



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1999 Volume II: Art and Identity in Mexico, from the Olmec to Modern Times

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## Popul Vuh

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.02.09  
by Norine A. Polio

The Popol Vuh, a sacred narrative of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala, survived the book-burning by Spanish missionaries in the 1500's. It was hidden and found in 1701 by a Spanish friar, Padre Francisco Ximénez, who recognized its value, copied the text, and translated it into Spanish.

The Maya story of the creation is contained in the Popol Vuh. According to this account, the god of the sky, Heart of Sky, and the god of the sea, Plumed Serpent, created the earth, mountains, and forests. They were pleased with their work, but wished to be thanked, praised, and honored for their accomplishments. Plumed Serpent and Heart of Sky then proceeded to create animals and men of mud and of wood, none of whom could communicate. It was not until the gods fashioned men of corn that the wonders of creation could be sung to the other gods for posterity.

This curriculum unit contains a dramatization of the Popol Vuh and technical suggestions for a simple reading or full-scale performance. It ends with a recipe for sweet tamales, a symbolic creation of people of corn shaped with cornmeal dough and wrapped in corn husks.

(Recommended for ESOL, Language Arts and Social Studies, grades 4-8.)

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