



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

The Taínos of Puerto Rico: Rediscovering Borinquen

Guide for Curriculum Unit 98.03.04
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This unit is specifically designed for Spanish for Spanish Speakers classes at the high school level, but may be adapted for advanced Spanish classes. (Spanish 4 Honors or Spanish 5). Most of the Spanish speakers or Latinos in New Haven are Puerto Rican and their ancestry is a combination or *mezcla* of Spanish, African, and Taíno. The intent of this unit is to reconnect the Puerto Rican student of New Haven with his Taíno heritage.

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 noted Puerto Rican author Rafael González Mu-iz stated, "*Nuestro indio vive todavía: en lo físico, los sentimientos de nuestra gente, la bondad, y la toponomía*". (Our Indian lives today: in the physical traits, the feelings and emotions of our people, our kindness, and the toponomy of Puerto Rico.)

The unit examines the Taínos via literature and art. Teaching strategies include analysis of literature using thematic approaches, problem-solving and cooperative group activities. The literature includes poems by Rafael González Mu-iz and Isabel Freire de Matos, creation myths, legends such as *Guanina* by Cayetano Coll y Toste, and fictional short stories by Edwin Fontáñez and Harriet Rohmer. Since one of the stated goals of the curriculum for the Spanish for Spanish Speakers' class is refining writing skills, writing assignments are emphasized: journal-writing, reaction papers, long poems, and a research project using the Internet.

Finally, the unit includes hands-on art activities and a methodology for analyzing art objects: description, deduction, and speculation. The art objects and artifacts to be examined include *dujo*, *cemí*, *guanín*, and artifacts from ball games and ceremonial parks. Some of these art objects may be found at El Museo del Barrio and at the Yale Peabody Museum. I developed the following metaphors to help the students connect the various parts of the unit:

- the puzzle or unsolved mystery
- the sacred mountain
- the sacred waters
- the number three

Included in the unit are the objectives, three lesson plans, correlation with the New Haven Foreign Language standards, an annotated bibliography, and recommendations for teachers of all levels who wish to do more extensive research. This unit remembers and celebrates the Taínos. *Nuestro indio vive todavía* .

(Recommended for Spanish for Spanish Speakers, Spanish for Hispanics, Spanish 4 Honors, and Spanish 5, grades 9-12)

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