

## INDIAN CEREMONIAL COSTUMES OF HIGHLAND GUATEMALA

Courtesy of  
Laguna Gloria Art Museum  
Austin, Texas

Guatemalan clothing is particularly interesting because many Indians continue to use "traditional" costumes (the women especially) as their everyday clothing. Before commercial production of *huipiles* and *cortes* on foot looms, nearly every Indian community used designs and color combinations that were unique to their geographic area. Thus it was possible to determine the community of an Indian solely on the basis of his or her clothing. To a degree this is still the case, although regional differences are blurring as Indians buy ready-made clothes with patterns and colors they prefer rather than the clothing that is traditional to their area. When you make *huipiles* in class, urge students to use many colors and patterns, as this is what makes Guatemala clothing interesting.

In Guatemala, a small country south of Mexico, one half the population is Indian and still speaks Indian languages. Tradition and crafts have survived from pre-Columbian times with little change. Each village has its own costumes and it is still possible to tell which village an Indian comes from by the clothes he wears.

Some words to remember:

1. *huipil*—blouse, ceremonial costume for women. Sometimes used for weddings.
2. *falda, refajo, or corte*—wraparound skirt woven on a foot loom
3. *faja*—woven belt
4. *tzut*—head covering
5. *perraje*—shawl
6. *servilleta*—napkin
7. *capexi*—outer garment for men.
8. *milpa*—corn patch, the heart of Indian farming

A wide array of colorful costumes have survived from ancient times. Art is an everyday part of living in Guatemala.

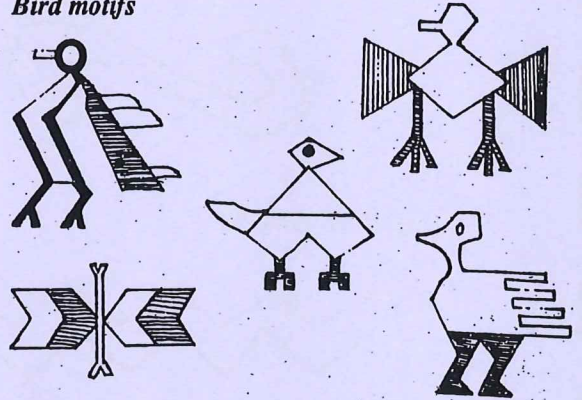
Designs are made by loom weaving, finger weaving, embroidery, and appliqué. Some are achieved by tie-dyeing the thread before weaving.

Three kinds of looms are used:

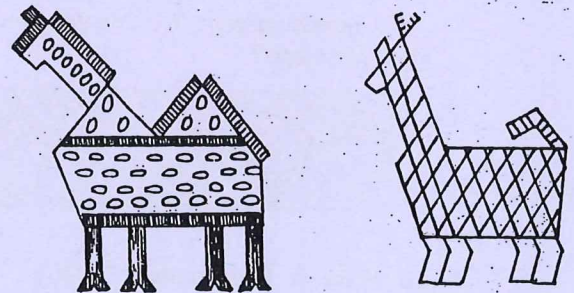
1. back strap loom—used by women to make strips of cloth not over 24 inches wide that are used for *huipiles*.
2. foot loom—usually operated by men to make wide lengths of cloth.
3. belt loom—makes narrow strips for belts and head ribbons.

Here are some of the symbols found on Guatemalan textiles:

### Bird motifs

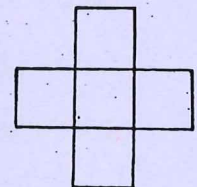


### Animal motifs



### Mayan cross

four winds  
four compass points  
four sides of the milpa



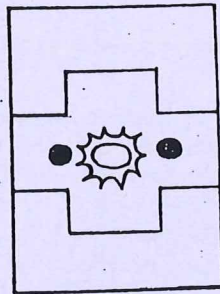
### LEVEL: HIGH SCHOOL

Source: Contreras, Gloria, Latin American Cultural Studies: *Information and Materials For Teaching Latin America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, Institute of Latin American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin.

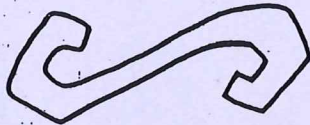


**Huipil (whee-PEEL)**

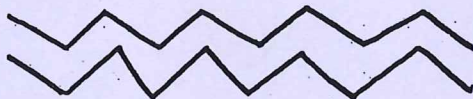
The yoke is in the form of a cross. The neck, encircled by points, symbolizes the sun. The appliquéd circles on the shoulders are phases of the moon.



An S lying on its side represents a worm or snake—a bringer of good tidings.



**Lightning (fertility)**

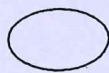


A puzzle for you: What do you think this design motif represents?

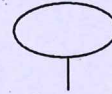


**To Make a Guatemalan Huipil**

1. Depending on your height, you will need 1 to 1 1/4 yards of 36" or 45" wide fabric.
2. Use lightweight solid-colored cotton.
3. Cut a pattern from newspaper making the neck shape:

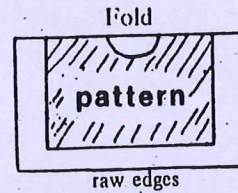


You may add a slit at the front so it will slip over your head easily:



4. Adjust your pattern until you have it just right. The *huipil* should come down almost to your hips. Its sleeves should hit midway between your shoulder and elbow.

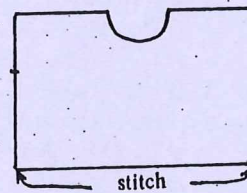
5. Place the pattern on the folded fabric with the neck at the fold, and cut out without cutting the slit:



6. Remove the pattern. Open the fabric out flat in a single layer. If you want a slit, cut it just in front.

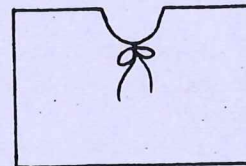
7. Hem all the way around, bottom and slides.

8. Fold together. Stitch up sides from the bottom to fit *you*, leaving openings for your arms:



9. Turn under fabric around the neck and decorate with fancy stitches using colorful embroidery thread.

10. Attach ties made of braided thread or yarn to the slit opening:





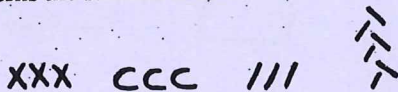
11. Decorate around neck and edges or tops of sleeves using motifs from your motif sheet. Appliqué or embroider or use a combination of both. You might add rickrack that looks like the lightning motif.

12. You might think that your *huipil* doesn't fit because it is so loose and bulky, especially under the arms and around the waist—but this is the way they are supposed to fit.

### To Make a Guatemalan Picture

Use your motif sheet for patterns. Glue your motif sheet onto thin cardboard and cut out the motifs. Now you can place the pattern on paper or fabric and trace or cut around the edges.

1. Trace around your motif patterns on a piece of paper. Decorate your motifs with bright crayons. Think of patterns the stitches made:



2. Cut motifs from bright construction paper. Use colors the Guatemalans like. Glue them on a sheet of paper of another color. If you wish, decorate them with crayons or colored pencils to imitate needlework. You might glue pieces of bright thread or yarn on your motifs.

3. Cut your motifs from bright bits of fabric and glue them on a piece of fabric you use for background. You might prefer to use pieces of colored iron-on fabric and iron your motifs on your picture. You can decorate your motifs with needlework. Perhaps you prefer to sew your design rather than glue it. Here is a simple stitch:

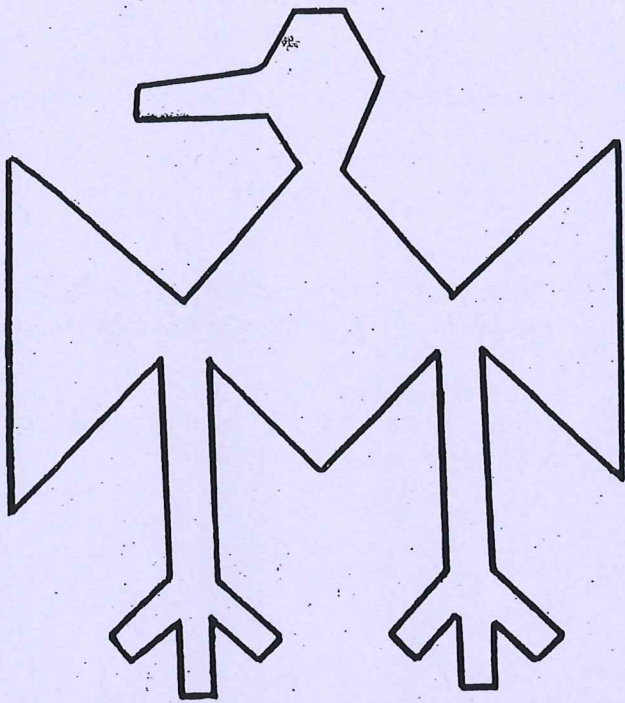


4. If you like to embroider, use the motifs for a design pattern. Use stitches you have learned or made up.

5. Create your own motifs. What is important in *your* life? Guatemalans decorate their clothes with symbols of things important in their lives.

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Cut figures on outline



CUT

