

 **Artes Américas**



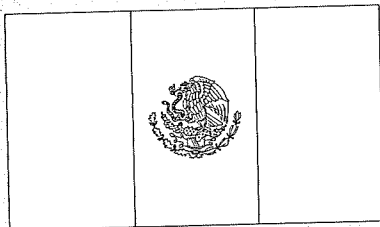
**STUDENT ACTIVITY PACKET**

**Grades 6-8th**



**BALLET FOLKLÓRICO DE MÉXICO**

**de Amalia Hernández**



*Navidades*

**A Christmas Spectacular**

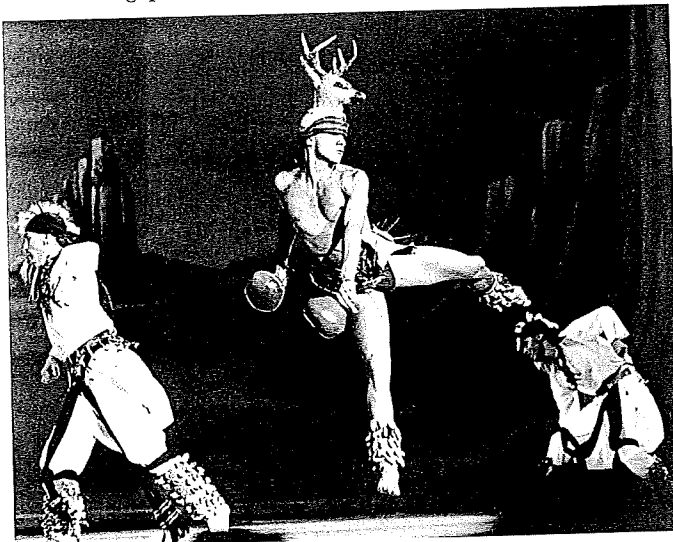


## WELCOME

TO THE BALLET FOLKLÓRICO DE MÉXICO DE  
 AMALIA HERNÁNDEZ STUDENT ACTIVITY PACKET  
 FOR *Navidades: A Christmas Spectacular*.

### Ballet Folklórico Picture

Ballet Folklórico has been dancing since the 1950s. The choreographer (dance director) takes Mexican folklore, or stories, and presents them in a theatrical way. It's called folkloric dance because it is the dance of the people, their traditions, customs, ideas, and stories. Look at the picture below. Use your imagination to think about the following questions.



- What do you see? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the mood? \_\_\_\_\_
- What does the music sound like? Fast, smooth, choppy, slow? \_\_\_\_\_
- What story does this picture tell? \_\_\_\_\_
- What happens next? \_\_\_\_\_
- What happened before? \_\_\_\_\_

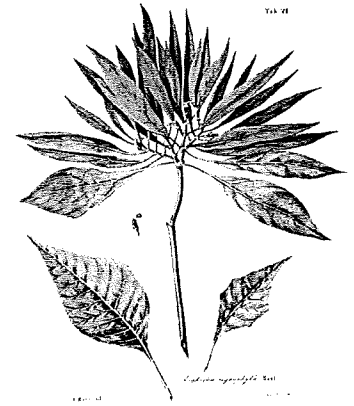
### Mexican Holidays

Just like other countries, Mexicans have unique holidays that they celebrate with unique traditions. Look up some of the following holidays and list three things that are traditions on these holidays: **Day of the Dead, Mexican Independence Day, Holy Week, Easter, and Cinco de Mayo.**

### Mexican Christmas

In Mexico, Christmas festivities begin December 16 and continue through January 6. **Nacimientos**, or nativity scenes, are placed all through the markets. They are usually made of clay and painted. They used to be the most important decoration at Christmas, but now with the U.S. influence, Christmas trees are more wide-

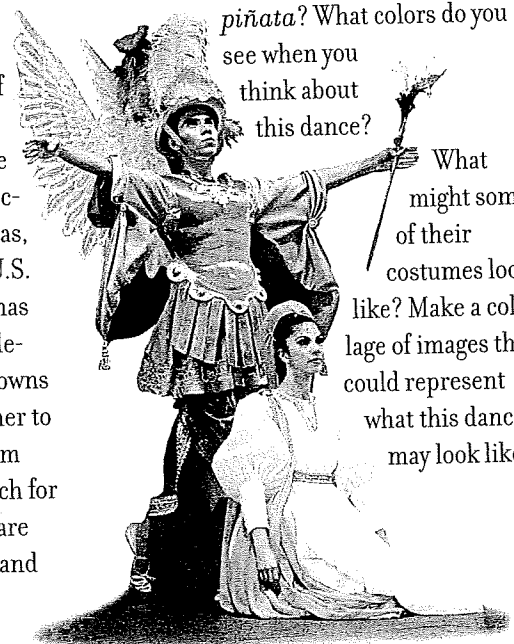
spread. Nine days before Christmas, towns and neighborhoods in large cities gather to reenact Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and their search for a place to sleep. These reenactments are called **posadas**. With candles in hand and voices singing carols, children and adults travel to neighbors to ask for



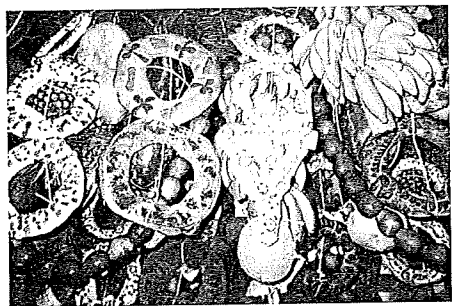
*posada*, or shelter. At the end of the journey, they break open a **piñata** with a stick and eat the candy inside.

**Pastorelas** also happen before Christmas Day. These are short plays in which the events leading up to Christ's birth are acted out. Children do not receive presents until January 6, the feast of the **Epiphany**, or the **Three Kings**. This is representative of the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh given to baby Jesus by the Three Kings. In the evening of the Epiphany, there is a special treat of hot chocolate and a ring-shaped cake. A tiny plastic baby—a token of good luck—is hidden inside the cake. Whoever gets the baby in the piece of cake has to give a tamales party for everyone on February 2, which is **Candlemas Day**.

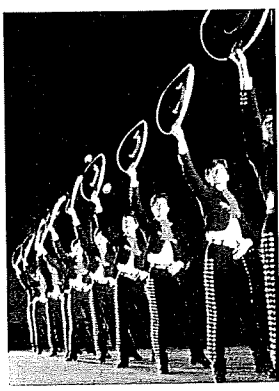
Ballet Folklórico took these Mexican Christmas traditions and created a dance that you will see. Think about how they might translate these traditions to dance. How might they represent the *posada*? How could they perform the breaking of the



*piñata*? What colors do you see when you think about this dance? What might some of their costumes look like? Make a collage of images that could represent what this dance may look like.



OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: Revolution *soldaderas* ballet. RIGHT: 1840 poinsettia illustration. BELOW LEFT: Yaqui Deer Dance. BOTTOM RIGHT: Christmas ballet. THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT: Alter of cakes and fruit. CENTER: Mariachis. RIGHT: José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) *Las Acordadas*, 1941. BELOW: Revolution dancer. BOTTOM: Festival of Tlacotalpan.



*Las Acordadas*, José Clemente Orozco, 1941. Reproduced by permission of the artist's estate.

### Traditions

Traditions can be something that you do every day, every month, or every year. Usually, traditions occur during a special time and help you connect with your family and friends.

What are some examples of traditions? Do you have any traditions? Think about traditions you may have with family, friends, or during certain holidays or birthdays. What makes them traditions? Why do the traditions still exist?

Cultural traditions—can you trace a tradition in your family back one generation? More? Share your traditions with one or more of your classmates. How do your traditions differ? How are they similar?

### Interview

Interview a grandparent or parent about the traditions in your family. What traditions do you have? Why do those traditions still exist? What traditions does your family no longer participate in?

Interview someone with a different cultural background from you. What are traditions that he or she has? What do you have in common with her or him?

### Costumes

When costuming Ballet Folklórico, many things have to be considered. Of course, colors and designs are very important; however, designers also need to think about the weight of the costume, the quick changes between dances, and the durability, because dancers are very active and the costumes get a lot of wear and tear. One invention that has helped the quick changes is the joining of skirt, bodices, and petticoats into one single piece, with an automatic clasp in the back. What else can you think of that would help dancers change costumes quickly?



### Communicating through Dance

Either take a tradition you thought of or make up a tradition for yourself. How would you create a dance about that tradition?

What costumes would you want? What colors? What style of music? What backdrop or set? What props would you need? Draw an image to represent your tradition. Think about the colors, the costumes, the set, and the total environment. Get up and try it out. Gather a group of your friends and create your own folkloric dance.

### Careers in the Arts

What you see onstage for any performance takes the work of many people behind the scenes. Here's a short list of some of the people who may be involved in creating a performance. Think about one challenge that each of these people might face:

- Choreographer** – creates and directs the dances

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- Dancers** – follow the directions of the choreographer

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- Scene Designer** – creates the ideas and designs for the whole picture onstage

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- Light Designer** – creates the ideas and designs for the light patterns, colors, and directions onstage

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- Costume Designer** – creates the ideas and designs for the costumes that the performers wear onstage

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- Music and Sound Designer** – creates the ideas and designs for all the sounds you hear and see onstage

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- Stage Manager** – manages and directs everything that happens on- and offstage during a performance



## Food

What are some traditional foods you may have on the following holidays?

- Thanksgiving?
- Fourth of July
- Birthdays?
- Rosh Hashanah?
- Christmas?

Why do you eat those foods on the certain days? Is it because of a cultural tradition? Is it because of a preference?

## Mexican Hot Chocolate

Chocolate was first discovered in Mexico. Mexicans grind up the cacao beans on a grinding stone and mix with a variety of ingredients to make delicious Mexican chocolate treats. The following is a recipe for hot chocolate that many Mexicans enjoy during Christmas time.

## Recipe

Makes 12 cups

- 1 cup masa harina (Mexican corn flour)
- 1½ quarts water
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 6 squares unsweetened chocolate, grated
- About 2 cups packed brown sugar
- 1½ quarts milk

1. Sift masa harina into a large saucepan. By sifting, the flour will be measured correctly and will keep light. Make a hole in the center. Gradually stir in water, until smooth. Stir in cinnamon.
2. Put pan over low heat, and simmer, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens.
3. Add chocolate, 2 cups of sugar, and milk. Stir until chocolate and sugar are dissolved. Taste, and stir in extra sugar if it isn't sweet enough.
4. Use an electric mixer to beat the mixture until it is frothy. Ladle into mugs and serve while it is hot.

Always be careful when using the stove and pouring the hot chocolate. Don't let the mixture boil.

## Credits

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Page 2: Poinsettia illustration, "Euphorbia erythrophylla" commonly known as flor de pascua or poinsettia pulcherrima, from Antonio Bertoloni, *Florula guatemalensis sistens plantas nonnullas in Guatemala sponte nascentes* (Bononiae [Bologna]: ex typographaeo Emygdii ab Ulmo, 1840). Gift of the Hispanic Society of America.

The Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin

Page 3: *Las Acordadas*. Gift of Alvin and Ethel Romansky, 1970. Photo by Rick Hall.

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Thank you and enjoy!



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