



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

Symbols of Hierarchy: Things of Bling in the Pre-Columbian Americas

Curriculum Unit 06.04.10, published September 2006
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Overview

Symbols of Hierarchy: Things of Bling in the Pre-Columbian Americas is an introduction to Pre-Columbian civilizations of Central and South America. Activities in this unit will help high school students examine artifacts that were symbols of status and things of importance from representative societies of South America and Central America. The unit aims also to help students make connections to things of importance in our society today. The unit addresses district, state, and national curricular standards and goals for history and social studies. An essential question is framed to help students connect their study of the Pre-Columbian Americas with characteristics of contemporary society: how can ancient things of importance teach us about the relationship between material goods and social status in both ancient civilizations and in our society today?

Introduction

Symbols of Hierarchy: Things of Bling in the Pre-Columbian Americas is written mostly in reflection to my experience at the 2006 Yale National Initiative. While I completed readings and research outside the seminar meetings, I found the most beneficial and unique aspects of the YNI experience to be the seminar meetings, collaborative time with fellows and the individual feedback meetings with the seminar leader. Subsequently, my attempts to write this unit felt more productive when I finally decided to include reflections on observations and interactions that occurred in sessions, rather than exclusively to focus on presenting conventional research. Actually, I could not replicate the benefits of the YNI seminar experience if I were writing an individual research paper or unit. There simply would not be enough time to teach oneself about the subject matter, strategies, and resources, in order to gain the same wealth of information to prepare for instruction. Additionally, there would be no benefit of feedback from colleagues or a seminar leader.

The power of the institute model is in its collaborative group setting. After all, our teaching is done in a group setting. I found my most meaningful work from May through July to have been at the two week intensive. The

seminar leaders presented the subject matter, we drafted our curriculums, and we modeled lessons in front of our peers. It only seems fair to exclaim the value of the experience throughout this unit.

Audience

While YNI units target the public school spectrum of grade, subject, and level, almost all of these units are written for use with students in urban districts. My audience happens to be ninth grade students at Wilbur Cross High School, a comprehensive high school of about 1400 students in New Haven, Connecticut. I enjoy the diversity of the school: Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian, and Asian. Generally, my freshmen classes have about 27 students in each one. Classes are categorized as honors, college, or basic level. In planning the lessons for this unit, I am trying to construct heterogeneous activities that will allow for student learning regardless of ability level. This includes the inclusion students who require modifications. In each of the last two years I have had at least three students from our inclusion program.

I like to think that my student audience and colleagues benefit from having Yale University nearby. Some students at Cross can participate in the Yale community as students in undergraduate classes. Teachers in the New Haven Public School System may also apply as fellows to the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute. Both students and teachers have access to a multitude of university programs, museums, and resources that can enrich learning.

I will specifically teach my unit to my ninth grade world civilizations classes. A number of standards addressed in the unit are listed in Appendix 1.

Rationale

To the chagrin of many teachers in high schools, teenage students often preoccupy themselves with things—particularly brands and styles of clothing and footwear, hairstyles, and even body art—when we want them pay more attention to their academics. It's hard to fault them. If you observe most adults you may find that they too have the same fascinations perhaps even to a more sophisticated and definitely to a more expensive degree. When I started exploring the topic of Native American things in preparation for the YNI, I could think of few commonalities between a Moche nobleman or woman and a twenty-first century American. I wondered how a high school student preoccupied with the latest ring tone, Ipod, or Xbox game would get excited about looking at the feathers or fashion worn by an Inca king. Yet despite these disparities in valuing like things, the fact remains that societies collectively come to embrace things and assign a hierarchy of value to them.

At the summer intensive, I began to think about how we come to value different things. The Aztecs esteemed feathers and jade, the Colombians valued gold, and the people of ancient Peru crafted a culture around woven cloth. While I didn't have a specific answer as to why, I thought that by having students examine symbols of status or value from different cultures, collectively we might come up with some answers about humans and their things. In conducting the research for this unit I came up with the notion that perhaps students would see a connection between things or symbols of status in their own lives and our culture at large with the

symbols of hierarchy relating to pre-Columbian societies in the Americas. I thought about why some things are more important than other things to people of the past as well as to us. I contemplated what determines the value of things in a particular society. I analyzed why seemingly intangible things can have value. Additionally, the seminar provoked my thoughts about what happens when converging cultures with different values desire the same things.

First, I'll admit that I find Native American things unique and exotic. Artifacts such as headdresses, earrings, and nose ornaments are rather 'cool' to contemplate for teachers as well as students. It's hard not to get a response from students to slides or photographs of Moche or Inca artifacts. They are colorful, often of precious metals such as gold and silver, and incorporate other natural resources such as feathers and rare stones such as jade. Our own customs, if viewed in an objective and really detached sense, can be equally as engaging. Students, not to mention adults, have gold teeth, earrings, nose rings, and tattoos, in addition to their support of a thriving culture of fashion.

Despite it being summer recess, I have imagined trying to entice my students into a critical view of their customs. In addition to asking a teenager how and why did Moche noblemen engage in wearing nose ornaments, I'd like them to consider, "Why do teenagers want to wear the latest Nike sneakers or baseball caps in school?" or "Why do some students have a piercing through their eyebrows?" While teenagers' responses to these questions might be predictable, they may issue the profound response, "I don't know" . . . or say something like, ". . . probably because they were . . . a . . . primitive?" They would probably affirm their own fashion with a statement like "I wear this hat (pair of pants, sneakers etc.) because I like to wear it (It's 'cool')." I believe this last notion is a connection worth investigating.

We might explore the presumption that groups of people feel pride or at least feel good about particular things and subsequently become attached to them. Why wouldn't this idea apply to pre-Columbian America? However, we might need to explore why some things go in and out of fashion. The hula hoop, pogo stick, GI Joe, and Cabbage Patch Kids were once popular toys. If they were fun to play with in one generation, why are they no longer fun? One can argue that in our current society, a culture of consumption dictates that we change our assessment of the value of things based upon the seemingly constant introduction of new goods and services. There is a need to keep our economy working through constant consumption and production. Planned obsolescence seems as much a factor in the design and marketing of things as is quality and utility. Today the maintenance of this cycle is facilitated by the globalization of markets. As world markets become more efficient, the ability to introduce new items for work, fashion, entertainment, and leisure exponentially rises. Brand named items compete for our attention and possession. New brands emerge and become the coveted items of a generation. Technology has also changed. Thirty years ago, none of us would have conjured up the notion of what Apple, Ipods, Xbox-es, and cell phones meant. We were just getting used to multi-function calculators (Texas Instruments), eight-track players, Atari, cable TV (only about 40 channels), remote controls, and push-button phones - Ma Bell even came out with the extended tangle-free phone cord.

While at the summer intensive, I squeezed a study break between sessions by shopping at stores around the Yale campus. However, when you are participating in a seminar on 'things and their value,' you realize at some point that you cannot escape things and the importance that society places on them-even though their importance may seem arbitrary for the reasons I mentioned above. In Urban Outfitters, surrounded by things of fashion and fancy, I saw an Atari game fashioned after the one I had played as a teenager. While the size of the Atari player and the ease of connection to a television had been somewhat altered from the game I had loved, the game featured the same pacing and special effects as the original. (I had to buy one!) However, somehow I felt as if I was buying the Marcel Duchamp version instead of the original. I certainly didn't need

this thing. But in a weird way I felt so sophisticated in that I had the power to revisit my youth with a simple purchase. This was so cool! And that is why I wanted to have and show off this thing. While I wondered if my purchase could be characterized as my being a victim of shameless consumer culture, I nonetheless thought the repackaging of this game was innovative and genius. Maybe this was art in some relative form to me. Our seminar read and discussed the meaning of art. It is a concept that has wide interpretation yet despite one's perspective, art inevitably involves a thing that holds a high degree of value.

By juxtaposing and discussing pre-Columbian and contemporary things of status, I would love for my students to be able to explore and develop a knowledgeable definition of art. My first instinct is to think of art as a word we are taught to associate with museums. Our seminar's readings, visit to the Yale Art Gallery, and discussions during the summer session made me think that students (and why not teachers) should begin at some point to develop a thoughtful awareness of what art means or does not mean. Esther Pasztor, in *Thinking with Things* explores the very question of what art is and is not. While she is critical of museum art and the word art itself, she points out that art and non-art share commonality in that both are inherently things that have various "sorts, functions, forms, and meanings" (Pasztor p. 10). If I were to promote my retro-Atari toy as a work of art I would inevitably be challenged by many of my colleagues and students. They would undoubtedly offer their own examples of what they consider to be proper art: the Parthenon, the Mona Lisa, Starry Night, Jackson Pollack, Andy Warhol, Nike? So whether one gravitates toward the notion of art in the classical sense- past ruins or big stone monuments, or in one of Thomas McEvilley's modern classifications — formal (art is based on beauty of form), content (art is based in expression not form), designation (art is whatever people decide it is), honorific (art is attributing value and importance to something) (Pasztor p.8-9), one has to interpret and place a value on an object or thing to develop his or her point of view. Given this idea, everyone including teachers and students would inevitably have something to say about jewelry, clothing, body art, and vessels, if they were framed with questions about their artistic merit.

The onslaught of the latest sneaker styles, hat designs, cell phone slipcovers and sounds, and mp3 players shows that they are things that are of importance and serve a function to adolescents. Students matter-of-factly refer to flashy and expensive things as *bling*. We can conclude that while the ancients may not have been blessed with our modern innovations, they certainly valued their own set of things that most likely created the same sense of pride, beauty, and importance that we feel when we wear a new and fashionable outfit and or acquire something new. I intend to explore the meaning of things in this unit in this context. An essential question of this unit will be, "How do artifacts tell us about status and social structure in ancient societies and in our communities today?"

Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade by Brian Fagan is an excellent source through which to gain insight into the values of things in different pre-Columbian societies. Let's look at the Inca of Peru. Fagan begins chapter two with William Prescott's description of Atahualpa's royal procession into Cajamarca, Peru, to meet Francisco Pizarro.

It was not long before sunset, when the van of the royal procession entered the gates of the city. . . Elevated high above his vassals came the Inca Atahualpa, borne on a sedan or open litter, on which was a sort of throne made of massive gold of inestimable value. The palanquin was lined with the richly colored plumes of tropical birds, and studded with shining plates of gold and silver. . . Round his neck was suspended a collar of emeralds of uncommon size and brilliancy. His short hair was decorated with golden ornaments. . . The bearing of the Inca was sedate and dignified. . . (Fagan p. 38)

Without questioning the veracity of Prescott's description at this time (he really wasn't there), we see that he, nonetheless, is trying to convey how the Inca displayed royal status. They elevate their king and carry him on a litter so that his feet do not touch the ground. They ornately decorate him in precious stones and metals. Yet, although Prescott was not there, the archaeological evidence from royal tombs and ethno history suggest that the Inca indeed had developed at least for their nobility, ornate costumes and jewelry that symbolized status. In fact, the consciousness of status appears to be of very high value to the Inca due to the fact that only nobility were allowed to possess gold, precious stones, and other symbols of wealth and status, including cloth made from the wool of the rare vicuna, a relative of the llama. The Inca nobility forbade anyone except nobility to own anything other than its most basic necessities. To ensure social control, they allocated to the peasant people. Interestingly, limiting the possession of gold and other status symbols of Incas to only nobility not only served to show class distinction, it also in a practical sense alleviated much crime (Fagan p. 49-50).

Since much of what we know about ancient Peru comes from unearthed tombs, it makes sense to look at what things were of value to pre-Columbian Americans by seeing what things of value the departing sought to take with them and what were offered as the most cherished gifts. Many things we know about come from burial sites.

Burial sites can offer striking insight into the values of a people. In many civilizations, both past and present, people seem to bury their dead with things that are symbolic of lasting importance. The sense of death as a lasting transformation (to try to put it in a way as not to offend anyone's particular beliefs) seems to inspire people to want to send off loved ones with their best things: things of comfort, nourishment, and power. While today's rituals may not seem as elaborate, as the burial of Moche nobles, they nonetheless seem to follow this rule. Most people are buried at least in a nice suit or dress. Photographs, jewelry, rosary beads, etc. are often included in modern burials. Psychologically we send off our loved ones dressed well with some remembrances of those left behind and with some instrument of power to help them in their transition. For Catholics, rosary beads serve this latter function. But this might also be a crucifix for a Christian or some other religious/spiritual figurine or symbol. Some burials convey the departures of the deceased in unique and more elaborate ways. I remember a popular rock song from the 1980's about Willie the Wimp, a Chicago gangster who was buried in his Cadillac as a coffin in 1984. Those cremated often have their ashes stored in decorative urns as remembrances. Additionally, the deceased can now literally turn themselves into *bling*. There is a process by which the ashes of the deceased can be compressed into a diamond quality stone!

I might add that the nature by which we in modern society bury our dead has changed over time and continues to change. Without discussing the trends toward cremation in any detail, it is safe to say that our way of conducting burials has changed from the traditional notion of a family burial plot on a farm, to municipal graveyards, to large private cemeteries, to the increased use of mausoleums. This point should be considered in the study of the burial traditions of ancient cultures. It seems unrealistic to expect that while our burial traditions have showed variance over the last one hundred years in the United States, that the traditions in ancient civilizations would be static over time.

The tradition of ornately burying the dead is not exclusive to the people of ancient Peru. It is interesting because what is known is still being uncovered in discoveries that have thrilled archaeologists and the general public alike. Arguably, they are more interesting than the burials of the pharaohs of Egypt where the mystery has been diminished due to years upon years of publication and study. Although, the ritual burial of Egyptian pharaohs and nobility has numerous parallels to Inca burials - extensive and ornate preparation of the body for the afterlife, Inca death traditions appear livelier and not as solemn. While both societies included dressing

their nobility with gilded artifacts and supplies for the afterlife, the Inca didn't just leave their kings to rest quietly in tombs, but carted them around ala *Weekend at Bernie's*. The cult of the royal mummies strove to keep the spirit of the Inca alive through worshipping the mummies and actually bringing the mummies around in public. They saw to it that the mummies attended all of the major ceremonies. In fact it was customary for the cult to have the mummies visit one another and have celebrations. Food set aside for the mummies to eat at these special celebrations was burned in special wood (Fagan p. 48). Yet, the tradition of ornately treating nobility predates the Inca. The Moche of ancient Peru practiced elaborate burials between the first and eighth centuries A.D. Among the many gold artifacts recovered at the Sipan tombs are nose ornaments and earrings. Gilded copper bells, crowns, necklaces, and ornate necklaces of silver, gold, and shells indicate that the Moche achieved a high level of craftsmanship.

These must have been important and elaborate burials. The amount of material on the deceased and in the tomb indicates that the burial practice could not be done quickly. It must have taken many hands to dress the body for burial in many layers of clothing and jewelry. These layers consisted of the most expensive and elaborate fabrics, piles of necklaces and breastplates of precious stones and metals, headdresses of the most colorful feathers, and other body ornamentation such as spears, shields, and armor. John Murra reports that the wake and burial of an Inca lasted as long as eight days. A burial shroud, not to mention the numerous outfits made to be buried with the deceased, measured 300-square yards (Murra 1962, p. 713).

Additionally, as we do in burials today in a much more subtle way, the grave has to be equipped with provisions to help the deceased in the afterlife. Preparing the body and providing these elements for an essential burial must have taken a considerable amount of time, labor, and resources. Considering that ancient Peruvians believed that ancestors retained power in their society, one would want to make sure that the deceased was given the finest items for a proper burial. Hence, these fine burials are the source of exciting archaeological finds that give real insight into the things that pre-Columbian Peruvians valued.

All of the dead of ancient Peru could not be bundled and carted around nor could every tomb be as elaborate as the tombs at Sipan. Some later burials in Peru indicated how other people of importance were laid to rest. One site worth examining is the cemetery at Puruchoco-Huaquerones in Amaru in the outskirts of Lima. Dating from 1438-1532, at least 2,200 individuals of all levels of Inca society are buried in the 20-acre site that is the second largest cemetery excavated in Peru. It is interesting to note that even seven hundred years after Moche culture we still see the people of Peru burying important things with the deceased relatives. Among significant findings at this site are a mummy known as the Cotton King (due to his being wrapped in about 300-pounds of raw cotton) and a mummified child (Cock p. 79). The burial with cotton underscores the importance of cotton cloth to the Inca. Pima cotton, indigenous to Peru, is perhaps the finest of three original varieties of cotton in the world. It is a long fiber that can be more easily woven into strong and durable cloth (Miller, class notes YNI; also Murra 1962 p.719). As fashion is important for students, the Cotton King, would be an excellent launching point for discussion of the importance of thread and cloth to society.

One does not have to be around high school students long to see which items are important to them. In fact, many of these items- clothing, cell phones, Ipods, high priced sneakers, body piercing, and tattoos-are sources of discussion, debate, and regulation in the school environment. I see students making connections between their own status symbols and those of ancient Peru.

Reading and writing strategies will be employed in this unit to reinforce curriculum standards and goals. The New Haven district is unveiling a new curriculum for the upcoming fall. The unit will include some specific standards and goals from the new curriculum.

This past year students began district-wide exercises in writing across the curriculum. For history classes this meant writing persuasive essays from the material in two or three resource articles. Last year one of the district essays was on whether or not Yale should answer the current Peruvian government's demand for Yale's holdings of ancient Peruvian artifacts. Students knew little about this topic when it was presented to them. I think the activities included in this unit will allow students to write more knowledgeable responses should this district-wide writing exercise be given again.

An exhibit on Machu Picchu has been on display at Yale University's Peabody Museum for some time. If the exhibit remains in the fall, it would make sense to plan a field trip to the museum to view the exhibit.

In addition to resources presented in our seminar, the unit will refer to specific number of texts some of which were already referred to: *The Tombs of Sipan*, *Kingdoms of Gold*, *Kingdoms of Jade*, and *National Geographic's* feature on Inca mummies in Puruchoco- Huaquerones. Additionally, material from the Guaman Poma, which can be accessed online, will be included.

Any pre-Columbian American would have difficulty understanding the things of importance in our society. I can imagine the quizzical look on the faces of a Moche, Inca, Aztec, Maya, and Pueblo as they watched someone talk into their cell phone or open up a laptop computer. While the things they valued are quite varied, one could say that they all come from the natural environment and they all showed the work of an artisan's hand. Pre-Columbian *bling* includes items fashioned from precious metals, minerals, rocks, animals, and plants. They include jewelry, textiles, and body art. In regard to function and form, some of these status symbols could be defined in contemporary ways as earrings, necklaces, tunics, headdresses, and tattoos. However, each symbol reflected something special that set it apart from its pedestrian counterparts. For instance, the rarity of the material in a given area might increase its appreciation and value. The amount of intensive labor or specialized labor needed to fabricate it or the intended message communicated through the symbol could also set it apart. Color, particularly turquoise or the brilliant red of a spondylus shell also added value. Lastly, how the object was obtained helped determine an object's value. In cases of tribute to provincial or regional chieftains or kings, sometimes all of the above applied.

Precious metals such as silver and particularly gold, were important throughout pre-Columbian world. Some of the first gold work is found in ancient Peru. Alva and Donnan suggest that the high status associated with owning metal objects, particularly of gold and silver, started in the early Moche period (circa 300 B.C.) and continued to all Andean civilizations that followed. In this tradition, only the people of high status, the elite, could own precious metals (Alva and Donnan p. 19). Excavations at Sipan, from 1987-1990, provide some excellent examples of Moche gold work, textiles, and pottery. Alva and Donnan's findings are published in the *Tombs of Sipan* (1993). In reviewing their publication, I looked at photographs of what my students refer to as *BLING*-gold, silver, precious stones and feathers (fashionable at the time) that adorn the human body.

Excavation of three tombs at Sipan revealed the burial of members of Moche nobility. In many cases the artifacts recovered indicate both the societal divisions of Moche society and the role of the noble or chief in maintaining a united society. Moche nobility achieved this duality by wearing items fashioned half in gold and half in silver. Among items recovered from tomb are a half gold and half silver breastplate and a necklace of 10 gold and 10 silver peanuts, gold and silver ceremonial knives, and a gold and silver scepter (Alva and Donnan p.94-99). Other items crafted of precious metal include nose ornaments, earrings, and necklaces. Many of these pieces make for great discussion and would be appropriate for class. One of my favorite is a two tiered copper gilded necklace from Tomb 2 (shown on page 151). The top row has nine smiling faces that are bearing teeth. The bottom row has nine frowning faces. Perhaps the arrangement of the beads reflects the

gods of the underworld on the bottom and happier gods in the sky. Or, maybe these indicate a number of captives. Gold eyes, nose and a band of teeth covered the face of the deceased nobleman in Tomb 1. On first glance they look amusingly like "Mister Potato Head" parts. A closer look reveals that even the nose (8.5cm long) has an elaborate carving in it (Alva and Donnan p.90-91).

Some of the most intricate and fun designs were found in Colombia where gold working had spread from Peru in the late first millennium BC. Goldsmiths in pre-Spanish Colombia probably had special status, and chieftains were often goldsmiths (Benson p.67). Near modern day Bogota, craftsmen "made jewelry for the elite and also fashioned small, cast-gold votive pieces to be offered to sacred lakes, caves, groves, and mountains" (Benson p.67). In one case, the chieftain of Guatavita had his body "dusted with gold and bedecked with golden jewelry" (Benson p. 67).

By the time of the Spanish Invasion in 1519, the Aztec had demonstrated the use of gold for adornment and tribute. The Spanish under Cortes were able to extort significant amounts of gold from the Aztec. These lessons were applied with even more cruelty and effectiveness to the Inca. Pizarro's plunder of the Inca revealed that the Inca had supersized the art of working with gold. Mastery of goldsmithing was so prevalent that Pachacuti Inca's palace at Cuzco had a gilded garden of life size plants and animals.

Cloth or woven textiles were even more important to the people of ancient Peru. The archaeological record indicates that textiles pre-date the invention of Peruvian pottery. As our seminar saw in the documentary, *A Continuous Warp of 5,000 Years* by Jon Cohen, the weaving of cloth from cotton and wool becomes the backbone of Peruvian society. Even today many Peruvians sustain themselves through the making of cloth. The legacy of ancient Peru can be explained through the beautiful and intricately produced cloth primarily by women on the back-strap loom. Perhaps more than in any other pre-Columbian society, weaving is the core to the culture. Intricate thread patterns are replicated in cloth after cloth and beyond. The enormous Nazca Lines even appear to me to reflect attributes of weaving with the warp. In addition, the ancient Peruvians used their textiles to mark distinction for the dead and the living. Mummy bundles were wrapped with up to four layers of beautifully dyed and decorated cloth. The living Inca was the only Inca allowed to wear cloth made from vicuna-wild alpaca. The difficulty of attaining certain colors, thread patterns, and the tightness of textiles indicate the value of particular textiles. The labor intensive work of squashing hundreds, if not thousands, of cochineal bugs to make red dye reserved red patterned cloth for those of the highest influence.

Given the elaborate adornment of precious metals, shells, beads, and feathers,

nobles buried in Sipan were buried in expensive clothes. The cumulative effect of the noble's costume at the time of burial must have been breathtaking. But you might wonder in this case as is the case for noble burials throughout the ancient world, "Why all this fuss for dead people?" The explanation for societies that historians feel confident about is seemingly simple and rational; given the belief system of the Egyptians for example, it would seem plausible to most students and me that they had to prepare their pharaoh for the afterlife. The same could be said for some of the great dynastic tombs in China. So, one could theorize that the ornate costume in the Sipan tombs probably fits into a belief system. Professor Miller suggested that each of the people buried in Sipan were dressed in costume of characters from their creation myth. Alva exclaimed that the enormous octopus breastplate of over 100 separate parts found in Tomb 3 would have the effect of "visually transforming him into an anthropomorphized octopus" (Alva p.193).

North of Peru, unbeknown to the Inca, the Aztec had developed their own set of costume fashions. In what is now Mexico City and its surroundings, jade and feathers held particular value to the Aztec. Written descriptions and illustrations of the Aztec king presented him in fabulous feathers, gold and jade. Indeed

wearing feathers was fashionable for most people of means. However, the rarest of feathers gained through tribute of the outlying provinces could only be worn by the Aztec king. Jade was valued and worn by people of means. An image of the fantastic headdress worn by Montezuma is available at the Yale University Digital Library image collection. I plan on showing this image to my students in a PowerPoint presentation that I am currently working on.

Based upon artifacts from burial sites, primary source documents, and traditions, we can see the importance of precious metals, stones, fabric, and feathers to pre-Columbian peoples. As with my Atari player, there has to be some appeal as to why these things have value in the pre-Columbian world. Esther Pasztory suggests that the true value of things lies in what they communicate to people (Pasztory p. 13). What communication did pre-Columbian *bling* offer to Amerindians of Central and South America? Nicholas Saunders presents compelling arguments that explore the appeal of brilliant shining objects to the Aztecs. He also wrote extensively on the consistent motif of the jaguar that appears almost everywhere in pre-Columbian fashion, vessels, and visual representations (Saunders, *People of the Jaguar*). To Saunders, it was the "positive spiritual and creative power of light. . . manifested in brilliant objects - from iridescent feathers to shiny minerals and metals" that indigenous people were drawn to (Saunders 1999, p.243). In "Biographies of Brilliance", Saunders not only explores the Amerindian attraction to light and brilliance, but he offers a diverging attraction to some of the same objects displayed by Spanish invaders. He says commercial interests, not spiritual or aesthetic ones, underscored the Spanish interest in acquiring the shining brilliant pearls and precious metals appreciated by the Amerindians. It also explains how the Amerindians, to the surprise of the Spanish, often would exchange sizable sums of precious metals for glass and mirrors. It is no surprise to see that what Saunders calls irreconcilable value systems at work that lead to ineffective trade, misunderstanding, and tragedy.

This tragedy is hardly displayed better than Bernard de Sahagun's account of Cortes' and his men looting the palace treasury at Tenochtitlan.

As soon as the Spanish had found lodging. . . and had rested. . . The Spaniards began to remove the gold from the feather pieces, shields, and other dancing accoutrements that were there, and in order to remove the gold they destroyed all of the feather-pieces and rich jewels. They melted the gold and made it into bars, and then took the stones that seemed good to them. The Indians of Tlaxcala took all the less precious stones and the feathers (Lockhart p. 49).

Strategies and Activities

Discussion

Students like to talk about things that are important to them. Simply posing questions with some visual aids or prompts might generate interesting ideas, allow students and teachers to explore similar and contrasting values, and promote reflective and critical examination of personal and societal values.

Some questions or provocative statements to discuss in class or have students write reflectively on are:

The latest cell phone model with all the bling ringtones is more valuable than gold to a high school student. Why or Why not?

What or who determines the value of things in a particular society?

What were things of value in the Americas before Columbus? What things did the Spanish invaders value? Compare the items that each side valued.

What role or function did things of value play in pre-Columbian Societies?

What do these things have to say about people of the past?

What do these things have to say if anything about us today?

What things do we value today and why do we value them?

How do competing value systems affect our attitudes towards other people and things?

Brainstorming

Thinking with your pen, listening and posting, and k-w-l are excellent strategies to get students thinking about things. In *think with your pen*, students write quietly about what they know on a subject that will be explored in their journal, notebook, or a piece of paper. After a minute or two (or perhaps more) of writing, students are invited to the board to write one or two of their responses without talking. After a sufficient number of responses are listed, the class may then discuss them. A more traditional way to brainstorm is to post and ask a question and write student responses on the board as they say them. During this process, the teacher may often group like responses, affirm each student's response, and ask students to clarify their response. Students may also complete k-w-l charts on for instance, the items of value for the people of Peru, Colombia, and the Aztec. In this strategy, students would write what they know about Peruvians, Aztecs, Olmecs et al. They would follow with thinking about and writing what they want to know about Peruvians, Aztecs, and/or Olmecs. At the conclusion of the unit, they would return to their k-w-l chart and write reflectively on what they have learned about Peruvians, Aztecs, and or Olmecs.

Reading Multiple Texts

Reflective writing becomes more substantial if students have access to vibrant resources. Reading multiple texts will allow students to explore the *bling* of pre-Columbian societies. Primary and secondary sources for multiple text reading include illustrations from the Guaman Poma, photographs from the Yale Digital Library, journal articles, and poetry. Aztec poetry contains excellent primary source accounts of things that were important to the Aztec people. Aztec poetry is full of references to symbolic things such as jade, gold, and feathers. Some examples include:

I have come, o my friends, with necklaces I entwine, with the plumage of the tzinitzcan bird I bind. . . from the Poem of Temilotzin (Leon-Portilla 1992:195)
Even jade is shattered, Even gold is crushed, Even quetzal plume are torn. . . One does not live forever on this earth: From Nezahualcoyotl's (Lord Feathered Coyote's) poem of sorrow Aztec Poems: <http://www.indians.org/welker/aztpoem.htm>

Aztec poetry effectively communicates elements of the human condition: a spectrum of joy, fortune, sadness, longing, and loss. Students may recognize this exclusively through reading selections of poetry. Students may read and discuss Aztec poetry for evidence of things of cultural importance. Parody may be employed as a strategy for interpreting poems and assessing students understanding. For instance, after reading

Nezahualcoyotl's (Lord Feathered Coyote's) poem of sorrow, I will have students write their own parody with instructions to insert things beloved to them in the place of the Aztec symbols of importance. Class readings of these student poems should be insightful and probably entertaining for the whole class.

Primary sources material can be drawn from the *Florentine Codex* via *We People Here* by James Lockhart and *The Broken Spears* edited by Miguel Leon-Portilla. They offer much insight into things of value to pre-Columbian Americans.

For instance, one can gain insight into things of *bling* belonging to Montezuma from primary source readings:

First were the appurtenances of Quetzalcoatl: a serpent mask, made of turquoise; a quetzal feather head fan; a plaited neckband of green stone beads, with a golden disk in the middle of it" (Leon-Portilla, p. 94)

In reading and interpreting the full passage (about a paragraph long) one can easily ask students to read, underline and make a list, of objects that were sent as gifts to Cortes. Furthermore students can be asked to suggest which items might be given the highest value to the Aztec given the frequency of their being mentioned.

One of my favorite accounts from the Florentine Codex reinforces Saunders idea that while Europeans and Amerindians both valued shining glittering things, they both had irreconcilable systems of valuation. Upon being accepted into Tenochtitlan, Cortes and his men help themselves to the stores of the royal treasury at Teocalco.

As soon as the Spanish had found lodging. . .and had rested. . .The Spaniards began to remove the gold from the feather pieces, shields, and other dancing accoutrements that were there, and in order to remove the gold they destroyed all of the feather-pieces and rich jewels. They melted the gold and made it into bars, and then took the stones that seemed good to them. The Indians of Tlaxcala took all the less precious stones and the feathers (Lockhart p. 49).

Saunders has his own evidence to support his theory. This would also be an excellent quote to discuss with students because it hints to the underlying incompatibility between Spanish and Inca culture.

Of all the things that the Spanish showed him, there was none he liked more than glass, and that he was very surprised that, having things of such beauty in Spain [the Spanish]. . .would travel to distant and foreign lands looking for metals as common as gold and silver. Atahuallpa to Francisco Pizarro (Saunders 1999 p. 247).

Re-enactment Models

Re-enactment models might also be effectively employed in studying the mummy cults of the Inca. Royal mummies were adorned in as much as four layers of clothing. Groups of students could create mummy bundles with symbols of things that they value. Upon finishing, the group would then become the cult of their mummy bundle and be in charge of providing for their "ancestor" for a specified period of time (one or two class days). This will be a fun way to reinforce the practice of these cults of trying to keep the spirit of their ancestor alive. Brian Fagan describes the cults taking the mummies to important feasts and even having the mummies visit each other (Fagan p.48-49). As rules for inheritance did not allow for the passing of one ruler's property to his children, these cults provided an odd yet needed function in caring for the estate of the

deceased Inca, and his less important offspring.

Multiple Sensory Presentation

One of the effective strategies Professor Miller employed in our seminar was to bring in samples of available things that were either the primary subject of our reading or were frequently referenced. It's easy to picture chocolate in the conventional way that we use it in our culture-sweet! However, in addition to reading and hearing that chocolate was hardly sweetened in the pre-Columbian era (sugar was not part of the New World diet), we also got to taste pure chocolate beans- certainly a bitter, caffeine laden, and quite memorable experience. I might let students try the same experience to some degree (with parental permission of course) with other items such as bitter, unsweetened chocolate, pumpkin seeds, potatoes, tomatoes et al. This is a multi-sensory way to experience and certainly remember the Columbian Exchange.

Interpreting Drawings, Paintings, and /or Illustrations

In addition to the strategies modeled by Professor Miller, all of us demonstrated mini lessons in our seminars at YNI. The practice helped us experiment with potential objectives, strategies, and classroom activities for our units and allowed us to work collaboratively. In many cases common subject matter or grade level sparked trading of ideas. I plan on using a role playing strategy to involve students in a lesson on a piece of Native American art that depicts Native Americans wearing symbols of hierarchy in their culture. Jayme Hicks, a ninth grade English teacher from Jacksonville School District modeled the strategy. Terry Pardee, a social studies teacher from East Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte, demonstrated a similar strategy. First, students observe and discuss a painting. The instructor hands out a sketch of the picture with everyone silhouetted and numbered. Each student writes dialogue for a character in the painting. Next, the class can recite the dialogue from their seat or from posed position that mimics the painting. I see plausible opportunities to use this activity as an introductory/anticipatory activity or assessment/exit strategy. This strategy appears to be adaptable to many forms of pre-Columbian Art including the figures found on wall paintings, pottery, and textiles.

The Guaman Poma is full of illustrations. Thanks to the work of Rolena Adorno, a Yale Professor of Portuguese and Spanish and the Dutch government, the full text with illustrations of the letter written to King Felipe from Guaman Poma is accessible on-line.

There is an excellent rendering of Pachacuti Inca to interpret.

Fortunately, many of the items that were of value to pre-Columbian Americans, aside from gold, can be easily and safely available for students, and even gold foil paper is commonly sold at holidays. Feathers, jade and other minerals, shells, fabric can all be acquired at craft stores.

Another activity would be to draw or sketch. Students will draw or describe how they would dress themselves given the notion that they would be the most important person in a particular pre-Columbian culture.

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