



## Mexico: Meso-American Indigenous People - The Huichol People Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading

Mexico is a country that shares a border with the United States. Because Mexico is one of our neighbors, it is important to know about their culture. The culture of a group of people includes art, music, food, clothing, religion, celebrations, and everything that makes up their daily life. Culture is usually influenced by the geography and history of the place where people live.

Long before Mexico was a country, different groups of native people lived on the land that is located between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. One indigenous group was the Aztecs. After Columbus landed in North America, soldiers from Spain arrived in Mexico and conquered the Aztecs. Thus, the culture of Mexico today is a blend of the Spanish and native groups. The Huichol people are one of these blended groups living in Mexico today.

The Huichol people live in the mountains located on the western side of Mexico. They have remained isolated from other groups of Mexico, allowing them to have a unique culture. Their daily life is greatly influenced by the geography of their mountain home. Because nature is sacred to them, the natural beauty of their surroundings can be seen in their artwork. The medicine man is the shaman who links the community with the "other world" from where their creativity pours forth as a gift from their deified ancestors to be given back as offerings to the gods.

The Huichol are best known for religious objects of art which are created using feathers, beads, and woven string. Examples of their art include God's eyes, yarn "paintings", and all sorts of beaded items. Objects are created using animals such as deer which are leaders, birds which are messengers, and snakes that represent the rain goddess. Flowers are used to adorn pictures while cacti symbolizes life and health. Arrows express gratitude and candles represent the illumination of the human spirit. Gourd bowls are used by shamans as containers carried during religious ceremonies. The bowls are decorated with important symbols. All the colors used in their artwork have special meanings to the Huichol people.

Huichol artwork is sold in order to help them survive. This is known as ecotourism.

Source: [www.thehuicholcenter.org](http://www.thehuicholcenter.org)



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**Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Using the information from the reading and your knowledge, match the symbol with the Huichol meaning.

**Symbol**

**Huichol Meaning**

\_\_\_\_\_ Arrows

A. Creatures associated with the rain goddess

\_\_\_\_\_ Deer

B. Considered to be a gift from the gods

\_\_\_\_\_ Cacti

C. This animal is said to lead and teach people

\_\_\_\_\_ Birds

D. Represent the illumination of the human spirit

\_\_\_\_\_ Gourd Bowls

E. Symbol for life, health, success, good luck

\_\_\_\_\_ Candles

F. Believed to be messengers to and from the gods

\_\_\_\_\_ Fire

G. Used to express gratitude or requests to the gods

\_\_\_\_\_ Snakes

H. Used by religious leaders as containers to carry important symbols



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### Pre-Visit Activity: Background Reading **KEY**

#### Symbol

#### Meaning

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D. Represent the illumination of the human spirit

\_\_\_ **H** \_ Gourd Bowls

E. Symbol for life, health, success, good luck

\_\_\_ **D** \_ Candles

F. Believed to be messengers to and from the gods

\_\_\_ **B** \_ Fire

G. Used to express gratitude or requests to the gods

\_\_ **A** \_ Snakes

H. Used by religious leaders as containers to carry important symbols