



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2006 Volume IV: Native America: Understanding the Past through Things

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## **The Popol Vuh: A High School Literature Unit**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 06.04.11, published September 2006

by Raymond F. Theilacker

This is a curriculum unit whose aim is to expose twelfth grade students to the mythology of the ancient Maya, as part of state and local standards requiring the reading and appreciation of world literature and culture. The unit is based on a translation of the ancient text of the *Popol Vuh*. Students analyze the work as a literary selection. Through this analysis, and a period of guided research, students make inferences about the nature of the Maya civilization of Mesoamerica. Throughout the unit, students are drawn to considerations of the culture, traditions, geography, and the visual art of the Maya.

This unit spans a 2 to 3 week period in a block schedule, but is fully adaptable to a school year structured in two semesters in a standard forty-minute schedule. The lessons are designed for collaborative or cooperative teamwork, and are driven by an inductive approach to learning. Students simultaneously tackle discrete reading assignments, tasks involving specific literary foci, and research routines that culminate in an evaluative essay and group presentations. Evaluation takes place through informal and formal assessments throughout the unit.

(Developed for World Literature, grade 12; recommended for World Literature, grade 12, and Native American Literature, grade 11)

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