

*Connecting Culture and Geography: The Symbolism of the Rukuri Votive Bowl*

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| **Introduction** | |
| A *rukuri* is a term used by the Wixaritari or Huichol people of the Sierra Madre Mountain range in Western Mexico to refer to a type of bowl or container. Originally crafted as a votive or sacred offering for an altar, this bowl was fabricated from a gourd, and then vibrant beads have been meticulously glued to the bowl's surface to create colorful designs are not merely decorative; they carry symbolic significance. The patterns and colors used in the beadwork often reflect Huichol cosmology, mythology, and the natural world.  Rukuris are also used in various ceremonies and rituals, such as offerings during important life events like births, weddings, and other significant milestones. Additionally, they are employed in healing practices and to seek guidance or protection from spirits and deities.  The art of creating Rukuris involves traditional techniques passed down through generations. The intricate beadwork indicates the Huichol people's rich artistic heritage and their connection to the spiritual world. It's important to note that the significance and practices related to rukuris may vary among different Huichol communities and families, but their role as vessels for spiritual communication and offerings remains a central aspect of Huichol culture.  **Through this lesson, students will learn about Huichol culture, their cultural practices, and the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountain range through the rukuri votive bowl. The students will make connections to Indiana’s environment and natural resources while learning how other cultures represent the natural world and religious beliefs in material culture.** | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**    ES.3.1 – Students identify and explore current traditions, rites, and norms of an ethnic or racial group(s) and how they have or are changing over time.  S.2.1 – Define culture and identify the material and non-material components of culture.  Grade 4 Indiana in the Nation and the world  Geography  4.3.5 Explain how glaciers shaped Indiana’s landscape and environment.  4.3.6 Describe Indiana’s landforms (lithosphere), water features (hydrosphere), and plants and animals (biosphere).   4.3.8 Identify the challenges in the physical landscape of Indiana to early settlers and to modern day economic development.  Environment and Society  4.3.13 Create maps of Indiana at different times in history showing regions and major physical and cultural features; give examples of how people in Indiana have modified their environment over time.  4.3.14 Read and interpret texts (written texts, graphs, maps, timelines, data, audio, video) to answer geographic questions about Indiana in the past and present.  Grade 6 History, Places, and cultures in Europe and Americas  6.3.7 Locate and describe the climate regions of Europe and the Americas and explain how and why they differ.   * **Examples:**  Gulf Stream and North Atlantic Current (NAC)   6.3.8 Describe and compare major physical characteristics of regions (biomes) of Europe and the Americas.   * **Examples:** rainforests, mountain ranges, rivers, woodlands, deserts.   6.3.10 Explain the ways cultural diffusion, invention, and innovation change culture.  6.3.11 Differentiate between the terms anthropology, archeology, and artifacts while explaining how these contribute to our understanding of societies in the present and the past. | **Compelling Question(s):**     * How does the environment of the Sierra Madre Occidental influence Huichol culture and art? * How do the Huichol use nature and animals in their artwork? * How can the geography of your region or environment influence your culture, art, and identity? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**    Students will learn about the traditional Huichol craft of rukuri, its cultural significance, and the techniques involved in its production. Through this artifact, students will also learn about the Sierra Madre Occidental in Western Mexico, its inhabitants, and surrounding flora and fauna to understand its relevance of contemporary Huichol Indigenous culture.  Additionally, students will make connections to Indiana’s environment and landscape through the creation of a similar craft. Students will learn about the state’s natural resources and how Indiana’s geography has shaped its cultural practices, art, and cultural identity. By comparing the Huichol culture’s use of natural resources in their art to Indiana’s local resources, students will gain a broader understanding of how geography influences cultural expression and community identity. | |
| **Materials** | |
| Articles and resources for background information   1. [Rukuri votive bowl W2W website](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/rukuri.html) 2. [Resources on the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountain Range](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sierra-Madre-mountain-system-Mexico/Physiography) 3. Other museum collections with similar items:  * [Museum of International Folk Art collection](https://collection.internationalfolkart.org/search/rukuri) * [British Museum](https://www.sdcelarbritishmuseum.org/exhibitions/the-intimate-lives-of-wixarika-people/who-are-the-wixaritari-or-huichol/) * [National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico](https://universoshuicholes.inah.gob.mx/home.html)   This resource is from a digitized exhibition and contains key information on Huichol worldview, folk tales, and symbols used in traditional art)   1. Resources on Huichol culture  * [Who are the Wixaritari or Huichol?](https://www.sdcelarbritishmuseum.org/exhibitions/the-intimate-lives-of-wixarika-people/who-are-the-wixaritari-or-huichol/) * [Atlas of Indigenous people in Mexico](https://atlas.inpi.gob.mx/huicholes-etnografia/) * [Waxirika Research Center](https://www.wixarika.org/artist-women-wixarika-or-huichol-people-mexico) * [Interview with Huichol Artisans](https://www.preciosa-ornela.com/story/los-huicholes-199)   YouTube videos:   * [Creation Myth](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTaxmWMv8dk) * [Huichol: About the first sunrise](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbQMmwLzDEE) * [Huichol Art](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYjMUEHwFX8) | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**   1. Begin by showing the students the image of the Ruruki in the W2W Rukuri (Votive Bowl) [website,](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/rukuri.html) and other similar Huichol items in museum collections (some resources are provided above). Ask students to make inferences about these items: What do they notice? What do they think these items are used for? What might these objects represent? From what part of the world do they think these items are from? Who would use them? Students may observe the vibrant colors and patterns, noting how the designs might symbolize nature, spirituality, or animals. **Emphasize that beads depict sacred symbols, animals, plants, and cultural elements central to Huichol cosmology, mythology, and knowledge.** 2. Show them a [map of Mexico](https://atlas.inpi.gob.mx/distribucion-por-entidad-federativa/) and locate the regions where the Huichol live highlighting the mountain range Sierra Madre Occidental. 3. Show the students the image of the votive bowl, make connections with the forms inscribed in the bowl as they simulate the shape of the mountains and represent the colors. Ask students what shapes they see in the bowl, describe the colors, and patterns. 4. Discuss how geography influences the daily lives and cultures of people. For instance, highlight how the natural environment shapes the materials they use (gourds, beads, yarns, and other resources) in their artforms and motifs depicted in them. Explain how the mountains and natural surroundings provide resources (plants for dyes, animals for symbolism) that influence Huichol art and spirituality.  * Explore different museum collections that have similar artifacts where they can find more examples of Huichol art. Students can research how these artifacts reflect the culture, beliefs, and geography of different regions. For instance, they may look into Native American beadwork, African of Pacific Islander textiles, or other Latin American ceremonial objects. By examining these collections, students can deepen their understanding of how art serves as both a cultural expression and a functional tool for rituals and compare these objects to the Huichol rukuri votive bowl to recognize universal themes in creativity and spirituality. * Indiana connections   Encourage students to observe the landscape around them and make connection between the natural world and creative expression, linking back to the Huichol use of landscape and nature in their cultural art.   1. Begin by discussing the geographical features of Indiana with the students. Explain how landscapes vary by region- mountains, rivers, forests, and plains- and how the colors and forms of the landscape can influence artistic expression. 2. Ask students to reflect on their own surroundings and the natural landscape where they live in Indiana. What types of natural features are common? Are there forests, fields, rivers, lakes, of other specific geographic forms that stand out to them? What colors do they associate with these features? Encourage them to think about how these shapes and colors might influence artistic designs or symbolize elements of nature. 3. Have students write a list of nouns that describe the forms and colors they perceive in the Indiana landscape. This could include words like:   Forms: hills, rivers, trees, fields, clouds, lakes, roads, mountains, valleys.  Colors: green, brown, blue, yellow, white, orange, red, gray, black.   1. After creating their lists, students can share their observations with the class. Discuss how these forms and colors may inspire creativity in local art or how they might be used symbolically, much like Huichol art reflects elements of the Sierra Madre Occidental landscape.  * Design your own votive bowl inspired by Indiana’s environment:   Students will create a mini votive bowl on paper that reflects both the geography of their own surroundings and the symbolism in the Huichol Rukuri bowl.   1. Have students brainstorm geographical features (e.g. mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, animals, or local landmarks) that are important to them or their community. 2. Students will sketch a design for their votive bowl, using symbols from nature and then draw the motifs using markers, colored yarn, crayons, etc. 3. Encourage students to think about how the geography of their environment influences their lives and how it can be reflected in their artwork. | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Group sharing  Once the bowls are complete, students share their projects with the class. Discuss how the geographic features they chose are important to them of their community and how they represented those features through art.  Prompt students to reflect on the Huichol tradition of using art to express the connection between the physical world and the spiritual realm and ask how geography might shape cultural identity. | |
| **Extensions**  Research project: Have students research the geography and cultural traditions of another cultural group and compare the geographic influences on their art.  Create a map: Students can create a map of their local community or a region of interest, using symbols or artistic representations to depict the geography and cultural features that define it.  For homework, students could research other aspects of Huichol culture, such as their spiritual beliefs, traditional rituals, or contemporary challenges, and consider how these aspects intersect with Huichol rukuri votive bowl. | |