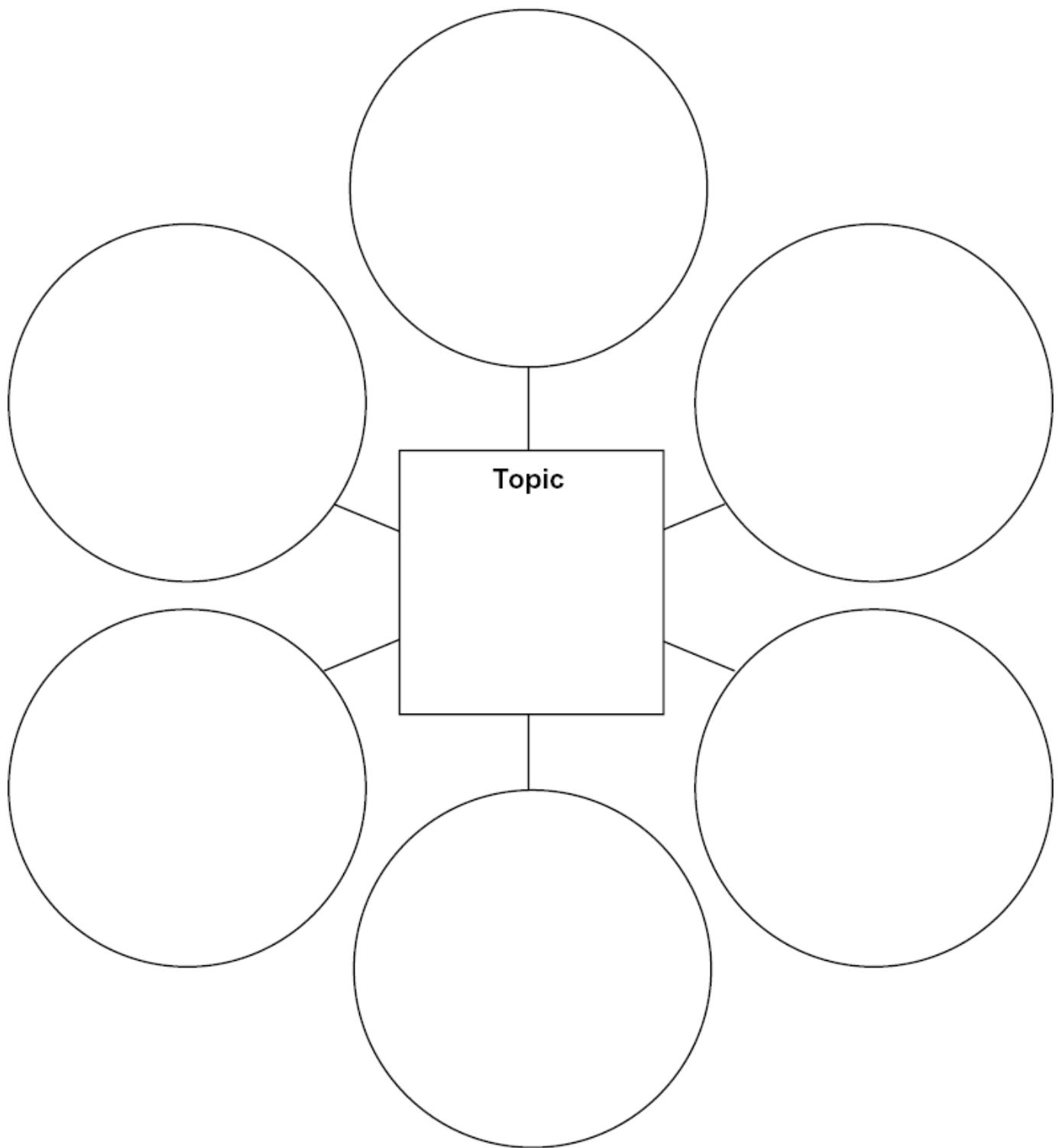
1. Take about 6 sheets of tissue paper and fold like a paper fan.
2. Cut the folded paper in half (this will make two flowers).
3. Take each half of the paper, still folded, and trim the ends into a broad point.
4. Bend a pipe cleaner tight around the center of each folded strip of paper.
5. Lift each layer of the folded paper until it forms a circular-shaped flower.
6. Tape the ends of the paper together so that the flower remains open.

History

The history of paper flowers in Mexico is tied to the history of paper-making. Before the Spaniards arrived in Mexico, the Aztecs made thick paper from wood pulp and bark. In the late 18th Century, tissue paper was introduced. The thin and pliable sheets made new arts and crafts—like *papel picado* (paper that has been folded and intricately cut with designs) and paper flowers.



Write details about your topic in the circles.



Peer evaluation rubric

	4 Excellent	3 Proficient	2 Partial
Research	1.Graphic organizers are completed fully; 2.Summary report consists of 10 or more full sentences; 3. Ideas communicated are clear and easy to follow, explain the history of the craft; 4. Used at least two electronic and two print sources.	1.Graphic organizers are not completed fully; 2.Summary report consists of at least 8 sentences; 3. Ideas communicated are somewhat easy to follow and understand; 4. Used at least three sources including both electronic and print.	1. Graphic organizers are missing important information; 2. Summary report consists of less than 8 sentences; 3. It's not very easy to follow and understand the concept; 4. Only two or less sources were used
Craft sample	1. Sample looks finished, attractive and neat; 2. Specific symbols and colors were used to emphasize the authenticity of a craft; 3. Chosen media supports author's creativity.	1. Sample is finished but not neat and attractive; 2. Either symbols or colors were used to emphasize the authenticity of a craft; 3. Chosen media partially supports author's creativity.	1. Sample is unfinished; 2. Neither symbols nor colors were used to emphasize the authenticity of a craft; 3. Chosen media did not supports author's creativity.
Presentation	1. Group used time wisely during the presentation; 2. Steps in the process of making a craft were clearly explained and easy to follow; 3. Group members cooperated well during the presentation.	1. Some group members used time wisely during the presentation; 2. Some of the steps in the process were clearly explained; 3. Some group members showed cooperation during the presentation.	1. Most group members used their time poorly; 2. Most of the steps were poorly explained; 3. Most group members needed assistance to cooperate peacefully during the presentation.

Suggested Reading:

1. Burns, Roxanne. (2007). How the Aztecs Lived. CDCM EDICIONES
2. Burns, Roxanne. (2007). How the Mayas Lived.CDCM EDICIONES
3. Castillo, Antonio. (2007). Mayas in campeche. Grupo Azabache
4. Moll, Roberto. (2008). Teotihuacan. Grupo Azabache