Latin America

Discovery Chest
Artifact Description Cards
In which country or region is this used?
• The Ayacucho Area of the Central Andes.

What is this?
• Gourds are vegetables similar to squash and pumpkins. When they dried, they were used as storage containers. People would often decorate them with carvings of daily life and religious symbols.

What is its significance?
• Since ancient Peruvians believed in life after death, they thought it very important to put gourds filled with food and water in the graves of people who died, because they would need these in the afterlife.
Miniature Backstrap Loom
(Peru)

In which country or region is this used?
• In the Cuzco area of Highland Peru.

What is this?
• The loom was a tool to help people make highly complicated weavings. It is made from cotton and wood.

How is it used?
• A set of wooden sticks, called heddles, controls a selected sequence of threads in the wrap, the vertical part of the loom. The manipulation of these heddles combined with the insertion of a weft, horizontal, threads result in woven fabric.

What is its significance?
• Pre-Columbian textiles tell the stories and histories of how the Peruvians lived, what they believed, who their leaders were, and what their aesthetic sense was. In addition, gifts of woven cloth were offered at marriages, among other rituals, and to form political, social, and religious alliances.
Faja (Belt) (Guatemala)

Who used this item?
- The Jacaltec-speaking Highland Maya in the Departamento of Huechuetenango Guatemala.

What is this?
- A handmade belt worn as a traditional accessory. It is made from warp-face brocading on cotton ground and was created with a backstrap loom. Warp-face design means that all of the designs are woven in as the belt is being made. They are not embroidered on after the woven fabric is finished.

What is its significance?
- Guatemalan textiles not only serve utilitarian purposes, but also mark ethnic or community affiliation, social, religious and economical status, religious belief, aesthetic values, occupation, sex, age, individual identity, and mastery of technique.
Mola (Blouse Panel)
(Panama)

Who used this item?
- The Cuna people, of the San Blas Islands off the coast of Panama

What is this?
- A woman’s shirt, or blouse, made of two decorative panels called “molas.” Molas are made by layering various pieces of cloth. Women sometimes take mola designs from their environment and paint them on the clothing.

What is its significance?
- The decorative shirts allow the Cuna women to express themselves through their clothing. Today, they even sometimes incorporate political slogans, commercial logos, or popular characters.
Who used this item?
• The Cakchiquel Indians of Solola, Guatemala. This sash is typically worn by women who live along the shores of Lake Atitlan.

What is this?
• A traditional accessory made from cotton, ikat plain weave with brocade. It was woven on a backstrap loom. The sash could be worn around dark blue wraparounds skirts, on the head for protection from the sun, or used occasionally for carrying bundles.

What is its significance?
• Women believe that they must wear a sash during pregnancy to protect the unborn baby. They also recognize the importance of a tightly wrapped sash to support their backs while weaving on the physically demanding backstrap loom.
Rebozo or Chal (shawl) (Guatemala)

Who used this item?
• The Cakchiquel-speaking Highland, Mayans, in Solona, Guatemala.

What is this?
• A shawl, which is a traditional accessory similar to a scarf. It is made of cotton Ikat plain weave with brocade and is woven on a backstrap loom.

What is its significance?
• The shawl is a rich example of Maya cultural expressions and can be appreciated for its sheer aesthetic beauty. As an important part of the culture, the shawl is woven with symbols that are especially important to those who traditionally make and use them.

Latin America
4B - CLOTHING
HUIPIL (Wee-peal)  
(Guatemala)

Who used this item?
• The Cakchiquel-speaking Highland Maya, specifically in the San Juan Comalapa, Department of Chimaltenango, San Juan La Laguna, Department of Solona, Joyabaj, Department of El Quiche, Guatemala.

What is this?
• A woman’s top, made of brocaded cotton on cotton ground weave. It is handwoven on a backstrap loom and would be worn tucked into a wraparound skirt and held in place with a woven belt.

What is its significance?
• Each village had its own unique set of design and colors and dress code. Decisions in dress have been made for each member of society by the strength of their culture's traditions, and necessity to dress in harmony with the group.
Poncho
(Guatemala)

Who used this item?
• The Quechua-speaking area of Highland Peru in the Andean Highlands.

What is this?
• Garment of clothing used to keep warmer in the higher altitudes of the Andes. This poncho is made from wool of either alpacas, sheep and llamas. Designs, colors, material choice are all marks of village identity.

What is its significance?
• The clothing examples in the Discovery Chest are simple, yet authentic examples of daily clothing found in the Andean highlands. Such textiles are found in the Cuzco area. While they are most definitely from a specific village and could be identified immediately by one who knew the region, regretfully, the supplier of these was uncertain about the village.
Who used this item?
• The Quechua-speaking area of Highland Peru in the Andean Highlands.

What is this?
• A hand-knit cap made of alpaca wool. The designs, colors, and material choices are all marks of village identity.

What is its significance?
• Designs may indicate social and economic status. In addition, a variety of other symbolic languages are expressed throughout design.
Morral (More-ral) (Guatemala)

Who used this item?
• The Cakchiquel-speaking Highland Maya of Chichicastenango, Guatemala.

What is this?
• Handmade cotton crochet shoulder bag used to carry essentials. Since indigenous clothing has no pockets, these carrying bags are essential equipment for everyone.

What is its significance?
• While it is unusual in Mexico and most of Latin American countries for men to be involved in the textile arts other than commercial weaving, these shoulder bags are very much a part of the men's art and economic tradition.
**SHIPIBO WRAPAROUND SKIRT**

(Peru)

**Who used this item?**
- The women of the Shipibo in Puculpa, Peru. They lived near the headwaters of the Amazon River.

**What is this?**
- A tradition piece of clothing made of cotton painted with natural dyes. The cloth is wrapped around the body lengthwise so that it does not fall down with great physical activity.

**What is its significance?**
- Women can identify each other's families and the different villages by the designs painted on the cotton. The designs are very unique and are taught by a mother to a daughter, so as to maintain the family identity.
**Tortora Reed Boat**  
(Peru and Bolivia)

**Who used this item?**  
- The Aymara people, who live in and around Lake Titicaca, the highest lake in the world.

**What is this?**  
- Totora reeds, which grow along the shores of the lake and are gathered to make into both full size and miniature boats, the latter used mainly as souvenir items.

**What is its significance?**  
- Reed boats are connected with the famous voyage of Thor Heyerdahl, who contracted boat builders on Lake Titicaca to build a large sea-going vessel like the ones that used on the lake. He wanted to see if humans could sail from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast of South America in a pre-industrial boat. It was his theory that ancient Inca sailors had learned their craft from Egyptian sailors, who sailed the Nile and crossed the Atlantic in very similar boats.

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*Latin America 1C - Transportation*
Jarrito/Drinking cup
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Mexico

What is this?
• A small, ceramic cup used for hot beverages. Traditionally, it is used for serving hot chocolate.

What is its significance?
• This type of ceramic cup is called a jarrito, the diminutive of the word, “jarro,” which means jug or pitcher. In fact, the jarrito is an exact miniature jarro.
Baby Carrier
(Mexico)

Who used this item?
• The Nahua Natives of Cuetzalan, Puebla, Mexico City.

What is this?
• A basket similar to a backpack used to carry young children. The basket is lined in cotton cloth woven in brown and white stripes to protect the baby. The baby's weight holds the sides of the basket in place so that the baby doesn’t fall out. It is worn with the strap on the mother's forehead or across the front of her chest at shoulder height.

What is its significance?
• Babies are such a ubiquitous part of life in rural Mexico that this is an ingenious way of carrying them.
Escobetillas/Brushes
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Mexico.

What is this?
• A straw and fiber brush bound with metal wire. It is used for everything from scrubbing pots and pans, like a Brillo pad, to brushing human or animal hair.

What is its significance?
• It is important to clean off the comal, the clay or metal griddle, so that fresh foods may be cooked on it.
Molinillo/Chocolate Beater
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Mexico.

What is this?
• A wooden tool used to make hot chocolate. The many loose rings of the molinillo act as beaters, making water and chocolate foam up after a minute or so of mixing. There are many different regional styles of molinillos, differing in number of concentric rings and hand carvings, which adorn the beater portion of the implement.

What is its significance?
• The molinillo is an essential item in virtually every household in Mexico. They are often stored in a special carved wooden rack which hangs on a kitchen wall.
Molcajete/Stone mortar and pestle (Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Many regions of Mexico.

What is this?
• A traditional “blender” made of volcanic stone. Salsas and hot pepper sauces are the main food mixed in the molcajete. Local curers use it for grinding herbs and other ingredients of natural cures.

What is its significance?
• The molcajete made meal preparation easier for the women. It is also used in making natural medicine.
Metate /Stone slab grinder
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Many regions of Mexico.

What is this?
• A miniature of the grinding slab, made of volcanic stone. It is used to grind the corn mixture to make tortillas.

What is its significance?
• It is the traditional gift from a bride's godfather at the time of marriage. Some Indian women in Mexico are buried with their manos (the hand grinding part). It is their belief that she may have to make tortillas in her afterlife.
Canasta de tortillas/ Tortilla basket
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Mexico.

What is this?
• A straw basket where freshly cooked tortillas are stored.

What is its significance?
• Along with the tortilla, the canasta de tortillas are an ever-present element on every Mexican dining table.

Latin America
5E - FOOD
Prensa/ Tortilla Press
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• Mexico City, Mexico.

What is this?
• A cast-iron tortilla press. The masa is placed in the middle of the prensa and it is flattened into the tortilla shape.

What is its significance?
• Tortillas are a traditional dish in Mexico, so the preparation and tools are important. Sometimes they are even passed down from generation to generation.
House Blessing
(Mexico)

Where is this item found?
• State of Michoacan, Mexico

What is this?
• This corazón, or heart, is a fascinating blend of indigenous and European beliefs and technology. It is made of wheat and hung inside homes to ensure that there will always be food.

What is its significance?
• The house blessing honors the "father who provides the harvest."
Retablo
(Peru)

Where is this item found?
• Ayacucho, a town in the Andean Highlands, Peru.

What is this?
• A wooden box, which opens with two doors. Inside are scenes portraying aspects of daily life in the Andes. It is made out of wood, dough mixture, oil paints, leather, and nails and is used as a portable altar when going from village to village, teaching Catholicism to the indigenous peoples.

What is its significance?
• Retablos are traditionally filled with little dough figures carrying out a religious activity or ceremony.
Iglesia/Church for rooftop Blessing (Peru)

Where is this item found?
• Ayacucho, Peru.

What is this?
• A ceramic church, which are traditionally placed atop highland Peruvian houses as blessings. As part of conversion, the Spaniards took what is one of the quintessential images of Christianity, the church building itself, and "crowned" the roofs of converted Indians.

What is its significance?
• The iglesia is representative of the Spaniards' efforts to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity.
Antara / Panpipes
(Peru)

Where is this item found?
• Central Andes, Peru.

What is this?
• A wind instrument made of different lengths of cane and held together by an interlaced jute, or string. Blowing across the opening at the top of each cane makes sounds.

What is its significance?
• They are a reflection of the cultural and geographical commonalities of Peru and Bolivia.
Quena/Flute
(Bolivia)

Where are these items found?
• Bolivia, in the Central Andes

What are these?
• Simple, unadorned pipes made of carved wood; the first quena is most likely made for a tourist market, while the second is more authentic. Quenas with complex or simple finger holes indicate the different levels of proficiency. Highly ornate ones were used for rituals or were owned by important people.

What is its significance?
• The instruments are important tools for teaching group history to younger generations and to maintaining a sense of continuity with the past.

Latin America
3G - MUSIC