



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1998 Volume III: Art and Artifacts: the Cultural Meaning of Objects

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## The Taínos of Puerto Rico: Rediscovering Borinquen

Curriculum Unit 98.03.04  
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This unit on the Taínos of Puerto Rico is designed for a Spanish for Spanish Speakers class, but may be adapted to any Spanish class above a Spanish 4 level of proficiency. Most of the Latino students at James Hillhouse High School are Puerto Rican. Their level of Spanish language proficiency varies but they share a desire to develop and refine their Spanish skills. They also share a desire to find out more about their culture. By their culture I mean the Puerto Rican culture, which includes the indigenous group: the Taínos. Part of a Puerto Rican's identity is the mixture of races and cultures: Spanish, African, and Taíno. Felipe Dessús captures this sentiment: "Soy indio, soy africano, soy borincano." <sup>1</sup>

Borinquen is the Taíno name for Puerto Rico and it means *La tierra del altivo Se-or*, or The Land of the Mighty Lord.

Although the Taínos are extinct as a separate and identifiable race or culture, they are alive in Puerto Rico in our vocabulary, music, and beliefs. As Rafael González Mu-iz noted, "*Nuestro indio vive todavía: en lo físico, los sentimientos de nuestra gente, la bondad, y la toponomía.*" (Our Indians live today: in the physical traits, the feelings and emotions of our people, our kindness, and the toponomy of Puerto Rico. ) <sup>2</sup>

For those Hillhouse students who are not Latino or not Puerto Rican, this unit is compelling in a different way. I have found my students want to know more about the Taínos and their tragic history of oppression and genocide. Our high school curriculum and our official textbooks in Spanish language classes are consistently silent about the contributions of the Taínos. The intent of this unit is to remedy this silence.

As a Spanish teacher, one of my goals is to introduce my students to authentic literature and culture. The Taínos are now extinct as a distinct and separate cultural group, but their legacy remains in the language, customs, and culture of some of the islands of the Caribbean: Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. Some sites still remain, such as ballparks, ceremonial parks, and caves. On some of these sites, petroglyphs remain. Some artifacts such as *dujos* (ceremonial stools) and *cemís* (household deities) can be found in museums. The language of the Taínos was not a written one, and primary sources are scarce. Some documentation of their lifestyle may be found in the writings of Spanish priests in Puerto Rico in the early 16th century. More extensive information may be found in the books by Ricardo Alegría, noted historian and author. Some of the Taíno words were borrowed by the Spanish and subsequently by the English languages, and are modern day reminders of this once proud and vigorous race of people. These words include *barbacoa* (barbecue), *cacique* (chief), *canoa* (canoe), and *huracán* (hurricane).

The information provided in our city curriculum and in our textbooks is perfunctory. The Taínos are underrepresented in the official textbooks used in New Haven. *Pasaporte* includes a section about the Taínos and *Juntos Uno* includes a brief article in its cultural magazine. The Taínos are not covered in our foreign language curriculum in an intensive or extensive fashion. This is not surprising, considering the dearth of material in general, even outside of language classes. There does not exist a large number of reference books or material about the Taínos. We do not have in or near Connecticut a large number of Taíno art collections with the notable exception of El Museo del Barrio in New York City. The intent of this unit is to remedy this by providing teachers with some information about the Taínos that could prove useful in the classroom.

What the Yale seminar by Professor Jules Prown offers is a way or methodology of viewing and analyzing the Taíno objects or drawings. This discipline is called material culture, and it explores the formal language of objects. Objects embody the attitudes and beliefs of a culture. The techniques explained in this seminar will enable me and my students to study the information available about Taíno objects such as *cemís* and *dujos*, including drawings of these objects. As the objects are studied, the culture of the Taínos will be more fully revealed to my students.

## TEACHER STRATEGIES

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### Overview of Student Activities

The students read, write, and examine art objects, legends, creation myths, poems, and historical documents. As active problem-solvers, they research the history and culture of the Taínos, keep journals with Taíno words and questions about the Taínos, and go to several museums. They conduct some of their research on the Internet. With all the information gathered, they do creative writing assignments on different topics assigned by the teacher. Furthermore, they listen to music of Taíno origin, make musical instruments such as maracas, draw Taíno symbols, and cook Taíno foods, such as mashed yucca.

One of the issues they will examine is the present regrouping or formation of Taíno groups in Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, New Jersey, and Florida. Another issue is the genocide of a people or a nation, and the inherent racism in the colonizing of the Caribbean. A third issue is an identity issue: Do they acknowledge their Taíno roots as Puerto Ricans? What other roots do they have? (Spanish, African, other) They will write a long poem exploring their identity and tracing their heritage.

Specifically, the objects they will read about, study, examine, and observe are the following: the *dujos*, the *cemís*, the *guanín* or gold medallion worn by the chiefs, the collars worn during the ball games, and the drawings or petroglyphs found in ceremonial parks. Most of these may be found in the Taíno exhibit at El Museo del Barrio. It is highly recommended that students take a field trip to El Museo as part of this unit. Ricardo Alegría includes authentic illustrations in his books as well as interpretive drawings by his wife, Mela. Rafael González Mu-iz has excellent photos of Taíno artifacts, as does Irving Rouse. Teachers are urged to consult the works of José Juan Arrom and Irving Rouse, both of Yale University. Finally, the New York Times recently published an amazing story. In July of this year, Taíno artifacts were discovered at a beach in Cuba. This event was documented in the New York Times, in the July 5, 1998 issue. These are some of the possible resources for teachers interested in expanding this unit.

## Metaphors for the unit

The metaphors were developed to assist the students in making thematic connections throughout this unit. They may be suggested by the teacher prior to class discussions or readings or viewings of art objects, or may arise from student comments and discussions. At some point, the list of metaphors with illustrations and questions should be prominently displayed in the classroom. A complete list of metaphors includes:

- a puzzle or unsolved mystery
- the sacred mountains
- the sacred waters
- the number three

### The metaphor of the puzzle

One of the metaphors for my unit is the puzzle or the unsolved mystery of the Taínos. Who were they? What was their life like before the *encuentro* or encounter between the Taínos and Columbus? What was their relationship with the Caribe Indians who also populated the islands but were warlike and the enemies of the Taínos? How did they interact with other indigenous groups in their area? What happened to them? How can we find out more about them? Where are they today?

Before starting the unit, the teacher should ask the students what they know and what they want to know about the Taínos. This is the first step in the puzzle. The students make a large wall map of Puerto Rico and superimpose the areas of inquiry as articulated in this preliminary activity. For example, what was their language? Where did they come from? What was their religion? As the unit progresses, the students fill-in the puzzle with their facts gathered. The unsolved mystery of the Taínos is their disappearance: did they really disappear or did they survive in some form? Another activity is to compare the unsolved mystery of the Taínos with the unsolved mysteries of other Native American groups, such as the Mayan or the Aztecs. For example, why did the Mayans abandon their cities?

### The metaphor of the sacred mountains

The mountains as a sacred symbol are included because the Taínos believed the gods lived in the mountains. Specifically, they believed that their supreme god, Yucahú, lived in El Yunque, in the rain forest of the Cordillera Central. Students are invited to think of other cultures that have mountains as sacred or religious symbols. Students could include the Greeks and Mount Olympus, the ancient Chinese, and many indigenous groups of the Americas. This concept of the sacred mountain as the dwelling place of the gods is pivotal to the students' understanding of the poem "*Indio Taíno, ¿dónde estás?*" by Isabel Freire de Matos.

### The metaphor of the sacred waters

The metaphor of the sacred waters was included because the Taínos attributed religious and mythical qualities to water. For example, the creator, Atabei, is associated with water. She is the goddess of water. Yocahú, the supreme deity, is also associated with water. Both of these deities are called *Bagua*, which is

water, the source of life. In daily life, the Taínos relied on the rivers and seas for fishing. They made musical instruments out of conch shells and used them in religious ceremonies. Finally, they were at the mercy of water for their farming. Without rain, they would not be able to farm their *conucos*. They prayed to the twin gods of rain and fair weather so that they would be pleased. This image of water as sacred is central to their beliefs.

The literature they will read will include a poem by Isabel Freire de Matos, several legends of the Taínos, including Guanina, The Drowning of Salcedo, poems by Rafael González Muñiz, and some creation myths. The primary sources examined will include Bartolomé de las Casas in his exposé of Spanish mistreatment of the Taínos in the Dominican Republic and selected passages by Fray Ramón Pané on the myths and religious beliefs of the Taínos. The history studied will also include the books of noted expert, Ricardo Alegría. The culminating activity will be to write, illustrate, and present a booklet about the Taínos to a class of elementary students in a bilingual program. This booklet will be accompanied by an audiocassette in both English and Spanish.

## A Note on Prior Institute Units of Relevance to this Unit

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Any teacher who is embarking on this project of researching the Taínos and following my guidelines and recommended activities should be aware that I stand on the shoulders of others. By that, I mean that my colleagues have already written eloquently about the Taínos. I would refer all readers of this unit to the following: Unit 82.05.09, *Mythology: A Study of Puerto Rican Myths, Legends and Folktales* by John C. Warner, and Units 82.05.08, 84.03.08, and 86.02.01, all authored by Doris M. Vázquez. These three units are entitled *La Nueva Canción en Puerto Rico*, *The Art of the Puerto Rican People*, and *Spain in Puerto Rico: The Early Settlements*. Her descriptions of the Taíno people and her bibliographies proved helpful in my research.

Furthermore, readers of this unit should be aware that this unit is part of a compendium of units that I have written primarily about Puerto Rico: *El Sabor del Caribe/ A Taste of the Caribbean* (An analysis of the symbolism of food in the oral and written literature of the Caribbean), Unit 95.04.01; *Las Voces del Caribe: Recent Immigrants from the Caribbean*, Unit 96.04.03; and *La Presencia africana en el Caribe: un análisis de la poesía afroantillana* (The African Presence in the Caribbean: An analysis of African-Antillean poetry), Unit 97.01.03. The present unit is a continuation of the prior units on the Caribbean with an emphasis on the island of Puerto Rico, or *Borinquen*, its Taíno name.

### Sources for this Unit

The sources I used for this unit are varied: chronicles by Spanish priests, such as Bartolomé de las Casas; records by historians and archeologists, such as Ricardo E. Alegría, Cayetano Coll y Toste, and Irving Rouse; and collections of Taíno objects, such as those found in El Museo del Barrio and the Yale Peabody Museum. Two outstanding anthropologists who have studied the Taínos are Yale authors, José Juan Arrom and Irving Rouse. Their books and research are available to readers who want more details from an anthropological perspective.

Other sources for this unit include literature about the Taínos or literature inspired by the Taínos, as well as several myths and legends attributed to the Taínos. The legends and myths I have examined are the creation myth of Atabei and Yocahú, the legend of Guanina, the legend of Salcedo, and the legend of the Taíno cave.

An unexpected source of information about the Taínos was provided by a visiting historian and poet from Puerto Rico, Rafael González Mu-iz, who visited the New Haven School System in April of 1998 to share his knowledge and recently published book *Poemas de mi Pueblo Taíno*, with the teachers of New Haven. A video and booklet about the Taínos entitled *Guanín* also was consulted. The author and illustrator, Edwin Fontanez, generously provided me with ideas, inspiration, and materials. Finally, the Yale Professor, Jules Prown, provided a methodology for describing and analyzing art objects.

### **Bartolomé de las Casas and Fray Ramón de Pané: Primary Sources**

A study of the Taínos should begin with a careful reading of the exposé by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. He wrote his descriptions of the Taínos of the Dominican Republic with the express purpose of alerting the world to the sufferings and exploitations of the Taínos at the hands of the Spanish *conquistadores* in the island of Hispaniola, today Haiti and The Dominican Republic. He extols the virtues of the Taínos as a gentle and unsuspecting people who were subjected to unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their oppressors. Another recommended author is Fray Ramón de Pané, who chronicled the religious beliefs and myths of the Taínos at the time of the conquest or *encuentro*. Excerpts of his journals are found in the book by Karl Waggenheim listed in the bibliography. A reading of one of these two primary sources and knowledge of the history of Puerto Rico during pre-Colombian times is highly recommended for any teacher using this unit. Other primary sources teachers may want to consult include the writings of Oviedo y Valdés, not covered in this unit but available to teachers interested in further research.

### **Ricardo E. Alegría: A Historian's Perspective**

In contemporary times, Ricardo E. Alegría has become the most eloquent gatherer of information about the Taínos of Puerto Rico. He has written several books about the Taínos and is considered the expert on the history of Puerto Rico. His book, *Historia de los indios de Puerto Rico*, is available in both English and Spanish. I rely on it heavily in this unit and recommend it highly for those teachers not familiar with the history of the Taínos of Puerto Rico. He was commissioned by the government of Puerto Rico to preserve several famous archaeological sites in Tibes and Caguana.

### **Irving Rouse: An Anthropological or Archaeological Perspective**

Irving Rouse has written several books about the Tainos from the perspective of an archaeologist. He describes the pre-Taino groups in the island, the origin of the Tainos, their extent and spread in the Caribbean, and the archaeological evidence to support his theories. If these areas are of interest to the reader, his books, listed in the bibliography, should be consulted. His findings and comments will be briefly included. I think he is an important part of this study of the Tainos because students should be aware that there is scientific data that supports the many legends, myths, and stories. This unit emphasizes not only the literature of the Tainos but the art objects they produced. In order to fully understand the art, one needs to know about the culture of the people. That cultural information may be gleaned in several ways: studying the people directly, studying the body of literature they produced, studying their art, and examining their artifacts of everyday life.

Since the Tainos are largely extinct as far as being an identifiable group living today, we are unable to study them via direct observation or interviews. The remaining sources available to us are the oral literature handed down, their legacy as expressed in their art and daily objects, and the theories constructed by experts from various fields as to their lifestyles and culture, based on evidence such as objects found in archaeological sites and museums. The most recent archaeological evidence was documented in the New York Times article of July 5, 1998.

## The Taínos: Background Information

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The Taínos are generally considered to be part of the Taíno -Arawak Indians who traveled from the Orinoco-Amazon region of South America to Venezuela to the Caribbean Islands. They were not the first indigenous group to arrive in Puerto Rico: the Archaics had arrived from Florida about 2,500 years ago. This earlier group were fishermen and hunters, and lived a nomadic life. Their culture was simple and they did not develop any art forms or farming methods. About 1,700 years ago, the Taínos arrived. They navigated the Caribbean Sea on their *canoas*. They went to Jamaica, the Bahamas, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. Although peaceful and non-aggressive, they had to combat the fierce Caribes who attacked the Taíno villages. Ironically, the region became known as the Caribbean, named after these fierce Indians.

The Taínos settled in Puerto Rico and quickly displaced or fused with the earlier indigenous groups. They were farmers and had a more advanced culture than that of the earlier groups. In their Arawak language, Taíno means the good ones. Thus, when Columbus arrived in 1493, they identified themselves as Taíno, the good and gentle people.

### Description of people, clothes, and ornaments

What did these people look like and what did they wear? They were short, bronze-colored, with straight black hair. They had no facial hair. They wore very little clothing. The married women wore apron-like skirts which they called *naguas*. This word has since evolved into *enagua*, a petticoat in Puerto Rico. Because a flattened forehead was a sign of beauty, they often forced their heads into a flat shape by using boards tied to the back and front of babies' heads. This is not unlike the customs the Mayans had of flattening their heads. This is one indication of similarities in customs between the Mayans and the Taínos. Others include the importance of ball games for social and religious purposes and some similarities in their religion.

For adornment, the Taínos decorated their bodies and face with paints made from plants and minerals. They did this for decoration and for protections against the insects. Also, they used special paints when they fought battles. Other adornments included headdresses made from bird feathers, necklaces and bracelets made from shells and stones, and amulets made of clay, stone, shells, or bone. These amulets were worn around their necks or hung from their foreheads for luck or protection.

The chiefs wore special adornments. Their head ornaments were made from gold or cotton and they wore a large disk or *guanín* around their necks. Since only the chiefs or *caciques* could wear a *guanín*, they were easily recognized as the leaders when they fought the Spanish. When the Spanish realized this, they concentrated on killing the chiefs, thus leaving their enemies demoralized since they were without their spiritual leader.

As a student activity, the class would view illustrations of the Taínos wearing their adornments and would make their own headdresses, amulets, or *guanín*. Also, the students could keep a folder of the designs, drawings, and art of the Taínos as they study them in class. Eventually, the students would make their own Taíno designs or illustrations for their original legends.

### A Taíno village, daily life, and transportation

Two indications of a developed culture are the organization of its society and the structure of its government.

Based on this criteria, the Taínos were very developed. They had a society that was organized into three levels: the nitaínos or nobility, the bohiques or medicine men, and the naborias or farmers. There was no slavery.

Each town or *yucayeque* was led by a *cacique* or chief. He was chosen because of his birth in a matrilineal fashion. When a chief died, his sister's son became the next chief. If there was no familial successor, the chief was chosen among the valiant young leaders. A *cacique* was usually recognizable because he wore a feathered headdress, a necklace with a golden medallion called a *guanín*, and was carried on a litter whenever he traveled. Also, during ceremonies, he sat on a special ceremonial stool.

Women as well as men could become *caciques*. This is of much interest to my students and usually generates much discussion. Some famous *cacicas* included Luisa and Anacaona. There did exist gender division as to the daily jobs; women did most of the farming and also prepared the fish and the game that the men brought home. However, women could join the men in battle. Men could have more than one wife, but usually only the *cacique* was able to afford such an arrangement.

The Taínos were sophisticated in their farming compared to earlier groups, and formed conical mounds or *conucos* for their seeds. Their principal crops were yucca, batata, and malanga, which are tapioc, sweet potato, and cassava. Corn was also grown but was not a staple and certainly not as important as in the maize cultures of Mesoamerica.

As far as the structure of the village, the farmers lived in small rounded huts called *bohíos*. In the center of the village was the chief's house which was more elaborate and rectangular in shape. It was called the *caney*. In front of his house was a flat, open area called a *batey*. This area was used for parties, meetings, religious events, and ball games. The *cacique* led his people in war and in peace. During a party or *areyto*, he sang the songs which served as the oral tradition for the town. He also decided when to go to war, and made judicial decisions on such matters as grievances and crimes. The island had a principal chief who was the leader of all the chiefs. When Columbus arrived, the supreme chief of the island of Borinquen was Agueybana.

## Transportation

The Taínos were accomplished seamen and traveled through-out the Caribbean in their hand-crafted *canoas*. Some large canoes could carry thirty people. The *caciques* owned these larger canoes and were thus responsible for public transportation. The importance of the canoes in the daily lives and in the expansion of the Taínos cannot be overstated. Due to their navigating skills, the Taínos were able to travel from their land of origin, the Orinoco Valley of Venezuela, and island-hop from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the Bahamas and Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and as far west as Cuba. This expansion did not occur over a short period of time, but it did guarantee a Taíno presence in the Caribbean. Another important consequence of their navigation skills and their canoes is that the Taínos had contact with other indigenous groups of the Americas, including the Mayas of Mexico and Guatemala.

This Mayan-Taíno connection provides students in the classroom with a rich source of inquiry. What is the evidence that the Taínos had contact with the Mayan culture? (Mayan god, Hurakán and Taíno god Huracán, similarities in their ballgames, and similarities in their social structure and social stratification.) Teachers who are not familiar with the theories and archaeological evidence should consult Miguel León-Portilla, Ricardo E. Alegría, and Irving Rouse, listed in the annotated bibliography. The Mayan-Taíno connection provides the classroom teacher with an excellent source for group activities, group problem-solving, comparison and

contrast activities including Venn diagrams, and oral debates or persuasive writing assignments.

- The Mayan-Taíno connection should be developed only after the students have studied the religion and the ceremonies of the Taínos, including the *areytos* and the ballgames.

## Religion

The Taínos were polytheistic. They believed in major deities, such as Atabei and Yucahú, and minor deities, including the deities of fair wind, the afterlife, and cassava, as well as their helpers. The Taínos called these deities *cemís*. A partial list of the deities includes

the mayor deities and some minor ones:

### Major deities:

- **Atabei** or **Atabey**, the mother of Yucahú, the creative force, the earth mother, the goddess of water, a source of life. Also, the goddess of fertility. Women prayed to her for a safe childbirth. She always existed. Other names: Yermao, Bagua, Maorocoti. Bagua means water and Maorocoti means of the mother, fatherless, of the great womb.
- **Yucahú** or **Yocahú** or **Yukiyú**, the supreme being, the creator, the god of the cassava and the sea, which are sources of life. Other names: Bagua, Maorocoti. Yucahú was the guiding spirit for all the Taínos.
- **Juracán**, changed his name from Guacar during the creation of the world. The brother of Yucahú and the son of Atabei, created by Atabei from magical elements in the air and therefore without a father. He became jealous of Yucahú when he saw his brother create the race of men, and tried to destroy his brother's creations. He became known as the god of strong winds, hence the name today of hurricane. He was feared and revered. When the hurricanes blew, the Taínos thought they had displeased Juracán.

### Minor deities:

- **Baibrama**, helped with the cassava, the main crop for the Taínos, and helped persons poisoned by the cassava.
- **Boinayel**, deity of rain, Son of the Gray Serpent.



- **Maquitaurie Guayaba** , Lord of the Land of the Dead
- **Marohu** , twin of **Boinayel** , deity of fair weather.
- **Opiyelguobirán** , the dog deity, watched over spirits of the dead

They often made idols of their *cemís* out of clay, wood, cotton, or stone. These idols are also called *cemís* . Sometimes they buried their *cemís* in their fields or mounds called *conucos* to ensure good crops. When a person who was a valiant warrior died, his bones might be saved inside a *cemí* . When a person or a village needed help or spiritual guidance, the chief consulted a *cemí* with the assistance of the witch doctor or *bohite* if the problem was medical in nature.

- The art collections in El Museo del Barrio and the Yale Peabody Museum include examples of *cemís* .

One of the most common *cemís* is the three-pointed figure of Yucahú. This illustration may be found in the books by Ricardo Alegría and Irving Rouse, as well as in many of the legends and short stories by and about the Taínos. The famous museum of archaeology in Puerto Rico in Jayuya is in the shape of this three-pointed *cemí* . There is a photo of this museum, El Museo Cemí de arqueología, in the *Juntos Magazine*, an ancillary to the *Juntos* textbook used in the New Haven School system. There is a good possibility that students from Puerto Rico, especially from Jayuya, may be familiar with this *cemí* shape.

### **Ceremonies: the areyto and the ball games**

The archaeological sites in Puerto Rico confirm that the Taínos had specific places called *bateyes* where their important events and ceremonies took place. Specifically, the *areytos* and ball games occurred in these park-like areas. They were rectangular and often bordered by stones three to four feet high. They were located in front of the chief's house. Rafael González Mu-iz' book has photos of the ceremonial centers in Tibes and Caguana.

### **Areytos: a ceremony to remember the ancestors**

The word *areyto* has many meanings. Some experts define it as a party, others as a feast, others as a quasi-religious ceremony with musical accompaniment. Ricardo Alegría states an *areyto* "is a big party to celebrate important occasions." 3 Miguel León-Portilla stresses the word itself is related to a word meaning to remember or to recall. 4 In fact, it was during the *areytos* that the chanting and speaking by the *cacique* resulted in a remembrance of the Taíno history. Thus, their oral tradition was preserved. Rafael González Mu-iz lists the kinds of *areytos* : 5

- *religioso* - a very solemn affair, related to their gods and beliefs
- *declaración de gracias* - to give thanks for a good harvest

- *festivos* - general festivities, with food and music
- *históricos* - retelling the history of the village or the great deed of a chief
- *de guerra* - to announce a war or declare a great victory
- *funerarios* - to mourn the death of an important person

Whatever the reason for the *areyto*, it was a big event for all the people of the village and took many days of preparation and usually included songs and dances. Musical instruments used included the *maracas*, a kettle-drum called a *mayohacán*, a *guiro*, flutes, a rain stick, and a conch shell called *guamo*. The cacique had a central role of announcing, leading the traditional chants, and presiding over the ceremonies. Yale Professor Irving Rouse sums it up by stating the *areytos* were “a religious ceremony celebrating the deeds of the ancestors.” 6

As one of the student activities, the class could have a feast or *areyto* and cook foods such as yucca, make invitations in Spanish, decorate the room with their Taíno drawings, and display their artwork. They could also bring in musical instruments such as *maracas* or *guiros*, which are still common today, or make their own musical instruments.

### **Ball games and ceremonial parks**

In the ceremonial parks or *bateyes*, the Taínos played their favorite sport, a ball game similar to the Mayan ball game of Mesoamerica. The ball was made from rubber resin. They could hit the ball with the head, elbows, hips, and feet, but not with their hands. They often wore cotton bands on their arms and legs, and painted their bodies. Both men and women played. For the specific rules, teachers should consult the description by Ricardo Alegría in his book, *History of the Indians*. Unlike the Mayan game, the Taínos did not sacrifice or decapitate the losers.

## **Conclusion**

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I have gathered historical, anthropological, literary, and artistic evidence to fashion a unit on the Taínos. It was a challenging task since I know the teachers of Spanish for Spanish Speakers or Spanish for Hispanics need a unit such as this one to supplement the city curriculum. It was a rewarding task for me as a Puerto Rican woman and educator. I welcome comments, critiques, and suggested ways to expand and adapt this unit. To my fellow teachers I say:

***Despierta, Boricuas. El indio Taíno vive hoy.***

(Awaken, Puerto Ricans. The Taíno Indian is alive today.)

## OBJECTIVES

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- 1. Students will read Taíno myths and legends.
- 2. Students will read poems, short stories, and histories about the Taínos,

using both primary and secondary sources.

- 3. Students will view Taíno art objects and artifacts and describe the objects using the methodology articulated by Yale Professor Jules Prown.
- 4. Based on literary and artistic sources in #1,#2, and #3, students will identify Taíno symbols of religion, authority and class, and sports.
- 5. Students will write original creation myths, legends, poems, and short stories about the Taínos.
- 6. Students will identify Taíno musical instruments, listen to the *maracas and guiro*, and analyze the impact of the Taínos on Puerto Rican music.
- 7. Students will identify Taíno words, locate towns, rivers, and nations with Taíno names, and discuss the impact of the Taíno language today.
- 8. Students will make Taíno-Mayan connections, comparing their foods, religions, and ceremonial ball games.
- 9. Students will compare the Taíno creation myths with the myths of other indigenous groups of

the Americas. (e.g., *Maya* , *Ciboney*,

*Guaraníes* , and *Makiritaré* )

- 10. Students will participate in a tutoring program at a New Haven elementary school and make presentations about the Taínos to the students.

## Lesson Plan #1: The Taínos: Rediscovering Borinquen

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Objectives:

1. Students will read with comprehension.
2. Students will develop pre-writing strategies.
3. Students will compare and contrast.
4. Students will expand their vocabulary in Spanish.

Foreign Language Standards:

- 1.2 Students will share personal reactions to authentic literary texts.
- 2.0 Students will gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
- 4.0 Students will make comparisons among cultures to develop insight.

Anticipated time: This activity will take 2-3 days.

**Scope and sequence** : This activity will take place after the introduction to the Taíno and before the map exercises.

Activities:

1. Teacher will ask the students to define a myth in their own words.
2. Teacher will ask students to glimpse at the reading and jot down the words they think are

Taíno words. (example: *huracán* , *maboya* )

3. Teacher will ask students if they are familiar with the myth of Atabei and Yocayú. One student writes on the board: *Lo que sabemos de Atabei y Yocayú . Lo que sabemos de la religión de los Taínos .*

4. Teacher asks class to read the myth silently.

5. After reading, the class is given a worksheet to write the names of the characters and the sequence of events.

6. Teacher asks comprehension questions.

7. Teacher asks students to retell the myth to the class.

Follow-through or homework:

Each day for homework the students will be assigned different creation myths from the Aztecs, Mayans, etc. The students will write a synopsis of each myth and their reaction to each myth, in their journals, to share in class.

Expansion:

At the end of the week, the students select any two myths to compare in a brief writing assignment.

### **Culminating :**

The students will write their original myth, whether a creation myth, or a myth to explain a natural phenomenon, such as the sun, moon, fire, etc. .

## **Lesson Plan #2: The Taínos : Rediscovering Borinquen**

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Objectives:

1. Students will develop research skills.
2. Students will compare research on encyclopedias with an Internet search.

Foreign Language Standards:

- 1.0 Students will provide and obtain information.
  - 2.0 Students will gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
  - 3.0 Students will use various sources, including print and technology, to connect to the outside world.
- Anticipated time: This activity will take one period in the library and one double period or block period in the computer lab.

Goal: The goal is to provide students with an opportunity to research the Taínos and to compare research methods. Students will be asked to reflect upon the paucity of materials found in their library research.

#### Activities

1. Students will be given the task of researching the Taíno in the encyclopedias in the library and recording all the data they find. They will be asked how they plan to research the Taíno in the encyclopedias.  
The class will agree on four letters. In the past, some have been: I for Indian, P for Puerto Rico, A for Arawak, and T for Taíno.
2. After the library trip, the students will regroup and share their findings.  
Faced with a paucity of materials, the students are asked to analyze this.
3. On the second day, the class will need a longer period for the computer research. The students agree on several search engines and words to use for their Internet search. Some possibilities are : Yahoo, reference, Encarta, Taíno. Students are asked to print the material they find.
4. At the end of the block period, students return to the classroom to analyze their findings, compare them with their findings in the library, and comment on the difference.

#### Variation:

Students are asked to read the poem by Isabel Freire de Matos: *Indio Taíno, dónde estás?* after the library research but before the computer research. This poem explores the issue of the invisibility of the Taíno today and the silence that surrounds him.

## Lesson Plan # 3: The Taínos: Rediscovering Borinquen

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### Taíno Research Project

1. Introduction: What you knew about the Taínos before you started this unit.

*Lo que sabía de los Taínos .*

2. Write your analysis and reaction to the poem: *Indio Taíno, ¿Dónde estás?*

*Mi reacción al poema*

3. & 4. Write your analysis and reaction to the two legends: Guanina and Salcedo, as well as one of the creation myths.

*Mis reacciones a las leyendas y el mito*

5. Write your individual research topic. (e.g., family)

*Mi tema: la familia*

6. Write what you learned from the encyclopedia exercise.

*Lo que aprendí de las enciclopedias sobre los Taínos*

7. Write a list of Taíno words that you learned and their translation.(at least 20)

*Mi vocabulario Taíno*

Extra credit: Draw a map of Puerto Rico and indicate 10 places with Taíno names.

8. Write a summary of what you learned in this project.

*Lo que aprendí de los Taínos.*

9. Write what you liked and disliked about this project.

*Lo que me gustó y lo que no me gustó de este reporte*

10. Make a cover page with your name, title, and class, and illustrate with a drawing or illustration evocative of the Taínos.

## Notes

1. Rafael Falcón, *Lo Afronegroide en el cuento puertorrique-o*. Miami: Ediciones Universales. 1993, p.9.
2. Rafael González Mu-iz, in speech April 27,1998 to New Haven Teachers, at Roberto Clemente Middle School.
3. Ricardo E. Alegría, *History of the Indians of Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Colección de Estudios Puertorrique-os. 1970. pp. 61-64.
4. Miguel León-Portilla, in *America in 1492: The World of the Indian Peoples Before the Arrival of Columbus*, edited by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. . New York: Random House, Inc.. 1993, p. 152.
5. Rafael González Mu-iz, *Poemas de Mi Pueblo Taíno*. San Juan: Publications Rafael González Mu-iz. 1997, p. 22.
6. Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1992, p. 173.

## Annotated Bibliography

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- Books for student reading list are so indicated.

Alegría, Ricardo E. . *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*. New Haven:Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 79, 1983.

This is an informative publication about the ballgame of the Taínos by an undisputed expert in the field.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Discovery, Conquest, and Colonization of Puerto Rico, 1493-1599*. San Juan: Colección de Estudios Puertorrique-os, 1974.

This book on the discovery and early colonization of Puerto Rico was relied on heavily by me in this unit. Available in both English and Spanish.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *History of the Indians of Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Colección de Estudios Puertorrique-os, 1970.



Another excellent book by Alegría, and a must read for teachers unfamiliar with the Indians of Puerto Rico. Available in both English and Spanish.

- Arnold, Sandra. *Child of the Sun, a Cuban legend*. New York: Troll Associates, 1995.

A good example of a legend by the Ciboney Indians of Cuba, to be used by students as a comparison with Taíno legends and myths.

Arrom, José J. . *Mitología y artes prehispánicas de las Antillas*. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989.

Arrom is one of the two Yale professors who lead the field in the study of the Taínos. Excellent source for examples of Taíno art.

Bercht, Fatima. *Taino: Precolumbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*. New York: Monacelli Press, Inc., 1997.

One of the several excellent guides of Taíno art provided by El Museo del Barrio.

Brau, Salvador. *La Colonización de Puerto Rico*. San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorrique-a, 1966.

Brau is considered one of the experts on the history of Puerto Rico and this book is a classic.

Carrión, Arturo Morales. *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1983. Chapter one examines the Indian heritage of Puerto Rico but teachers should read the entire book for a detailed history of Puerto Rico. Babín, María Teresa. *La Cultura de Puerto Rico*. San Juan; Instituto de Cultura Puertorrique-a, 1973.

A good overview of Puerto Rican culture for all teachers.

de Las Casas, Fray Bartolomé. *In Defense of the Indians*. Dekalb: Illinois University Press, 1992.

This book offers a rare glimpse into the climate that existed in the early colonial years of Puerto Rico and social, political, and religious describes the oppression and ill treatment suffered by the Taínos.

- de Rosario, Rubén and Isabel Freire de Matos. *Abecedario de Puerto Rico*. Sharon: Troutman Press, 1968.

This book, a collection of Isabel Freire's poems beautifully illustrated by Antonio Martorell, includes a poem used in this unit: *Indio Taíno*. The format is an alphabet book that emphasizes the indigenous words of Puerto Rico.

Falcón, Rafael. *Lo Afronegroide en el Cuento Puertorrique-o*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1993.

As the title suggests, Puerto Rican short story, especially as written by José Luis González, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Caremolo Rodríguez Torres, and Ana Lydia Vega. The quote is taken from the theme of "el negro" in an introductory poem by Luis Felipe Dessús, but the entire book is highly the recommended reading for teachers interested in the Black literature in Puerto Rico.

- Fontáñez, Edwin. *Taino: Guanín's Story*. Arlington: Exit Studios, 1997.

The book and accompanying video are Fontanez' fictional version of the daily life of a young Taíno. Available in both English and Spanish from Exit Studios.

- González Mu-iz, Rafael. *Poemas de Mi Pueblo Taíno*. San Juan: Publications Rafael González Mu-iz, 1997. Used extensively in this unit, this book of recently published poems is by a poet and historian who clearly is knowledgeable about the Taínos.

The format is teacher-friendly in that each topic is introduced by a brief narrative followed by beautiful poems in Spanish, extolling

the virtues and way of life of the Taínos.

- Jaffe, Nina. *The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1996. Although geared for readers k-7, this book offers another creation myth of the Taínos and is included in this unit as an example of a myth that high school students may retell to younger students.

Josephy, Alvin M. *America in 1492: The World of the Indian Peoples Before the Arrival of Columbus*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1993.

This book is a collection of writings about America from the point of view of America, not Europe. Chapter 6, by Miguel León-Portilla, describes the Taínos of the Caribbean and the Mayans of Mesoamerica. León-Portilla examines the Taíno- Mayan connection. A pivotal book for this unit.

Prown, Jules D. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method", *Winterthur Portfolio*, Volume 17, no 1 (Spring 1982), 1-19.

This article by Yale Professor Jules D. Prown defines material culture and proposes a methodology for extracting "information about culture, about mind, from mute objects" by using a three-stage process of description, deduction, and speculation. This article is required reading for those teachers who plan to follow my recommended activities for art objects in this unit.

- Rohmer, Harriet and Jesús Guerrero Rea. *Atariba and Niguayona: A Story from the Taino People of Puerto Rico*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1976.

This delightful story about two Taíno children shows the bond that existed between the Taínos and nature. High School students may read this book for the storyline, the information about the Taínos, the beautiful illustrations, and to compare it with other Taíno stories and legends.

Rouse, Irving. *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the people Who Greeted Columbus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

For those teachers who want to know exactly what the archaeological evidence is for the Taínos, this is the book to read. A good reference book that includes cultural theories, linguistic theories, archaeological theories, and an excellent bibliography.

Rouse, Irving and Ricardo E. Alegría. *Excavations at María de la Cruz Cave and Hacienda Grande Village Site, Loíza Aldea, Puerto Rico*. New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 80, 1990.

A specific archaeological site in Puerto Rico is examined thoroughly by Rouse.

Rouse, Irving and José J. Arrom. *The Tainos: Principal Inhabitants of Columbus' Indies*, in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson, pp. 509-513. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Another writing by Rouse, for teachers who favor the archaeological approach.

Saunders, Robert and John Dixon, Leonor Toro, and Marita Kennedy. *The Indians of Puerto Rico*. New Haven: Migratory Curriculum Development Project, Connecticut State Department of Education, 1978.

A charming book by the Migratory Project aimed at teaching Puerto Rican history to Puerto Ricans in the mainland. Offers excellent teaching strategies, worksheets, and activities aimed at elementary and middle school students.

Waggenheim, Karl and Olga Jiménez de Waggenheim. *The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996.

This book is ambitious in its scope: from 1493 to the year 2000. Part one concentrates on the Taínos and has excerpts from Fray Ramón Pané on the daily life and religious beliefs of the Taínos. Highly recommended for all teachers.

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