

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

# **Art Images of Tenochtitlan, Past and Present: The Case of the Virgin of Guadalupe**

Curriculum Unit 99.02.10 by Luis Recalde

In the past I have worked on some curriculum units about the history of Tenochtitlan as a city and as a center of power in the Mexico of the sixteenth century, before and during the conquest. In these units my interest rested on the opportunities to create an atmosphere of learning and exploration with my students. The wealth of the cultures involved and the theme itself presented for students of the fifth grade level ample resources to apply a complex array of skills in any particular task. Building a model of a city was one of those tasks. At present it is my intention to create a curriculum unit in which students will apply their previous knowledge to expand the possibilities for further learning in a multidisciplinary context. Icons and objects of power created by artists of Tenochtitlan were and are created and recreated in the past and in the present. The Spanish cleverly realized the power of the Aztec icons and devised methods to incorporate them into the new culture emerging from the original encounter. Such seems to be the case of the Virgin of Guadalupe. I would like to give emphasis to the transitional period when the colony was established to throw some light on the mechanisms of communication, control and power that forged a new society, a new culture and an emerging Mexican identity (Debroise, 95).

It is clear to all of us that the future and the present of a people depend, among other things, on how well they learned from the experiences of the past. For the people of Mexico the past has two faces: the European, the African and the Native on one side, and the victory and the defeat on the other; victory because within its soul the spirit of the Spanish conquistadores has found a place, and defeat because the destruction of the original cultures of Mexico has always been a difficult reminder of how the country was born. The African people come into Mexico both as conquerors and as slaves (Alegría, 1990). It is the world from the outside, the intruder, destroying the Native cultures and re-building from the pieces one more time. It is a constant job for everyone in the culture born out of this pain. And, as Carlos Fuentes would tell us, it is a matter of inventing a reality. Mexico and its people had to learn how to invent its culture from the elements aforesaid.

If at one point the intent of the Spanish invader was to supplant the cultures that they encountered with their own, then, it was necessary to destroy the Native cultures so as to make the new society function without reminders and ghosts of the powers of the past. From the beginning the Europeans (there were other Europeans present in the Spanish armies) negate the cultures of the Natives. In fact, they chose to believe the Natives where not human (Konetzke, 30-33). The Spanish invaders found themselves destroying the material culture of the Natives such as temples, texts, sculptures, icons of power and in some instances the people who carried these cultural traditions and knowledge. The Spanish needed to have complete control of the situation

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and the icons of power of the Natives had to be obliterated. This was not an easy task, and in Mexico it proves to be an impossible one. In this context the presence in Tepeyac of the Virgin of Guadalupe is of utmost importance since its appearance in history is part of a pattern of events. Once the Conquistadores have managed to destroy the religious centers in Tenochtitlan they felt the need to fill in the vacuum. As soon as they entered a new town, village or city they searched for these centers of power, in Mexico these were generally religious centers, immediately destroying the icons in whatever form they might have been, and placing in that space the Virgin or the Cross (Rivera Pagán, 259). No where could this be more clear than in the Templo Mayor itself. Gómara, the official chronicler of Cortés tells us that Cortés destroyed some of the gods of the temple in Tenochtitlan to the horror and dismay of Moctezuma. It seems to keep the peace, he allows the Spanish to place the image of Our Lady and the Cross (Gómara, 139).

In spite of the efforts to destroy and bury the cultures of the Natives, as in the classic case of Tenochtitlan, there emerged a new culture out of the rubble. In the case of the Virgin of Guadalupe, it was the Spanish who used images and powers of the Native past in Tepeyac to blend and forge a new icon charged with the necessary energy to steal the imagination of a people. This is paradoxical. In an effort to control the Native people, in an effort to get to the core of their spirituality, the Spanish make a syncretic move in choosing Tepeyac and Guadalupe to come together in the miracle of Juan Diego. In fact, "...most anthropologists believe the Virgin represents a powerful synthesis of the Christian and Mesoamerican beliefs: she is still called Tonantzin by the Nahua" (Foster, 69). It is interesting to note how the making of a new culture forces the conquistador to incorporate icons of the Native past that they want to suppress in the first place. As in the works of Diego de Landa, who wrote about the Yucatec Maya culture "...providing the key to decipherment of ancient Maya hieroglyphic texts that reveal the very Maya religion Landa hoped to repress" (Foster, 67).@:

The objectives of this unit, in light of our discussion, then, have to be constructed considering the importance of the understanding of culture. In Mexico, as in many other colonized environments, the culture controlling the lives of the Natives and Europeans as well is governed by the goals of the conquering icons of power. In the case of the Spanish, the most obvious icons of power have to do with the spiritual world and with war. Architecture also has a very strong influence in both cultures. The European and the Aztec cultures are builders of cities. In this context it is imperative to introduce to the student the concepts of dynamic cultures, alive, changing and struggling with each other to determine the future course of the people involved in the conflagration. An important objective is to find students writing about culture and the possibilities of change. Students will enrich their vision of the world and society by realizing that their lives could be envisioned as contributors of change because of the nature of culture. Further, the city itself becomes an icon of power. The Spanish did not take long to understand this reality. Destruction of the city was immanent. Once the cities were destroyed, it was necessary to erase them from the surface of the earth. We can see this when we find pieces of great monuments reconstructed by artists only with the imagination. Students can learn lessons from this experience in Mexico. The city where they live, New Haven, is an image of power. It is important to keep our city, our environment strong and health. This is an excellent theme for the exploration of writing and reading; an introduction to the actual building of a model.

The world and the lives of the Natives in Mexico displayed a rich array of deities and sacred figures. Díaz, Cortés, Sahagún and other conquistadores report to us the rich field of gods and supernatural power related to this aspect of life. The gods of the Aztecs could be painted, sculpted, made up of gold, corn, blood, paper and many other materials. "They are made of dough from all the seeds and vegetables which they eat, ground and mixed together, and bound with the blood of human hearts which those priests tear out while still beating" (Cortés, 107). The mountain, the sacred mountain of Tepeyac accommodated several deities "who were referred to in the early colonial period by the generic name of Tonantzin" (Peterson, 2). In Tonantzin we have

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several powers in one. Tonantzin was really a collective name for several goddesses. Sahagún speaks of some of these powers incarnated in the Virgin. The "grandmother," called by the Aztecs Temazcalteci, and faithful protector and patron of medicines, childbirth, baths and many other virtues is just one of them (Sahagún, 2). In the present the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe comes back in fiction projected from the sixteenth century as echoes of la Llorona herself taken from the old Mexican myth of the pre-conquest period (Somerlott, 233). The images of power, safe of any danger for the structure of power of the European, take root in fertile soil, ironically to become the image of consolation, goodness and love for the defeated Native. Opportunity to use the Virgin for the advancement of a social class presents itself in the history and culture of Mexico (Peterson).

The Virgin of Guadalupe is one of the many icons of power emerging at a time when a new culture was surfacing out of the violent and devastating encounter of the Aztecs with Europeans and Africans. This is not the only image of power at the time (López-Baralt, 1990). In the Andes the mountains are and were objects of power as in Mexico. Nonetheless, power was also envisioned by the ability to evade conquest. The rain forest of the Amazon is and was a natural protection against abuse and slavery for the natives of the area. Because of this, the cultures emerging from the forests were charged with a power that other people from the Altiplano wanted. Virgins started emerging from the depths of the forest to take a central place in sacred places in the mountains. An example is the Virgin of Quinche around Quito. This phenomenon did not limit itself to one area. It is present in the entire continent. By the end of the sixteenth century, many Europeans drew and painted the sagas of America. There were many other objects and images that were not and are still not well known and understood. When we look at Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess mother of Huizilopochtli, we know that we are in front of a figure of power and reverence. Her presence is overwhelming and domineering. "Her image was a terrifying one" (Bingham, 28).

As time went on, the cross and the figure of Jesus became also icons that demanded obedience and respect from all. Each icon and object of power had its own connotation and a place in the hierarchy of the original society from where they came from. At the moment of reflection and contemplation of the surviving masses, the meaning of these objects took a new life. The victors and the defeated both make up the story and the history of the new society. Through these mechanisms of conscious and subconscious actions and thought, the new Mexico emerges. The Spanish icons of power prevail, but always with the presence of ghosts of the Aztec past.

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is an image of power. It is an image of power for several reasons. The first and most obvious is the power and sacredness of a Virgin in the European mind of the time. Santiago, Nuestro Se-or and the Virgin are always in the minds and hearts of the Spanish warriors whenever they are in need of protection and power. This happens throughout the Conquest (Bernal Diaz del Castillo). These icons functioned in a hierarchy. This rank of importance was transferred little by little into the minds of the Natives. A hierarchy of power and importance was established at a time when society was most in need of direction and identity. The security of the new society depended on the establishment of a functional system. We could only imagine the sense of loss and pain that the Native population endured at this critical time. Not only did they lose their homes and lands, their spiritual world was vanishing. The devastation was unprecedented and widespread. People died by the thousands in the taking and destruction of Tenochtitlan alone. Later on we will see a vast devastation of entire populations and cultures. Germs and viruses imported from Africa and Europe into the altiplano contributed to the demise of the population also.

Their gods had abandoned the Natives and the world was viewed as upside-down. Society and all its components needed to create sources of direction, power and hope, "...there was an attempt to convince, encourage or, finally, discipline populations into believing a predominant set of values" (Debroise, 95). The

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Virgin is one of these sources of power and direction. Another reason why the image of the Virgin and all its representations are powerful is the reliability of its presence at a critical time. People could actually rely on this Virgin because it looked like them. Although the Virgin of Guadalupe in Spain is an extremely dark lady, its Mexican counter part looks Mexican. The gods of the indigenous cultures had been destroyed by the zeal of the Europeans. Something had to come that would make sense and would bring hope and stability to a world upside-down. It seems that the Virgin of Guadalupe was not such a hit in the beginning of the formation of the new culture in Mexico. "Not until the nineteenth century did Guadalupe's cult gain in strength among a largely disenfranchised population. Moreover, only in the twentieth century has her image taken on new meaning compatible with her title, "Mother of the Mexicans" (Peterson, 1). The idea of bringing a set of values to a defeated population is independent of its effectiveness. What stays as an underlying structure and premise is the urge to control and justify the conquest of the world of the Nahua world by Europeans. The conquest is a fact, but making it work requires more than persuasion and guns. It takes the manipulation of icons and images that would establish a world of order and meaning.

The Virgin is intended to be a sacred object of adoration. This image of adoration is transported from the shores of Europe to the new continent. It was not an American-born icon. Its origins are in Spain and its consequences are in America. Its creation in Spain pertains to a pattern that comes from the seventh century. There is an apparition and the finding of a statue which is an "...archetypal Castilian legend of the time..." (Christian Jr., 39). All this conceptualization of one of the icons in the forging of the culture in Mexico is perfectly understandable by a fifth grade student. It is a discovery of a profound structure in the grasping of history. It is also a challenge to their thinking. What becomes even more important is the discovery by the student of a system of culture. It feeds itself from elements from the inside and the outside. This is to say that an icon could not exist successfully in isolation. The image of the Virgin works because it is related to "our revered mother" (Peterson, 2). The image of the virgin is born in Tepeyac home of Tonantzin. Tepeyac becomes the sacred mountain. This mountain has a spring of underground water. Tepeyac is the sacred pyramid resembling the temple of Tenochtitlan. "The Nahuatl name for a city is altepetl, meaning "watermountain," and it signifies that a settlement must have water and a mountain to be habitable in both the practical and mythic senses" (Pasztory, 102). The Virgin faces west in the very first drawing of the apparition (Perea, Illustration # 4). Students could address the content areas of a fifth grade curriculum and also learn and discern the process by which culture, history and society intertwine to forge an identity of a people and a new way of life. The relevancy of this idea is based on the possibilities for hands-on activities where students could be assessed from the insert with task assessment lists. The experience of working with icons of power could have many vehicles of expression. We could have in the classroom a project building models or constructing murals, both are activities requiring concentration, planning, organization, know-how and resources. In fact, these kind of tasks have already yielded excellent results in schools in the Southwest (Miera, 1999).

One of the strategies to impart this information to the student and to develop methods to generate more information through their research is to develop a fair and clear method of evaluation and assessment. Students need to know what is expected of their work. For this it is essential to make and ask students to be active participators in the process of learning. The task assessments lists and the tasks are one of the ways to get students involved as active learners and planners. The idea is to introduce the concept to the class and begin to figure ways to design tasks and assessments lists around a particular subject. Our subject is icons of power. A mural has been conceived as a perfect example of good assessment practices. The fact is that this methodology allows the student and the teacher to develop confidence and a relationship of work based on collaboration and teamwork. It also introduces the assessment piece as instruction and the instruction as assessment (Hibbart, 1996).

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The lessons that follow are inscribed within this concept and demonstrate the virtue of allowing the student to get engaged into the process with more responsibility and accountability. This way of conducting the learning environment could be applied to any level of learning. The final prize is the prospect of developing a portfolio of assessment and collaboration because other teachers could join together to work on one theme. Bilingual classes benefit from this inclusion in a myriad of ways. So does the mainstream.

It is a well-established fact that the muralist culture in Latin America has its roots in the cultural work developed after the Mexican Revolution. José Vasconcelos, one of the ministers of education, helped to propel this type of cultural expression. Public places and large public walls became the canvas of expression for the ideas of the common people. History was written on these walls for the view of all. It seems that it answers some of the aspirations and needs of the people of Mexico at different stages of its history. Many of the murals in Mexico and other countries in Latin America reveal a goal for political, artistic, or even propagandistic expression. A monumental expression of art, like a mural, when rooted in the realities of a people, takes the spirit and the imagination in search of meaning and further expression. I have been able to see some of this phenomenon when working on backdrops for our school's celebrations. It is this spirit that I intend to tap when working with icons of the Mexico of the Conquest and of colonial times. Once having established this relationship, I would like to inquire with my students into the path of these icons at the present time. For instance, how is the Virgin of Guadalupe of today similar or different than the Virgin of the time of Juan Diego? Peterson has argued that the mental image of the Virgin is quite different now than it was in the sixteenth century ("The Virgin of Guadalupe," 1-2).

The history of the creation or, if you will, of apparitions of virgins in Latin America since the arrival of the Europeans is full of questions and surprises. One of the interesting aspects of this theme is the creation of schools of painting that dedicated its energies to painting, sculpture, theater and dance. Painting saints and Virgins was the work of organized guilds in the centers of culture of the colonies. This historical aspect has its roots in Spain and is another question that has to be explored in the classroom as part of a social studies activity. The world of the Nahuatl speaker also offers a myriad of organizations dedicated to the promotion of culture and art. Here lies the intricacy and complexity of the world of the mestizo. Each item of power is a text embodying other texts. The apparition of the Virgen in Tepeyac is an archive where several texts come together to generate images and more texts ( on the theme of the archive see González Echevarría, 1990).

In all I think that students have a great opportunity for reading, research, writing and mathematical thinking, all blessed by the virtues of the arts. Whatever project we take is also a project of mathematical calculations and critical thinking. One of the aspects of utmost importance from the point of view of the student is the opportunity to learn about himself/herself in a project evoking pride and knowledge. Writing activities could be introduced to students in the form of vignettes. Each student develops a theme taking a small aspect of it at the time. Students build portfolios in this way. Illustrations are encouraged and in many cases necessary to be able to visualize the image and the icon under study. At the end we have a process and a product; students become charged with curiosity and are ready to take on the next question and the next task.

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## **Lesson One**

Assessment Lists and Tasks

**Background Information** 

It is important for students to participate actively in the formulation of tasks and assessments. In this way students will develop the abilities and confidence to write well. and to apply this information and discipline to the Connecticut Mastery Test. Students will study and use the elements of expository writing.

Task

Students will be able to discuss in groups the planning of assessment lists for the building of a model of the city of Tenochtitlan. Students will formulate strategies for the development of information and organization for the accomplishment of the task.

Audience

Students, teachers, parents and administrators.

Purpose

To learn how to organize research and to grasp a deep understanding of the writing process.

Procedure

Make groups and formulate strategies for dividing the work.

## **Lesson Two**

Build the model of Tenochtitlan

VINCENT E MAURO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LISTA DE EVALUACION DE TAREAS DE UN MODELO

Puntaje de la Evaluación

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5. Nuestro grupo pudo negar a un acuerdo
sobre qué y cómo hacer el trabajo
4. Preparamos los materiales con cuidado
5. Pudimos hacer buenas observaciones
durante nuestro trabajo
6. La persona encargada de tomar notas
tomó la información generada en las
conversaciones del grupo
7. Usamos medidas a escala y estimamos
cuando necesario
8. Usamos colores, títulos, y líneas claras
para expresar lo que era Tenochtitlán
9. El trabajo es nítido y bien presentado
10.La estructura es fuerte y durable
PUNTAJE TOTAL 100%
VINCENT E MAURO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PERFORMANCE TASK ASSESSMENT LIST FOR A MODEL OF TENOCHTITLAN
Assessment Points
Points Earned Assessment  Elements Possible Self Teacher  1. We listened to the directions and
instructions very carefully.
2. There is a clear explanation of the
Meaning of the model
3. Our group was able to come to an
agreement about how and what to do
4. We prepared our materials carefully

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5. We were able to make good observations
throughout our task
6. Our recorder was able to keep track of the
information generated in the big and
little chats in our group
7. We used excellent estimations and measured
the elements of model carefully
8. We used colors, titles and made clear
lines
9. The work is neat and well presented
10. The structure of the model is strong
and safe
10. TOTAL POINTS 100%
De alamana di Information

# **Background Information**

The city of Tenochtitlan was one of the largest cities of the world. This city was thought to be indestructible. It was thought to be the foundation of heaven.

## Tenochtitlan

Proud of itself

Is the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

Here no one fears to die in war.

This is our glory.

This is Your Command,

Oh Giver of life!

Have this is mind, oh princes,

Do not forget it.

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Who could conquer Tenochtitlan?

Who could shake the foundations of heaven?

Aztec Poem (Smith, 196)

The building of Tenochtitlan is a large undertaking that could be done when planned well in advance and attended to on a regular basis. It is said that this city had about 60,000 public buildings. It is always advised to take a portion of the city to depict the grandeur of its palaces and monuments. The temenos is the sacred plaza that actually depicts its greatness. The presence of the Templo Mayor and the convergence of all the roads of the empire in it give an idea of the complexity of the Aztec world. This pyramid has two temples on top, one for Tlaloc, the god of rain, and the other for Huizilopochtli, the sun god and the god of war. Tlaloc points to the north and Huizilopochtli to the south. The temples faced west. Tenochtitlan is the center of the universe and the temple the center of Tenochtitlan. Further, the city itself could not have any meaning without the construction of the chinampas, or floating gardens, because they give its people an agricultural base. The fact that a prophesy is fulfilled when they settled on the island gives the ruling class the power to build and conquer. The Aztecs become the most powerful nation in the area. "Their destiny was fulfilled when various signs were miraculously displayed in the reed beds of the lake. The Mexica Knew that their god had at last unequivocally spoken when he commanded them to found their city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan where an eagle was seen perched on

a cactus" (Brundage, 137). Task

Students are to construct a model of the city of Tenochtitlan using manageable scale and archeological information extracted from books about the subject.

#### Materials

Glue
Construction paper
Balsa wood
Water paints
Brushes
Cardboard
Cotton

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School and the community.

Purpose To understand relationships between cultural values of Tenochtitlan by reconstructing part of the city in a model. To create the opportunity for writing and research. To value our culture and the cultures of other people. Procedure

Give students an assessment list about a model. And follow this through the task. Cut wood and cardboard in accordance to the scale determined. We used the scale 10 by 11 by 1 when building the sacred precinct and the main pyramid. Cut it in small squares and rectangles. Glue these shapes to build pyramids and little buildings. Glue them to the surface of the construction paper making sure that the surface is the configuration of water and land and plazas. Make these configurations with color and texture. Use sand or dirt for this effect. Paint the little buildings and make sure that they obey the format of the archeological texts. Make sure that students enjoy this task.

## **Lesson Three**

## Construction of a mural of the culture in Mexico: the origins of culture.

The theme of culture in the classroom, when it is well organized and focused, is a favorite of the students. Although it involves several activities and lessons, the theme about a mural is a very rewarding undertaking that could involve the cooperation of other teachers and other members of the community. Students from different levels, bilingual and from the mainstream, are able to work together in different activities for a single theme. Murals are fascinating objects that tell stories using several media. They tell a story and have a beginning and an end. Because of this aspect, in the classroom this theme could be divided into several subthemes. Students have the opportunity to work in teams and to make choices about their tasks.

VINCENT E MAURO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LISTA DE EVALUACION DE TAREAS DE UN MURAL DE LA CULTURA EN MEXICO

Puntaje de la Evaluación

Posibles Puntaje Obtenido

Elementos Puntos Propio Maestro

1. Nosotros prestamos atención

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a las instrucciones con mucho cuidado
2. Hay una explicación clara de lo que intenta
demostrar el mural
3. Nuestro grupo pudo llegar a un acuerdo
sobre qué y cómo hacer el trabajo
4. Preparamos los materiales con cuidado
5. Pudimos hacer buenas observaciones
durante nuestro trabajo
6. La persona encargada de tomar notas
tomó la información generada en las
conversaciones del grupo
7. Usamos medidas a escala y estimamos
cuando necesario
8. Usamos colores, títulos, y líneas claras
para retratar a la cultura mexicana
9. El trabajo es nítido y bien presentado.
10.La estructura es fuerte y durable.
PUNTAJE TOTAL 100%
VINCENT E MAURO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PERFORMANCE TASK ASSESSMENT LIST FOR A MURAL OF THE CULTURE IN MEXICO
Assessment Points
Points Earned Assessment
Elements Possible Self Teacher
1. We listened to the directions and

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instructions very carefully.
2. There is a clear explanation of the
meaning of the mural
3. Our group was able to come to an
agreement about how and what to do
4. We prepared our materials carefully
5. We were able to make good observations
throughout our task
6. Our recorder was able to keep track of the
information generated in the big and
little chats in our group
7. We used excellent estimations and measured
the elements of mural carefully.
8. We used colors, titles and made clear
lines
9. The work is neat and well presented
10. The structure of the mural is strong
and safe
10. TOTAL POINTS 100%
The Mural of Mexico

Background

 $\label{eq:mexico} \mbox{Mexico is a culture that came about by the blending of several cultures.}$ 

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Task

Students will construct a mural of the cultures of Mexico depicting the icons of power.

#### Audience

School and the community.

## Purpose

To understand the life of cultures.

#### Procedure

Give students assessment lists. Provide materials and ideas. Work in teams; communicate. Put mural together.

# **Glossary**

Altiplano: The high plateau in Mexico.

Coatlicue: The mother of Huizilopochtli.

Hernán Cortés: Spanish conquistador of Mexico.

Nahuatl: Language of the Aztecs.

Nuestro Se-or: Jesus Christ.

Santiago: A Saint; Saint James. The cry of war of the Spanish was "Santiago."

Temenos: Is the sacred enclosure for the Greeks; in Tenochtitlan is the center of the empire. It is

the center of the universe of the Aztec spiritual and material world.

Templo Mayor:

The pyramid with the two temples to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli. It signifies the sacred

mountain; the underworld and the world above.

Tenochtitlan: The city of the Aztecs. Today is Mexico City.

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Tepeyac: Mountain where Guadalupe came to Juan Diego.

Tonantzin: Several goddesses of the Aztecs dwelling at Tepeyac.

Virgin of Guadalupe: A Virgin originating in Spain; Patron of the Mexicans.

Juan Diego: Native that spoke with the Virgin of Guadalupe.

# **Vocabulary**

Mural: A painting or mosaic on a large wall.

Syncretism: The presence of several cultural elements coming together in a new culture.

Conquest: The time when the Spanish took over the lands and cultures of Native Americans.

Models: Copy built using a scale to represent an original object and example is the model of the City of

Tenochtitlan.

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Wood, Marion. Growing Up in Aztec Times. Troll Associates, 1994.

# Other Resources

New Haven Free Public Library: Videos and books

Yale Art Gallery: Collections of Pre-Columbian Mexican Art. Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute: Other curriculum units about Mexico on printed volumes and the Internet. The Internet.

https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu

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